

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND CHURCH LOYALTY

by Charles E. Bradford, D.D.

## Introduction

This chapter seeks to address the question What is the loyalty level among African-American Adventists toward their church? What is the extent of their attachment? The question comes at a time of waning denominational loyalties in North American Protestantism. Fewer North American Christians maintain the strong denominational ties that they once had. The once-popular little ditty “I’m a Baptist [Methodist, etc.] bred and a Baptist born, and when I’m dead there’ll be a Baptist gone” is no longer heard. How strong, then, are the ties that bind African-Americans to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination? Is church membership meaningful?

It is an enigma to some that there is a significant African-American presence in the Adventist Church. Perhaps this is because Adventists, for whatever reason, are often identified with those denominations that are thought of as being not only theologically but also socially conservative. In fact, the feeling persists in some circles, unfairly, that Seventh-day Adventists are exclusive, clannish, and even xenophobic to a degree.

This chapter proposes that African-Americans, in fact, have been part and parcel of the Adventist experience from its inception in the Millerite movement until the present.

It would be less than honest to deny that African-Americans have had their share of unpleasant and discouraging experiences within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is to be expected in a nation whose struggle with the demonic powers of racism has been its defining experience. The American religious establishment and the Adventist Church have not been exempt. But if it can be demonstrated that African-Americans have a high level of loyalty toward their church (“enfeebled and defective” though it may be), and if the causes for this perceived high level of loyalty can be identified, then the “Black experience” can prove to be helpful to the worldwide fellowship, which is under divine mandate to “reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, NIV).

## Loyalty Defined

“This is where the fortitude of God’s people has its

place—in keeping God’s commands and remaining loyal to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12, NEB). “At this the dragon grew furious with the woman, and went off to wage war on the rest of her offspring, that is, on those who keep God’s commandments and maintain their testimony to Jesus” (Rev. 12:17, NEB).

One could make the case that loyalty is the most highly esteemed and desirable of all character attributes, an essential condition or element in every human relationship. Every culture and society honors and esteems the loyal person. Poets write odes to the noble and the true to be sung by schoolchildren. The worst denunciations are saved for the traitor. It is a terrible thing to be deemed untrustworthy, disloyal—to question the loyalty of another is an insult of the highest order.

This idea has prevailed in all societies and cultures in all times. It is a fact basic to our common humanity. Loyalty, therefore, is the glue, the bonding agent, between God and humanity, and between fellow humans. There is a covenantal aspect or dimension to the concept. In biblical times the loyal or faithful soldier was indispensable. Loyal subjects are the backbone of the kingdom. The health and strength of any organization is determined by the loyalty of its rank and file.

Loyalty is the hallmark of the saints. The word invokes images of heroic struggles against overwhelming odds and suggests standing up for what one believes, refusing to give in, a determined resistance to the forces of evil. It carries overtones of heroism, of a brave little boy struggling against the awesome power of the sea and saving the kingdom. The inference here is of a faithful minority, a remnant, outnumbered, outgunned, but nevertheless faithful, constant, and victorious in Christ’s strength.

Loyalty also suggests feelings of devotion, attachment, affection, of emotional involvement. In the biblical setting, love demands loyalty. In fact, it is proved by selfless service and obedience—first to God and the truth, then to family, spouse, and children. It is a matter of honor.

In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the personification of this quality of character that He enjoins upon His children. He is “the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:9); His “compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithful-

ness” (Lam. 3:22, 23, NIV). The sense of the Hebrew word is literally firmness, fidelity, stability, dependability.

Loyalty has as its demands and requirements conduct worthy of the fellowship, the group, a high sense of responsibility and accountability. When a member of the group fails to live up to the expectations of the primary community, everyone is dishonored. One who is loyal is not easily turned aside from the mores and customs of the primary group—they are the significant others. A depth of commitment is necessary to fulfill the terms of the covenant.

The New Testament Greek word *tereo*, translated “loyalty,” literally means “to guard, to hold fast, to keep, preserve, serve, watch.” Sometimes the concept is enriched by the use of *pistos*, meaning “trustworthy, sure, true, faithful.” Without doubt this is one of the grandest of all biblical concepts. An eschatological community emerges that is distinguished by its constancy and dedication, who obeys “God’s commandments” and remains “faithful to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12, NIV). Again loyalty is the hallmark of the saints; they can be counted on.

### How Is Loyalty Measured?

The people whom God has taken into special covenant relationship must “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). “The special advantages and privileges that God’s chosen people enjoyed,” observes Ellen White, “made their responsibility greater than that of any other people. By holiness of life, by steadfast loyalty, by faithfulness in the payment of tithes and offerings, by cheerful, devoted service, they were to acknowledge God’s sovereignty, and testify in word and deed that they were made better by the favors bestowed upon them. Thus they were to be a light to the surrounding nations, revealing to idolatrous peoples the true God and the glory of His character.”<sup>1</sup>

One indicator of loyalty is financial support. Another indicator would be faithfulness in attendance at the meetings of the church. Organizational support is another category. Then, of course, there is involvement in the activities of the church—witnessing to neighbors, relatives, and friends; participation in church programs such as Ingathering, Community Services, etc.; willingness to make personal sacrifices of time and effort to further the aims and objectives of the church. Another indicator is a wholesome attitude toward church authority as expressed in its administrative structures on every level—the local congregation, the local conference and union, and especially the General Conference.

Loyalty is measured also by the degree of one’s agreement with the church’s message, its doctrinal statements, and its standards, policies, goals, and objectives. It is also reflected in the support of Christian education, which

Seventh-day Adventists see as the carrying out of the biblical mandate that “all thy children shall be taught of the Lord” (Isa. 54:13). African-American Adventists measure up quite well in every loyalty indicator.

### Why African-Americans in the Adventist Church?

A news reporter on assignment to a union conference session expressed surprise at the number of African-American Adventists in attendance and their level of involvement. “What is there in Adventism,” he asked, “that attracts so many Black people? I always thought of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as being a White church.” (He had for some time lived near a large Adventist educational institution.)

His observation was a valid one. Only a tiny percentage of African-Americans belong to America’s predominantly Caucasian mainline churches. In fact, 90 percent of African-American church members belong to Black denominations. Booker T. Washington used to say, “If you see a Black man anything other than a Baptist, you can be sure a White man has been tampering with his religion.” Of course, Washington was speaking of the largest Black denominations, not the almost exclusively White Southern Baptists or even the American (Northern) Baptists. It comes, therefore, as a surprise to most people that African-Americans make up more than 25 percent of the Seventh-day Adventist Church membership in North America.

The question arises, Why would any self-respecting African-American want to become a Seventh-day Adventist? Why join a church that is socially conservative? Are African-American Seventh-day Adventists especially naive and easy to convert?

Perhaps the answer lies partly in the fact that Adventism is an end-time message. Not only is Adventism eschatological; it is also about justice and judgment. Adventism makes use of the apocalyptic vision, which has a powerful liberating effect. “The early churches,” writes Keith A. Russell, “had a vision of the future that empowered the present and gave hope to the believer, and the eschatology that informed them was often apocalyptic.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Adventism, from the beginning, used the symbolism and language of the great apocalyptic prophets, especially Daniel and John the revelator. And we must not forget that Jesus’ great end-time prophecies are given in apocalyptic terms—sun blackened, moon bloody, stars falling, powers of heaven shaken, the Son of man coming in power and glory!

Apocalyptic appeals to people who are being ground down by overwhelming forces of oppression and evil: “They [African-Americans] have adopted and adapted the sacred texts of their diaspora host’s culture. . . . The Bible has come to serve as a surrogate sacred text for an ethnic community

lacking (or estranged from?) indigenous literary artifacts. It is a community at the same time distinguished by a rich oral textuality and a brilliant improvisational aesthetic. This surrogacy of the biblical narrative for Black America means that the culture inscribes its experience in the world of Scripture as an extension of that world—as if the Bible were its own literary record of human participation in divine transcendence.”<sup>3</sup> The lyrics of the Negro spirituals are dominated by the imagery and vivid symbolism of Scripture.

The brutal ocean passage and the oppressive nature of American slavery was a transforming experience. Out of this crucible there emerged a new and different kind of people, with a distinctive mentality and ethnicity, whose experience could be defined only in apocalyptic terms. As the poet says: “Is not the bond of a common fate closer than that of birth?”

### Not Against Flesh and Blood

Ellen G. White introduces a new dimension, the demonic, when she says: “The whole system of slavery was originated by Satan, who delights in tyrannizing over human beings”<sup>4</sup> She calls slavery “the accursed sin. . . . In the sight of heaven it is a sin of the darkest dye.”<sup>5</sup> Prejudice against the American slaves, she wrote, was “created not by mere flesh and blood, but by principalities and powers.”<sup>6</sup> “No human power alone could overcome it.”<sup>7</sup>

The War Between the States thus becomes a divine act of liberation tantamount to the freeing of the children of Israel: “God saw the foul blot of slavery upon this land, He marked the sufferings that were endured by the colored people. He moved upon the hearts of men to work in behalf of those who were so cruelly oppressed. The Southern states became one terrible battlefield. The graves of American sons who had enlisted to deliver the oppressed race are thick in its soil. Many fell in death, giving their lives to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. God spoke concerning the captivity of the colored people as verily as He did concerning the Hebrew captives, and said: ‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people . . . , and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them.’ The Lord wrought in freeing the Southern slaves.”<sup>8</sup>

Ellen White would not have us lose the lesson: “Those who study the history of the Israelites should also consider the history of the slaves in America.”<sup>9</sup>

It took a message with a transcendent vision, an intense eschatological awareness, to draw African-Americans out of their churches, and in many instances to convince them to leave family and friends, to become part of a strange new movement. They made the experience of Abraham—the man who “obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Heb. 11:8, NIV)—their own.

African-American Adventists had to face the wrath of Black clergy whose theological positions were threatened by these new teachings and White employers who were infuriated at the prospect of losing their best workers on Saturdays. In one instance in which Adventist doctrines had made inroads in the community, a mob “found one of the leading black believers in the area, N. W. Olvin, and thrashed him with a buggy whip, stopping only when commanded to do so by a white man who brandished a revolver.”<sup>10</sup>

### In the Millerite Movement

The presence of African-Americans in the ranks of the Millerites has been well documented. Frederick Douglass, the great antislavery orator, was tremendously impressed by the great meteor shower of 1833. That phenomenon, coupled with the powerful prophetic preaching of Miller and his associates, made Douglass a believer, although he never formally joined any religious body. His daughter, Rosetta Douglass Sprague, became a member of the First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Washington, D.C.

The names of several prominent African-American ministers (or “messengers,” as they called them)—Father Bowles, John Lewis, and William Foy—appear in various Millerite publications. These brethren were highly esteemed for their labors. William Still, a slave who obtained his own freedom and was later active in the Underground Railroad, was a committed Advent believer.

In 1840 William Miller, recovering from typhoid, was unable to attend the important Boston conference. He wrote a poignant letter to his friend Joshua Himes, expressing his regrets at his inability to attend and, in Pauline manner, naming a number of leaders who “have been in my mind”: “I had set my heart on this, to see and to hear Brothers Jones, Litch, Ward, Cole, Himes, Plumer, Millard, Burnham, French, Parker, Medbury, Ayres, Smith, and others. . . . Those colored brethren, too, at Belknap Street, with Christian hearts; heaven, I hope, has stamped them as its favorites.”<sup>11</sup>

African-Americans are present and accounted for in the early days of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Black people are believed to have been among the charter members of the Washington, New Hampshire, church, one of the first organized Seventh-day Adventist congregations. D. M. Canright baptized three African-Americans in Kentucky in 1876. In 1878 C. O. Taylor baptized an African-American preacher/sharecropper in Houston County, just south of Macon, Georgia. J. N. Loughborough converted C. M. Kinney in Reno, Nevada, in 1878. Kinney became the first African-American to be ordained to the gospel ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

About the same time Henry Lowe, a former Baptist minister, was baptized in Tennessee, where he became a pioneer Seventh-day Adventist worker among African-

Americans in that state. T. B. Buckner, a native Mississippian, became a Seventh-day Adventist in 1889 while working as an accountant in St. Louis, Missouri. Buckner returned to Mississippi as a literature evangelist and later became a pastor in Montgomery, Alabama; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Detroit, Michigan. In 1883 J. O. Corlis reports that there were 267 White believers and 20 African-American members in the Southern field. Tithe paid by African-Americans in 1892 was \$40. By 1906 it had grown to \$5,000.

On a stormy day in 1859 Ellen White records visiting the home of a Brother Hardy, where she and her party “were heartily welcomed by the family. A good dinner was soon in readiness for us of which we thankfully partook. This is a colored family but although the house is poor and old, everything is arranged with neatness and exact order. The children are well-behaved, intelligent, and interesting. May I yet have a better acquaintance with this dear family.”<sup>12</sup>

### The Influence of Ellen White

Any discussion of loyalty among African-American Adventists must take into account the enormous influence of Ellen G. White, who used her office as God’s messenger to the church to badger, cajole, and persuade the fledgling church to take up the work among the recently freed population in the South. In Ellen G. White’s vocabulary the Southern work was the Adventist mission to African-Americans.

In 1890 she urged: “Let us do something now. Let every church whose members claim to believe the truth for this time look at this neglected, downtrodden race, that, as a result of slavery, have been deprived of the privilege of thinking and acting for themselves. They have been kept at work in the cotton fields, have been driven before the lash like brute beasts, and their children have received no enviable heritage. Many of the slaves had noble minds, but the fact that their skin was dark was sufficient reason for the whites to treat them as though they were beasts. When freedom was proclaimed to the captives, a favorable time was given in which to establish schools and to teach the people to take care of themselves. Much of this kind of work was done by various denominations, and God honored their work. Those who attempted to work for the black race had to suffer persecution, and many were martyrs to the cause.”<sup>13</sup>

African-Americans have always felt that they had an understanding friend and advocate in Ellen White. Never has a serious attack been launched on the Spirit of Prophecy from the African-American community. Though perplexed by some of Ellen White’s statements on race, Blacks have no serious quarrel with her status as prophet.

### African-American Seventh-day Adventists Opted to Work Within the System

The establishment of separate denominations com-

pletely apart from their White counterparts was the pattern for African-Americans after emancipation. Most notable is the example of the Methodists and Baptists. It is extremely important to note that African-Americans chose to stay in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and work through the system. The establishment of a separate denomination by African-American Adventists has never been seriously considered.

Mrs. Jessie Wagner, whose parents became Adventists early in the century, reports that the members of their little company were often urged to set aside an offering for “the school at Ooltewah” (now Southern Adventist University). This is not an isolated example of African-American Adventists giving for the development of institutions they could not attend. They also had to listen to their church leaders use Ellen White’s pragmatic counsels to foster a permanent policy of exclusion.

Ellen White’s statements in *Testimonies*, volume 9, and *The Southern Work* that call for accommodation to segregation and discrimination were often quoted: “Let colored workers labor for their own people, assisted by white workers as occasion demands. . . . Let the colored believers have their place of worship and the white believers their place of worship.”<sup>14</sup> “But for several reasons white men must be chosen as leaders.”<sup>15</sup> “Common association with the blacks is not a wise course to pursue. To lodge with them in their homes may stir up feelings in the minds of the whites which will imperil the lives of the workers.”<sup>16</sup>

“The breaking down of distinctions between the white and the colored races unfits the blacks to work for their own class, and exerts a wrong influence upon the whites.”<sup>17</sup> “The mingling of whites and blacks in social equality was by no means to be encouraged.”<sup>18</sup>

Of course, this counsel was ad hoc and not to be codified and hardened into permanent policy. Her advice was pragmatic, for the time that then was, “until the Lord shows us a better way.”<sup>19</sup> Further, it was given in a time when “those who attempted to work for the black race had to suffer persecution, and many were martyrs to the cause.”<sup>20</sup>

African-American Adventists were wounded and disappointed by all of this, but the power of truth prevailed. They adopted the vocabulary of the movement and became part and parcel, warp and woof, of the fabric of Adventism.

### In Spite of and Because Of

Calvin B. Rock, vice president of the General Conference, finds it helpful to look at the African-American Adventist experience in three distinct periods: (1) the struggle for participation, 1909-1929; (2) the push for structural accommodation, 1929-1944; and (3) the battle for modified autonomy, 1944-present. Whatever the issues of the moment, African-American Adventist Church leaders and

members have always responded from within a firm position of loyalty to the church and its mission.

Those African-Americans who heard the message of Adventism and were moved to accept what they heard were not completely naive. They certainly were not “rice Christians.” Most White Seventh-day Adventists were poor, and the fledgling denomination’s institutions and units of organization were financially strapped. They had no rice to give. People from the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder do not naturally reach out to the down-and-out, especially if they are not of their “kind.”

Even Seventh-day Adventist Whites reflected the commonly held ideas about people of African-American ancestry as being inferior. As a young conference departmental director in the 1950s I was given a lay evangelism syllabus to use in my work that stated boldly, “Pentecostals and Coloreds don’t stick.” Whoever put that presentation together evidently had low expectations of African-Americans as future supportive members.

African-Americans, though, were wise enough to separate the inconsistencies in the lives and some of the preachments of the less-than-perfect human beings who brought them the “truth” from the “message” itself. Ellen White urged that “the matter is to be presented in such a way that the truly converted colored people will cling to the truth for Christ’s sake, refusing to renounce one principle of sound Bible doctrine because they may think that the very best course is not being pursued toward the Negro race.”<sup>21</sup>

African-American Adventist believers reasoned that the brethren were not proprietors, but stewards. They understood that it was not their business to judge. They made allowances for the weakness of human flesh—did not the apostle Peter crumble under the pressure of the Judaizers? (see Gal. 2:11-14). One thing was clear: the “message” did give them a good feeling about themselves, a sense of self-worth—as Kinney expressed it in 1889, the truth is powerful to change hearts when men and women surrender to its claims.

In a strange and providential way, the use that some Adventists made of Ellen White to keep African-Americans in “their place” (for example, their use of volume 9 of the *Testimonies*) prepared them for the later attacks on Ellen G. White that have caused such a “shaking of Adventism” as has been seen in recent years. African-American Adventists were forced to develop a hermeneutic for Ellen White’s writings, albeit not articulated, that helped them deal with the hard questions; the alternative was to reject the authenticity of Ellen White’s ministry. If African-Americans could handle the “volume 9” assault, they certainly could withstand the questions raised by the church’s critics today.

Furthermore, African-American Adventists grasped the idea of “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people,” and in spite of all the negatives, counted themselves a part of the

number. In the words of the spiritual, “I been introduced to the Father and the Son, and I ain’t no stranger now.”

### **The Struggle for Participation, 1909-1929**

The struggle for participation meant petitioning the brethren, “knocking at the door.” As early as 1889 C. M. Kinney was protesting the “separation of the colored people from the white people” as being “a great sacrifice upon our part. . . . This question to me is one of great embarrassment and humiliation, and not only to me, but to my people also.” After assuring the brethren of his faith that “the third angel’s message has the power to remove this prejudice upon the part of those who get hold of the truth,” Kinney goes on to make some suggestions and outline a course of action that he calls “twelve propositions.” They are no less than prescient.

Proposition 8 states that “until there is enough to form a conference of colored people, let the colored churches, companies, or individuals pay their tithes and other contributions to the regular state officers, and be considered a part of the state conference.” Proposition 11: “When colored conferences are formed they bear the same relation to the General Conference that the white conferences do.” Though Kinney’s petition is a frank, uncompromising indictment of church leadership, it carries no bitterness, no threat of breaking away from the movement: “I am willing, however, to abide by whatever the General Conference may recommend in the matter, and advise my people to do the same.” Kinney set the pattern.

In each of the three eras that Rock references, African-American Adventists maintained their loyalty both “in spite of” and “because of”—in spite of benign neglect and sometimes outright mistreatment; in spite of a double wage scale, one for Whites and the other for African-American Adventist employees; in spite of a two-tiered committee system, in which the “real” executive committee met in the morning and made all the meaningful decisions, and the “Colored” committee was called for the afternoon of the same day and asked to vote on those items that involved the “Colored” work. In spite of these difficulties, the work made steady progress during this era. “The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times” (Dan. 9:25).

The loyalty of African-American Adventists was maintained during this era also “because of” the emergence of a cadre of great African-American church leaders. Ellen White had insisted that “their voices are to be heard in the representative assemblies.”<sup>22</sup> Early on, the structures were configured to give Blacks at least limited representation in church governance.

In 1909 the General Conference established the North American Negro Department to foster the work among Blacks. The first secretary of this new department was J. W.

Christian, a Caucasian. In 1918 W. H. Green, a Washington, D.C., lawyer-turned-Adventist-clergyman, became the first African-American leader of the department. For the next 10 years Green worked out of his Detroit residence. By the time F. L. Peterson was appointed, in 1930, the GC officers had provided office space for him at the GC headquarters.

As Blacks were given greater responsibilities (the union conferences were encouraged to organize Colored departments where the membership warranted it), a large cadre of talented leaders came to the fore. They were effective advocates for their people. African-American Adventists were held together and encouraged to faithfulness by the likes of W. H. Green, F. L. Peterson, and G. E. Peters, all secretaries of the GC Colored Department; union and state evangelists J. W. Allison, J. G. Thomas, F. S. Keitts, T. M. Coopwood, J. G. Dasent, M. M. Young, O. A. Troy, J. H. Wagner, W. W. Fordham, Sydney Scott, and J. H. Laurence; and Thomas Branch, missionary to Africa.

The times developed quality leadership in quantity. Showing a great capacity for hard work under tough circumstances (W. H. Green was called “cross-country Green” because of his extensive travels back and forth across the North American continent), these men exhibited administrative skills while being, above all, powerful expositors of the Word who presented the doctrinal positions of Adventism with clarity, conviction, and persuasion. The members took pride in the “preparedness” of their ministers, vis-à-vis the clergy of other African-American churches in their communities—the church was constantly raising the educational standards for its ministers.

Rock observes: “In several cities strong congregations were developing, and a number of absolutely brilliant and powerful Black preachers were now in the pastorate.” Some became almost household names in Black Adventism: P. G. Rodgers, F. C. Phipps, W. D. Forde, A. N. Durrant, B. W. Abney, T. M. Rowe, R. L. Bradford, J. Campbell, J. H. Laurence, U. S. Willis, M. G. Nunez, H. W. Kibble, T. M. Fountain, etc. The list is by no means complete. At the same time Oakwood College was rapidly developing into the premier educational center for African-American ministers.

### **Loyalty During the Struggle for Accommodation, 1929-1944**

The impression should not be given that there were no dissidents among African-American Adventists. Rather they usually opted to work within the system. But there were times when for one reason or another a “brother” felt compelled to “bolt the party.”

Louis Sheafe, a former Baptist minister from Ohio, became disaffected while pastoring in Washington, D.C. Sheafe was an extremely popular speaker, and his services were in great demand. Proof of how highly Seventh-day

Adventist Church leaders valued his ministry is found in the extensive correspondence that both Ellen White and A. G. Daniells had with Sheafe. They pleaded with him to remain faithful to the main body, because his talents and skills were needed. However, after several attempts at independence he made a final break with the denomination about 1915.

Sheafe’s dispute was ecclesiological. He felt that it was “the right and privilege of the individual church to take part directly in all of missionary work, to ordain persons for special work at home or abroad; to exercise self-government under the guidance of its exalted Head, Jesus Christ; to collect and expend its means, such as tithes and offerings, furnished by its members; being subject to no foreign tribunal or court of review. The only recognized head of this church above the pastor is the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>23</sup> Sheafe finally accepted a pastoral assignment with the Seventh Day Baptists. His ecclesiological views probably made him more comfortable in a Baptist setting.

John Manns pioneered the Seventh-day Adventist work among African-Americans in Florida and Georgia. Anna Knight felt that he was the most effective preacher among African-American ministers. Others said he possessed extraordinary natural leadership gifts. By 1917 Manns had left the Seventh-day Adventist Church to establish the Free Seventh-day Adventist Denomination. At the second biennial session of the church, held at the Bethel Free Seventh-day Adventist Church in Savannah, Georgia, January 21-23, 1921, Manns published, in strident language, his reasons for the founding of a new denomination, all of which seemed to be racial. He stood firm in his assertion that it was “because bigoted White leaders among Seventh-day Adventists have failed to consider the necessity of such vital changes, but have fixed a permanent bar against the Negro leadership of the organization.” Manns’s dispute was social and organizational.

Manns’s brother Charles, also a Seventh-day Adventist minister, did not follow his brother in his defection. Manns and Sheafe were very effective leaders, but their departure from Adventism did not cause a great stir throughout the ranks of African-American Adventists, although Manns did visit and recruit members of Seventh-day Adventist congregations in some English-speaking territories in Inter-America.

The defection of J. K. Humphrey, of New York, was different, becoming somewhat of a cause célèbre. The Humphrey movement was the Kellogg experience of African-American Adventists. “J.K.,” as his ministerial colleagues called him, was the acknowledged leader of Black Adventism, though without official portfolio. He founded churches in Brooklyn and Manhattan. The First Harlem church became the largest noninstitutional church in the denomination. He held great evangelistic campaigns year after year in Manhattan and was known by his non-Adventist admirers as “Bishop Humphrey.”

At the 1929 Spring Council, African-American Adventist pastors, greatly influenced by J. K. Humphrey, petitioned the General Conference for authorization to organize "Colored conferences." The item was placed on the agenda for the Fall Council, and a commission was appointed to give study to the matter during the interim. Although Humphrey did not attend the council, his influence was felt in a strong way.

After vigorously debating the pros and cons of the issue at length (African-American leadership was by no means united on the issue), General Conference leaders, according to F. L. Peterson, advised the African-American brethren to go back to their districts and to not "bring up the subject again until Jesus comes." The remarkable thing about the whole experience is, there was no threat to "bolt the party." Black ministers did indeed go back to their districts and continue to work, and the African-American church continued to grow.

But Humphrey had already embarked on a project—the Utopia Health Benevolent Association—that would put him on a collision course with the "brethren." The Greater New York Conference administration expressed their concern that Humphrey did not submit the plans to the conference for approval. When the conference president asked Humphrey to "drop me a line setting me straight on this matter," Humphrey admitted that "some of us are interested in this effort to help the colored people," adding wryly, "It is absolutely a matter for the colored people." The die was cast.

Ultimately Humphrey's ministerial credentials were withdrawn, and on January 14, 1930, the Greater New York Conference executive committee adopted a resolution to drop "the First Harlem church from its sisterhood of churches, and that the First Harlem church no longer be recognized as a Seventh-day Adventist church."

Elder Humphrey proceeded to organize a new denomination—the United Sabbath Day Adventist Church. Most of the members of First Harlem followed him. Humphrey appealed to African-American pastors to join his movement, and several did. He came to our home in New Rochelle, New York, and urged my father, R. L. Bradford, at the time pastor of the West Chester County Adventist churches, to be secretary of the new "General Conference." (My father told me this years after I was an ordained minister.) Humphrey's approach to him was "Bradford, come with me; I'll make you the secretary." When Dad said "No, J.K., I can't do it," Humphrey's retort was "Why not? You know the brethren are mistreating you even as they did me."

"That may be true," my father answered, "but, J.K., this is the message!"

My father's response was typical of the majority of African-American Adventist pastors. He admired J.K. for his great gifts and leadership, and even sympathized with

him and appreciated the tremendous work he had done, but he could not break ranks with the organization. (Ironically, the New York *Amsterdam News* did report that Bradford joined Humphrey in bolting the party.)

United Sabbath Day Adventist churches were established in several American cities, including Newark, New Jersey, and St. Louis, Missouri, but the membership was concentrated in metropolitan New York City. Humphrey visited Jamaica and Costa Rica and gained some support, but after the leader's death in 1952, the movement splintered into two or three groups that continue to carry out their mission. Through the years the controversy has largely been forgotten both by United Sabbath Day Adventists and Seventh-day Adventists.

G. E. Peters, newly elected secretary of the Colored Department of the General Conference, was sent to New York to salvage the situation. Under his leadership the Ephesus SDA Church was organized and became the largest congregation in the Atlantic Union.

### **The Oakwood Strike**

Oakwood College was founded as the Oakwood Industrial School. In 1917 it became Oakwood Junior College. The faculty was all White at first, but eventually African-Americans were appointed. The administration was all White until 1931, when the student leaders called for a strike. Well-organized and carefully thought through, the demonstration was carried out with little bitterness and animosity. The leaders were mostly ministerial students, who, equipped with arguments from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, petitioned the union and General Conference leaders for an African-American president to be appointed and for African-American pastors from the North to be placed on the board of trustees. The students felt that ministers from the large cities of the North and East were better equipped to deal with the problems of a student body that was becoming increasingly city-based.

The students prevailed, and J. L. Moran was appointed president. But there was a price to be paid: the five most identifiable leaders—H. R. Murphy, W. W. Fordham, Alan Anderson, Jr., Ernest Mosely, and A. Samuel Rashford—were expelled.

Numbered among the loyal student opposition were other future church and lay leaders, including: Frank L. Bland, Frederick B. Slater, Monroe Burgess, A. Stewart Brantley, Vernon Small, Moses James, and William Betts. Several young women also were prominently involved: Louise Critchlow Murphy, Otivie Bowman Bland, Bernice Johnson Reynolds, and Maxine Brantley.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Battle for Modified Autonomy, 1944-Present**

During World War II there was a strong push for inte-

gration on the national scene. The finest of Black youth were called to make the supreme sacrifice for their country. President Roosevelt had signed an executive order banning discrimination by race in the defense industry. Intelligent and thoughtful African-American Adventists, who loved and supported their church and wanted to see it lead the way in matters of human dignity (and their numbers were increasing all the time), were moved to address the situation. Should the church lag behind the world?

Through a series of events General Conference leadership was made keenly aware that Black Adventist laypeople were extremely dissatisfied with the church's glacial progress in race relations. The volcano erupted when Lucy Byard, from New York City, was admitted to the Washington Sanitarium, but upon discovery that she was not White, hospital administrators had her transferred to Freedmen's Hospital for African-Americans. She died in transit.

A group of laypersons, largely from the Ephesus church in Washington, D.C., formed the National Association for the Advancement for Worldwide Work Among Colored Seventh-day Adventists, to seek redress for the many indignities to which African-Americans were subjected. The organization published an impressive pamphlet entitled "Shall the Four Freedoms Prevail?" The record was clear and irrefutable—not one sanitarium in the denomination would accept African-Americans into their schools of nursing. It was extremely difficult even for the brightest and best qualified young African-Americans to enroll in any academy or senior college in North America, and those who were admitted were segregated in the dining halls and limited in their choice of roommates. In today's language, there was a "glass ceiling" firmly fixed above the African-American constituency.

The General Conference leaders immediately dispatched the vice president for North America to visit the lay group. The GC representative was surprised at the quality of the committee and the depth of their resolve. Suddenly GC leadership was convinced that the "time had come for a change in the colored work." That change was not full integration, but—to the glory of God—a school of preparation for African-Americans that would enrich the worldwide fellowship.

J. L. McElhany, General Conference president; W. H. Branson, GC general vice president; and J. J. Nethery, president of the Lake Union, became change agents. African-American pastors may have initially brought up the idea of "colored conferences" in 1929, but in 1944 it was placed on the agenda by the most powerful leaders in the denomination. At the Spring Meeting of the GC Committee, held in Chicago, Illinois, in 1944, the question was put first to a special delegation of African-American leaders, many of whom were skeptical as to the reason for the rumored establishment of Black conferences. But when McElhany, Branson, and Nethery made strong speeches, the vote was

clear—African-American conferences would be organized. W. A. Spicer, former GC president, joined his brethren in arguing persuasively that a Black brother who could successfully administer a church of 500 or 600 members could surely administer a conference. The item was placed on the agenda, discussed by the full council, and passed without any serious opposition.

African-American Adventist leaders were not all agreed on the issue. A number of them felt that nothing less than total integration was acceptable. Some of them went along with the proposition grudgingly. In their struggle to make the church all that God would have it to be, Blacks have differed on methodology and structure, but never on message and mission or ultimate goal.

### **The Laymen's Leadership Conference**

The Seventh-day Adventist message, with its emphasis on education, hard work, and thrift, inevitably motivates those who embrace its tenets toward excellence. As with the early Methodists, they move rapidly up the ladder of social, intellectual, and financial improvement. African-American Adventists became known in their communities as solid citizens and achievers. If involvement in the mission and operation of the church are valid loyalty indicators, African-American Adventists rank very high on any scale.

The Laymen's Leadership Conference (LLC) drew its strength from a group of talented professionals whose chief organizer was Frank W. Hale, Ph.D. As one would expect, their thrust was toward equal access to educational and employment privileges for African-Americans: "We have adjusted to quota systems in our colleges and professional schools. We have adjusted to the philosophy of 'white teachers only' in our institutions of higher learning. We have adjusted to the philosophy of 'menial tasks only' for the few Negroes who have served in such units as the Review and Herald Publishing Association and the Voice of Prophecy. . . . We have adjusted and adjusted. Now it is time to readjust!"<sup>25</sup>

LLC members carried their message effectively through mass meetings and rallies and the public press to all the large centers of the African-American church. By the time of the 1962 GC session the movement had placed General Conference leaders on notice. Now their petition became very pointed—an African-American should be made a vice president of the GC. It is not possible to prove that LLC's appeal was solely responsible for the election of F. L. Peterson to this post, but at any rate, LLC's activities did not hurt.

Taking a different tack, LLC did not at first look with favor on regional conferences, an interim, less-than-ideal arrangement they felt should be tolerated but not embraced. And they certainly were not supportive of the push for

Black unions during the seventies. More in tune with the objectives of the civil rights movement, LLC types would not “adjust” to anything less than the ideal. This is not to criticize these good people; it is simply to point out that people of the highest idealism are also needed. Their point of view should be understood and appreciated.

### Church Loyalty and the Black Unions Issue

The proposal to organize Black (regional) union conferences engaged the entire North American Division as no other organizational issue has since the reorganizational discussions of 1901-1904. It was the agenda for the day and dominated the conversation. There was no neutral ground; the North American church was polarized.

The item was first discussed officially during the quadrennial meeting of the North American Division Regional Department in Miami, Florida, in April 1969. The discussion quickly broadened and intensified. A study commission was appointed. Two conferences were scheduled—January 13, 1970, and April 16, 1970—to consider carefully all sides of the argument. A few articulate laypersons, four of the eight regional conference presidents, and a large number of church pastors formed a core group advocating the plan. A large number of laypersons and denominational employees considered the plan too radical, and it was defeated on April 19, 1970. But the issue refused to go away. At the request of the regional presidents it was revisited at the Annual Council of 1978. Again there was disappointment, but no serious thought of secession.

Calvin B. Rock, one of the strongest proponents for Black unions, remarks: “It is clear that Black leadership today, as historically, elects to function from a loyalty bias rather than from the matrix of an either/or decision. Loyalty and justice do not, in their thinking, present themselves as mutually exclusive phenomena. To be loyal to the church is to be solicitous for its welfare—to be solicitous for its welfare is to work toward rectifying its ills.”<sup>26</sup>

The presence of African-Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been positive. The very people of whom it was said “They don’t stick” have exhibited extraordinary growth in membership and finance year after year. They now comprise almost 30 percent of North American Division membership. This despite years of discrimination and economic privation. African-American Adventists have developed a “survival kit” that has enabled them to maintain their loyalty “in spite of.”

In the plans and purposes of God, the whole church may profit by the experience of its African-American brothers and sisters. This struggling yet victorious people make their greatest contribution to their church and the larger society when they are assured of their self-worth

and affirmed by the belief system they have espoused—the message. When African-Americans, ordinary people, come to see themselves as laborers together with God, identifying with His plans and purposes, a sense of security maximizes their ability to serve their fellow human beings with dignity. They will not envy the rich and privileged, nor will they despise the poor and underclass. Buying into the divine economy helps the believer to see the big picture and thus transcend the injustices and inequities of the present.

An intense eschatological sense of the nearness of Christ’s return—the *naherwartung*—which is the essence of Adventism, gives one perspective and clears the mind wonderfully by breaking the spell of mammon, the “tyranny of things.” The apocalyptic vision also provides motivation for responsible action and the adoption of an authentic Christian lifestyle. “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Peter 3:11, 12, NIV).

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor*, Apr. 23, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Keith A Russell, *In Search of the Church* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Dupre, ed., *Christian Spirituality* (New York: Crossroads Pub. Co., 1991), vol. 3, p. 404.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 359.

<sup>6</sup> ———, *The Southern Work*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Arthur White, *The Early Elmshaven Years 1900-1905* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua V. Himes, *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology Selected From the Manuscripts of William Miller, With a Memoir of His Life* (Boston: Moses A. Dow, 1841), pp. 241, 242.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), vol. 3, p. 139.

<sup>13</sup> ———, *The Southern Work*, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> ———, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 210.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>16</sup> ———, *The Southern Work*, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> ———, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 206.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>20</sup> ———, *The Southern Work*, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> ———, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 215.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin B. Rock, Ph.D. dissertation, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> See W. W. Fordham, *Righteous Rebel* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1990), pp. 27, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Laymen’s Leadership Conference letter, July 4, 1961.

<sup>26</sup> Rock, p. 157.

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THE INFLUENCE OF ELLEN G. WHITE

by Delbert W. Baker, Ph.D.

## Introduction

The story of the African-American sojourn in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is dramatic, eventful, and full of unexpected turns. The scenes shift from danger and disappointment to confrontation and conflict to breakthrough and eventual progress. Throughout the account, however, there are two constants—the *providential leading* of God and the reality of *prophetic guidance*, both of which are articulated in the ministry of Ellen White. As surely as God had led the Israelites out of Egypt, she noted, so had He led the Black race out of slavery. Ellen White added that “He designed to work still further for them” and lead them into a knowledge of His truth.<sup>1</sup>

Many SDAs remain unaware of this element of SDA history and its impact on the denomination at large, and what is known is sometimes sketchy and incomplete. But to understand the contemporary Black work, one must view it in a historical context. The beginning 50 years of the Black work are especially important because they provide the foundation for all succeeding progress. This account will attempt to fill in the gaps and expand our understanding of the larger picture.

The story begins more than 130 years ago, at the end of slavery, when a major challenge faced the fledgling SDA movement—the solemn task of taking the gospel to 5 million newly freed Blacks, who, along with their forebears, had suffered centuries of brutality and deprivation. The challenge was clear, the need overwhelming. Yet powers of resistance conspired to halt any effort to improve life for these people, so long deprived of the most basic rights.

In spite of obstacles, the work among Blacks moved forward through periods of encouragement, discouragement, momentum, inertia, breakthrough, and progress. It is this history and the effect on it of the ministry of Ellen White that this chapter will address. We shall do so by first examining her general philosophy and attitude toward slavery and the social conditions of society during her earlier ministry, and then by referencing two specific chronological periods of history in the early development of Black Adventism.

The first period, the beginning years, involves the years before 1891. This period, covering approximately three decades, represents the gloomy years of the Black work.

The church struggled with the dilemma of the race question, wrestling with philosophical and logistical questions dealing with the *who*, *what*, and *why* of the Black work. Caught up in organizational paroxysms brought on by denominational uncertainty and the quagmire of social unrest, the church made little progress among Blacks during this period. However, throughout these years we see Ellen White prompting the church to address the urgent need to develop a substantive presence among Blacks in the South.

The second period of time, the expansion years, covers 1891-1910. During this 20-year span the Black work grew rapidly, flourishing and spreading throughout the country. These were years of danger, but also years of advancement and success. The counsels of Ellen White and the efforts of Edson White and other supporters of the Black work were finally having an effect. The church had begun to move ahead, with immediate results. This period of activity provided the ideological and organizational basis for subsequent progress.

Race remains a sensitive and controversial issue in society and the church. However, the story of the Black work in the United States offers a poignant reminder of God’s providence and shows how He has blessed this movement in spite of challenges. We can be profitably instructed and guided by our past. In this account some may be drawn to what might have been had the church moved more quickly and aggressively; others might be drawn to the progress without noting the tremendous sacrifices that Whites and Blacks contributed to the work. These views notwithstanding, the most important focus is the constancy of divine providence.

As background, an overview of how Ellen White addressed the second-class status of Blacks in her day is in order.

## Ellen White and the Status of Black People

Before the early 1870s SDAs confined their efforts primarily to North America. When the church began to consider a broader perspective for outreach effort, it turned its attention to Europe. In 1874 John N. Andrews went to Switzerland as the first SDA missionary.

At that time, however, the primary social question for the church was whether it would be willing to follow the gospel commission and assist another part of the human

family, the Black race in America, just out of slavery. The message of Christ emphasizes unity, equality, and love for all people—especially the needy and unfortunate close at hand. The SDA Church was to model Christ’s gospel of love and inclusion—in practice. It was in this context that Ellen White repeatedly told church leaders that they were not fulfilling their mission if they neglected their disadvantaged Black brothers and sisters in their own country—they must reach out and diversify.

### The Church and Diversity

In 1895 Ellen White highlighted a blatant inconsistency in the church’s missionary thrust relative to equitable evangelism: “We should take into consideration the fact that efforts are being made at great expense to send the gospel to the darkened regions of the world . . . to bring instruction to the ignorant and idolatrous; yet here in the very midst of us are millions of people . . . who have souls to save or to lose, and yet they are set aside and passed by as was the wounded man by the priest and the Levite.”<sup>2</sup> Again Ellen White, stressing the theme of diversity, emphasized that the church was to evangelize all ethnic groups—and especially the disadvantaged group close at hand. She left the church little room to excuse its lack of evangelistic inclusiveness.

Ellen White, in her support and advocacy of the Black work, personified the words of Christ in Luke 4:18, 19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

No person had greater impact on the inclusion and status of Black people in the SDA Church than Ellen White. It is impossible to talk about Black SDA history without constantly referring to her contributions. Pioneer Black workers invariably pointed to either Ellen White or her writings as the source of their inspiration and guidance. The Black work would have had little momentum had Ellen White not championed the cause.

### Family Contributions

Every member of the White family made contributions to the development of the Black work. James White was the General Conference president who issued a call for volunteers to work in the South. Edson White gave at least a decade of his life to building the Black work along the Mississippi River. William White, as his mother’s assistant, actively endorsed her teachings on equality, fairness, and inclusion during her life and after her death.

Ellen White unequivocally opposed slavery in all forms. Based on the principle outlined in Deuteronomy 23:15, she

advocated that SDAs violate the fugitive slave laws, which demanded the return of a runaway slave. In 1859 she wrote: “The law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey; and we must abide the consequences of violating this law.”<sup>3</sup>

Later, in 1861, she received the historic vision at Roosevelt, New York, that revealed the horrible curse and degradation of slavery. She declared that God was bringing judgment against America for “the high crime of slavery,” and that God “will punish the South for the sin of slavery and the North for so long suffering its overreaching and overbearing influence”<sup>4</sup>

Leaders in the Black work used Ellen White’s writings as a guide in the building up of the work. Primary among such resources were *The Southern Work* (published in 1898 and about 1901 aboard the *Morning Star*) and *Testimonies for the Church*, volumes 7 (1902) and 9 (1909). Though these books contained statements that can be problematic when read out of context, they showed that the Black work was a priority with Ellen White. Church periodicals such as the *Gospel Herald*, *Review and Herald*, *Signs of the Times*, and other papers also contained a wealth of material by Ellen White and other church leaders offering counsel on the Black work.

James White, as editor of the *Review and Herald*, spoke out strongly against slavery as unbiblical. He cited evidence that the beast in the book of Revelation 13 was the United States in that it looks like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon. Other leaders who had much to do with the development of the Black SDA work during this historic period were John Byington (later the first General Conference president) and John P. Kellogg (father of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg), both of whom are believed to have operated stations of the Underground Railroad from their farms in New York and Michigan. These early leaders typified the strong moral consciousness and antislavery activism among early SDAs. Uriah Smith, another prominent SDA leader and *Review and Herald* editor, also spoke out against slavery and went so far as to denounce Abraham Lincoln prior to the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation for not acting immediately to free the slaves.

Ellen White’s extensive counsel reveals at least seven principles upon which she based her advocacy of the Black work.

1. *The biblical principle.* God had commissioned the Adventist Church to take the gospel to *all the world*, including the Black people of the South.

2. *The moral principle.* Adventists were obliged to do what was morally right. To go to foreign countries and ignore the Black race was not morally right.

3. *The humanitarian principle.* All decent people, Ellen White reasoned, who saw the suffering of people just out of

slavery should follow the example of Christ and provide help.

4. *The empathetic principle.* The White race was challenged to empathize with those who were deprived of education and civil freedoms, exposed to abuse, and treated as nonpersons.

5. *The restitution principle.* Ellen White felt that the entire country had benefited from the life, energy, and labor of Black people, and it was time to restore something to them for the decades of loss and injury they had suffered.

6. *The societal principle.* Ellen White reasoned that if one part of society was weak, the whole society would be weakened. If the Black race could be strengthened, then the entire society would be strengthened.

7. *The eschatological principle.* If Adventists ignored the Black race and did nothing to ameliorate the deplorable conditions in which they existed, they would answer for it in the judgment.

### The Beginning Years: 1860-1890

The years 1860-1890 were characterized by hesitation, awkwardness, and neglect. With each passing year of delay after the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, the SDA Church lost ground. SDAs were outmissionaried by Protestant and Catholic organizations. It was a regrettable period. In 1865 the United States faced the proverbial “winter of discontent.” A melancholy air hung over the nation. In many quarters people seemed seized with feelings of malaise and hopelessness. While the union had been preserved and the slaves freed, the cost had been astronomical. More than 600,000 Americans had died in the war—more than in all the country’s subsequent conflicts combined. Large areas of the South were ruined physically and economically.

On the other hand, it was a time for change and adjustment. The status of the newly freed slaves pressed for attention. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified by the states in late 1865, officially ended slavery in the U.S. However, that was only the first step. The controversial period known as Reconstruction (1865-1877) followed, during which the government sought to protect the rights of freed slaves and help them start new lives.

Unfortunately, Reconstruction provided “too little for not long enough.” The nation’s racial problems soon continued, with segregation, discrimination, lynching, sharecropping, and the draconian Black Codes becoming a way of life in the South.

At the beginning of the 1890s Ellen White began a stream of articles, letters, and messages concerning the Black work, including a letter from Australia addressed to “my brethren in responsible positions in America”: “The colored people might have been helped with much better prospects of success years ago than now. The work is now tenfold harder than it would have been then. . . . After the

war, if the Northern people had made the South a real missionary field, if they had not left the Negroes to ruin through poverty and ignorance, thousands of souls would have been brought to Christ. But it was an unpromising field, and the Catholics have been more active in it than any other class.”<sup>5</sup>

In another letter, addressed “to the board of managers of the Review and Herald Office,” she characterized the lack of involvement shown by the church toward the Black race: “The Lord is grieved at the indifference manifested by His professed followers toward the ignorant and oppressed colored people. *If our people had taken up this work at the close of the Civil War, their faithful labor would have done much to prevent the present condition of suffering and sin.*”<sup>6</sup>

### Multicultural Roots

From the beginning of the SDA Church in the New England states, the general trend of evangelism was westward, not southward. As a result, Black people living in the South had little knowledge of SDA teachings. However, there were a few Black SDA believers in Northern churches even from the beginning years of the SDA movement. While there was some integration in SDA churches in the North, Blacks associated with these churches according to the social patterns of the region.

Blacks in the Millerite movement played a significant part in the preaching of the soon coming of Christ. William Still, Charles Bowles, and John Lewis, recognized Black ministers, were coworkers with William Miller, Joshua V. Himes, and other Millerite leaders. William Ellis Foy (1818-1893) was a Black minister who received four visions prior to those received by Hazen Foss and Ellen White. Frederick Douglass was acquainted with the Second Coming and other Advent teachings. The message of Christ’s soon Advent and the abolitionist views of prominent Millerite leaders helped to make the Advent movement appealing to Black people. Records indicate that several of the meeting places used by abolitionists were also used by Millerites to preach the Advent of Christ.

### The Appeal of SDA Teachings

In 1860 the SDA Church adopted its name, and in 1863 the church officially organized, thus positioning itself to fulfill the mission of sharing the gospel and the liberating teachings of Christ with Black people. Unfortunately, the church did not begin any initiative to address the needs of the Black race from an evangelistic or humanitarian standpoint for more than a quarter of a century. The church essentially avoided the issue in spite of Ellen White’s appeals for action.

How ironic that when the Black race was in need of a complete system of truth that could improve the total person—mentally, spiritually, and physically—the SDA

Church, in possession of just such a system, failed to actively share that truth to the Black race. Each of the SDA teachings was uniquely suited to address the needs of the people so recently freed from bondage.

Ellen White eloquently described the situation in which Black people found themselves: “God cares no less for the souls of the African race that might be won to serve Him than He cared for Israel. He requires far more of His people than they have given Him in missionary work among the people of the South of all classes, and especially among the colored race. Are we not under even greater obligation to labor for the colored people than for those who have been more highly favored? Who is it that held these people in servitude? Who kept them in ignorance, and pursued a course to debase and brutalize them, forcing them to disregard the law of marriage, breaking up the family relation, tearing wife from husband, and husband from wife? If the race is degraded, if they are repulsive in habits and manners, who made them so? Is there not much due to them from the white people? After so great a wrong has been done them, should not an earnest effort be made to lift them up? The truth must be carried to them. They have souls to save as well as we.”<sup>7</sup>

Christianity offered general help for the recently freed slave, but SDA teachings had the specific system of truth needed. In every particular, Adventism offered Black people the essentials to successfully make it through this life to eternity to come. Specific appeals of the SDA system of truth to the freed slaves included:

1. Slavery destroyed self-esteem—the Scriptures offered hope and direction.
2. Slavery separated families—Christ as Saviour provided a Friend and security.
3. Slavery exploited ungodly desires—salvation offered reformation and eternal life.
4. Slavery encouraged abuse—stewardship nurtured health and wholeness.
5. Slavery discouraged positive values—standards taught a positive lifestyle.
6. Slavery bred hateful revenge—the sanctuary encouraged trust in God’s judgment.
7. Slavery forced continual labor—the Sabbath facilitated physical and spiritual rest.
8. Slavery ridiculed faith—the Spirit of Prophecy focused on providence and protection.
9. Slavery fostered spiritualism—the state-of-the-dead teaching pointed to the resurrection.
10. Slavery cultivated hopelessness—the Second Coming promised deliverance.

The period following 1865 was characterized by sporadic and individual efforts from lay missionaries and ministers of Southern origin. During this period SDAs made

little, if any, effort to evangelize Black people. Rather, White ministers conducted evangelistic meetings for Whites in various Southern cities, and Black people attended these meetings uninvited. They often stood outside or sat in the back of the meeting place.

### The Segregation Question

Non-Adventist authors Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, in their controversial book on Adventism, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, argue that Adventist pioneers, at least after they became Seventh-day Adventists, had very little personal contact with Black people and were hesitant to associate with them. They posit that even when Adventists began evangelization in the South in the 1870s, it was not on behalf of Blacks: “Blacks . . . found the church after turning up at Adventist meetings without being directly invited.”<sup>8</sup>

Bull and Lockhart maintain that Adventists were generally passive and accommodating in regard to racial issues. They concede that while Adventists may not have endorsed segregation, they did accept it as part of life in the South. They argue that racial segregation in the SDA Church was initiated and perpetuated “first by expediency, and then by choice”<sup>9</sup> There is, however, another perspective.

The SDA Church leaders *did address* the issue of segregation during the pre-1891 period. SDA ministers in the South encountered a perplexing dilemma when Blacks attended their evangelistic meetings and churches. The important question was What should we do?

A. W. Spalding, in his unpublished manuscript “Lights and Shades in the Black Belt,” suggests that integrating churches would have hindered the work in the South: “The matter [of segregation] did not come prominently to the attention of the denomination, because it was in only two or three places that the difficulties were acute, and the cause in the South was not extensive enough in those years to take over much of the time of the annual conferences.”<sup>10</sup>

The segregation issue did not appear in the records of the church until 1887. Entries in the *General Conference Bulletin* cite that the delegates had engaged in animated discussion on a resolution that the church recognize no color line. The discussion resulted in an amended resolution that stressed that “no distinction whatever” should be “made between the two races in church relations.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the session established a three-person committee to “consider the matter carefully, and recommend proper action to the conference.” A week later the committee reported that they saw “no occasion for this conference to legislate upon the subject, and would, therefore, recommend that no action be taken.”<sup>12</sup> This left the question of segregation and race relations to the discretion of individual ministers and teachers. After the 1887 segre-

gation discussion, items concerning the South and the Black work receded into the background.

### Landmark Progress

As the work developed throughout the South, Black congregations sprang up. In 1886 Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, became the location of the first Black SDA church. The pastor was Harry Lowe, formerly a Baptist minister. The second Black SDA congregation was established in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1890, with A. Barry as its pastor. The third Black SDA church was started in Bowling Green, Kentucky, in 1891, followed by churches in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1892 (started by Charles Kinney), and Nashville, Tennessee, in 1894. The Edgefield Junction, Louisville, Bowling Green, and Nashville churches are located in what is now the South Central Conference, and the New Orleans church is located in what is now the Southwest Region Conference.

Oakwood Industrial School, renamed Oakwood College in 1943, was established in 1896 with four buildings, four teachers, and 16 students (eight women and eight men). The institution, with a property value of about \$10,000, began in response to the appeals of Ellen White to develop a training center in the South for Black leaders. General Conference leaders purchased a 360-acre farm (the property later included 1,000 acres) about five miles north of Huntsville, Alabama. Ellen White identified this as a place that God had selected and would richly bless.

Ellen White visited the campus in 1904, and through the remaining years of her life she constantly promoted and supported the school. On numerous occasions she spoke of having received “divine instruction” in regard to Oakwood College. It has been estimated that 85 percent of the Black leaders of the church have spent some time at Oakwood College during their educational experience.

### The Expansion Period: 1891-1910

After more than 30 years of relative inactivity on the part of SDAs in the South, the tide began to turn during the 1890s. The SDA Church’s outreach to African-Americans prospered because certain individuals accepted the challenge to champion a moral cause. This phenomenon illustrates the dynamics of an organization struggling with racial inclusiveness. The triumph of this chapter in SDA Church history illustrates the providence of God in bringing the Black work into being in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

The years 1891-1910 commenced with an event that proved to be a turning point in the history of the Black work: the presentation by Ellen White of the historic message “Our Duty to the Colored People.” The message was delivered to the delegates of the twenty-ninth General Conference session, held in Battle Creek, Michigan. During

her presentation Ellen White insisted that after years of neglect the church could not go on ignoring its duty to the Black race without incurring God’s displeasure.

Fully aware of the confrontational content of her message, she conceded: “I know that that which I now speak will bring me into conflict. This I do not covet, for the conflict has seemed to be continuous of late years; but I do not mean to live a coward or die a coward, leaving my work undone. I must follow in my Master’s footsteps.”<sup>13</sup>

With words of authority, she declared that God had shown her many things regarding the Black race and that “sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made great effort for the salvation of souls among the colored people.”<sup>14</sup> Ellen White enunciated many of her foundational positions on the issues of Black people, the Black work, equality, and race. In it she appealed to church leaders to begin the work and seek to make up for lost time. This presentation contained principles that she would continue to elaborate on for the next 20 years.

### Change Agents

Perhaps these years are best characterized by the efforts of scores of dedicated people who gave themselves unreservedly to building the Black work. Examples of some early-but-lesser-known workers were Will Palmer (Edson White’s associate), R. M. Kilgore, H. S. Shaw, and Dr. J. E. Caldwell. However, three people—Ellen White, Edson White, and Charles Kinney—were the major change agents and architects of the Black work.

### Ellen White

Ellen White (1827-1915) can be called the initiator of the Black work. Her influence was constantly in favor of equality and the inclusion of Black people in the church. In addition to the emphases already enunciated, Ellen White’s influence was also felt in the ongoing guidance she provided her son Edson during the time he worked in the South and in the institutions he established to build and strengthen the work among Black people in the South.

### Edson White

The dedication and far-reaching contributions of Edson White (1849-1928) during close to two decades of service were invaluable to the progress of the Black work. Edson White’s ship, *Morning Star*, and the varied ministries carried on from that venue were among the primary catalysts for assertive efforts on behalf of Black people. Sensing the need to coordinate all the efforts in the South on behalf of Blacks, Edson White established the Southern Missionary Society in 1895. This self-supporting organization was established in Vicksburg, Mississippi, aboard the *Morning Star* and remained independent until it was merged with the

Southern Union Conference in 1901. Staffed with a group of missionary-minded volunteers, for more than two decades its groundbreaking work promoted education, health, evangelism, and general self-betterment among Black people. Its programs included education, community assistance, training in self-supporting work, industrial education, and basic principles of thrift, business, and health.

In a December 1899 editorial in the *Gospel Herald*, Edson White emphasized Ellen White's molding influence on his work: "We have ever regarded instruction coming from this source [his mother's writings] as the very highest authority. These instructions have been plain and explicit, and when followed, success has ever attended this work" (italics supplied). With Ellen White's counsel and financial and moral support, Edson White created a lasting model for the Black work in the South.

Another major contribution was the *Gospel Herald* (1898-1903), the predecessor to *Message* magazine, which was first printed aboard the *Morning Star*, with Edson White as its first editor. The *Gospel Herald* had as its objective the "reporting and promoting [of] the work among the colored people in the South." Edson White targeted Black and White SDAs as primary readers and used the magazine as an evangelistic and fund-raising tool.

The success of the Black work under Edson White can be summarized in a simple four-step model: (1) Ellen White would convey a general principle or recommendation to Edson; (2) Edson, via the Southern Missionary Society, would adapt and implement the counsel; (3) the efforts would be examined and refined in the context of the Southern work; and (4) Black and White Adventist workers would participate in the implementation of the counsel.

Though other Adventist ministers, including E. B. Lane, D. M. Canright, and R. M. Kilgore, preached and worked in the South before Edson White went there in 1894, it was Edson White's work aboard the *Morning Star* that comprised the first successful effort by SDAs on behalf of Black people. The steamboat ministry forever changed the character of the Southern work. Its success is measured in the establishment of schools and churches along with successful initiatives in publishing, health, and missionary outreach.

### Charles Kinney

Charles M. Kinney (1855-1951) can rightly be called the father of Black Adventism. A slave from birth, Kinney was born in Richmond, Virginia. Moving west after the Civil War, Kinney settled in Reno, Nevada, where he attended evangelistic meetings held by J. N. Loughborough. Won to the truth through the preaching of Loughborough and Ellen White, Kinney held dear his acquaintance with them.

Kinney became the first to articulate the concerns of Black Adventists in the areas of race, church polity, and or-

ganizational equity. For two decades he labored throughout the South for Blacks, preaching to any person who would listen to his message. Kinney believed that Black people needed to grow in three areas to reach their potential: education, experience, and economic development. He was an avid proponent of the view that SDA doctrine could provide for the spiritual needs of disadvantaged Black people; therefore, he did everything in his power to see that his people received a knowledge of the truth and that the church did everything possible to advance the Black work.

Kinney, believed to have been the first Black ordained minister (1889), had a deep burden for his people. In an 1885 issue of the *Review and Herald*, he appealed to the readers who wanted to see the gospel go to all people to pray for him so that "I may have strength, physical, mental, and spiritual, to do what I can for the colored people."<sup>15</sup>

The concept of Black conferences was first suggested by Kinney when he was confronted by efforts to segregate him and his members at camp meeting on the day of his ordination. He advocated Black conferences as a way to work more effectively among Blacks and help ease racial tensions in the church. By the time of his death (1951), he saw the Black membership in North America dramatically increase to more than 26,000.

Throughout his long and fruitful ministry, Kinney continued to establish congregations and build churches, until his retirement in 1911. Charles Kinney's story is one of struggle, faith, persistence, and eventual triumph. It is another biography that deserves to be told in detail.

### Organizational Inclusion

With a Black SDA membership of approximately 1,000 after a decade of general outreach to African-Americans, church leaders felt that a new form of organization was needed to coordinate the burgeoning work. So in 1909 the General Conference Committee officially voted that the North American Negro Department be established. This development signaled a significant and symbolic phase in the progress of the Black work. Before this the Black work was not structurally recognized at the higher levels of the organization. But since then the Black work has become an integral part of every level of the SDA administrative structure.

### Implications for Today

The development of the Black work during these early years is a clear manifestation of God's providence. The Bible indicates that God's church is to be inclusive of all kindreds, tongues, and peoples. The historical timing of the freeing of the slaves and the organization of the SDA Church created an opportunity for SDAs to fulfill the gospel commission. Therefore, this charge to evangelize Black people was as much a challenge to the denominational atti-

tude toward race relations as it was in fulfilling its ongoing evangelistic mission.

So from a careful study of denominational history, it is clear that it was God's plan for Black people to be an integral part of the SDA movement. Providence, borne out by the messages given by Ellen White, marked each step of progress. The evolution of the Black work does not represent the efforts of one race to paternalistically help another; rather it is the outworking of God's plan that His church be multicultural (Rev. 14:6) and that it deal with the needs of the oppressed and excluded. The Scriptures came through the Hebrew nation to the other nations of the world (John 4:22). All groups received a knowledge of the gospel, even as Blacks did. All groups are recipients of the gospel and grafted into the body of Christ.

The story of African-Americans in the SDA Church is a story of drama and perspective. The people and events of this period gave meaning and momentum to the Black work today. As a result of the work, sacrifice, and labor of the pioneers, the African-American church has prospered throughout the United States and has become a source of inspiration for Adventists in America and around the world.

As the church today faces new problems of ethnicity and diversity, the history of the Black work highlights four lessons that may prove instructive even today: (1) Ellen White's continuing influence as a change agent in the SDA organization; (2) the positive ways the church addressed itself to the sensitive issues of race and inclusiveness in past years; (3) the organizational techniques the church employed in the difficult Southern states; and (4) the methods adopted by the church in starting and supporting work in a new and undeveloped field.

The progress we see today is the result of the combined efforts of the entire church under the blessing of God.

Records show that in the 1890s there were only 50 Black members. However, by 1918 there were more than 3,500 Black members! Similar dramatic increases occurred in tithes returned, mission schools, workers, and churches. Today membership in Black conferences is approaching 250,000, and tithe is more than \$90 million!

We have hope in the future because we have seen what God has done in the past. The story of the Black work continues, and it is with renewed confidence that we move forward. God has led and guided through His providence and the prophetic gift He has granted. He *will* continue to lead in the future. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), vol. 4, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195. Italics supplied.

<sup>7</sup> White, *The Southern Work*, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 194.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur W. Spalding, "Lights and Shades in the Black Belt," in Ellen G. White Estate Document File 376, p. 138.

<sup>11</sup> *General Conference Bulletin*, Nov. 14, 1887, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1887, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>13</sup> White, *The Southern Work*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Kinney, "Labor Among the Colored People of Topeka, Kansas," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 27, 1885.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), p. 196.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND PUBLIC EVANGELISM

by Charles D. Brooks, D.D.

## Introduction

It is not my purpose to write a history of evangelistic endeavors within the Black Seventh-day Adventist Church. I do wish to show, however, how we fit into God's program and how He intended us good from the beginning of the remnant movement. When the disappointed saints, purged and tried by the fire of ostracism and calumny, were so depleted of pride and self-sufficiency as to proclaim before God their willingness to do any and all that He required, for the first time since the biblical canon closed, God honored this commitment with a restoration of *all* the spiritual gifts, including that of soul winning, and extended to the children of slavery an abundant measure of this grace.

## Chosen

The year was 1844, and something wonderful was about to begin on earth in response to a great religious awakening! Vague rumblings of prophecy had been permitted by God to inspire and motivate a people to longingly expect and daringly proclaim that Jesus would return on October 22 of that year. On several continents men and women who loved the Lord and sought assiduously for "light" were stirred and attracted to the much-neglected doctrine of the "coming of Christ." Much earlier Martin Luther and other theologians had highlighted 1844 as a momentous year for God's people.

The great Protestant Reformation had come alive, strengthened by the Holy Spirit to revolutionary proportions. The blessed hope would ever after be central to God's people as the 1260-year darkness of papal supremacy dissipated. Alas, while the Reformation broke the ancient bonds of Romanism, and persecution ended in fulfillment of Christ's prophetic promises, the majority of followers refused to advance the light; the Reformation was arrested, and the various groups became creedbound.

Instead of walking in the light that the great Prince of heaven was shining on their pathway, they proclaimed their intention to believe and practice *only* what their leaders proclaimed to them. Competition became the bane of the churches, they refused to look to Jesus *only*, the law of God was still held in contempt, papal festivals and human institutions became sacrosanct, and their progress was stifled in a kind of humanized theological malaise! The various

movements named themselves in honor of their leaders: followers of Luther became Lutherans, followers of Wesley became Wesleyans, and followers of Calvin became Calvinists. Who would simply follow Christ?

A spiritual stupor settled over the Protestant Reformation. The "deadly wound of the beast" entered a healing process, and Protestants began to waste their time in the devilish pursuit of persecuting one another while erecting great buildings and prestigious institutions.

The very atmosphere was rife with confusion, and the essence of "Babylon" began to materialize. The *awesome thing* that God had inspired died. The prophecy declared: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. 3:1). Darwinism drew minds away from creationism and the Creator; Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, and others emerged with their own doctrines and substitute Bibles; and men in pulpits tried to compensate for their absence of power with theatrics and emotionalism! The substance was gone, and the church waned! As 1844 approached, it was time for an awakening.

William Miller and kindred groups in North and South America and Europe focused on the promise of Christ's second coming. Their minds were riveted on *prophecy*. They rediscovered the impeccably accurate "time prophecy" of Daniel 7 and 8. Calculations were made; something had to happen in 1844. Fulfillments of the earlier parts of the 2300-day prophecy compelled people to believe that the latter part could not fail.

Unknowingly, they had misinterpreted the words "then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" to mean that the end of sin and sinners was imminent. Thus the saints prepared for the day—October 22, 1844—when they believed the world would end.

At that time, on that very day, millions of people whom God loved with His perfect love were in bonds of servitude—slaves in this country that He had established to be the "land of the free." These slaves, brutalized and dehumanized by the barbaric and bestial treatment of their masters and their government, were untaught and unprepared for such an event as the coming of Christ. And they without us could not enter in to the heavenly Canaan! God would not have it! These noble Blacks, forbidden by law even to

learn to read, had fastened their hearts onto Christ and His hope. They sang of it in their spirituals. They embraced it in their theology.

So came the great disappointment of 1844. October arrived amid great anticipation and fear. A great solemnity fell across the land as the often-maligned Millerites waited and hoped. October 22 became October 23, and at last they had to bow their heads and experience the bitterness of the Disappointment. They became the subjects of ridicule and derision; mockery almost obliterated the blessed hope of Christ's coming from the hearts of Protestant Christians. Millions were locked into falsehood forever.

Many Advent believers returned to whatever they were before, or worse, became infidels and atheists. However, the bitter disappointment became for a small group a refining process. The fearful and unbelieving lost their hold on truth and were shaken off; those who remained pleaded earnestly with God for light. They knew He was not a God of failure! They knew His Word was true! With tears they sought understanding. And God provided it. Hiram Edson was walking in a cornfield when illumination came in answer to the prayers of the pleading saints. And shortly after, a young girl, Ellen Gould Harmon (later White), was given a clarifying vision. The message? That the sanctuary in heaven was the focal point of the prophecy, that the judgment of God's people, dead and living, had commenced there, and that Jesus was pleading His blood, interceding for lost humanity, sending His Spirit to woo men and women everywhere in a final message to a doomed world.

As the eyes of God's humble saints were opened by the Holy Spirit, they saw again the prophecy of Revelation 10: "Thou must prophesy again." This time our Black forebears would not be left out!

(It is noteworthy that our truths did not come from the Spirit of Prophecy or from the great schools of theology. Rather God honored simple saints on their knees in barns and cottages in New England. The Spirit of Prophecy was what it ever is—a confirmation of the truths of God's Word.)

### **Included**

The righteousness of God is an affront to unrighteous humanity! His absolute fairness surprises us, and we must bow before His terrible majesty. The mandate of Revelation 10:11 required His faithful "little flock" to begin again to proclaim His truth "before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings"—which certainly would include our Black ancestors. The stage was being set economically and politically for a crisis that would lead to our freedom. Some 18 years after the Disappointment, as the believers were being organized into God's remnant church, Abraham Lincoln lifted his pen to that wondrous document called the Emancipation Proclamation, which took effect on January

1, 1863. According to historians, the signing was of such consequence that "the pen shook violently in his hand." Nevertheless, through divine providence, the ultimate objective of saving the union could not be accomplished without also freeing the slaves! This was God's doing! His enterprises cannot be ultimately thwarted or defeated.

In God's plan, Abraham Lincoln and the thunders of the Civil War provided the context, but freedom was the watchword. In heaven the theme was "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free!" Black people would know the truth! Black people would be included! In fact, God chose one of us, a mulatto named William Foy, to be the conveyor of special instructions direct from His throne so that the seemingly impossible task could be accomplished.

This one special gift (Luther, Calvin, and Wesley were all given the gifts of apostles, teachers, governments, etc.) was tied to complete obedience to God's law—including the Sabbath. In His wisdom God perceived in that late 1844 commitment among His people a willingness to walk in all the light He would send, and thus He honored His remnant people with the Spirit of Prophecy. And He chose a Black man to be His spokesperson and the proclaimer of an unpopular message. The gift of prophecy was given to a Black man before it was given to Ellen White, and he tried to be faithful, though his credibility was heavily discounted because of his race. Nevertheless, he did proclaim the visions publicly; Ellen White witnessed to that.

In spite of the zeal of the pioneers and their willingness to sacrifice, to give up comforts and convenience for the sake of the cause, they were victimized by their mores, their upbringing, and their unsanctified social expectations. Blacks were included, yet in large measure they were still a forgotten people. William Foy faced massive opposition, and eventually the gift passed on to Ellen White, the weak vessel chosen of the Lord.

God's mandate called for heavy energy to be invested in evangelism, as was the case with the apostolic church. But the remnant church, despite the expiration of the system of slavery and the direct counsel through Ellen White to defy racial laws, was slow to evangelize Blacks. Unfortunately, the remnant people were still hidebound by custom and social propriety.

Blacks were still being neglected, and for those who would give attention to former slaves, the work was difficult. People of color were present in those early congregations, though few in number. Evangelism, for us, would be, must be, a *raison d'être*, and God blessed it in a signal way! Kindhearted, Christlike White men and women reached out in pity and love. Our eyes saw the "glory of the coming of the Lord."

Ellen White showed extraordinary courage. Often under contempt both in and out of the church, she was always

steady and never willing to be bent by these forces. She believed and lived as she wrote, always obedient to the heavenly visions. And part of her counsel—God’s counsel—was that all of God’s children should be taught of the Lord. Though Blacks were largely uneducated—most were unable to read and write—and though they still bore the scars of slavery and inhumanity, yet by the caring providence of God we would not be left out of His plan of redemption!

There was in American society, in spite of the awful sacrifices made to abolish slavery, the persistent attitude that these ebony-skinned former servants were, by nature, subhuman and therefore incapable of intellectual development on a par with Whites. Arthur Patrick wrote in his doctoral thesis: “William Miller, for all his evangelical zeal, felt until the 1830s that African-American slaves and their families were without souls and thus beyond the pale of salvation. However, before the arrival of the great day of hope in 1844, Miller was convinced that those he came to know as ‘our beloved Black brethren’ were part of God’s family.”<sup>1</sup>

America has not yet recovered from this racist nonsense, and what a price this country continues to pay for such recalcitrance. Under this influence early Adventism’s attitude toward Blacks was characterized by benign neglect at best. However, the Lord set His servant, Ellen White, apart from the racial madness that existed in this country. From Australia she would send testimonies concerning us—her mind cleared by the sundering seas. She focused on the plight of the humble Black masses as God directed, and her son and the church received instructions and counsel that would revolutionize the church’s approach to working for Blacks.

It took divine prophetic intervention to get God’s reluctant church off center. Edson White built a small boat called the *Morning Star* and sailed from the north down the Mississippi River into the very “heart of the beast,” as it were. From Nashville and points south through Mississippi, God began to call, and Black sons and daughters responded in dignity and gratitude, bringing with them nobility of character and a potential to set the nation on fire in the power of the third angel! The forebears of the great workers of the Black Adventist Church came to the unpretentious little boat and thus to Jesus’ remnant fold.

Thus in spite of threats and dangers, the work had now begun especially for us. We were within the focus of the Advent leaders, and there we would remain—finally included! The year was 1894. Three years earlier Ellen White had addressed the General Conference with a historic message: “Our duty to the Colored People.” In 1896 Oakwood College was founded, and the training of Blacks to reach Blacks with truth and education was inaugurated. The Black Adventist Church thus became a force, and evangelism was our lifeblood.

### Sowing and Reaping

A great work had begun, and laborers had to remember God’s counsel not to despise the “days of small beginnings.” God’s way often differs from human ways, and God’s way is infinitely superior. Unless we learn to trust Him completely and follow Him unflinchingly, we will often fail to see how He is leading and what His grand design is!

There were more than 4 million slaves in 1865. A few noble-hearted Christians won many of them to Christ in spite of the awful atmosphere of hatred and oppression. These new Christian Blacks came to trust in God and to express their faith and hope in song. And thus the “Negro spirituals” were born out of the matrix of suffering and sorrow. The slaves dreamed and hoped and sang about a “better day a-comin’.” They believed fervently that Christ would eventually deliver them—even if it meant after death—so they sang “Deep river . . . I want to cross over into campground.” Then the blessed truth of Christ’s coming struck home to their hearts: “Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.” They loved the story of Jesus dying for them. Mournfully and lovingly they would sing, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord? . . . O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble.”

Charles M. Kinney, born a slave in Richmond, Virginia, in 1855, went west after the Civil War in search of opportunity. While in the West he heard J. N. Loughborough lecture on Adventism. This former slave would ever after be a part of God’s remnant people. Referred to as the “father of Black Adventism,” he became the first Black to be ordained as a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Immediately after hearing Loughborough, he set to work. Chosen to serve as secretary of the Nevada Tract and Missionary Society, Kinney placed books and periodicals in the Reno, Nevada, public library and in businesses and other institutions. From Reno he was sent to Healdsburg College, where he met and conversed with Ellen White. In 1885 he concluded his academic work and was sent to Topeka, Kansas, where he labored with great energy among the Black population. His first campaign netted 24 precious souls.

Kinney went next to St. Louis, Missouri, where racial opposition was especially keen. At the 1891 General Conference session Ellen White had stated that “among those in St. Louis who believe the truth are colored people who are true and faithful, precious in the sight of the God of heaven, and they should have just as much respect as any of God’s children.”<sup>2</sup> In the late 1880s Kinney was sent to Louisville, Kentucky, where he was ordained and organized the second Black Adventist church in the world. From this great leader the torch was passed on to intrepid ebony preachers ablaze for God and for whom evangelism was an imprimatur. Kinney was also the first to recommend Black conferences as a way of facilitating God’s work among Black people.

Ellen White's testimonies and counsels, later published in *The Southern Work*, received scant notice. In fact, these valuable counsels had been cast into the general conference attic and later "discovered." Edson White was responsible for having them published. In 1893 Edson was in private business in Chicago, Illinois, and his spiritual state was low. His mother's letters from Australia spoke to his heart, and he began to seek God. It is believed that he discovered soiled copies of Ellen White's manuscript on the "Colored work" while rummaging in the attic in Battle Creek.<sup>3</sup>

Edson began to read and pray, and God laid a unique burden on his heart. Armed with a special commission and mandate from God, he entered a field of service that was virtually unoccupied. He became captain of the steamboat *Morning Star* and sailed forth on the Mississippi.

The *Morning Star* was 72 feet long and 12 feet wide. The ship, along with a cabin barge towed along as living quarters for his staff, contained living quarters, a printing press, a clinic, a chapel, a school, and a library. In those days this was a very dangerous business. Local Whites conspired to dynamite the *Morning Star*. A lynch mob made plans to hang the Lord's servant, and one of his Black associates was whipped unmercifully. However, converts were won who would profoundly influence the church from thenceforth.

Edson White went to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where he used a little book that he had prepared to teach the illiterate Blacks to read. It sold for 25 cents, and half went to the colporteurs and half to the printer and the mission. Volunteers on his staff included Edson's wife, Emma; Miss M. M. Osbourne; Fred Halladay; Dr. Kynett; and nurses Lydia Kynett and Ida Wekel. What sacrifices these dear Christian warriors made in love. The *Morning Star* was privately owned and financed. Publications printed and distributed by the missionary enterprise were forerunners of *The Southern Watchman*, *Our Times*, and *Message* magazine.<sup>4</sup>

Sunday schools were held on the deck<sup>5</sup> as well as night schools for adults. Edson's pioneering work extended up the Yazoo River, and in 10 years there were 50 small schools in six Southern states.

This work, directed so carefully by God, was still being neglected and underfinanced by His church in this country. Many still showed contempt and racism in their treatment of their brothers and sisters of color. But God's plan must triumph in spite of opposition, obstacles, and stumbling blocks. Oakwood College began turning out workers with a zeal for soul winning. The Black church began to take shape as an integral part of God's remnant movement, characterized by growth and deep spiritual fervor.

As mentioned, in 1890 there were only 50 Black Seventh-day Adventists. "By 1910 there were more than 3,500."<sup>6</sup> In 1909 progress in the Black work moved the General Conference Committee to organize the North

American Negro Department. Without the great emphasis on evangelism from our earliest days, our presence and growth would not have been of note. Our work was now recognized and had become an indispensable part of all this church stands for.

Black Adventist workers, especially those who passed through Oakwood College, began to disperse all across this country and the world. Black preachers, blessed with the gifts of eloquence and imagery and substance, clearly defined the Adventist message with simplicity and power. Thank God, the message He has given us to preach comes interwoven throughout with power. It just needs "preaching" and "living," and God's Black Adventist servants were qualified by the Holy Spirit to do both. Across the land a host of Christian soldiers preached with power: P. G. Rodgers, Benjamin Abney, Napoleon Smith, W. H. Green, John and Charles Manns, George E. Peters, F. L. Peterson, M. C. Strachan, L. C. Sheafe, J. K. Humphrey, R. L. Bradford, C. F. Phipps, Louis Bland, J. E. Cox, Sr., J. H. Laurence, U. S. Willis, T. M. Rowe, A. E. Webb, H. W. Kibble, R. E. Warnick, H. R. Murphy, W. W. Fordham, and others.

Notable among them was J. G. Thomas, whose gift lent itself in a particular way to evangelism. Thomas was uneducated—"I had the good fortune to marry a schoolteacher," he would say, "and she worked on me." With flawless delivery and impeccable English, this humble man preached in large tents in the days of oil lamps and kerosene heaters. I once asked him, "Elder, we have trouble with acoustics in tents even with microphones. How did you do it?"

He answered, "Son, you had to bellow."

"What about the rain-swept nights," I pressed, "when the clatter of raindrops on the canvas nearly drown out everything?"

"Oh," he said, "you had to bellow a little louder."

Thomas had wit and humor about him, but he was deadly serious about his calling and commitment. "Prayer is the key," he said, speaking of power in the pulpit. "I've come here to preach for you for one week. I have fasted and prayed for one week."

Thomas baptized thousands across the South, many of whom remain rock-solid Adventists today. Thomas observed with a smile, "Pastor Brooks, in those years we brought them in 'hard.' We wouldn't think of baptizing folk until they had been drilled in the message and had demonstrated conversion through their practice. If I had known better and brought them in 'easy,' as is done today, I could have baptized twice as many."

Such pioneers as Allison, Rowe, Phipps, John H. Wagner, Sr., J. H. Laurence, J. Gershom Dasent, and others demonstrated that the Holy Spirit was not confined to the South. Newark, New Jersey; Cleveland, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; and other Northern cities felt the

power of the three angels' messages with deep conviction. F. L. Peterson carried his considerable gifts to Los Angeles and points west. The work grew and prospered.

In 1943 Lucy Byard, gravely ill, was carried to the Washington Sanitarium by ambulance. Admitted at first, upon discovery that she was Black (though a longtime member of the church from Brooklyn) she was discharged and sent to Freedmen's Hospital at Howard University, where she died. This unfortunate incident precipitated a powerful shift in the organization of the Adventist Church. Black leaders pressed the General Conference to redress their grievances, to move against discrimination and racism in the church. Our mandate from God included the words "every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." The truth is that Adventists, of all people, have the least excuse to practice exclusionary racism; real Christians cannot carry this burden of evil and expect to please God.

The outcome of their gentle yet clear protest was the offer by the General Conference leadership to allow Blacks to have "their own conferences." This was not their request. Black Adventists wanted to be represented where they were "taxed" and included as participating members in the corporate church. However, they accepted the offer and set up their own conferences under Black leadership. The year was 1944. With little money, much wisdom, and the indispensable nurturing of God, the Black work quadrupled its membership, its working force, its finances, and its institutions in a relatively short time. What hath God wrought! We discovered we were not a liability after all, but a genuine, bona fide, validated asset to God's work. And so we remain. Evangelism, in a special way, has been responsible for all of the success we've known since 1946.

Later came additional waves of soldiers, fighting valiantly in the oppressive heat of summer under tents or the open sky, with sawdust under their feet. Small budgets and broken-down equipment did not stop R. T. Hudson, Wilmot Fordham, Ike Johnson, Willie Lee, Charles Bradford, Russell W. Nelson, Walter Starks, and many others from building the kingdom of God among Black people. It is not possible to recognize by name all the great contributors to this success in a single chapter.

Ministerial education is a vital part of our success. We used to say that eminent Bible professors Calvin Moseley, E. E. Rogers, and C. T. Richards would send out ordinary pastors who, under God, became extraordinary soul winners. Nearly every pastor would plan at least one annual campaign and preach his heart out for eight to twelve weeks. God gave the increase, and the church grew by leaps and bounds. At Oakwood College there was for years no specific course taught in public evangelism, yet the college produced great evangelists. It was God's doing! The students listened to and modeled their mentors, imbibing what

Bob Smith calls "the spirit of evangelism." Ministerial students studied the preparation of handbills and outlines under C. E. Moseley. The Friday night seminar, with choice music and fervent prayers in a deeply spiritual atmosphere, offered these young ministers-to-be the opportunity to present inspiring messages. Students then went from the campus to downtown Huntsville, Decatur, Jasper, Scottsboro, and other nearby towns to practice what the Lord had given them. Young women were very active along with them, providing powerful music and the pleasant Christian contacts that are so indispensable to successful evangelism.

In summers students would fan out across the nation to assist senior evangelists in their campaigns. They took copious notes. They learned what to do and what *not to do!* They learned to present messages of substance, appealing first to the intellect, then to emotions, and through them both to the will, as I. H. Evans wrote in his book *The Preacher and His Preaching* (p. 26). C. E. Moseley, who worked with George E. Peters, one of the most outstanding soul winners of those times, added, "We taught what we heard, saw, and experienced."

The Oakwood Theology Department brought in successful evangelists to lecture. These workers brought along sermons, outlines, procedures, handbills, etc., and distributed them freely among the students. There was no discussion of payment; nothing was "for sale." It was the desire of these preachers to help, to pass along the torchlight, to see new waves of evangelists continually rising up to ensure that the work continued to grow.

E. E. Cleveland was one such worker. Baptized by the Holy Spirit, Cleveland's compelling style and methods were such that every campaign produced at least 100 souls (generally many more than that). At the same time he trained scores of successful preachers; produced outlines, books, and articles; and conducted seminars and field schools. His whole body and soul burned with zeal to get the "Word" out. His ministry deeply affected my own ministry.

I first met him in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1946. My family had not been long in the church. We had been brought in by a godly minister named Napoleon B. Smith, a man so totally unselfish and so deeply spiritual that we revered him. That year brought Cleveland to our town. I had not experienced public evangelism before, and as I gathered with the crowds around Cleveland's tent, I could hardly wait for him to begin. I felt a kind of disappointment when he finished each night, simply because we never tired of hearing him. I was 15 years old that year.

The next summer he went to the other side of town and conducted a second campaign. I was sitting in his empty tent on a glorious Sabbath afternoon, with gentle breezes blowing and the sun shining brightly, when God called me. The Lord said, "This is what I want *you* to do. I will help

you to make truth clear.” I accepted God’s call and His promise. I have failed Him, but He never failed me.

Out of the Cleveland school (I never worked with him personally, in spite of my requests) came a new cadre of preachers who not only pastored well, but gave the “certain sound” each year under canvass and in halls and churches, and the growth continued unabated! Cleveland has done evangelistic campaigns all over the world, accompanied by his wife, Celia, and while making great personal sacrifice.

Evangelism is our calling, our duty, our mandate from heaven, the grand elixir for what ails the church. An active, enthusiastic, Spirit-filled program of soul winning will fix most problems. It will help raise financial goals, reduce dissonance, calm tensions, promote love and understanding, stabilize churches, and mitigate apostasy and schism! As God gave manual labor to the first family as a blessing to them, His commission to the church to “go into all the world and teach all nations” has not only the objective of church growth in view, but harmony, peace, and progress in the corporate church body and personal spiritual development for each member.

In 1974 the gifted musician Walter Arties was inspired to begin a television program aimed at America’s largest minority. There were, to be sure, pangs of birth as *Breath of Life* came into being. We believe it was God’s idea, though, and Arties was His instrument to press the idea home. His talents and his experience in religious broadcasting were a bonus in getting this enterprise going. I was asked to join the staff as director/speaker. Our staff was very small, our equipment nil, and our finances inadequate, yet we accepted the challenge—just three men and one woman. Talk about “small beginnings.”

However, before we were adequately exposed on the airwaves, we decided that evangelism was the reason for our being. “To get the Word out” was our motto. We would do follow-up in the cities where we were aired at such great cost. We conducted campaigns from the beginning, for evangelism is the essence and lifeblood of *Breath of Life*. Soul winning, by the mighty help of God, validates our existence. Twenty years after those humble beginnings—with nearly 11,000 baptisms, 13 new churches, and unnumbered men and women drinking in the truth from modern media presenta-

tions—no serious person asks, “Is *Breath of Life* productive or necessary?” The program has tapped the musical talents of our youth, and mail received from men and women of many professions and walks of life have been filled with warmest praise for the message and mission of *Breath of Life*. But evangelism has made us. For all this we give all glory to God, to our blessed Saviour, and to His awesome Holy Spirit.

No matter what your profession, station, or office, if you belong to Jesus and are a part of His remnant church, *you* are personally accountable to evangelize, to carry the truth, to live the truth, to exemplify “truth and love combined” wherever darkness abides.

Nothing on earth—not job, position, honor, or riches—is more important now than being on the Lord’s side and being involved in the finishing of His work. Our considerable talents must be exercised to this end! We cannot endure to the end without the “latter rain” experience, and we have learned that one of the principal reasons for this outpouring is for effective witnessing! It cannot be left to ministers alone. There must be a combining of our forces—laypersons with ministers—and all under the aegis of the Holy Spirit. Then we will see a demonstration of power that shall eclipse the glories of Pentecost.

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world . . . and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). The work isn’t finished yet. Great days are before us! Heaven’s gifts will be poured out without measure. We shall yet see the glory of the Lord—and with all the church does, nothing is more important, more germane to her mission and existence, than evangelizing souls. Woe to the man or woman who concludes that “evangelism is dead.” When that happens, the earth shall die, sin shall die, and suffering shall die! May we be inspired with you to reach ahead with great faith and works to the glory of God!

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Patrick, “Christianity and Culture in Colonial America” (1991).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), pp. 4, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1962), vol. 2, p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>6</sup> Delbert Baker, in *Adventist Review*, Feb. 4, 1993.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND MISSION SERVICE

*by Walton Whaley, D.Min., and Leola Whaley, R.N.*

## **Introduction**

Black Seventh-day Adventists have a noble history of service in the church's mission program. The present cadre of Black missionaries have logged more than 148 years of mission service. When we take in the total sweep of the history of Black involvement in mission, from the time of Anna Knight, who served in India in 1901, and Thomas Branch, who served in Nyasaland (now Malawi) in 1901-1902, the total exceeds 1,000 years. With our relatively recent emergence as a resource pool for Adventist world mission, that record is indeed admirable. However, there is pronounced reluctance among today's Black Adventists to pursue a mission career actively. We shall examine that reluctance and the ways the church is addressing it in the light of our personal mission experience and that of others.

## **Black Reticence**

Casual interviews with church workers through the years have produced a number of reasons there is not a more aggressive response by Blacks to mission service opportunities. Many potential workers are concerned that there is a cut in salary and that missionaries are forced to live a less-than-desirable lifestyle. These concerns, however, result largely from a misunderstanding of the General Conference policy on compensation of missionaries.

When a missionary enters upon his/her service, there begins a redistribution of the salary: 25 percent is designated "home base deposit" and placed into the missionary's bank account in the United States; a liberal educational subsidy for children is put in place; and in some situations a cost-of-living allowance is also deposited monthly in the bank account. Conditions differ, but for the most part, reasonable and sometimes ample housing is provided. After six years of service an extended interdivision service allowance is activated and set aside yearly for the missionary, which is a great help when the missionary family returns permanently to reestablish in the homeland.

In addition, policy provides an outfitting allowance, freight allowance, Social Security assistance, baggage allowance, health-care assistance, car depreciation, and travel allowance to help make missionary economics creditable. Our experience in the mission field has been that our needs

have been met and even modest savings have been possible.

When we were first contacted regarding mission service, we felt unable to save while shackled with house payments, car notes, credit card balances, and bills, bills, bills. As we arranged to let go of these things, one after another, and pay off our debts, the sense of freedom became exhilarating. Being debt-free as we boarded the plane for Africa helped convince us that our decision to go was extremely worthwhile.

The trappings of materialism do not disappear simply because one becomes a missionary, however. The challenge to downsize the personal inventory of material things is ongoing. Self-denial is often a poignant issue because of the great contrast in living standards that sometimes exists between the missionaries and the majority of the people they serve. Some missionaries take opportunity to invest in young people needing a Christian education—many of today's indigenous leaders in mission lands were recipients of a missionary's sponsorship. This is cited only as additional confirmation that missionary remuneration is quite adequate and need not be a deterrent.

Another reason for Black reticence toward mission service is the popularly held conception that it is difficult to get back into the work in the homeland once you return from the mission field. Circumstances may vary, but as we look at the list of workers who gave a portion of their lives to mission enterprises, none were denied an opportunity to reestablish themselves in the work upon returning. In fact, many Black former missionaries are today serving the church in the homeland with high distinction. In recent years economic realities have forced various church entities to be selective, and some shopping around has become necessary for the returning missionary. But God is able! He always makes a way.

On the other hand, church administrators often do not wish to lose a talented person to the mission field. But in the final analysis, after having done their best to test the worker's resolve, they give their blessing, knowing that they are making a contribution to the world church, and at the same time making an investment in a worker who will come back home someday with greater talents to share.

The education of children also militates against mission service. In many situations the only option is home-schooling,

sometimes straight through high school. If the missionary family can handle it, this can be the most rewarding period of life for parent and child. The Home Study Institute provides tremendous teaching materials that parents can use in the formation of learning habits and character development. Regularity of classes and perseverance in covering the content of the courses produces students who can soon study on their own and face higher educational challenges undaunted.

Fortunately, the Adventist Youth Service program can be tapped to get help in areas of study where the parents cannot cope. By the way, the teaching parent, usually the mother, receives a stipend for teaching her own children. Often one missionary mother will do the teaching for several families. And sometimes a full-time volunteer teacher is called to teach missionary children. The SDA Church is not unmindful of the necessity of providing adequate opportunity for the education of missionary children. Education need not be a deterrent, especially for families with young children.

With older children the decision to go into mission service might best be decided as a family, with all the pros and cons laid clearly on the table. When all are allowed to give input to the decision-making process, it is possible to reach a contractual agreement in which all family members make a commitment to go as a missionary family. Thus the family as a whole has ownership of the call. Options will be factored in, such as children attending boarding school at a certain age and grade level, permanent return after a full term of service to attend to educational needs of the family members, etc. The thought here is that fragmentation of the Black family should be avoided at all costs. The spirit of oneness, of being united in a common cause, provides a powerful bonding that the family will treasure for life: "We did it together, and what a blessing it was!"

Another aspect of Black reticence toward mission service, alluded to earlier, involves the Black Adventist lifestyle in America. The economic advantages in this country have tended to produce a "heaven on earth" syndrome. Condominiums, town houses, luxurious "chariots," stocks and mutual funds, corporate ladder-climbing, and gold credit cards have transformed many in Black America, including upscale Black Adventists, into a "me and mine" culture. Many of us have training to serve God and humankind, but have instead spent our talents serving ourselves. We hope to pacify God with a handout now and then, while our brothers and sisters in physical and spiritual need continue to wait for help. The words of Jesus Christ ring out with awesome authority and piercing appeal: "Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly" (Luke 21:34, NKJV).

Though we can use our money to help by proxy, there's

nothing like personally accepting the towel of service, kneeling down to take the feet of suffering people of the world in our hands, and bathing those feet in the waters of compassion and loving concern. To look into the eyes of a child and say "You're somebody! Let me help you become a person of unlimited possibilities. A person of hope. A person of integrity. A person of responsibility. A person of wisdom. A person of skill." That's what mission service is all about—a chance to reach out and serve someone.

If we embrace in our hearts an attitude of gratitude for what God has done in our lives, we set the stage for the Holy Spirit to lead us to service in a sphere. God's mission is a global mission. The field is the world, and the command to go into all the world and preach the gospel is given to all Seventh-day Adventists. Black Adventist missionaries have shown, and will continue to show, the same level of loyalty and commitment to service in His world vineyard that is expected of all who confess Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Foreign mission service is not for everyone. For some, personality considerations, family circumstances, health problems, and financial dilemmas defy easy resolution. In the face of such conundrums we are challenged to believe that God's biddings are enablings. However, the realization that God directs our paths when we trust Him with all our heart, and a commitment to follow the Saviour "wheresoe'er my lot may be," is the essence of the child-like faith that Jesus commends as worthy of entering the kingdom of heaven.

An important concern is the fear of harm to the missionary and his/her family. We are living in a world under Satan's siege. Inhumanity knows no geographic boundaries, as recent explosions of ethnic violence sadly demonstrate. However, Christ conquers fear when we consecrate ourselves to His service; He walks with us wherever we go. It should also be noted that General Conference and division leaders constantly monitor situations around the world and take timely steps to make sure missionary workers are as protected as possible, including temporary removal from dangerous areas.

The "home mission" argument has added to the reticence of Black Adventists in seeking foreign service. "The cities of America have pockets of illiteracy, poverty, and degradation akin to that in the missions abroad," some say. "We have plenty of work to do right here." Granted, but as W. R. Robinson used to say upon his return from mission service: "The work won't be finished anywhere if it isn't finished everywhere."

Those who feel they are being called by God to mission service must not allow protective sentiments to keep them from leaving their homeland and fulfilling the purpose for which God has summoned them. The kingdom of God must be preached around the world as well as in our homeland.

### Further Challenges

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is taking a fresh look at what it means to carry out the commission of Jesus to preach the gospel in all the world. The inhabited areas of the globe have been subdivided demographically, exposing thousands of people groups within which the Adventist message has no viable presence. The challenge to enter these unentered people groups in this generation has gripped anew the imagination of the Adventist Church.

New strategies for accomplishing this mission are unfolding daily. Exciting news of SDA presences established in towns and villages, cities and countries, heretofore unentered flows around the world in unceasing streams. The vision of twenty-first century mission advance contains thrilling possibilities for Black SDA involvement.

A new financial base for mission funding has surfaced. "Direct project giving," which allows members to earmark their funds to specific projects they are interested in, has been added to the mission fund practice that the church has followed for more than a century. The magnitude of the task now being defined demands unparalleled sacrifice on the part of Adventist believers.

Structural reorientation of the mission program is a necessity. New forms of mission service must be designed. The deployment of new missionaries will focus on the Global Mission mandate to target unentered areas of the world. Thus fewer missionaries will be sent to established areas. The twenty-first-century missionary appointee will be a pioneering missionary, especially trained to begin new work.

The radical reduction of missionary personnel in already established areas needs to be looked at carefully. It is always expected that national leadership will eventually

take the place of missionary leaders. While this is the happy goal of the mission program, the church still needs to maintain a world church profile in mission lands. Mission churches are young churches. The indigenous leaders have expressed gratitude for the moral support and encouragement provided to their leadership by a consultative, collaborative foreign missionary presence.

The levels of educational development in mission lands have not yet begun to meet the needs of the millions of new believers who are joining the Adventist Church even in the past 15 years. More schools and trained teachers are needed. Current church worship centers cannot seat even one third of the membership in some locales. Members in some countries worship in schoolrooms, homes, and under the trees. There is great need for houses of worship.

Adventist literature is almost nonexistent in many areas because of financial constraints, language barriers, and logistical problems. A foreign missionary presence is needed to focus on and address such concerns as these. Monetary concerns are exacerbated by the fact that membership in many of these areas is 80-85 percent under the age of 30, with little or no income with which to support the church. Some local leaders have established entrepreneurship training to help church members become self-supporting and thereby able to support the church.

Black SDAs pause on the threshold of a great opportunity. Before us spreads a world with millions of people trapped in the prison of ignorance, suffering, and despair. We hold the key to their freedom. In Jesus Christ there is wisdom, relief, and eternal hope. As we share Jesus through the loving concern He gives us, and as we go forth in mission service, we are reaching out with gratitude for what He has given us.

## PARTIAL LIST OF NOTABLE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MISSIONARIES

Benjamin and Celia Abney  
Dolly Alexander  
Robert and Cornelia Andrews  
L. G. Antonio  
Nathaniel and Etta Banks  
Maurice and Esther Battle  
Carlyle and Erma Bayne  
Dr. George and Lois Benson  
Dr. Blake  
Thomas and Mable Branch  
Paul, Sr., and Alice Brantley  
L. W. Browne  
Paul and Patricia Bryant  
Naomi Bullard  
Howard and Lois Bullard  
Karen Burke

Robert and Cynthia Burns  
Art and Hope Bushell  
Ken and Elizabeth Bushell  
Theodore and Frankie Cantrell  
Ray and Carol Cantu  
Robert and Rose Carter  
Harry and Beverly Cartwright  
J. M. Cherenfant  
Clyde and Barbara Cassimy  
Dr. Byron Connor  
Chauncey and Bernadine Conner  
Donald and Carrie Crowder  
Lucious and Naomi Daniels  
Danny and Elizabeth Davis  
Dr. Carl and Lavetta Dent  
Samuel and Bernice De Shay

Pierre Deshommes  
Irwin Dulan  
James and Gerri Edgecombe  
Ronald and Dorothy Forde  
Francis and Vera Danforth  
Sidney Gibbons  
Boyd Gibson  
Phillip and Violet Giddings  
Samuel and Elita Gooding  
Claudine Gordon  
Oswald and Thelma Gordon  
Alvin and Lucy Gouldbourne  
Greta Graham  
Ruby Graves  
Alfonso and Estelle Green  
Eula Gunther

James and Carol Hammond  
Helene Harris  
Dunbar and Lorraine Henri  
Glenn and Winnie Howell  
George and Jean Hudgins  
David and Jane Hughes  
J. M. Hyatt  
Samuel and Sarah Jackson  
Alcega and Veronica Jeanniton  
Roland and Marie Joachim  
Johnny and Ida Johnson  
Ruby Jones  
Ted and Esther Jones  
Gertrude Jordan  
Dennis and Dorothy Keith  
Anna Knight  
E. A. Lawrence  
Dr. J. P. Lawrence  
Harold and Barbara Lee  
Celeste Lewis  
Ronald and Marylin Lindsay

Jason McCracken  
Roland and Lelia McKenzie  
Gloria Mackson  
C. Miller<sup>4</sup>  
Leland and Lottie Mitchell  
Craig Newborn  
Leonard and Ora Newton  
Lester and Priscilla Parkinson  
James Patterson  
Robert and Barbara Patterson  
Max Pieere  
John C. and Sarah Pitts  
Robert and Janet Presley  
Louis, Jr., and Janice Preston  
Lois Raymond  
Ruth Rhone  
Dr. Earl and Ann Richards  
Ray and Joan Ricketts  
William and Hortense Robinson  
John Rogers  
Henry Saulter

Donald and Dorothy Simons  
Richard and Ruth Simons  
Ruth Faye Smith  
Randy and Debra Stafford  
Douglas and Helena Tate  
Clarence and Carol Thomas  
Edna Thomas  
Lindsay and Evelyan Thomas  
Carmelita Troy  
Owen, Jr., and Ann Troy  
Guy Vallery  
Hermann and Philippa Vanderburg  
James and Sarah Washington  
Walton and Leola Whaley  
Gerald and Beverly Wilts  
DeWitt and Margaret Williams  
Ronald and Equilla Wright  
Gosnel and Doreen Yorke  
Theus and Elissa Young

Next >>>

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING

by Paul Stewart Brantley, Ph.D.

## Introduction

“No line of work will be of more telling advantage to the colored people . . . than the establishment of small schools.”<sup>1</sup>

The story of Black Adventist education is filled with adventure born of adversity. That so much could be done with so little is nothing short of miraculous. But God specializes in miracles, and for more than 100 years His handiwork has been seen and felt in the development of SDA schools for Black children and youth.

This essay recounts the humble origins of this movement, examines more recent developments, and suggests courses of action for the present and future. “Basement” is used as a figure of speech throughout this article to represent the humble origins of church schooling in Black Adventism. In two very different ways church schooling can be thought of metaphorically as a basement experience.

First, the basement is a foundation. Education is also a foundation—for both individuals and cultures. The first years of human life determine one’s destiny. In like manner, the first years of SDA education helped forge the unique culture of Black Adventism, which represents an impressive but little-known success story in the wider arena of twentieth-century American life. The story of the *Morning Star* is as much about forging a culture as it is about educating youth.

One hundred years ago Etta Littlejohn, Cynthia Johnson, and Josephine Green were educated in the lowly church school basements of one generation. Yet Christian education would change their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren—C. E. Bradford, C. B. Rock, Garland Millet, Carl Dent, and many others. From an inauspicious foundation emerged leadership for a new American culture.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the basement is an inferior portion of the structure and rarely a showcase. In the basement are stored surplus belongings—things too valuable to be discarded outright, but not sufficiently useful for day-to-day proximity. Basements are often inhospitable, even uninhabitable, yet from such dour, dank environments the church school story has its remarkable beginning.

Black SDA church schools began at a time during which racial conditions in America after slavery were at their

worst. Following the Civil War, Blacks in the South were left educationally disenfranchised and economically bereft. L. A. Hansen described his first impressions of Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1895:

“The main business street of the city [consisted of] low-roofed rambling buildings, oxen-pulled carts slogging through the streets deep in mud. Here and there were men idly whittling as they sat on benches, and cotton bales piled high—the only evidence of business and industry. We were at once struck with the open gutter sewer system. Sanitation was fairly well maintained by the many buzzards that policed the streets. . . . All household waste was thrown into the streets for them to squabble and scramble over.”<sup>3</sup>

In those days, as in slavery, it went against the political grain to educate Black people. In spite of the noble efforts of a variety of missionary societies, the majority of Blacks were left destitute. Former slave owners felt little sympathy for educating people freed from the very slavery they helped perpetuate. Weary of war, Northerners retreated into a state of benign indifference.<sup>4</sup> By the turn of the century some public schools in Mississippi even charged tuition to students of color. Blacks learned to read and write against great odds.

The first SDA school for Black children was begun near Kansas City, Missouri, by Mrs. H. M. Van Slyke in 1877. Shortly afterward Joseph Clarke and his wife, of Texas, established a tent school for Black children.<sup>5</sup>

The educator who stands out for his pioneering efforts on behalf of Black Adventism was James Edson White, the elder surviving son of James and Ellen White. Edson, as he was commonly called, was a freewheeling maverick who never fit in well with the church’s hierarchy. Yet under the Spirit’s conviction the thought of taking the gospel to the forbidding areas of the South intrigued him and challenged his rather brash spirit. With his mother’s encouragement he accepted the challenge.

After overseeing construction of an ingenious steamer, the *Morning Star*, White and his party sailed down the Mississippi River in hopes of establishing the SDA work among the towns served by the river. To drum up support for his bold initiative, White began publishing a newspaper, the *Gospel Herald*, from the deck of his boat.

White's *Gospel Herald* made fascinating reading, consisting of a motley assortment of news notes, plaintive appeals for workers, and homilies from his mother's pen. In line with his shrewd entrepreneurial spirit, White carried slick advertisements in the *Gospel Herald*, including a pitch for the Eureka Fly-Shuttle Loom, the "speediest, easiest running, and most durable rag carpet loom on the market—a potential means of support for the fatherless and widow and a veritable Klondike at home."<sup>6</sup>

The *Gospel Herald* called for sponsors to finance the building of combination church and school edifices for this needy field. The following estimates were made as to the cost of a church and school: New church and school: 10 acres of land, \$120; chapel, \$325; house for teacher, \$150; basement for school, \$125; total, \$720.<sup>7</sup>

These were bargain-basement prices even for those days. Lest his Northern readers miss the point, White assured them the same facility up North would cost at least \$2,500. Soon after the turn of the century, Black SDAs had constructed some fairly well-built edifices, but the schools were generally still to be found *in the basement*.

In 1901 Ellen White traveled to the South to examine Edson's work. Describing her visit, she said: "I went to Vicksburg, and what did I see there? Just as pretty a little church as we have built at Cooranbong [Australia]. *In the basement of this meetinghouse*, a church school is held."<sup>8</sup>

### The Basement Years

"Trials will be met in this work; discouragements will press in upon the soul as teachers see that their labors are not always appreciated. Satan will exercise his power over them . . . hoping that he can cause them to murmur against God."<sup>9</sup>

Life "in the basement" was difficult for the early educational pioneers. Edson set up evening schools in some of the Baptist churches to accommodate the unbridled eagerness of the disenfranchised Blacks in learning to read and write. But when the Sabbath truth was finally declared, Edson's efforts in Mississippi were often met with intense opposition on the part of both Blacks and Whites. On several occasions his life and the lives of his followers were physically threatened.

As if that were not enough, the denomination's leaders in Battle Creek grew soft in their support for White's enterprise. He was criticized for failing to secure prior authorization for his schemes and for the marginal caliber of some of his Black and White associates. But most discouraging of all was the General Conference's diversion of more than \$11,000 that had been earmarked for his project to other areas of church work.<sup>10</sup>

Crushed, despondent, and broken in health, Edson wrote: "I think I have never felt such utter desolation, and almost hopelessness as I have felt. . . . Sick, and discour-

aged, and failing in health, money gone, two mortgages on the property, no financial interest of any particular note from the General Conference, opposition from publishing houses, and then the care of all this great work."<sup>11</sup>

They pressed on, and their patience was rewarded. Within weeks nearly 100 children had begun attending his school near Vicksburg. Tuition was 10 cents a week. It was almost impossible to describe the pandemonium as former slaves and their children packed themselves into the little building. At times students had to sit in each other's laps, space was at such a premium. The noise was deafening, with several classes all carrying out their daily recitations simultaneously. Emma White even conducted a class for six elderly women, ages 60-80, who came to school each evening moaning and complaining after a full day of arduous domestic labor—but they all eventually learned to read!<sup>12</sup>

As student enrollment mushroomed, Fred Rogers and his wife, from Walla Walla, Washington, were called to join White's group. Initially, Rogers met with good success, but soon trouble brewed. Infuriated over some specious rumors, resentful Whites and jealous first-day Blacks combined to drive the Adventists out of town. The group threatened Rogers, and attempted to sink the *Morning Star*.<sup>13</sup> This turn of events forced White and Rogers to rely upon Blacks as teachers of their own—the Strachans, the Sebastiens, J. W. Dancer, and others—while he provided coordination for other schools that had begun to spring up in other states. The plan prospered to the extent that by 1908 there were 18 schools under Rogers' care, enrolling more than 600 children. For 14 years Fred Rogers devoted his life to educational work among Blacks.

Of course, White and Rogers were not the only educational pioneers to experience severe privation.<sup>14</sup> A primitive church school in Denmark, South Carolina, numbered more than 200 children, all "gathered in one room and supplied with but one teacher to carry on in all grades."<sup>15</sup> In 1897 two women teachers were added, and attendance grew to the extent that many had to be turned away. The crude school was supported entirely by donations. Only one teacher received a modest stipend, while the other two teachers donated their time and "trusted God for their support."

Coming to school "in the basement" failed to deter newly emancipated Blacks; education was seen as the passport out of poverty. Black youths by the hundreds flocked to mission schools—at one time nearly 40 schools were operating in Mississippi alone, allowing Blacks to receive a Christian education and become literate, productive citizens.

But progress came at a cost. One woman told what it was like to teach under primitive conditions. Assigned to teach a multigrade school in the basement of a Northern Black SDA church, the teacher had nearly 40 students, with no help and little material support. On cold wintry mornings

she was first obliged to make a fire in the old potbellied woodstove, then tackle classroom teaching responsibilities. Of course, the teacher's work didn't end at the conclusion of the school day, for she was expected to report to the homes of the children and collect tuition to pay her salary. Often the meager pay never came.<sup>16</sup>

Rosetta Baldwin, who probably holds the record for continuous service to church schools (more than 72 years!), recalled her first school assignment back in 1923 in the country town of Wilson, North Carolina. She worked and lived under deplorable conditions, and her pay was about \$25 per month, which Baldwin was obliged to raise herself. The funds were obtained more successfully from families of non-SDA students than their Adventist counterparts.<sup>17</sup>

Later Baldwin was called to open a school in Charlotte, North Carolina, which, as usual, was located in the basement of the church. Baldwin found, upon arrival, that the basement floor was bare dirt. She organized a club to raise money so that a basement floor could be installed. For two weeks she lived out of a little suitcase she brought with her until she could receive her belongings from her prior school.<sup>18</sup>

Mildred Asey, the first teacher at Chicago's pioneer school for Black Adventist children, went to Chicago in 1913 after completing a two-year course at Emmanuel Missionary College in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Mildred's one-room school, a forerunner of Shiloh Academy, was comprised of 20 children between the ages of 6 and 14 crowded into cramped quarters in the basement. Yet the school soon flourished and grew.<sup>19</sup>

Privation and hardship was the lot of church schools in the Black Adventist community. Yet they were successful, thanks to the many Black SDA pioneers who braved the challenges and privation during the teens, twenties, and thirties. So many stories could have been written of "life in the basement." Their contributions, though somewhat depreciated and forgotten in this life, represent the firstfruits of a system of education for young Black children that today is unsurpassed by any Protestant denomination in North America.

### Steps Out of the Basement

"Promising young men and young women should be educated to become teachers. They should have the very best advantages. Schoolhouses and meetinghouses should be built in different places and teachers employed."<sup>20</sup>

Progress in Black SDA education paralleled Black progress in the nation as a whole. In spite of a crippling depression, the march toward improvement continued unabated. By 1930 Black SDAs in the United States boasted 119 church buildings, 44 ordained ministers, 20 junior college teachers (at Oakwood), four academy teachers, 48 elementary teachers—and four separate school buildings operating out of the basement!

The Oakwood School served as an anchor for the fledgling church schools early in the twentieth century. Influenced by Booker T. Washington's model, the school received accolades from government agencies. One inspector from the U.S. Bureau of Education found Oakwood "the nearest to the government's ideal in the South."<sup>21</sup>

One legendary figure associated with improving church schooling was Anna Knight, a young woman who had graduated from the Battle Creek College nurse's course and who served as the denomination's first Black missionary to India. After returning, Knight was engaged by the Southern and Southeastern unions to coordinate Black educational work in the South. A former schoolteacher, Knight used both her nursing skills and her teaching savvy in her efforts to standardize courses of study and raise the consciousness of Adventists to the abysmal conditions extant in Black SDA schools. Knight founded the National Colored Teachers' Association (NCTA), which for years gave Black Adventist teachers a sense of professionalism.

In time Black SDA elementary schools began to shed their image as crude fugitive outposts. Schools opened in such areas as Nashville, Tennessee (1907); Chicago, Illinois (1913); New York City's Harlem (1920); Indianapolis, Indiana (1933); St. Louis, Missouri (1934); and Omaha, Nebraska (1937). A new Los Angeles Academy, administered by Joseph F. Dent, Sr., was built in 1946—another church school facility not located in a basement.<sup>22</sup>

A church school for Chicago opened in 1913 under the driving force of its pastor, W. D. Forde, of Barbados. Forde's commitment to the church school was so great that he and the Bible instructor held adult education classes at night for parents and other adults in the church. In 1933 another school opened in Indianapolis, taught by Gertrude Dabney. A church school opened with eight students in St. Louis in 1934, and in 1937 a school in Omaha, Nebraska, opened its doors under the principalship of A. B. Humphrey.

To accommodate the large number of Black Adventists in the New York area, Harlem Academy was organized as a day school in 1920, under the leadership of J. L. Moran. Though the school began in the church, four years later the church acquired Carlton Hall, allowing Harlem Academy to have its own building. Though the school was successful, New York City was felt to be an inappropriate venue for boarding students. In 1946 Moran was commissioned by J. Wagner to begin a boarding school for Blacks near Pine Forge, Pennsylvania.

Black SDA education took further steps out of the basement with the arrival of Natelkka E. Burrell at Oakwood Junior College in 1939. Burrell started the first student Future Teachers of America Club in the entire state of Alabama—an organization that brought prestige to the college. Nearly all of her FTA students later took positions as

elementary church school teachers. Burrell singlehandedly taught 23 credit hours per week, observed her student teachers, and served as principal of the elementary school—all at the same time! She later coedited, with Ethel Young, the church's first reading series.

Other educators attempted to rouse elementary teachers from a bargain basement mentality. Lake Region education director Jonathan Roache helped sponsor a joint convention for teachers of the Lake Region and Allegheny conferences in Cleveland. Soon after, C. C. Cunningham and F. H. Jenkins planned a joint convention in Atlanta in 1958 for teachers in the South Atlantic and South Central conferences.

Likewise, in the fifties a modern school facility was built in Atlanta, catering to aspiring Black middle class. Separate school buildings were secured in such places as Cleveland, Ohio; Cassopolis and Detroit, Michigan; and Jacksonville, Florida. A laboratory school was built on the campus of Oakwood College. Unfortunately, the process of bringing church schools up to modern standards during the fifties meant the demise of numerous church schools in the rural South that had opened following Edson White's work along the Mississippi. The schools were unable to bear the financial encumbrances associated with modernization and upgrading.

The sixties and seventies saw increased professionalism on the part of Black SDA elementary schools. During that time eight schools were opened in the Northeastern Conference alone; facilities were upgraded, and teacher pay and benefits gradually were increased. Certification became a requirement, and a master's degree became commonplace.

Oakwood College continued to serve as the primary source for teachers for Black SDA schools across America. In 1976, under the leadership of L. L. Quirante, Oakwood's Education Department sponsored an education superintendents' conference that organized Black SDA educational leaders into an informal caucus, which became the North American Division Council on Education in the Regional Conferences (NADCERC), held in connection with the annual Black ministerial meetings at Oakwood College until 1987.

As a result of NADCERC, several developments took place that impacted Black SDA elementary education. First, a curriculum development team headed by Norwida Marshall prepared a colorful monograph on Black Adventism for use in all NAD schools. *A Star Gives Light* was received favorably in both Black and non-Black SDA schools for its interesting portrayal of Black Adventist heritage.

Second, Oakwood's Education Department conducted the first survey of the needs of Black SDA educators within the regional conferences.<sup>23</sup> The survey secured an approximately 90 percent response from the nearly 400 Black Adventist educators contacted.

Third, the organization served as a forum for discussing financial support for education. In 1982 and 1983 conference presidents, treasurers, and educational superintendents met with the Oakwood staff to examine ways to meet the economical challenges posed by the operation of church schools. Conference presidents Charles Joseph and Charles Dudley argued for alternative financial schemes that would extend beyond existing denominational commitments.

Black SDA elementary education has made some real strides, but the greatest testament to the validity of the Black SDA school lies in the lives of students who have left school halls for college classrooms and responsible positions in the world of work. SDA youths past and present are demonstrating through graduate study and employment that a Black SDA education can be a distinct advantage. Oakwood's Education Department, the tradition hub of Black SDA education, has secured national accreditation under the leadership of Dr. Roland McKenzie and occupies a state-of-the-art facility located on the western edge of the campus.

### Contemporary Black SDA Education—Home at Last?

"It is the nicest work ever assumed by men and women to deal with youthful minds."<sup>24</sup>

From the basement, a system of schools was forged that helped form a new culture in America among nearly a quarter of a million Adventists of color. Today enrollment in Black SDA elementary schools in North America is approaching 10,000,<sup>25</sup> not including Blacks attending non-Black church schools. SDAs of African ancestry have established themselves as a force to be reckoned with. A visit to any church sanctuary or gathering of Adventists of color reveals prosperity, and education has figured prominently in that advance.

The Black Adventist educational system stands in sharp contrast to America's toxic environment of alcohol, drugs, and immorality. Public education, bereft of a clearly discernible moral purpose, most often fails to empower students with the sense of faith and destiny needed to function successfully in today's world. Even Christian education in non-Black environments sometimes fails to provide the sense of identity and personal value that Black youth—and particularly young Black males—need.

But is it safe to say that Black Adventists conduct the best organized, best endowed system of Black Christian schooling of any group or denomination? Have we as educators really come out of the basement? Several recent studies suggest that it is premature to celebrate success.

In 1981 I conducted a survey of education in the regional conferences, sponsored by the North American Division.<sup>26</sup> Three hundred questionnaires were mailed to teachers in the regional conferences, and a gratifying 351 responses were returned (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Impediments to Teaching**

**1981 Study of 351 Teachers in the Regional Conferences**

Percent of Teachers Indicating "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"	Statement
70	I spend a <i>lot</i> of time making up my own teaching materials.
68	We need more classroom space in our school.
59	I clearly understand where I will be teaching next year. (Surveyed in May)
48	I clearly understand conference policies regarding contracts and hiring.
45	Parents in my church perceive our church school as somewhat inferior.
45	At least half the students in our school come from low income homes.
43	My paycheck has always come on time.
38	My school children had all their books at the beginning of the school year.
37	Student discipline has been a problem this year in our school.
29	I clearly understand conference policies regarding fringe benefits, subsidies, etc.
24	I have all the basic teaching aids and supplies that I need to do an effective job of teaching.
26	I had the service of a teacher's aide or volunteer parent.
25	I've had an uninterrupted free period during the school day.
19	My salary is adequate enough to take care of my needs.
19	I've received the <i>Journal of Adventist Education</i> each month.
15	Our school library is very helpful and adequate.

Total enrollment of regional schools had exceeded 7,500, and the average school was twice as large as its White counterpart and more likely to be located in an urban area. Non-SDA enrollment in Black SDA schools (42%) was almost three times that of other SDA schools (15%).

The schools were much more likely to be tuition-driven, depending upon non-SDA funding to help make up for shortfalls in church financial support. In interviews, half the school principals reported no fluid assets on hand as of July 1. When asked the most critical problems facing the school, most responses related to finances—curriculum was mentioned by only four principals. As a result, the schools projected an image of a hand-to-mouth existence. Even purchasing schoolbooks and basic teaching supplies was problematic.

The scenario at the conference level was not much better. Of the nine conferences, six had experienced turnovers in leadership in the span of three years. In only one conference of the nine did the superintendent have an associate to

help supervise and visit classrooms. This figure has grown to three as of 1996.

A survey showing teacher perceptions of their school as of spring 1981 showed not total dysfunction, but ailing enough to indicate some vestiges of a basement mentality even then. Has the scenario changed during the 15 years since? Two databases were analyzed recently to uncover clues as to the profile of the Black SDA elementary school in more recent times. The first analysis was derived from Profile '89, a national survey of teachers I have conducted for the North American Division Office of Education every two years since 1987.

*Profile survey.* In 1989 teachers from the Profile survey who taught in the regional conferences were culled out from the rest of the group and comparisons made. Teachers were asked to rate on a scale from 1 (no problem) to 9 (very much a problem) which of 16 critical areas were problems at their school. Ratings of 7, 8, or 9 were operationally defined as a "problem." Approximately 38 of the random sample of 488 teachers comprised the regional conferences subsample. In some of the critical areas there were no differences between regional and nonregional teachers (Table 2), but in other critical areas there were marked differences (Table 3).<sup>27</sup>

*Valuegenesis.* The Valuegenesis study is the largest survey ever undertaken by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Nearly 12,000 students, parents, pastors, and teachers participated, including 766 Black students.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, the number of Black SDA teachers participating was small (27). That group scored not significantly different than the entire group of teachers on most variables. However, Black SDA teachers scored lower than the other racial groups ( $\alpha = .05$ ) on perceived administrative support, teacher involvement, and perceived presence of drugs in the school.

The 766 Black SDA students had some definite ideas about education and the schools they attend. Although in general secondary students, their perspectives may shed light on how they view the world of schooling. Some attended Black SDA schools and some went to other SDA schools. At any rate, their perceptions are important enough to warrant the attention of all persons sensitive about Black SDA youth. An analysis of Valuegenesis done on a separate Oakwood College sample was done by Melvin Davis, of Oakwood College.

In some instances Black student responses are similar to responses of White students; in other instances there are marked differences. Black students consistently reported more favorable attitudes toward church. Their homes, although more likely to be broken, are just as happy as White homes. But ratings of their schools lag somewhat behind their counterparts (Tables 4-6 and 7-9).

**Table 2**  
**Problems in Teaching—Areas of Not Much Difference**  
**Profile '89 Survey**  
**Comparison of Teachers in Regional (Black)**  
**and Nonregional (Nonblack) Schools**

Critical Area	Percent Regional Teachers Rating Area as a Problem	Percent Nonregional Teachers Rating Area as a Problem
time management/work overload	47	46
ability to cope with the wide learning ability levels	35	34
feeling loneliness and isolation at work	30	21
discipline	26	20
keeping physically fit	21	28
principal support	19	9
conference support	18	12
standardized testing	8	4
racial adjustment	5	4
effective methods that reach students	5	13

**Table 3**  
**Problems in Teaching—Areas of Much Difference**  
**Profile '89 Survey**  
**Comparison of Teachers in Regional (Black)**  
**and Nonregional (Nonblack) Schools**

Critical Area	Percent Regional Teachers Rating Area as a Problem	Percent Nonregional Teachers Rating Area as a Problem
adequate budget	63	26
lack of spirituality in students	47	31
inadequate classroom space	46	19
inadequate teaching supplies	45	12
school morale	36	16
support of parents	27	16

**Table 4-6**  
**1990 Valuegenesis Survey Responses**  
**Comparison of Black and White SDA Students**

“I look forward to going to church.”

Response	Black Students (n=approx. 750)	White Students (n=approx. 4,800)
not at all or slightly	35%	44%
true or very true	39%	29%

“My family is happy.”

Response	Black Students (n=approx. 750)	White Students (n=approx. 4,800)
not at all or slightly	16%	16%
true or very true	72%	73%

“I like my school.”

Response	Black Students (n=approx. 750)	White Students (n=approx. 4,800)
disagree or strongly disagree	24%	18%
agree or strongly agree	76%	82%

**Table 7-9**  
**1990 Valuegenesis Survey Responses**  
**Comparison of Black and White SDA Students**

“There is a real school spirit.”

Response	Black Students (n=approx. 750)	White Students (n=approx. 4,800)
strongly disagree or disagree	37%	33%
strongly agree or agree	63%	67%

“Students often feel put down.”

Response	Black Students (n=approx. 750)	White Students (n=approx. 4,800)
strongly disagree or disagree	52%	65%
strongly agree or agree	48%	35%

“If you could choose your school, what kind of school would you choose?”

Response	Black Students (n=approx. 750)	White Students (n=approx. 4,800)
Adventist	66%	78%
Public	22%	13%
Other	12%	9%

## Conclusion

Life in the basement has been hard. But fortunately the privations experienced by Fred Rogers, Anna Knight, Franklin Warnick, J. L. Moran, and so many others<sup>1</sup> are a thing of the past. Today Black Adventist schools are likely to be housed in separate school buildings and commodious accommodations, just as Ellen White called for a century ago.

So have Black Seventh-day Adventist schools come out of the basement? In many respects they have. No longer are students boarded in cramped, drafty closets, left to the mercy of the elements. No longer do threadbare teachers knock on students' doors after class to collect their salaries. Teachers are now considered conference workers. The sharp salary discrepancies between teachers and ministers, women and men, have lessened, if not entirely disappeared.

But in other respects Adventist Christians still appear to be haunted by a basement mentality. Children are our most valuable asset. Are we providing them with the finest that Christian schooling can offer? Or will the church continue to "get by" with second-rate learning opportunities for Black Adventist youth? The destiny of any nation or culture depends on how well it educates its young. And yet within the Christian church are those who would disparage church schooling. Too frequently schooling appears to be near the bottom of the Adventist pecking order. Sadly, nearly half the Black SDA teachers surveyed perceived that the church looked down upon the church school as an inferior operation.

The basement is not merely a location. The basement is a way of thinking—a metaphor for second-class citizenship and low esteem. For all the strides Black SDAs have made, much remains to be done. So how will Black Adventism view its schools—as institutions merely to be tolerated, or as key to its existence? Will we be willing to grant to our church school teachers the same level of respect given to pastors, physicians, engineers, and attorneys? How is it with Black Adventism?

The objective of Black Adventist education must never be simply to take up residence on the "main floor." We have a higher goal, which is to prepare Black Adventist youth for "the life that now is" and "the higher joy of wider service in the world to come."<sup>29</sup> That goal alone must be the continuing direction of Black Adventist corporate thinking and action.

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Sept. 21, 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Mylas Martin, in personal conversation, makes the point that Black Adventism is a unique form of American life, a phenomenon that warrants much more attention by virtue of its productivity and accomplishments.

<sup>3</sup> L. I. Hansen, in Jacob Justiss, *Angels in Ebony* (1975), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald D. Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970), pp. 19, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Norwida Marshall, ed., *A Star Gives Light: Seventh-day Adventist African-American Heritage* (Southern Union Conference and the North American Division, 1989), p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> *Gospel Herald*, Aug. 1898.

<sup>7</sup> James Edson White, in *Gospel Herald*, Aug. 1898.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, quoted in R. Steven Norman III, "Edson White's Southern Work Remembered," *Southern Tidings*, October 1995. (Italics supplied.)

<sup>9</sup> ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 6, p. 156.

<sup>10</sup> Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1984), pp. 85, 86.

<sup>11</sup> In Reynolds, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Justiss, p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> Reynolds, p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> Justiss, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> Jessie C. Dorsey, in *Gospel Herald*, 1899, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> Frances E. Blake, interview, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Rosetta Baldwin, interview, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, p. 198.

<sup>19</sup> Justiss.

<sup>20</sup> E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> J. I. Beardsley, "Christian Education for the Negro," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 21, 1919.

<sup>22</sup> Gilbert D. Hall, "The First Seventh-day Adventist Schools in the Black Conferences" (unpublished manuscript prepared for Dr. Clarence Barnes's denominational history class, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Ala., Nov. 2, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> Paul S. Brantley, *Education in the Regional Conferences: A Comprehensive Survey* (Huntsville, Ala.: Oakwood College, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> An estimate.

<sup>26</sup> Brantley.

<sup>27</sup> ———, *Profile '89: An Assessment of Curriculum Usage in SDA Schools* (Silver Spring, Md.: North American Division Office of Education, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Peter Benson and Michael Donahue, *Valuegenesis Report I: A Study on the Influence of Family, Church, and School, on the Faith, Values, and Commitment of Adventist Youth* (Silver Spring, Md.: North American Division Office of Education, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 13.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THEOLOGICAL DIRECTIONS

by Bertram Melbourne, Ph.D.

## Introduction

Many nations and peoples look back with pride at their “golden eras,” while others look forward with eager anticipation to the arrival of expected utopias. What options, though, are open to Black Seventh-day Adventists, particularly in the arena of theology, when we can neither look back with pride, nor be completely satisfied with present accomplishments, nor anticipate the future with confident expectation—if certain prevailing proclivities persist?

Was Neal Wilson, former president of the General Conference of SDAs, speaking for Adventist Blacks when he wrote, in the preface to the book *Movement of Destiny*, “So often through the passage of time the original goals and purposes for this Movement of Destiny become blurred and are nearly lost. Our vision becomes dim. We cannot look back, and we do not seem to be able to look ahead”?<sup>1</sup> Or was he simply reflecting the harsh reality that as a movement we cannot look back with pride, for we have “fumbled the ball” on matters that were designed by God to make us distinctive and exemplary?

At this critical time, can Black SDAs have an impact on the theological direction of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Those assuming there can be no impact, evidenced by the minor presence they maintain at the theological centers of the church, have missed the point. Black SDAs have made, are making, and must continue to make significant contributions. However, we must learn from the past, maximize the present, and prepare for the future. Endless possibilities exist, but the task must be embraced and vigorously pursued.

The myth that African-Americans lack educational ability must be dispelled along with the myth of the late 1920s and early 1930s that suggested Blacks lacked administrative ability.<sup>2</sup> Continued assent to the notion that Blacks are inferior academically indicates that notions of racial superiority and bigotry still reside in the hearts of brothers and sisters in Christ, and it’s time for us to allow a rich dose of Christ to wash us clean from our inherent or acquired prejudices so that the rest of us can pursue vigorously the freedom we have in Christ. Adventists, majority and minority, have the same mission, in the same church founded by the same Lord; thus we must be willing to reflect the kinship He established to glorify His name.

It has seldom been a lack of preparation or ability that has prevented Blacks from influencing theological directions to the degree that they could or should. More often it has been a lack of opportunity. Charles Kinney, who was born a slave, was identified as exhibiting great potential as a church worker after becoming an SDA. Though sponsored by the church for two years of preparation at Healdsburg College, it was the colporteur work to which he was assigned following his studies. Eventually he became the first African-American to be ordained as an SDA minister.

William H. Green was another Black with potential to influence theological direction. A graduate of Shaw University, he held degrees in both theology and law. His law practice found him arguing cases even before the United States Supreme Court. This speaks well of his talents and potential. In the church he distinguished himself in the Adventist ministry and had the distinction of being, as secretary of the Negro Department, the first Black elected to the General Conference. The wisdom of his election as secretary in 1918 was demonstrated by his administrative and diplomatic skills as well as by the growth of the Black work under his guidance until his untimely death 10 years later.

Summing up the period of his leadership, church historian Richard Schwarz notes that the growth of the period took place despite “the survival and spread of discriminatory practices in Adventist schools and sanitariums and in some churches.”<sup>3</sup> He even contends that “tragically, all too many American Adventists of Caucasian background found it difficult to shake off their culturally acquired prejudice against blacks.”<sup>4</sup> What more might Green have achieved had the climate been right or had he been given more opportunities?

Frank Loris Peterson also had the potential to affect theological directions to a greater extent than he was given opportunity. His life and career presented a number of firsts in the SDA Church. He was the first Black to graduate from Pacific Union College, to publish a book in the denomination (1934), to serve as secretary of the Pacific Union Colored Department, to be elected associate secretary of the General Conference, and to be elected vice president of the General Conference.<sup>5</sup>

Peterson’s book, *The Hope of the Race*,<sup>6</sup> expressed his desire to inform people and impact their thinking on doctri-

nal and theological issues. Also, his administration of the Negro Department of the General Conference witnessed the inauguration, in 1935, of *Message* magazine,<sup>7</sup> “a new evangelistic journal aimed at American Blacks.” Through the years this journal has given Black thinkers a vehicle for expression as well as a medium for some limited theologizing—particularly when its editorship passed on to African-Americans.

If there was one Black Adventist in the mid-twentieth century who had the expertise and training to influence the church’s theological directions, that person was Owen A. Troy, Sr. Described as “a creative, constructive genius, a man of explicit detail who used his great talents to the honor and glory of God,”<sup>8</sup> Troy was the first person in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to earn a Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) degree (he received his M.A. at the University of Chicago and his Th.D. from the University of Southern California). However, he never taught at the SDA Theological Seminary or at any of the SDA colleges in North America. Five years after he received his doctorate, he was called to be associate secretary of the General Conference Sabbath School Department because of his expertise in biblical Hebrew and Greek.

Denied real scope for meaningful and adequate theological expression in the arena where it really mattered, Blacks turned to writing. But here too they were faced with problems. Since most Blacks were denied the opportunity for theological training, they were unable to utilize “proper” theological language to command the attention of the scholarly world—their works were regarded more as doctrinal and devotional than theological.

This tendency to disregard Blacks as legitimate scholars was not limited to the Adventist academic community. Cain Felder notes: “Only a few decades ago White Bible scholars, who had exclusive prerogatives as the academic elite, would have found it unthinkable that African-Americans could be bona fide scholars. The very notion would have brought either laughter or some condescending quip from members of the Euro-American biblical academies, which were then composed entirely of White males. Until recently the idea of a Black Bible scholar—whether Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish—was something of a novelty, an aberration.”<sup>9</sup>

James Cone concurs and notes that “it was generally assumed by most Whites, and many Blacks as well, that Black culture had no unique contribution to make to Christianity in general and humanity in particular.”<sup>10</sup>

Undaunted by these hurdles, many Black SDAs employed the denominational publications to express themselves, while others authored books. Regarding denominational publications, Blacks primarily had access to *Message* magazine. However, as an associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association, E. E. Cleveland sat on

the editorial board of *Ministry* magazine. To the extent that this gave him a voice in determining the editorial policy and theological content of that journal, he was able to influence theological directions. A review of his articles confirm this fact. Since Owen A. Troy, Sr., had the opportunity to affect the theological direction and content of the Sabbath school quarterlies, he too, in some limited way, helped to determine theological directions.

Recently Roy Adams, Ph.D., a Black graduate of the SDA Theological Seminary, was made an associate editor of the *Adventist Review*. In that capacity he participates in decisions that determine the theological directions of that journal. Besides, his editorials and articles have influenced the theological thinking of both Adventist clergy and laity.

Recently, also, the *Review* invited Calvin Rock, D.Min., Ph.D., a former president of Oakwood College and a vice president of the General Conference, to author a monthly column called Faith Alive. With his background in ministry and ethics, Rock has used this column to influence the theological thinking of the church to some extent.

E. E. Cleveland, the most prolific Black author to date, has produced devotional, doctrinal, and theological books.<sup>11</sup> While he has not utilized the classical theological jargon, he has influenced others to think critically about what they believe, and to do so in the context of and from a scriptural and theological base. To that extent we can say he has influenced SDA theological directions.

To illustrate, consider *The Middle Wall*. In the first chapter Cleveland presents some of the dilemmas Black Christians in this country face and asks his Caucasian brethren, “Do you really understand?” He climaxes the chapter by advancing the notion that while they don’t, Christ does, since He too experienced rejection.

After presenting Peter’s vision and experience at Cornelius’ house for what they really were—a call to break down prejudice—Cleveland makes some pertinent points aimed at influencing the theological thinking of his readers. Highlighting the Jerusalem leadership’s reaction to Peter’s unprecedented initiative, he says: “No church can call itself Christian and yet not rebuke this evil (racial friction) in its midst. Love and racial prejudice cannot dwell in the same heart or house without that house being divided against itself.

“Again, today in many places a similar situation exists. How must it be dealt with? The answer is the eleventh chapter of the book of Acts. . . . The full weight of gospel authority was turned against the prejudiced attitude. It was exposed for what it was . . . sin against God and man. The gospel of love must be more fully preached if the church is to free herself of this deadly evil. Christianity is not the white man’s religion or the black man’s. It is the religion of Jesus Christ, and its churches are houses of prayer for all people.”<sup>12</sup>

After demonstrating how Jesus and Paul broke down

the middle wall, along with noting the contributions of modern abolitionists, Cleveland invites his Caucasian readers to remember the plight of their fellow Black Christians. He suggests that in crisis times God alone (theology) can stem the tide.

Cleveland moves deeper into theology when he addresses the issue of the social gospel, seeing it as “the teaching that now man may by human means convert this world into the kingdom of God on earth.”<sup>13</sup> While he appears to repudiate the social gospel, he does espouse some of its aims: “The true Christian can no more isolate himself from society’s needs than he can view social reform as his primary work. And it is not.”<sup>14</sup>

There is truth to this argument. Walter Rauschenbusch, one founder of the social gospel, says: “Our labor for the kingdom here will be our preparation for participation hereafter. The degree to which we have absorbed the laws of the kingdom into our character will determine our qualification for the life of heaven.”<sup>15</sup>

Rauschenbusch continues: “Class pride and its obverse passion, class contempt, are the necessary spiritual product of class divisions. They are the direct negation of solidarity and love. They substitute semihuman, semiethical relation for full human fraternity. The class system, therefore, is a sinful denial of the kingdom of God, and one of the characteristic marks and forces of the kingdom of evil.”<sup>16</sup>

Rauschenbusch suggests that “the social gospel is the old message of salvation enlarged and intensified.”<sup>17</sup> What he means is that the prevailing approach to the gospel has been individualistic since it focuses on seeing the sinfulness of every human heart and does not address the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of individuals. It “seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience. It calls for the faith of the old prophets, who believed in the salvation of nations.”<sup>18</sup>

While it is true that the gospel is not all social, there is a social dimension that must not be ignored. The gospel must not be so otherworldly that it is of no earthly good. People who need to hear the gospel now have needs that must be met. Some are saying, “Pie in the sky for the sweet by-and-by cannot feed me or my children now.” Recognition by the church that it has a role in the social order to do what Jesus did in His ministry will assist in seeing that injustice in any form is not tolerated in the Christian community. The church certainly must demonstrate that the “sweet by-and-by” can indeed influence, transform, and sweeten the needy and hurting in the “here and now.”

Furthermore, as Noel L. Erskine argues, “it is unfortunate that the Christian churches were an important part of this process of domination” and have “in more overt ways . . . often used theology to undergird the system of oppres-

sion.”<sup>19</sup> Thus it is incumbent that the gospel be liberated from these trappings employed to entrench racism and exploit Blacks and other minorities.

Certain aspects of the social gospel are indeed objectionable, an example being the equating of the social order with the kingdom of God. But other aspects of the social gospel are vital for the church now and could have been helpful in the struggle.

Calvin B. Rock’s theological works include *Seeing Christ; The Love of Christ; Our God Is Able; and Go On! Vital Messages for Today’s Christian*. With the continuing dialogue in the church concerning the nature of Christ as well as the place of works in salvation, the first two of these works are vital for theological directions, the third helps people to reflect on the greatness of God, while the fourth provides good theological reflection.

Roy Adams recently authored *The Sanctuary: Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology and The Nature of Christ: Help for a Church Divided Over Perfection*.<sup>20</sup> These books, given the present theological climate of the church, are designed to influence theological thinking and ultimately theological directions. Having written his doctoral dissertation on the sanctuary, Adams is eminently qualified to address such issues, and as reviewers have pointed out, the book is bound to stir up the minds of the saints.

One must question the notion that Black publications are primarily devotional and/or doctrinal in character. For example, Peterson’s book admittedly has a doctrinal bent, but its theological intent is evident in its opening and closing chapters, which begins with “In the Beginning God” and ends with “In the End God.” His preface also acknowledges his intent in that he presents God as the answer to humanity’s questions, the solution of our problems, and our only hope for the future. Examination of the writings of C. E. Moseley, E. E. Cleveland, and O. A. Troy, among others, especially in *Ministry* magazine, also attest to this tendency toward theologizing, albeit in a doctrinal garb.

There has been relative silence on the issues of Black power, Black liberation, the developing countries, feminist/womanist theologies, etc. Here also was opportunity to influence the theological directions of our church and move administration in a direction that would have confronted the issues of racism, poverty, bigotry, as well as social justice, and would also address the concerns of a large segment of its membership while at the same time engendering honest theological debate and interpretation, but we apparently fumbled the ball.

It is significant that it was the debate concerning the creation of Black unions in the SDA Church that elicited from Black leaders some theological reflection on the civil rights struggle and, to some extent, Black theology. In a White

paper titled "A Better Way,"<sup>21</sup> presented to the commission to study regional unions on January 13, 1970, Calvin Rock attempts to influence the direction of the church socially, sociologically, and theologically. Rock presents three theological milestones yet to be achieved by the church: righteousness by faith; the "pilgrim complex," or ethic; and and togetherness.<sup>22</sup>

Rock, whose paper addresses the latter point, rightly argues that Adventists are "a conservative people who have evidently taken their conservatism too far." He suggests that "to carry our conservatism into the area of human relations as applies to desegregation is to pervert and misapply an otherwise healthy tendency." Adventists, says Rock, are Fundamentalists who are "given to more dogmatic and authoritarian preachments that confirm our positions rather than a liberal understanding of principle."<sup>23</sup>

These insightful observations could have benefited the church had its leadership listened to his plea. However, it took 18 years and a Caucasian Lutheran researcher, Merton P. Strommen, to gain the church's attention.<sup>24</sup> As a matter of fact, Strommen explains the tension that Rock observes in his church:

"Three of our major studies have shown that when ministries accent what a person does—is preoccupied with rules and regulations—serious flaws appear in the members. Our massive study of 4,000 Lutherans showed that upward of two in five are law-oriented. As such, they tend to be prejudiced, self-oriented, aloof from community needs, authoritarian in their approach to parenting, and intent on seeking their personal advantage. By way of contrast, those whose focus is on what God is doing for them are far more likely to have an intensely personal commitment to Christ, a happy outlook on life, openness to needed change, involvement in social issues and helping activities."

Thus the solution to Rock's dilemma is found in a theological direction. The Adventist position on social and racial issues is an outgrowth of our theology. SDAs are conservative and law-oriented; therefore, it is no wonder that there is little interest in issues relating to social justice. As Rock puts it: "We cannot be too surprised that we are slow to evolve from any social or theological position."

In 1976 Rock presented a second paper on the same issues and with the same intent. From his standpoint as an ethicist and a theologian he looked at the morality and ethics of the treatment of Blacks in the church, and hence the need for Black unions to provide lateral and vertical mobility. He argues that the church, given its track record and the problems it faces on minority issues, should be willing to make room for cultural pluralism. For him, that is the best model to solve the dilemma that Blacks in the SDA Church face.

Also producing a paper for the commission on Black unions was Lorenzo Grant, Ph.D.,<sup>25</sup> who argues that the

model employed by other presenters, especially Rock, is sociological and thus, in his estimation, unacceptable for ecclesiological conclusions. In his discussion Grant posits a creative political model utilizing Black theology and quoting from such gurus as James Cone.

After quoting Rosemary Reuther, who suggests that "black theology walks a razor's edge between a racist message and a message that is validly prophetic, and the character of this razor's edge must be analyzed with the greatest care to prevent the second from drifting toward the first,"<sup>26</sup> Grant too becomes prophetic, warning that "this solemn responsibility is not the domain of the white hierarchy. The black theologian must in his inmost soul be true and honest with God." An interesting suggestion, certainly, that is neither explained nor followed up by Grant.

Again, what we see here is an attempt to influence the theological and political direction of the church. According to Grant, the ethical dilemma facing the church must lie at the door of those who have the oversight of the total church.<sup>27</sup> He attempts to make church leaders aware of the need for growth in applying social justice for the diverse constituency of the church. To achieve his aim he employs what he knows best—theology.

In his classes at the SDA Theological Seminary, Walter B. T. Douglas, Ph.D., has been one of the foremost proponents of liberation and Black theology, influencing the theological thought of his students through his lectures. Douglas also presented a paper<sup>28</sup> to a professional meeting on the topic.

Pedrito Maynard-Reid wrote a dissertation at Andrews University that he later published through Orbis Press. Addressing the matter of the rich and poor in the book of James, he attempts to influence thought on the matter of social justice. Since his work was not published through denominational channels, it has not had much impact on theological thinking within the church.

Currently Black scholars, nationally and internationally, are challenging the prevailing Eurocentric biblical posture. Cain Felder notes: "Although it may surprise some well-meaning Christians and Jews in America today, much of what is regarded as legitimate and objective biblical analysis (exegesis) and interpretation (hermeneutics) have been done for the distinct purpose of maintaining Eurocentrism. The biblical role of non-Europeans in general and Blacks in particular has thereby been trivialized and left in the margins."<sup>29</sup>

To counter this tendency, an Afrocentric approach to biblical interpretation is being posited by Black scholars.<sup>30</sup> Certainly our White counterparts will not and cannot speak for us on these issues, which involve social justice. We must lift up our voices and our pens in defense of just causes and in support of right and justice.

Because Blacks and other minorities remain underrep-

resented on committees and venues that determine the church's doctrinal direction, there is a need for the voices and pens of Blacks to be prominent in the church. In the SDA Church in general there is an increase among people of color in Europe, Africa, and the Americas—it might even be the case that people of color are the majority in the church today. Here in the United States, the birthplace of the SDA Church, there is today a decline in membership among Caucasians and an increase among minorities.

Concurrent with these developments is what sociologists are calling the “browning of America,” which means there might not be a reversal of this trend in the foreseeable future. Thus there is indeed a great need for Black Adventists to have a major role in determining the theological directions of the church. The trend of having others think for us and tell us what to do must be halted; we are equal partners at the table and must not abdicate our place or our responsibilities to anyone. The shaping of the theology of the church is just as much our task as it is anyone else's.

Only by examining the past can one discern the pitfalls and problems that dogged the feet of our forebears. Further, only by learning from the past can one move to the future on sure footing. It is natural, then, that as we seek to explore theological directions for our tomorrows we examine such directions in our yesterdays and today's. With this information in hand, we are certainly equipped to move forward.

### Black SDAs and Theology

As the historical overview has indicated, Blacks have been doing theology in a garb that, though legitimate, may well be dubbed unconventional when judged by the standards set by the majority culture. One such avenue has been preaching, which historically has played a vital role in Black religiosity.

Denied access to the forums already mentioned, and given the ready and captive audience for theologizing that the weekly church congregation provided (an audience that wanted to hear the Word of God as articulated through His preachers), Black preachers found in the weekly sermon a vehicle of theological articulation. As such, Black preachers have by and large taken their preaching seriously. We've treasured the time with our congregations when we have an opportunity to interpret and communicate God's Word.

C. E. Bradford, I believe, would concur with this notion. “In your work as Seventh-day Adventist clergymen,” he counseled in his book *Preaching to the Times*, “you exercise both priestly and prophetic functions. . . . As prophet you declare the eternal Word as gospel, not as a mere writer of sermons but, as James H. Robinson puts it, ‘a medium between the mind of God and the hearts of men.’”<sup>31</sup>

Bradford further endorses the link between preaching and theologizing when he brings the two together in his dis-

ussion of the sons of Issachar.<sup>32</sup> He even calls upon preachers “to do some hard theological thinking.”<sup>33</sup> Bradford then makes by far one of his most pertinent statements marking this link: “We [preachers] may never become systematic theologians, but we are for all of that practical theologians, because there can be no divorce between theology and preaching. Every pastor is a theologian in residence. Preaching is a sort of immediate theologizing. And, remember, if it won't preach, it's not good theology.”<sup>34</sup>

Examples of this concept can be deduced from Bradford's sermon to the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas, in which he spoke of a “pathetic search for a more satisfying formula, a new theological construct to ‘finish the work.’” Bradford related “the need to love God and to love one's neighbor as an essential posture in doing anything for the Lord” and that the church “must be vertically alive to God and horizontally in touch with men and all that troubles them.”<sup>35</sup>

In this address Bradford was certainly trying to influence theological directions. How else can one interpret the intent of the following statement: “The church must be in deed and in reality the Just Society. The principles of justice and neighbor love must be worked out in the laboratory of human experience, in the here-and-now?”<sup>36</sup> That this unique call is coming from a high-ranking church leader is astounding.

Mervyn Warren, Ph.D., professor of preaching and chair of the Religion Department at Oakwood College, would also concur with the conclusion we are arriving at regarding preaching being viewed in the context of theology. In his doctoral dissertation on the preaching style of Martin Luther King, Jr., and in a later work titled *Black Preaching: Truth and Soul*, Warren argues in favor of this correlation, maintaining that the centralization of the church in the life of African-Americans is a theological outcome of freedom to participate in preaching and worship.<sup>37</sup>

This link between preaching and theology is evident in the wider Black community as well. Concurring with Bradford and Warren on this point, Latta Thomas goes further to associate music with preaching: “This is the amazing thing—that blacks were able to see themselves and the power of a liberating God in the stories and models of Moses, Daniel, Joshua, the three Hebrew boys in the fiery furnace, John, and Jesus. . . . They created songs to celebrate these convictions. We now call them spirituals and congregational songs. Not only that, those black toilers in the heat of the day created a biblical theology, long before Bultmann, with ‘Sweet Jesus’ as the center. . . . It is no accident, therefore, that the early American black church in bulrush exile produced a Nat Turner [and] a Gabriel Prosser.”<sup>38</sup>

C. J. Curtis, in his book *Contemporary Protestant Thought*,<sup>39</sup> in a chapter titled “The Negro Contribution to American Theology: King,” asserts: “The theological contri-

bution of Afro-Americans has long been neglected. In our time we are beginning to recognize the significant contribution that they have made and continue to make. From the devotional power of the great Negro spirituals to the dynamic theology of rapid social change of a Martin Luther King, Afro-American religious poets and thinkers have covered the spectrum of the great themes of American theology: freedom, love, justice, and the church's social responsibility."<sup>40</sup>

Curtis also corroborates the notion that "Martin Luther King was the most important theologian of our time, not because of the plenitude of his literary production, but because of his creative proposals for dealing with the structure of evil."<sup>41</sup> Herbert Richardson advanced this idea in an article titled "Martin Luther King—Unsung Theologian."<sup>42</sup> Since it was not the plenitude of his written theological production that warranted that designation, it must have been his preaching and his speeches, for these are the vehicles that propelled him into national prominence. Here, then, is corroboration that preaching is indeed a legitimate way to do theology.<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly enough, Black theology, which has been the premier *modus operandi* for most Black scholars for more than a quarter century, had its genesis in the pulpits of Black churches. Crediting the roots of Black theology to "a small group of radical black clergy,"<sup>44</sup> James Cone says: "To theologize from within the black experience rather than be confined to duplicating the theology of Europe or white North America was the main objective of the new black theology. It represented the theological reflections of a radical black clergy seeking to interpret the meaning of God's liberating presence in a society where blacks were being economically exploited and politically marginalized because of their skin color."<sup>45</sup>

Given, then, this association of preaching with theologizing, who can estimate the impact of Black preaching on the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

### Directions of Theology

Today a plethora of voices, both national and denominational, are seeking to influence people, their directions, and their future. There are myriads of questions, challenges, and approaches to theology and Scripture. If we are to influence theological directions of our church, which view of theology shall we espouse and/or articulate? What shall be our contribution theologically on the issue of the church's future?

Our church is facing a crisis: our members do not believe as unquestioningly as they once did, they do not give as willingly as they once did, and they do not trust leadership as unequivocally as they once did. They are clamoring for more autonomy, more involvement, more say. Some among us even think we are becoming more congregational. Is there truth to the idea that "at an increasing rate the church is becoming a meaningless abstraction"?<sup>46</sup> In which

theological direction shall we go on this issue? Shall we maintain the status quo, or should we become creative? Shall we seek divine guidance as we reexamine the issues as the pioneers did? Just what shall our contribution be?

Another theme that is being discussed in theology generally is Black theology. Black theology is only one segment of a larger movement in the theological field today. The larger reality is "liberation theology." In theory, liberation theology refers to any theology that addresses or deals with oppressive situations. Most known is that sector that originated in Latin America and whose advocates believe they should be on the side of the poor, for that is where God is. Other forms include Black theology, feminist/womanist theologies, developing-countries theology, African theology, etc.

Latta Thomas points out that "in most black American communities today, liberation, self-determination, healthy identity, and justice for black people are the main items on the [theological] agenda." He points out that while this does not mean a neglect of concern for others, it implies that since they are presently at the bottom of the social and economic ladder, they must have priority now.<sup>47</sup>

Since our constituency is Black, will we follow this agenda, or will we ignore these concerns? Will we address these concerns from an SDA perspective so that our members, who doubtlessly have an interest, will not have to read them in a context that may challenge or distort their faith?

In fact, the church in general, our segment included, is alienating—or, put more mildly, losing the attention of its intellectuals. Part of the problem is that we are not addressing their concerns. While we are concerned with doctrines and lifestyle, they are more interested in the implications of how Christ affects my decision-making; how I address the perplexing questions of life, such as abortion, euthanasia, surrogate parenting, etc., in the light of my Christian stance; how I face the racism of my church and maintain my faith; and whether I should be involved in social action as an SDA Christian.

The theological directions of the church that we advocate should include responses to these concerns. Noel Erskine notes that "an important task of Black theology is the reclaiming of Black America from humiliation."<sup>48</sup> Should that be a part of our agenda as SDA scholars and clergy?

Furthermore, there is a segment of the Black community that views the Bible as the creation of Caucasians. For many, the cross and the Bible are increasingly becoming symbols of European aggression. They are asking, "Is the Bible Eurocentric, Afrocentric, or what?" and "Is it relevant to the needs of this generation?" Shouldn't the theological direction we advocate restore confidence in the Bible as the Word of God?

Some Black scholars, becoming aware of this trend and seeing a problem in the prevailing methodologies of biblical

interpretation, have taken a stand. They see a Eurocentric approach that not only has downplayed the Black presence in Scripture but also given that presence a negative and derogatory portrayal.<sup>49</sup> Will our vision of theological directions encompass this area, which needs to be addressed for our people? My question is Will we take seriously the Black experience as a dictum of theological reflection?

As we contemplate this notion, I would remind us of a comment by Erskine: "Any theology in North America that ignores [the Black experience] runs the risk of being irrelevant."<sup>50</sup> Do we want to be irrelevant to our people?

The foregoing is a brief synopsis of what is happening theologically on the national scene. Denominationally, we are consumed over doctrinal issues. If we are to influence theological directions, what shall be our posture on:

1. The sanctuary? This is the 150th anniversary of the Great Disappointment, and as it is remembered, some in our ranks are concerned about our view of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment. Some leaders are concerned that there is great disbelief among the ranks of the clergy on these issues.

As we face the future and seek to influence theological directions, what shall be our view on the following issues? Is there a sanctuary in heaven? What really happened in 1844? Did Christ enter a new phase of His ministry, or did He go into a new apartment in the heavenly sanctuary? Besides, is there an investigative or pre-Advent judgment? Who is judged—the living, the dead, the saved, the unsaved? If we are to influence theological directions, we must decide on our views and where we stand on these issues before we can move forward.

2. The nature of Christ? Currently, the church is polarized on this issue. One camp insists that Christ had the fallen nature of humanity, which is the historic Adventist position. To this camp Christ had to be human in order to be our example and to save us. For them this was part of the message of Waggoner and Jones in 1888, and was also the position of Ellen G. White.

The other camp suggests that Christ had the pre-Fall nature of Adam. He was fully human, but as the Second Adam He came as the first Adam came. This group also feels that this position is articulated by Ellen G. White.

The interesting thing is that these two groups talk at each other and never to each other. What shall be our view on this issue? Shall we study and pray as the early pioneers did, asking the Lord to reveal His truth to us, or shall we join one or another of these camps?

3. The role of law? Another issue that still consumes us involves the function of the law in the Christian's life. While most Adventists will agree that we are saved by faith and not by works, not as many are sure of the relation of works to salvation. Some believe we are saved by faith

alone; others believe that salvation is by faith and works, or, as they explain, by faith that works. Just what is the precise relationship, and what position should we take to the future on this issue?

Much debate is going on in regard to justification and sanctification. Some espouse one and deny or downplay the other. Also being debated are inspiration, eschatology, the role of Ellen White, and the atonement. The latter is the latest issue and can be summarized simplistically as to whether Christ died as a substitute for human beings (penal substitution) or to build community, that is, to bring people together in a fellowship of love. Again the lines are drawn.

### A Possible Direction for SDA Theology

While within the Seventh-day Adventist Church we are more concerned about doctrines, outside the church the issues are different. Which model shall Black Adventists follow? It is up to us to decide what kind of message we will have for the future.

The twenty-first century is approaching; what will we take to it? Will we continue to do business as usual, or will we make a difference? Many of our brothers and sisters face disease and deformity, both physical and spiritual. Many are dissatisfied about how they are living and how they know they should be living. They are facing injustice and inequality, economic and otherwise; there is oppression of body, mind, and spirit, and fear of death. What certainties, what hope, shall we offer to meaningfully address these needs?

While within the church the ongoing debates are polarizing and alienating people, the debate outside the church is bringing people together in fellowship and meaningful dialogue. Among Blacks in general primary concerns involve the application of truth to life and issues of social justice. Where shall we stand?

Surely Black Seventh-day Adventists cannot afford to be spectators sitting by, watching history unfurl. We must be profoundly involved. We must face the future with meaningfulness and relevance. Since the cross unites, not divides, we must find ways to address doctrines that will not cause alienation. Furthermore, our emphasis should not be on doctrines solely for the sake of doctrines, but on application of doctrines to meaningful Christian living that is not only inwardly focused but also outwardly focused, extending to God's needy children outside the fellowship.

As we look to the direction in which Black Seventh-day Adventist theology should go, a few things must be noted. First, the role of God is significant. Throughout the centuries of the Black struggle faith in God has been undaunted and a stabilizing factor. Even when the Word of God was used against us, to entrench our misery and make our lot more harsh, our faith stood firm. Thus the role of the Bible must be fundamental—there can be no equivocating. Our

world began with God, it is being sustained by Him, and it will end with Him. He must, therefore, be a central core of any theology that we will articulate.

Second, the role the Bible has had in the Black community is a crucial fact that must be neither ignored nor minimized. Viewed as the Word of God, the Bible is esteemed, its words are taken as authoritative, its counsels viewed as normative, and its liberation struggles, particularly those motifs relating to the liberation from Egyptian bondage, embraced as instructive and applicable to the contemporary struggles. Consequently, the Bible must have a pivotal role in any theology that is articulated. Here, then, are my suggestions for the direction of SDA theology.

Usually theology begins with God or revelation and inspiration; however, I am going to make a departure here. Since we are considering Black SDAs and theological directions, we are actually speaking of a specific sector of the believing community. Furthermore, since there is such fragmentation in the church—African-American SDAs, African SDAs, Chinese SDAs, Filipino SDAs, Haitian SDAs, Hispanic SDAs, Korean SDAs, etc.—and since we are doctrinally polarized, I submit that we need to center upon that which unites. My preferred starting point would be Jesus Christ, but He too has become a divisive topic. I will therefore begin with a community of believers, namely, the church.

Now, what is the church? The church is a believing community, but a believing community in whom or what? It is a community that believes that God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand, a fact that God acknowledged by pouring out His Spirit on a group of diverse people at Pentecost who were commissioned to represent Him in the world. This new group of people, the church, is not bound by national or racial boundaries. Rather the church is people of all races, languages, cultures, ethnic backgrounds, etc., who show forth His praises and bring people to repentance.

Such a definition takes us back to the traditional beginning and God; thus SDA Blacks must advocate a God who is Creator and Source of all being. A God who is neither a human construct nor a human creation. A God who is eternal and self-existent. A God who is compassionate, kind, loving, gracious, and long-suffering. A God who is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. A God who is holy—sinners cannot enter into His presence—and must reveal Himself to be known.

Because of who He is and what He has done creatively and redemptively for humanity, God deserves to be loved, revered, praised, and worshiped. Furthermore, since what He has done can be replicated by no other being, He deserves sole worship. He has taken the initiative by outlining how and when He should be worshiped, and has designed response to His requirements as an indication of

stewardship. The point, then, is that His believing community is a group of stewards who recognize that life, living, and care for our body temple are loving responses; that because God graciously made the world and all in it and entrusted it to our care, He deserves one tenth of our income and one seventh of our time.

Since God is a God of order who has at heart the best interests of His people, He has given rules and standards—principles—by which the community in general, and the people in it in particular, must abide. These rules don't proscribe behavior. Rather they are intended to define the limits beyond which we can't go without hurting ourselves. Viewed thus, they are designed for our protection, to keep us happy rather than as restrictions to distress us and make us unhappy.

Now, to suggest that there is a believing community implies that there is unbelief. Precisely so, for through a seed of doubt sowed by the tempter, the first humans doubted and disbelieved God, thus plunging our world into sin. The Creator had warned the first pair that if they failed the test of loyalty they'd been given, they would die. But when Adam and Eve did precisely what they were advised not to do, sin and death came. However, a loving Creator did not eternally destroy them. Instead, He made an "everlasting covenant" with them to rescue them from their fallen condition. That is precisely what He did in Jesus Christ, and He invites His believing community to share this news with the world.

Those who accept this news of salvation, shared by God's agents, join a community of believers founded at Pentecost and congregated around its resurrected Lord. God promised a Saviour. Humanity anticipated a Messiah. But when He came in an unexpected manner, though He was the Son of God He was neither acclaimed nor accepted. In fact, He was rejected as an impostor and insurrector.

The preexistent Son of God was bruised and ill-treated, crucified and buried; but He rose again by the power of God and ever lives to make intercession for His saints. In Him God became part of humankind. Hence, He was fully God and fully man. Any emphasis on one nature to the exclusion of the other does Him injustice. Further, we do not have definitive proof to support one side above the other conclusively.

Thus we must advocate a Christology that is rooted in the preexistence, incarnation, passion, and resurrection, as well as exaltation, of Jesus, the Son of God, who was the most perfect revelation of God. This Christology sees Jesus' successful earthly sojourn as an answer to Satan's challenge against God. Further, it advocates the vicarious life and death of Jesus on our behalf. He was made sin for us and died "once for all."

The result of His sacrifice, according to Romans 5:1, is peace. But peace is not just the absence of physical strife; it encompasses soul peace, a peace that comes from a right re-

relationship with God—a vertical dimension—effected through Jesus Christ. But there is a horizontal dimension, too. Abraham was blessed so that he could be a blessing (Gen. 12:1-3). Peace is effected through a cross that has a vertical as well as a horizontal beam. Likewise, Christ not only unites us with God but also with one another, a horizontal imperative of the cross and of redemption that impels the believing community.

Thus our Christology must exclude neither substitution nor community building. The two are not mutually exclusive. Further, Jesus told His disciples that their love for one another will convince the world that they are His followers. The gospel does not divide or polarize people—it unites them; it does not segregate or divide people—it brings them together and makes peace between them. Thus if we find ourselves being alienated from others of the household of faith by what is said or believed, someone or something needs reconnection with Christ.

Now, if the community is not to be divided by what it believes but rather to be united by it, should it be divided by its constituents? Note that whenever the church experienced phenomenal growth, it occurred when it has been most oblivious of its composition and when it was united by the Spirit. These times include the days prior to and following Pentecost, the ministry of Stephen and Philip, the ministry of Saul and Barnabas at Antioch, etc. Lack of growth and problems always accompanied disunity.

For example, Acts 6 details the rupturing of relations between Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews ultimately threatening the unity of the church. Hebraic Jews generally cultivated a superiority complex because they lived in the homeland and had not compromised with the enemy and with Hellenization. Furthermore, they had not adopted the language of the enemy, as the Hellenistic Jews had. These prejudices spilled over into the church and spoiled the unity of the neophyte movement, marring their experiment with a just society. The charge was levied at the Hebraists, who were in charge of the food distribution, that they were favoring their own and neglecting the needs of the Hellenists. These charges, true or false, were believable and precipitated a rupturing of relations and a breakup of unity.

If we who live in the closing days of the world are to fulfill God's mission successfully, we must learn from these experiences and not allow differences to divide us. Diversity must be celebrated; we are one people with the same God, the same mission, and the same destiny. Differences in language, culture, and ethnicity are givens, but let us unite under God to fulfill the mission He has assigned us. John Donne is certainly correct: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main . . . ; any man's death diminishes me, be-

cause I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."<sup>51</sup>

If we are thus to fulfill God's mission, we must learn from the experience of the early church. To the extent that we do, we will be willing to widen our circles and broaden our vision. If our vertical relationship is in place, and if self is crucified with Christ, as it should be, there will be no problem with our horizontal inclusiveness.

We must forget our differences and unite so God can use us to accomplish His task. Wouldn't it be great if our generation could experience phenomenal growth under the guidance of the Spirit? If it is to be, we must know the formula.

A believing community can obtain its motivation, energy, drive, and direction only from the sources that motivated the early church: the Word and the Spirit. We must recognize that God has spoken to His community through Scripture. Though Scripture is the recording of experiences/encounters that individuals and nations have had with God, it is more than that. Our theology must recognize the guiding hand of God redemptively in history as He has led His chosen ones to accomplish His purposes. As such, Scripture, while inspired and sacrosanct, is a revelation of God recorded by human beings in human language.

Moreover, the believing community must be conversant with the content and intent of Scripture to avoid the mistakes of the past and be guided in the present and the future. Scripture informs us that when the Holy Spirit was first received, the believing community was in one place and in one accord; differences were put aside, as they prayed in the name of Jesus for a fitness to meet others. Their foremost desire was to reflect in their lives the image of God.<sup>52</sup> If these same aspirations characterize the church in its latter days, God will extend His recognition by pouring out His Spirit in latter rain power, just as He did at Pentecost in early rain power. Just as the Spirit was the driving force behind the phenomenal growth of the early church, He will guide and direct the last-day church in the same way.

The direction theology should take, therefore, must encompass belief in the Holy Spirit and in the Scriptures as the Word of God. Note that belief in Scripture has always been part of the Black tradition, especially those sections dealing with liberation and the exodus motifs. To be relevant, theology must maintain this focus—but should have the liberation Christ achieved at His exodus and the building of a united community centered under the Holy Spirit foremost on its agenda. Doctrines cannot unify the church. Organization cannot do it. Only a congregation of the church around the resurrected Lord, as happened at Pentecost—and recognized in heaven by the outpouring of the Spirit—can accomplish this task.

Eschatology must feature prominently in any theology for the future. Adventist eschatology, as the name implies,

has featured the imminent return of Christ. We have seen events in the late eighteenth century as heralding the rise of the Adventist Church and the beginning of the end-time. We have also seen ourselves as Laodicea, the church that is to usher in the Second Advent.

The problem is that as the Second Advent has seemingly been delayed, there has been an increase of apathy and a lack of commitment to this doctrine. Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockart, in their book *Seeking a Sanctuary*, suggest that there has been a decline in belief in the imminent Second Advent and that it has been replaced by a new emphasis on justification.<sup>53</sup> If they are correct, then reevaluation is needed, because the question is not which should occupy center stage, justification or the Second Advent. The point is that God is seeking people who have been justified by the blood of the Lamb and who are preparing for the Advent.

Any eschatology that focuses on the delay or the coming itself is misdirected. There needs to be a healthy tension between eager anticipation of the eschaton and the supposed delay. If we believe Jesus that no one but the Father knows the time of the Second Advent, then the church should focus not on the Advent or its delay, but on the Person of the Advent and the mission He has assigned.

How would such an approach be different? By taking seriously Christ's word in John 14:1-3 and Matthew 25. In the first passage Jesus summons His followers to commitment and certainty, to freedom from anxiety about the future: "If I go . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself." Thus faith assures us He'll return. Until then we must wait.

In Matthew 25 Jesus related the situation prior to the Second Advent in an interesting fashion. A man assigned tasks to his subjects in his absence. Some among those awaiting the long-expected event became so absorbed with the wait that they were lured into complacency and thus did not make the necessary preparation (develop character) for the return. The other group, however, prepares (develops character) and is thus ready for the bridegroom.

The chapter also contrasts the activities of the groups during the waiting period. They are given interesting labels and specific locations, and are separated by an unmistakable agenda, which the church should include in both its theology and its practice. Thus instead of focusing on the delay, the church and its theology should focus on the person of Christ and the agenda He outlined.

This agenda contrasts with the prevailing emphasis in that while the latter focuses on the "hereafter," with little focus on the "here and now," Jesus outlined activities that the waiting church should engage in here and now as it anticipates the hereafter. This agenda addresses the needs of the infirm, the incarcerated, the homeless and hungry, the

naked, etc. If this should be the modus operandi of every waiting saint, what are we doing as a church to impress this upon our members? Shouldn't this agenda characterize our theology and practice as we await the Advent?

Analysis reveals that a social justice agenda characterized the early church and the early Advent movement. Micah's poignant question "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8) is representative of the early pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who were involved in the antislavery and abolitionist movements as well as the Underground Railroad.<sup>54</sup> Shouldn't we also be concerned about social justice? Shouldn't our voices be heard against injustice? This is not just a liberal agenda; it is God's agenda for His people: "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).

Now, as Black Seventh-day Adventists ponder theological directions, we must espouse a theology of hope and of liberation. Blacks in this country, though emancipated more than 100 years, have lost faith in a system that has left them enslaved economically and dependent on handouts. They have lost faith in a system that has seen a large percentage of Black males incarcerated and who thus cannot be positive role models for their young, a system in which they are valued for their brawn and seen as inferior intellectually.

God is a liberating God—isn't that the point of the Exodus and Calvary? We must, therefore, proclaim liberation from sin, injustice, and oppression. God has freed us to become liberators: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" and "You, my brothers, were called to be free" (Gal. 5:1, 13, NIV). We who have been freed must never enslave others; we must never be supporters of any system or cause that shackles others. We must have an undying commitment to liberation and justice.

If indeed Christ has freed Christians to be liberators, then the Black Seventh-day Adventist Church has an obligation to join the task of liberation. Black, womanist/feminist, developing countries, liberation, African, and Caribbean theologies, etc., are, I believe, cries of oppressed peoples for liberation in Christ. That is the way we should interpret R. S. Sugirtharajah and her colleagues in *Voices From the Margin*.<sup>55</sup> To the extent, then, that these are pleas for help, they should influence the theological direction that Black Seventh-day Adventists take. As people who have experienced oppression, we should address the task of listening to and aiding these fellow Christians who seek to be heard and who deserve to be.

The Sabbath and healthful living can be presented in a context of liberation. In Deuteronomy 5, observance of the Sabbath is set in the context of liberation from Egyptian bondage. We can reinforce this concept from the standpoint of liberation from the bondage of sin as effected in the death

and resurrection of Jesus. Sabbathkeeping is then not only an act of obedience to a divine command; it is a worshipful response to the love of Jesus, a modeling of the example set by a Saviour who respected the Sabbath by resting on it at Creation as well as in redemption.

Similarly, healthful living can be seen in the context of a loving response to the liberation from sin. Romans 12:1 challenges Christians to present their bodies in the best condition possible to God as a living sacrifice and as a rational service of worship. Because Jesus liberated us from the bondage of sin, our response as Christians ought to be to preserve our bodies in the best condition possible, since we are stewards and since the Master bought us at so great a price. This motivation for healthful living is powerful, for it removes the focus from us and places it where it rightly belongs—on Jesus and His liberating sacrifice on the cross. Which right-thinking person could resist or neglect such a great sacrifice on their behalf?

But there is another way to view healthful living. Since God is Creator and the world belongs to Him, then as stewards of His grace we have a responsibility to take care of the environment for Him. As such, we must articulate a theology that addresses the responsible use of the environment so that it can best serve the purpose for which the Creator designed it. Such a theology would address the preservation of the rain forest, endangered species, and the killing of animals for pleasure and gratification—perhaps providing a better basis for vegetarianism.

## Conclusion

As we face the twenty-first century, I see challenges and opportunities. At no other time in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have Black Adventists been poised to contribute meaningfully to Adventist theology. I don't believe, however, that we should wait for handouts or for inclusion. There are things we can and should do, and places where we can start.

First, I believe that we cannot continue to embrace a Eurocentric theology. However, proclaiming an Afrocentric theology could be interpreted as reverse discrimination. I would suggest a Christocentric theology, and by this I am not pulling Christ down into a human problem as the Corinthian Christians did. Like Paul I am seeing Christ as the one who gives meaning and legitimacy to any doctrine or theology; He must be the center and focus of any meaningful dialogue.

This theology, rooted in a believing community that finds its purpose for being in Christ and thus unites around Him and His agenda, embracing a social dimension while not neglecting traditional beliefs and/or doctrines, can be relevant and effective in today's society and the future. So where do we go from here? The ball is in our court. What shall we do with it? We must decide.

<sup>1</sup> In LeRoy E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1971), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1979), p. 565. See also W. W. Fordham, *Righteous Rebel: The Unforgettable Legacy of a Fearless Advocate for Change* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Schwarz, p. 391.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See the *North American Informant*, March-April 1977. Titled "The Way the Lord Has Led Us," this issue focuses on the progress of the Black work in North America and on persons who were influential in its growth.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Loris Peterson, *The Hope of the Race* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1934). This work will be discussed later.

<sup>7</sup> The name was first proposed as the new name of the *Gospel Herald* in 1906. However, the name was never employed for that magazine. Actually the magazine was revived in 1910 and continued under its old name.

<sup>8</sup> See Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists With an African Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1984), p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stoney the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Cleveland's works, published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, include such titles as *Mine Eyes Have Seen* (1968); *Ask the Prophets* (1970); *Free at Last* (1970); *The Middle Wall* (1969); and *Sparks From the Anvil* (1971).

<sup>12</sup> Cleveland, *The Middle Wall*, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), p. 239.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 248-256.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 6. See also Donald Musser and Joseph L. Price, *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), pp. 447-449.

<sup>19</sup> Noel L. Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary: Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1993); *The Nature of Christ: Help for a Church Divided Over Perfection* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1994).

<sup>21</sup> C. B. Rock, "A Better Way" (paper presented to the commission to study regional unions, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>24</sup> See Merton P. Strommen, "Why Business as Usual Is No Longer Possible" (draft paper presented to the planning conference at Loma Linda University, Jan. 5, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> Lorenzo H. Grant, "Ethical Rationale and Model for Meeting the Growing Needs of the Regional Work" (paper presented to the commission to study regional unions).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Walter B. T. Douglas, "Liberation Theology and Theologies of Liberation" (paper presented to a professional group).

<sup>29</sup> Felder, p. ix.

<sup>30</sup> See Cone; Felder, *Stoney the Road and Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989); Latta R. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1976).

<sup>31</sup> Charles E. Bradford, *Preaching to the Times* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1975), pp. 12, 13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42.

<sup>35</sup> In Reynolds, p. 259.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Mervyn Warren, *Black Preaching: Truth and Soul* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1977), p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, pp. 17, 18.

<sup>39</sup> C. J. Curtis, *Contemporary Protestant Thought* (New York: Bruce Pub. Co., 1970).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>42</sup> As cited by Curtis. For the full article, see Herbert Richardson, "Martin Luther King—Unsung Theologian," *Commonweal*, May 3, 1968, p. 201a.

<sup>43</sup> See also Mervyn Warren, "A Rhetorical Study of the Preaching of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Pastor and Pulpit Orator" (Ph.D. dissertation,

Michigan State University, 1966).

<sup>44</sup> Cone, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Liechty, *Theology in Postliberal Perspective* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Erskine, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> See Felder, *Stoney the Road and Troubling Biblical Waters*; Thomas; and Cone.

<sup>50</sup> Erskine, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> John Donne, *Devotions on Emergent Occasions*, no. 17.

<sup>52</sup> E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> See Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 79.

<sup>54</sup> See Schwarz, p. 98.

<sup>55</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND CHURCH ECONOMICS

by Henry E. Felder, Ph.D.

## Introduction

This study focuses on the relative economic status of Black Seventh-day Adventists who are members of regional, or predominately Black, conferences that are a part of the North American Division (NAD) of the church. The principal analysis will compare data on tithes and memberships. Reported tithe is used as a proxy for income under the assumption that tithe and income move in the same direction.<sup>1</sup>

In order to assess trends, data will be used from the year 1950 (after Black conferences had been in existence for five years) to 1994, when data were last available. Data will be used in five-year intervals under the assumption that this is sufficient to determine trends. Since Black Adventists are part of a larger community, comparisons will be made regarding that community as a frame of reference.

## Model of the Economic Status of Black Adventists

Black Americans have been a part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from the earliest days of the denomination. Numerous times in various volumes of the *Testimonies for the Church* Ellen White addressed the economic as well as spiritual needs of the Black members.<sup>2</sup> Much of her writings spoke to the economic status and needs of the newly freed slaves during the last part of the nineteenth century.

However, not much is known about the economic status of the Black members of the church in more recent periods of church history. In most economic models of the status of Black Americans, emphasis is placed on the relative earnings, employment status, and wealth condition of Blacks compared to similar statistics for Whites and other groups.<sup>3</sup> No such data exist for Black Seventh-day Adventists, who are not numerous enough to be captured by typical census surveys. We can use such economic models, however, to infer conditions about relative economic status.

The basic economic model to describe economic status begins with the assumption that individuals value goods and leisure, and make choices that provide for the best trade-off of the two subject to a budget constraint.<sup>4</sup> From these types of models, three relationships help provide the basis for understanding the economic status of any group. The first establishes how income flow permits the family to purchase goods and services, save money for future consumption,

and provide for the basic needs of modern life. The second is a labor supply equation that shows the relationship between hours of work, labor force participation, and the expected wage the individual can command in the marketplace. The third relationship is a wage equation that shows the personal and other factors that determine the amounts individuals get paid for work.

The budget constraint relates the ability to buy goods and services to the income of the family or individual and the sources of that income.

$$1. \text{ Prices} \times \text{goods} = \text{income} = \text{earnings} + \text{interest} + \text{rents} \\ + \text{dividends} + \text{government transfers}$$

Total income is the sum of the flow of funds from wage earnings, the flow of interest from the ownership of financial capital, the flow of rents from the ownership of property, the flow of dividends from the ownership of stock, and the flow of transfer payments (both cash and noncash) from government sources.

Since approximately 75 percent of all income in this country comes from wage earnings,<sup>5</sup> the labor supply and wage equations that determine the amount of wage earnings provide clues to the factors that determine economic success.

$$2. \text{ Hours of work} = F(\text{expected wages, demographic factors, environmental factors})$$

$$3. \text{ Wages} = G(\text{hours of work, demographic factors, environmental factors, occupational factors})$$

The result of these equations is the key relationship that describes economic status, which is the amount of earnings available to the family or individual.

$$4. \text{ Earnings} = \text{wage rate} \times \text{hours of work}$$

The wage rate is a reflection of the gender, race, education, skills, and occupation of the individual. Participation in the labor market and the hours that the individual works determine the amount of earnings, which, as expressed in equation 4, determines the amount of income.

The economic status of any group results from the amount of income they have when compared to the income of other groups.<sup>6</sup> When the income is large enough, the family is economically self-sufficient.<sup>7</sup> This income provides the basis for returning tithe, educating children, buying homes and cars, and all other economic activities the family or individual wishes to undertake. When income is low, especially when the major source of income is from government transfers, the family may be in poverty.

Economic status is relative to the environment and society in which it is examined. Generally, to determine the economic status of one group, comparisons are made either with the society as a whole or with the economic status of another, or comparison, group. These data are compared at a point in time or over several time periods in order to provide information about trends, absolute status, and relative status. The ratio of income of the subject group to the income of the comparison group provides a convenient point of reference for assessing relative economic status.<sup>8</sup>

#### 5. Ratio = income (subject group)/income (comparison group)

The economic model suggested here will form the basis for assessing the relative economic status of Black Adventists.

#### Sources of Data Used in the Analysis

The data used in the analysis come primarily from the *Annual Statistical Reports* of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I also use data on income, marital status, and other characteristics from the U.S. Bureau of the Census' *Current Population Reports*.

Because data on the actual economic conditions of Adventists are not available, I assume that the average tithe is a proxy for the income received by the average member of the various NAD conferences. Information on offerings

is not systematically analyzed since the data suggests far greater variance in how conferences report offerings.

However, there are several limitations to the use of the tithe, especially as a proxy for the income of Black Adventists. First, data on Black Adventists who live in areas in which there are regional conferences but are not members of such churches are not included. It is not known how many Black Adventists are in this category.<sup>9</sup> The absence of data on such Black Seventh-day Adventists means that the analysis must be interpreted narrowly, and therefore is not representative of all Black Adventists.

A second limitation is that the regional conference structure does not extend to the western United States, where 12 percent of all Adventists reside,<sup>10</sup> but where only 10 percent of Black Adventists in the NAD reside. Specific data on the member tithe of Blacks who attend predominantly Black churches in these areas are not reported separately, as is true for the areas of this part of the country. Since the focus is on the regional conferences, this analysis does not systematically include data on the 10 percent of all Black Adventists who reside in the Pacific Union and the North Pacific Union.

A third limitation is that tithe is only a proxy for actual economic status and may be a rather poor one. The average tithe paid and reported is the product of how many members pay, the average percent of income paid as tithe, and the consistency of the amount paid. Each of these indicators can vary dramatically over churches and over time. Ratio analysis is used to overcome some of the limitations of aggregate tithe data.

#### Analysis of the Data

Table 1 presents data on the membership, tithes, and world mission offerings of the nine regional conferences and the Black constituencies of the Pacific and North Pacific unions.<sup>11</sup> In 1994 there were approximately 217,660 Black

**Table 1**  
**Memberships, Tithe, and Offerings of Regional Conferences, 1994**

Conference/Union Tithe/Offering/Member	Members	Tithe	Offering	Tithe/Offering	Tithe/Member	
Allegheny East	24,143	13,834,859	334,792	14,169,651	573.04	586.91
Allegheny West	11,131	4,278,336	99,518	4,377,854	384.36	393.30
Central States	8,700	2,451,013	63,741	2,514,754	281.73	289.05
Lake Region	21,891	6,614,011	169,911	6,783,922	302.13	309.90
Northeastern	40,191	17,520,268	500,729	18,020,997	435.93	448.38
South Atlantic	24,906	8,377,500	187,088	8,564,588	336.36	343.88
South Central	24,680	8,543,161	172,301	8,715,462	346.16	353.14
Southeastern	21,093	8,068,771	242,576	8,311,347	382.53	394.03
Southwest Region	15,427	5,475,530	116,924	5,592,454	354.93	362.51
North Pacific	1,861	907,829	19,308	927,137	487.82	498.19
Pacific	23,637	8,963,956	230,251	9,194,207	379.23	388.98
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>217,660</b>	<b>85,035,234</b>	<b>2,137,139</b>	<b>87,172,373</b>	<b>390.68</b>	<b>400.50</b>
<b>NAD TOTALS</b>	<b>807,601</b>	<b>480,730,815</b>	<b>22,444,820</b>	<b>503,175,635</b>	<b>595.26</b>	<b>623.05</b>
<b>NAD MINUS BLACK</b>	<b>589,941</b>	<b>395,695,581</b>	<b>20,307,681</b>	<b>416,003,262</b>	<b>670.74</b>	<b>705.16</b>
<b>BLACK/WHITE</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.58</b>	<b>0.57</b>
<b>BLACK/NAD</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>0.64</b>

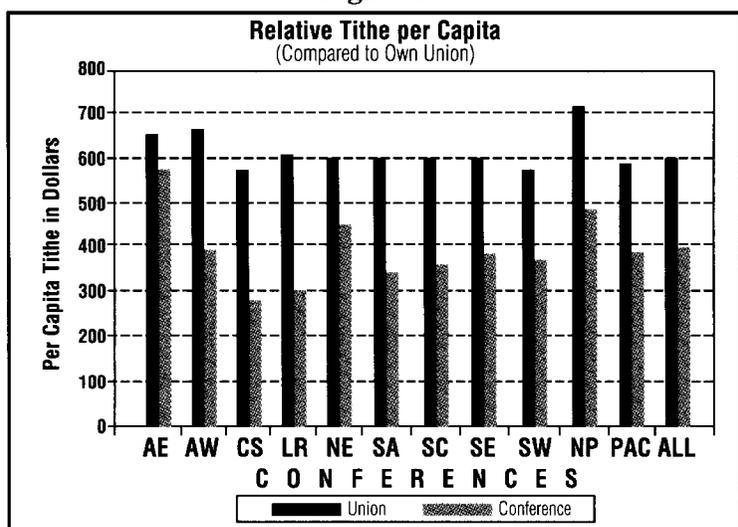
members in the NAD,<sup>12</sup> or 27 percent of the total membership of the NAD. Black members contributed \$85 million, representing 18 percent of all tithe given. In addition, Black members gave world mission offerings of \$2 million, representing 11 percent of the offerings given. In total, Black members contributed \$87 million of the \$503 million given for tithe and world mission offerings in the NAD. This represented 17 percent of total NAD tithe and offerings.

At the end of 1994 Seventh-day Adventist membership was 8,382,558 worldwide. That year these members gave \$853 million in total tithe and world offerings. The NAD contributed 60 percent of the total, with approximately 10 percent of the church's population. Black Adventists gave 10 percent of all tithe and offerings worldwide. As a group, Black Adventists contributed more tithe and offerings to the church than any division except the NAD.

In absolute terms, the contributions of Black Adventists were sizable. In relative terms, Black Adventists gave \$390.68 tithe per capita. This compares with a per capita tithe of \$595.26 for the NAD as a whole and \$670.74 for the NAD minus Black Adventists (or primarily White Adventists). The tithe per capita of Black Adventists was 0.58 of the tithe per capita of the rest of the NAD (a ratio of 1.0 would mean that the average tithe per capita was the same for both groups).

Relative economic status as measured by per capita tithe is not constant across all the regional conferences. In some conferences Black Adventists have relatively higher incomes than in other conferences. For example, per capita tithe ranges from \$573 in the Allegheny East Conference to \$282 in the Central States Conference. To adjust for differences in the cost of living, the tithe per capita for each regional conference and the Black population of the North Pacific and Pacific unions were then compared with the tithe per capita in the unions in which the conference was located. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



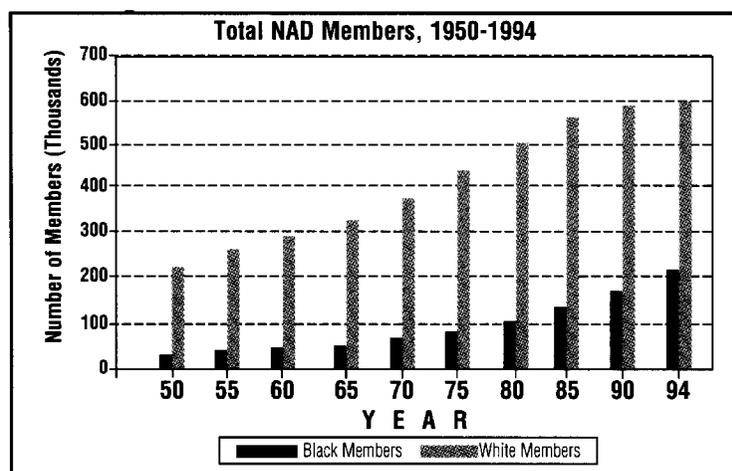
Allegheny East has a tithe per capita that is 88 percent of the tithe per capita of the Columbia Union as a whole, while at the other end the Lake Region Conference's tithe per capita is 50 percent of the tithe per capita of the Lake Union. Thus in its union the Allegheny East Conference has nearly reached economic parity with the average of all other conferences. This suggests that any conclusions about the relative standing of Black Adventists must be tempered by the knowledge that there is wide variance in relative standing.

Information about the tithe, offerings, and tithe per capita for a single year gives us only a small insight into the relative economic status of Black Adventists. Trend analysis is helpful for assessing the extent that Black Adventists have advanced economically from the time that regional conferences were first introduced in 1945. To make trend analysis meaningful, it is necessary to adjust dollar amounts for inflation.

**Time Trend Analysis of the Status of Blacks**

Figures 2 and 3 show the time trends of total membership and membership share of Black and White members in the NAD over the period 1950 to 1994. In 1950 Black membership in the regional conferences was 23,264, or less than 10 percent of the total membership in the NAD. Tithe receipts were \$1,195,633, or 6 percent of the \$21 million collected in the NAD.<sup>13</sup> Annual tithe per capita in the Black conferences was \$51.39.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 2



Yet church membership and tithe grew rapidly in the Black conferences, eclipsing that of the rest of the NAD, as shown in Table 2. Black membership growth increased to the point that by 1994, 27 percent of all NAD members were part of the regional and West Coast Black constituencies.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 3

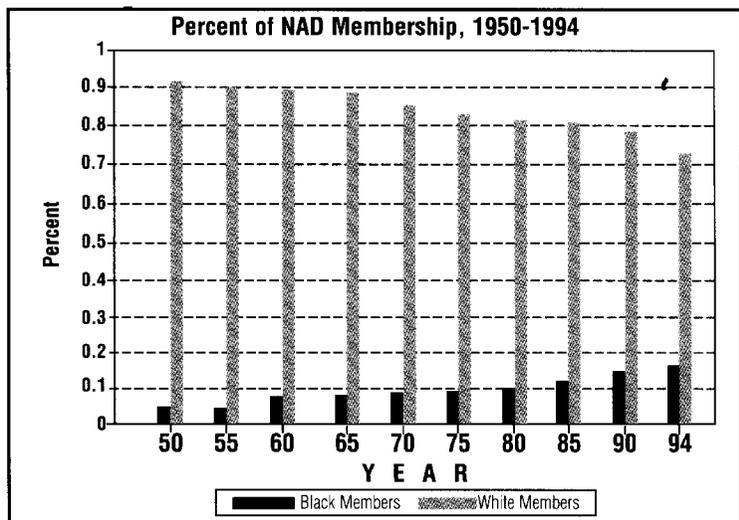


Table 2

Average Annual Growth Rates in Memberships and Tithe

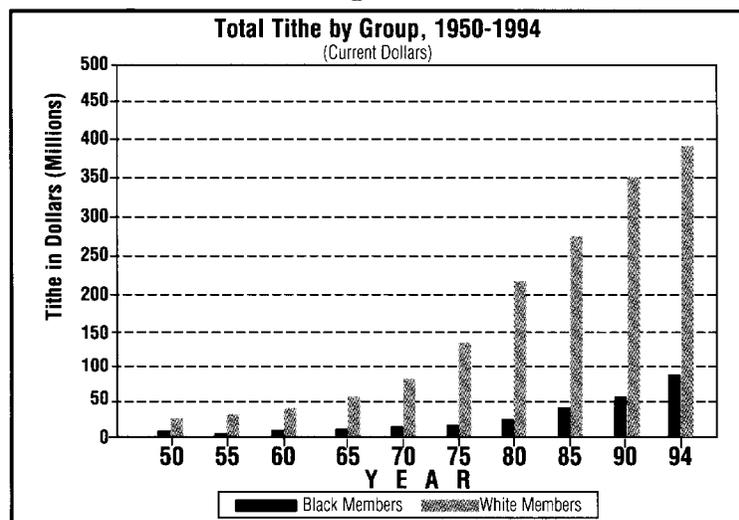
Period	BLACK CONFERENCES		NAD/BLACK CONFERENCES	
	Membership	Tithe	Membership	Tithe
1950-1960	5.98%	15.66%	2.96%	11.04%
1960-1970	7.04%	16.22%	2.75%	10.30%
1970-1980	7.70%	20.87%	3.07%	15.70%
1980-1990	6.74%	16.51%	2.03%	6.12%
1990-1994	7.37%	11.42%	0.53%	3.05%

Source: Calculation by author based on the annual figures for membership and tithe of the regional conferences only.

Note: The tithe growth rates are based on current dollars.

In Figures 4-7 I show the trends in total tithe and tithe per capita in current dollars and after adjusting for inflation. For Black Adventists the real total tithe increased steadily in 1990 dollars from \$6,489,000 in 1950 to \$75,004,000 in 1994. In the rest of the NAD, however, real tithe increased to \$347,113,000 in 1980 and remained relatively flat after

Figure 4



that. On a per capita basis, real tithe peaked for White Adventists in 1975 at \$781.12 and in 1970 at \$427 for Blacks. After these periods, real per capita tithe declined to \$577.28 for Whites and \$344.59 for Blacks.

Figure 5

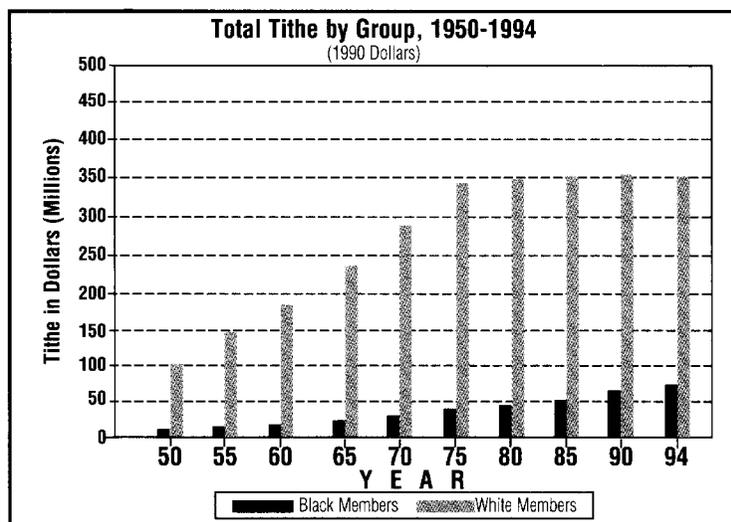


Figure 6

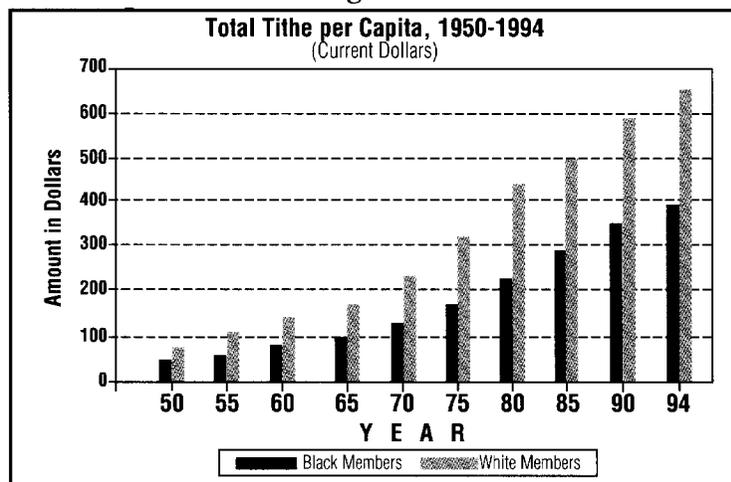
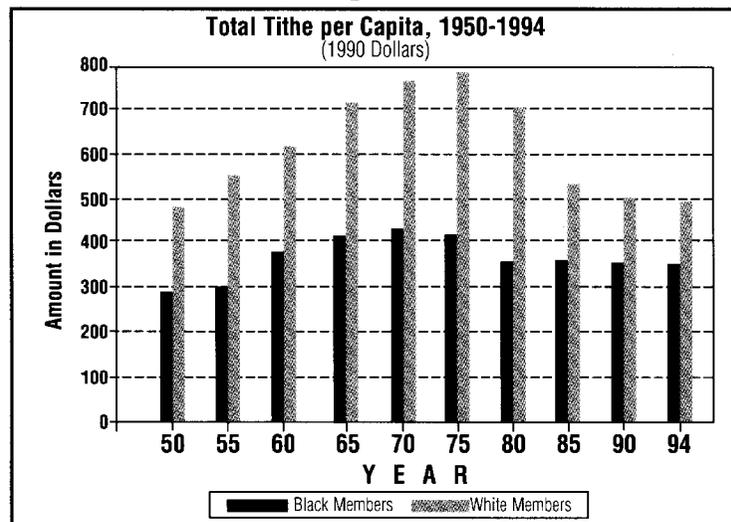


Figure 7

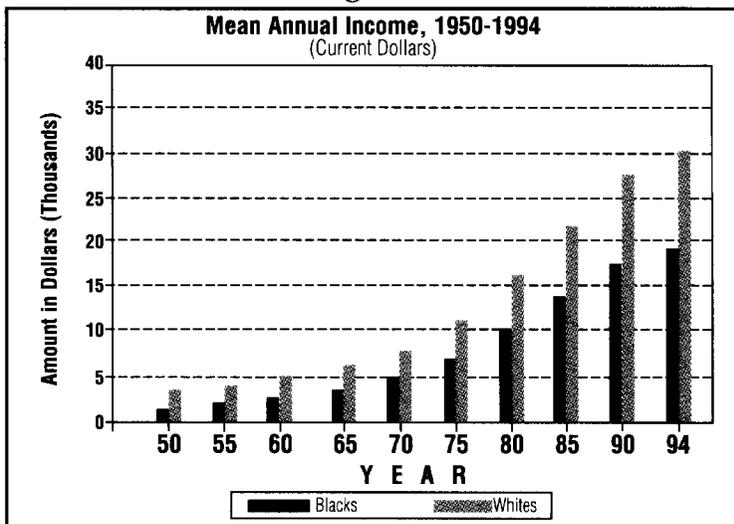


The decline in real per capita tithe for both the Black and White constituencies has implications for the economic status of both groups and for the church as a whole. If it is true that tithe reflects actual income, then real income has declined for both Black and White Adventists. To the extent that this is true, it means that funds to support mission and outreach programs of the church have decreased greatly. It also means that for the average Black Adventist, absolute economic status has declined.

Black Adventists do not exist outside of the total Black community. Factors that determine economic status in the larger community will have a significant bearing on how well Black Adventists are doing. Therefore, to understand the relative economic status of Black Adventists, we need to assess the overall economic status of Black Americans. We will seek to determine whether there are relative declines in the overall Black community, or whether this appears to be happening just to Black Adventists. For the Black and White communities, it is possible to observe sample data on actual wages.

In Figure 8 I show the mean annual income for Black and White workers in current dollars for the period 1950-1994. In Figure 9 the same information is given in real (1990) dollars.<sup>16</sup> In 1950 working Black individuals earned an average of \$1,608 (\$8,731 in 1990 dollars), compared to an average of \$3,092 (\$16,789 in 1990 dollars) for working White individuals. The Black-White income ratio was 0.520. The Black-White ratio increased relatively steadily as Black income increased to 63.3 percent that of White workers. In real dollars income gains for Black workers increased in most years.

Figure 8



In 1950 the Black-White tithe ratio per capita was 0.587. By 1994 the Black-White income ratio was to increase to 0.633, while the Black-White tithe per capita ratio

increased only slightly to 0.597. During the intervening years Black-White income ratios and Black-White tithe ratios have remained relatively flat and closely associated, as shown on Figure 9.

Figure 9

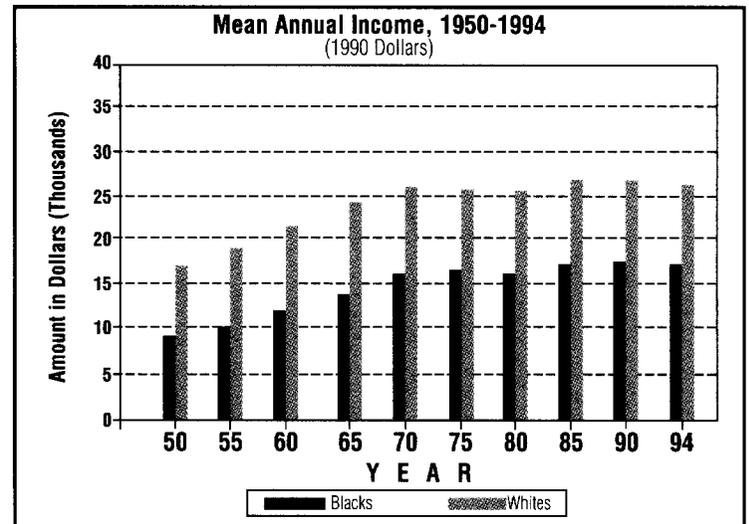
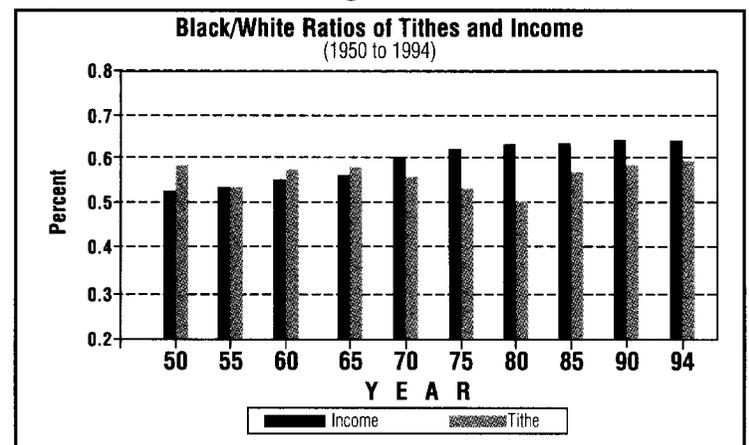


Figure 10



The meaning of the Black-White ratios of Figure 10 suggest several things about the relative economic status of Black Adventists when compared to the relative status of all Blacks. One interpretation is that working Black Americans have steadily improved relative to working White Americans. However, Black Adventists have not improved to the same degree. Another interpretation is that there are environmental circumstances that lead to reductions in Black tithe per capita that do not impact in the same way on all Black Americans.

It is apparent, however, that while all Blacks have moved steadily, Black Adventists have not broken out of the narrow range of relative tithe per capita in the years indicated in this analysis.<sup>17</sup> Over the 44-year period represented by this analysis, Black Adventists have returned approximately 0.58 of the tithe of White Adventists. At no

time has the Black title ratio exceeded 0.60. The consistency of the time trends seem to suggest that, indeed, Black Adventists have not kept up relatively as well as all Blacks in the society.

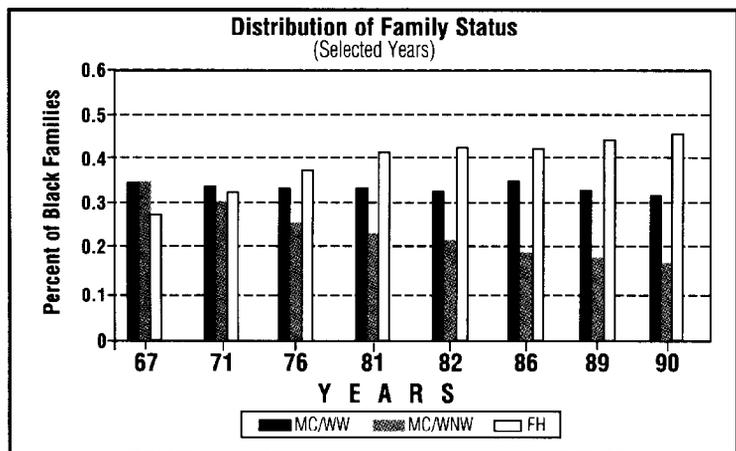
The finding that relative economic progress has been very limited for all Blacks is somewhat surprising, given the dramatic changes in the economic status of Blacks over the period covered by this analysis. Close analysis, however, reveals that the Black community is not economically homogeneous and that some segments of the population are making better progress than other segments. We would expect that this would be true for Black Adventists as well.

When we segment the Black family by family status we find dramatic economic differences across groups. Black families may be separated into three groups:

1. Married-couple households with a working wife (MC/WW)
2. Married-couple households without a working wife (MC/WNW)
3. Households headed by a single female (FH)

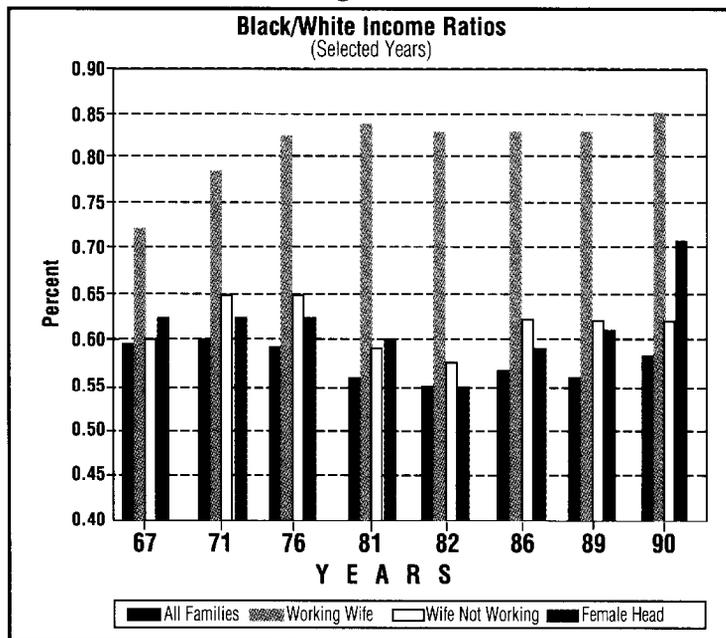
In Figure 11 we see the distribution of these three types of Black families for selected years from 1967 to 1990.<sup>18</sup> Over the period 1967 to 1990, households headed by females became the majority type of the three household types, increasing from 27 percent to 46 percent. At the same time such households fell further behind in relative and absolute income when compared to other Black households and to White households, as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 11



Black households that had a working wife had increases in their relative incomes over the period 1967 to 1990. In 1967 such Black families had median annual incomes of \$28,695 (in 1990 dollars), while White families had median annual incomes of \$40,040. By 1990 those amounts were \$40,038 and \$47,247 for Black and White families, respectively. Thus Black families with working wives earned 0.85 of the income of White families with working wives.

Figure 12



On the other hand, families headed by single female heads had incomes that were virtually flat at \$12,000 (in 1990 dollars) for Black families and \$19,000 for White families. In 1967 single females headed 27 percent of Black families and 9 percent of White families. By 1990 that percent had increased to 46 percent and 32 percent for Blacks and Whites, respectively.

Another factor in stagnant or declining relative Black economic status is that lower real earnings for Black families since the mid-1970s have resulted in the erosion of gains made in the 1960s and 1970s. As succinctly put in *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society*, by Gerald Jaynes and Robin Williams: "An important explanation . . . is that while the occupational positions and hourly wages received by employed blacks have continued to improve relative to whites, blacks' relative employment has fallen significantly. As a consequence, incomes and aggregate measures of earnings, being largely composed of the product of wages and employment, have not kept up with gains in wages."<sup>19</sup>

Conclusions

The Black Adventist community is not homogeneous, and evaluation of relative economic status must be tempered by that fact. However, given the assumptions about title income, it is possible to conclude that Black Adventists have not kept pace with the relative gains of Blacks in general. While such a conclusion must be verified with more detailed and specific data, there appears a trend that suggests at best stagnant changes in the relative economic condition of Black Adventists. The analysis also suggests that the Adventist Church has far fewer resources to

apply to its mission than was available in the recent past.

<sup>1</sup> The implicit model is  $tithe = F(\text{income, other})$ . It is assumed that the function is monotonic and linear, that is, as income increases, tithe<sup>6</sup> also increases in a predictable way. It is an assumption that as household, family, or individual income increases, tithe returned will also increase.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, pp. 199-225; vol. 7, pp. 220-245.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of this type of analysis include *The Black Population in the United States*, of the *Current Population Reports* of the U.S. Bureau of the Census. An extensive synthesis is found in *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society*, eds. Gerald Jaynes and Robin Williams (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1989). *A Common Destiny* also contains a bibliography of articles on Black economic status.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Microeconomic Analysis*.

<sup>5</sup> *Current Population Reports: Consumer Income* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Because of the scarcity of goods and resources, rational individuals and groups will usually act in ways to conserve or increase their share of those resources. A measure of economic status, therefore, is the extent that any group commands those scarce resources in relationship to the command of resources by other groups.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Felder and Thomas Hungerford, "Opportunities and Disincentives on the Road to Economic Independence" (U.S. General Accounting Office, GAO/HRD-93-23, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> A ratio of group incomes is a convenient means of comparing relative economic status; however, it is not the only means. Average wage rates, hours of work, education levels, or any other flows or stocks can be used to describe relative status. In a cash society, income is probably the best means of determining relative economic status.

<sup>9</sup> The Office of Human Relations of the NAD is attempting to address this issue; however, no reliable data exists.

<sup>10</sup> *132nd Annual Statistical Report—1994* (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> This is the only year in our study for which data were systematically available on Black churches in the western U.S.

<sup>12</sup> Black memberships in Canada and Bermuda are not part of this total since economic data on these groups were not available separately for Blacks. As noted earlier, this figure does not include Blacks who are members of conferences that are coterminous with regional conferences.

<sup>13</sup> Sources of data on tithe and membership are the published *Annual Statistical Report* of the General Conference for the year cited. All dollar figures are current dollars unless otherwise noted.

<sup>14</sup> The year 1950 was a very difficult year for Black Adventists and Blacks in general. There were 15 million Black Americans, and 63 percent of them lived in the South. Life expectancy for Blacks was seven years less for males and nine years less for females. The average Black adult aged 25 or older completed only seven years of schooling. The average income of a Black individual was \$1,608.

<sup>15</sup> There is virtually no data on the number of Black Adventists in the Pacific and North Pacific unions in 1950. The growth rates are all based on the memberships of the regional conferences.

<sup>16</sup> Source of data on wages come from *Income and Poverty* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Table P-2, CD-ROM, 1993). Consult that source for notes on how the data were kept consistent over the years.

<sup>17</sup> There is little reason to believe that the results would be different for years not analyzed.

<sup>18</sup> *Current Population Reports* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Series P-20, Table L, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Gerald Jaynes and Robin Williams, eds., *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1990), p. 323.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND SECULAR RELATIONSHIPS

by Frank W. Hale, Jr., Ph.D.

## Introduction

In her provocative chapter “The Church Between the Times,” in the classic volume *The Witnessing Community*, Suzanne De Dietrich indicates that the church “stands under the twofold sign of Christ’s resurrection and of His coming again in glory and might. It stands between the times: its citizenship is in heaven, its task is on earth.” The central question remains: What does it mean for the church of Christ to be “in” and not “of” the world? The church, called to be an exemplary society as a challenge to the surrounding world, betrays Christ and its mission when it allows standards and categories of the world to take the upper hand over its own; when national, racial, or social prejudice invades it; when the ideologies and slogans of the world blur the message of Jesus and the salvation He offers to all. The twofold temptation of the church remains the same as it has always been: (1) the temptation to conform to the world—the salt losing its savor and, as a consequence, its usefulness; and (2) the temptation to live in self-contented isolation—the salt kept in the saltbox, equally useless.

It has long been my conviction that Seventh-day Adventists too often err by boxing themselves into frozen fellowship and effectively hiding their light under the bushel by embracing a superstitious fear of contamination by contact with others. In doing so, we have denied our Lord glorious opportunities to impress society with our knowledge and personality.

This chapter attacks social recalcitrance in three ways: first, by a look at how this author’s background brought conviction regarding the need for Christian social activism; second, by discussion of conclusions of the church and the world drawn from philosophy, experience, and the Word of God; and finally, by offering some suggestions for positive societal relationships.

## The Personal Journey

I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, but I spent most of my boyhood days in Topeka, Kansas, where my parents had moved when I was 10 years of age. My parents were solid Seventh-day Adventist Christians who recognized the importance of being Seventh-day Adventists, Christians, and citizens at the same time in order to meet the secular challenge.

They were aware that some people viewed Seventh-day Adventists as a cult whose theological viewpoints separated them from the normative expressions of religion in our culture. Therefore, they were determined that their denominational affiliation would in no way compromise their Christian principles and their commitment to responsible citizenship.

In this context they led rather isolated lives, at least in terms of their social activities with non-Adventists. As a consequence, I had little interaction with children not of our faith, except during those limited classroom and playground experiences that I enjoyed while attending public school in Topeka. The fact there was no Adventist church school in the city placed me in the company of children with whom I was able to develop only a casual relationship. Once school was out, except for infrequent telephone conversations, I never had many occasions to visit their homes or to enjoy some of the movie, party, and dance experiences that they so often talked about between classes, on the playground, or on the way home after school. While I enjoyed a rather active social life with my SDA friends, the desire for peer approval and social conformity began to take its toll on me emotionally during my early teenage years.

I learned to compensate early for the isolation that made me feel deprived of what I had come to feel—that I deserved the recognition, acceptance, and approval of all my schoolmates. As a consequence, I developed a heightened interest in intellectual and cultural pursuits. After all, I didn’t have the slightest opportunity to develop a reputation as a dancer or an athlete, as these practical skills appeared to have been highlighted at weekend parties or sports events while I was immersed in religious activities at home or at church.

Nevertheless, my performances in the classroom won me favor from my teachers and respect from my classmates. I was determined not to be an “outsider,” even though I probably had less contact with my classmates than any other student in my school. In a short time my fellow classmates sought me out for help in writing essays, solving math problems, preparing book reports, and proofing assignments. I received the top awards in my classes for achievements in math, science, social studies, English, and music. As a result, I gained the applause and adulation that others had already earned because of the close friends and warm rela-

tionships that they enjoyed, which were unavailable to me. During those years—from the fifth through the eighth grade—I began to make a conscious effort to demonstrate that my religious background and training offered me a unique and enhancing advantage rather than peculiar and detracting disadvantages.

When I entered Topeka High School I exerted an unusual effort to be a part of the “in” crowd, even though my contacts were confined only to those snatches of time that were available to us during the school day. The handful of Seventh-day Adventist students who were enrolled there were “outsiders” for the most part because they did not wear the varsity jackets and letters that gave recognition to those who had been singularly successful in athletic endeavors. I searched for ways to make inroads into the secular crowd without compromising the things that I had been taught as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. The wisdom of my resourceful father, a very successful businessman, contributed profoundly to my sense of self-worth and what I had to offer to my associates at school. Dad and Mom, Seventh-day Adventist fundamentalists to the core, pursued the drama of each day with prayer, Bible study, and a conscious effort to give assistance to the less fortunate.

But Dad had a special sense of community that extended beyond the boundaries of his local church family. At his used bookstore in downtown Topeka, his engaging and magnetic personality was responsible for attracting a substantial clientele that patronized the store in large numbers and especially on Sundays, as he was closed for Sabbath observance on Saturday. He put into his business a fine mastery of psychology and a genuine concern for people that catapulted his enterprise into capturing a following that included the general public, scholars, state leaders, and business colleagues, as well as persons of prestige and considerable eminence.

Dr. Charles M. Sheldon, one of the great religious stalwarts of the twentieth century and the author of *In His Steps*, was a frequent customer. He and Dad engaged each other in lively discussions on a variety of topics ranging from religion to economics to politics. Alf Landon, Republican nominee for president in 1936, developed the habit of stopping by the store on certain Sundays. Usually Dad had a stack of books awaiting him—books of special interest, particularly in government and politics. He and the governor maintained a close relationship through the years, exchanging Christmas cards even after my parents moved from Topeka in 1948.

George G. Hunter III puts it this way in his thought-provoking volume *How to Reach Secular People*: “Christians who reach secular people are honest about themselves. . . . And this honesty liberates them from a holier than thou stance.” Dad was always so relaxed, so warm, and so transparent in his love for people that his witness was effective,

simple, and commanding. Those who came in contact with him caught the vision of his Christianity without any effort on his part to impose his theological beliefs upon them. At the same time he lost no opportunity to share denominational tracts with those who came into the store.

On one occasion I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Karl Menninger, the internationally famous psychiatrist who headed the Menninger Sanitarium and Foundation, located in Topeka. During intervals when I wasn’t waiting on customers, I read several of Dr. Menninger’s books (at Dad’s insistence), including *The Human Mind*, *Love Against Hate*, and *Man Against Himself*. Dad was never tentative about introducing me to such notable people. Few would deny that my father was a man in public life who in many ways rose above the exclusive trappings of religious provincialism. His impact was so effective that he was elected to the Topeka Chamber of Commerce, the only African-American so recognized at the time.

With such a formidable role model as my father, I really needed little encouragement to choose a path that would allow me to identify with appropriate secular interests. Though maintaining my respect for the Seventh-day Adventist teachings and principles of my upbringing, I felt the need to follow the dictates of intelligent inquiry and participate in those activities that would cultivate and promote the interests of the school in addition to my personal development. One such challenge was representation on the student council, a fervent concern of the few hundred Black students among the 3,000 enrolled at Topeka High School. In those days there was tension between Blacks and Whites because of the segregated activities in the school. There were separate social hours, separate governing bodies, and separate varsity sports activities. There was even a special area, designated “Little Harlem,” where Black students “hung out” during class breaks. I had been elected president of the Negro Advisory Council during my junior year, which automatically qualified me to serve on the Student Council as representative of the Black students who had elected me over four other candidates who had run for the office.

My success was both surprising and exhilarating, because I did not have the social credentials of my opponents, but I was widely respected because of my academic standing, my willingness to promote the interests of Black students, and my family’s standing in the community. Fortunately, these factors countered any pressures for social conformity that could have compromised my religious beliefs and neutralized my effectiveness had I expended my energies in attempting to follow the traditional requirements for being a part of the “in” group.

### **College and University Life as a Student**

I struggled to accept my parents’ decision for me to

attend Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, after I had been awarded a four-year scholarship to Howard University, the “Harvard” of historically Black institutions of higher education. I am sure that Calvin E. Moseley, Jr., who had baptized both of my parents some years earlier, was a major influence on their ultimate decision that spiritual emphasis at Oakwood overshadowed the academic reputation, appeal, and distinguished record of Howard University.

No other single experience in my life was so full of true excitement and inspiration than the year and a half that I spent as a student at Oakwood College. It was a period of never-to-be-forgotten experiences that included Friday-evening vesper services with the most impressive singing of spirituals by the student body, high-octane preaching every Sabbath, and the warm Christian fellowship of students and teachers. Although I was quick to recognize, even at 16 years of age, that Oakwood was a heaven-ordained institution, I was soon disappointed when I discovered that it was not privy to the resources that would have made it competitive with its secular counterparts.

At Oakwood I was challenged to consider the possibility of returning to the institution someday either as a teacher or in an administrative capacity. I felt, in a most fundamental way, that Christian education, in order to validate its mission, had to satisfy both spiritual and secular challenges. In those days there was a great deal of emphasis on religion as the core of the institution’s mission—as well there should have been—but there was very little emphasis on other disciplines. It almost seemed as if Christianity was isolated from the educational arena.

I left the campus after three semesters and matriculated at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, before eventually earning baccalaureate and master’s degrees at the University of Nebraska.

My decision to matriculate at the University of Nebraska rose from my fascination with the field of communication, as much practical information and inspiration had come to me through the stimulating teaching of Prof. Winton Beaven at Union College. His classes in speech were alive with topics that focused on the contemporary issues of the day, and we were always expected to support our point of view with documentation. While discussions were sometimes heated, Beaven would say whimsically, “Heat is no substitute for light.” Beaven was a person of genuine credibility. Such credibility is earned; it does not come automatically because of one’s position, reputation, or credentials.

### **Racial Encounters**

My experience in the deep South jolted me awake to the reality of my predicament as a Black man in America. Even though I had been introduced to the writings of Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey, I was not at

all prepared for the firsthand racial encounters that I experienced in Alabama or in Lincoln, Nebraska. As I became more and more familiar with the political and racial focus of the times, I developed a passion for championing causes associated with the rights of African-Americans. I believed that there was much talk about democracy and too little practice of it. However, the issue of racial equality was perceived as a “secular” issue among leaders in the Christian community. Even as Black people were being deprived of their rights and privileges, the clergy was “passing by on the other side” so as not to be involved in what they considered social or political issues.

The idea of the inferiority of Black people has enjoyed wide acceptance in the church community. Numerous sociological studies have documented the fact that church members generally are more bigoted and less tolerant than those who claim no church affiliation. What an indictment!

I found such views and practices so absurd that I challenged them at the highest levels while a student at Union College. I felt so strongly in this area that I united with non-Adventist students at the University of Nebraska to organize a social action council to integrate such places as the Mayflower Grill and the restaurant at the Cornhusker Hotel. By 1950 we had been active in challenging most of the eating places that refused service to Blacks.

My early readings had been so saturated with the lives and experiences of such dynamic freedom fighters as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, and W.E.B. DuBois, that I felt I could not ignore my responsibility to become active in the struggle for the liberation of oppressed peoples. Quite honestly, I felt that the church was far too silent on such matters, seeming even to trail atheists and agnostics when it came to promoting a theology or philosophy of political, economic, cultural, and sexual liberation. Its testimony has been frail, equivocal, and too often tardy when it did decide to become involved.

So I concluded that Adventists had no monopoly on counsel and advice, and that one could engage in intensive dialogue with the secular world and still remain true to Christian and denominational principles.

During my senior year I was selected to represent the university in the spring festival of communication, which involved competitions in oral interpretation and debate. I was deeply interested in the topic of civil rights because of the national exposure President Harry Truman had given the subject by establishing the Committee on Civil Rights. Well-rehearsed for the stiff competition, I received superior ratings in all of my presentations. But it was exposure to friendly non-Adventist young people that led me to understand that the love of God manifests itself in marvelous ways among those not of our faith. I had been accepted with courtesy and congeniality, the likes of which I had not

received from some “Christian” White people. It was then that I discovered that the words “secular,” “world,” and “White” were not always bad words.

Upon completing my bachelor’s degree, I was admitted to graduate school at the University of Nebraska to pursue a master’s degree in speech and political science. I would never have been able to complete the task without the sturdy and loving support of my wife, who temporarily forfeited her studies so that I could complete mine. The demands of graduate work were exacting and unequivocal. I found myself engulfed in my studies from “the crack of dawn” to “burning the midnight oil” in order to facilitate my program. In August 1951 I was awarded an M.A. degree.

### **Beginning My Professional Career at Oakwood College**

I had to make a choice between an offer to teach at Lincoln University in Missouri and an offer I received from President Frank L. Peterson to teach at Oakwood College. I could not escape my upbringing. I knew that God deserved the firstfruits of my career, and I had no difficulty in accepting the offer to teach at Oakwood for one fourth the salary I was offered at Lincoln. It wasn’t a decision that I really had to ponder. Rather it was a strange and wonderful choice based on how good God had been in bringing me that far in achieving my educational goals.

In 1952, after my first exciting year at Oakwood, President Peterson selected me to fill the new post of director of public relations. At my suggestion the president recognized the need for a physical education building and gymnasium on campus to meet the recreational needs of the student body. Until that time Oakwood had never made a public appeal for money in Huntsville or Madison County, Alabama. Oakwood had been an asset to the community—its faculty and students patronized local businesses, its dairy provided milk for the town, and its laundry and dry cleaning plant served hundreds of residents.

In short order we whipped up a plan of action. Most of the people in the surrounding area were aware that Oakwood College was a Seventh-day Adventist institution, but they were largely unacquainted with the details of our operation. They had little background on us except that we were “different” in terms of our day of worship, our diet, and our dress. Other than what they considered to be our “peculiarities,” they knew little about Oakwood’s mission.

Early on I met with a number of key business and professional people in the community, sharing with them all of the positive things that were happening at Oakwood in terms of character development, degree offerings, student activities, and the indispensable role of work opportunities. This opportunity to engage the city and county fathers in instructive dialogue was rewarding. As a consequence of this strategy, we received endorsements of our fund-raising venture

from numerous community leaders, who agreed to have their written statements of approval printed in a brochure, which we distributed by the thousands throughout the area.

This experiment gave the college personnel and members of the community a chance to interact with each other and to move beyond the transparencies of religion, race, and separation. These leaders helped spearhead the drive that eventually led to the erection of the new physical education facility. This nonthreatening dialogue and participation of city and county officials was a liberating experience that opened the door to future contacts in the secular community.

In fact, this experience continued to open doors of opportunity when I became president of Oakwood College in 1966. Until that experience of 1952 I had felt that Oakwood was on the outskirts of our local community—separated by our location, our color, our dogma, and our conscious effort to maintain a physical and psychological distance. However, I was uncomfortable being on the fringe of the community, knowing that we had so much more to offer than simply giving them an opportunity to contribute to our Ingathering campaign once a year. From my perspective, our witness was far too general, and I knew that generalities have no power to attract, to challenge, to inspire, or to persuade.

One of my first actions as president was to establish a community advisory council to promote goodwill between the college and the community. It was a positive stroke that enabled the college to gain sustained attention and support from the community while offering us the rich expertise of fertile minds where we lacked either experience or competence or both. The council provided us with informational and fiscal capital beyond our expectations.

Concertmaster Alvin Dreger and the Huntsville Civic Orchestra became an ongoing, celebrative delight on our campus, with their participation in the annual rendition of Handel’s *Messiah* and other special occasions. The one unchanging aspect of Oakwood’s history and legacy has been the excellence of its music. The Huntsville community has been so supportive of the Oakwood Choir that in 1970 funds were raised to send the choir and the Huntsville Civic Orchestra to Los Angeles to perform Verdi’s *Requiem* on Easter Sunday to a standing-room-only crowd at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

A triumphal marriage existed between the college and the community. I was invited to be a member of the Association of Huntsville Area Companies, composed of representatives from more than 65 space-related industries. I also served as a member of the Alabama Center for Higher Education, a consortium of Alabama’s historically Black colleges and universities. Changes are brought about “by people who try to influence the segment of life they are involved with, strengthening the relationships and institutions with which they are associated.”

I was aware that many people have a negative image of the church and church-related institutions such as Oakwood College. The age in which we live is technologically oriented, and so much emphasis is placed on science that some people tend to doubt the church's capacity and intelligence to distinguish between truth and its beliefs. Leslie Newbigin, in his work *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, makes the point that our culture has divided life into a "public world" of facts, upon which everyone agrees; and a "private world" of values, beliefs, and religion, in which each person believes in something or nothing by choice.

Our aim at the college was to reach secular people through social and professional networks comprising relatives, friends, and colleagues. It was obvious that a relevant church was one that met community needs. We attempted to meet the physical needs of the community by providing farm and dairy products in local stores, by selling bakery goods to local restaurants and hotels, and by providing laundry and dry-cleaning services to local residents and to Army personnel at the Redstone Arsenal. We opened our academic doors to people of all races and denominations, and many of our teachers spoke at social and civic organizations. Our music department shared its talent with schools, churches, and civic organizations. We brought speakers with national reputations to the campus, and our doors were open for the community to attend many of these events without cost. On special occasions the mayor, members of the city council, and other public officials were pleased to accept our invitation.

The relationship between the college and the community was harmonious, and we made sure that we would neither exploit nor manipulate their goodwill. We related directly and altruistically to them without any intention of imposing demands based on the conditions rising out of our relationship.

### **Administrative Opportunities at Ohio State**

In 1971 I left Oakwood College and became associate dean of the graduate school and professor of communication at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. This position enabled me to establish sound contacts and relationships in the religious community, the social/civic community, the educational community, and the political community. I had had some experiences in a secular environment, serving a professorial appointment at Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio, between the years 1959 and 1966. The situation at Ohio State immersed me into a secular arena that was both conscious and unlimiting. In the past my exposure to a secular environment had been more incremental.

The life of a Seventh-day Adventist educator on a secular campus can be a viable communicating form of Christianity. Many of my associates did not have the re-

motest idea of what Seventh-day Adventists believed. The university experience provided me an unprecedented opportunity to share my faith in discrete ways so as to not compromise the principle of separation of church and state. Many of my colleagues were surprised when I did not attend meetings of the graduate council, faculty, or other important university functions, most of which were held on Saturdays. The university, on occasion, also held functions on Sunday, which my colleagues had no philosophical difficulty in attending. Apparently most people live their day-to-day lives "outside" the influence of Christianity. Religion, spirituality, and God are all being edged out to the periphery of people's conscious world.

Early in my administration as dean in the graduate school, I began to establish meaningful relationships with local Black ministers. Recognizing the church as an important base for targeting youth with academic potential, good character, and leadership skills, I intentionally established an agenda for informing and influencing these clergy who were in direct contact with significant numbers of these youth on a weekly basis.

The clergy soon learned of my leadership role in the local Seventh-day Adventist church, so my base in the church and my role at the university provided me with unparalleled opportunities to speak at local churches for special programs such as Education Day, Men's Day, Family Life Day, Black History Month, etc. During one particular year I had the privilege of speaking during the worship hour on Sunday at 16 different churches.

Each year my office sponsored a Gospel Extravaganza during the time when several hundred African-American seniors from historically Black colleges and universities would visit the Ohio State campus. Over the years we invited such gospel celebrities as Edwin Hawkins, Walter Hawkins, Tremaine Hawkins, Andrae Crouch, and the Winans, among others. Local artists from the Columbus churches had opportunity to demonstrate their musical wares during the preliminaries. These events created a bond between my office and the Black community. The tradition is still alive after 23 years.

Having recognized the importance of plowing, seeding, and watering fields of influence previously left uncultivated, I knew that we could not afford to sit back and wait for people to come to us. Contacts were made with African-American representatives who were members of the city council, the school board, and the Ohio General Assembly. Most of them became my avid supporters. God truly blessed our efforts and helped to make every day count. He provided an ongoing opportunity for a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and his church to be viewed from a vantage point of uniqueness, dignity, and creative productivity.

Too often our image has been one of smugness and in-

sensitivity; we adopt a holier-than-thou attitude and refuse to contribute to the religious community. My setting provided me with the opportunity to help undress the image of Adventism from all the baggy and unsightly clothes it has picked up. My Adventist colleagues at the university made major and positive contributions in helping institutional personnel to graduate from their negative perceptions of Seventh-day Adventist Christians by offering a new and meaningful interpretation to our influence as credible and competent Christians.

### The Jesse Jackson Connection

In 1975 I was an active member of the local PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) chapter in Columbus, Ohio. When the chapter president was unable to attend the national convention, which was meeting in Philadelphia, I was elected to represent the chapter. It was there that I first met Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Jr., president of the national PUSH organization, located in Chicago. Our meeting was the beginning of a friendship that has lasted for nearly two decades. It has been a refreshing experience to engage in the dialogue and process of developing programs and strategies for championing the needs of oppressed people worldwide.

During that convention Jackson asked me to serve as a member of the National PUSH board of trustees. I felt very honored to be included among these distinguished board members, a who's who of Black community activists. It was also at that conference that I first met Rev. William Gray, who at that time was president of the local PUSH chapter in Philadelphia. Gray has since become a United States congressman, chief executive officer of the United Negro College Fund, and a special envoy to Haiti.

Anyone knowing Jesse Jackson has to be aware of his record in pushing for new national initiatives. Among items on his agenda have been:

- ❖ Setting a goal for full employment.
- ❖ Promoting a foreign policy committed to human rights.
- ❖ Advocating a comprehensive industrial policy toward reindustrializing America.
- ❖ Reassessing the unjust distribution of wealth.
- ❖ Redefining threats to national security to include sickness, poor housing, malnourishment, and unemployment.
- ❖ Designing a foreign policy based on negotiating first and threatening and fighting second.
- ❖ Formulating an educational policy that teaches for life, not merely for making a living.

On September 28, 1978, I coordinated the visit of Jackson to the Ohio State University campus, where he was invited to address nearly 1,000 students and faculty of the College of Education. That same year I outlined a plan by which African-American educators could come together to

give stability and visionary leadership to the PUSH-EXCEL education movement. As a consequence, Jackson asked me to coordinate a national conference for mobilizing excellence in education. The program involved a joint sponsorship between Operation PUSH, the U.S. Department of Education, and Howard University. Mary Berry, assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, and James Cheek, president of Howard University, assisted me as primary planners of a conference that drew more than 1,000 educators from around the country. The conference proved to be successful in broadening the commitment and renewing the determination of teachers to continue to challenge and motivate our children and youth to develop their minds.

In the fall of 1983 Jackson returned to the Ohio State University campus to announce to an overflow crowd of 3,200 his decision to seek the Democratic Party's nomination for president of the United States. He was greeted by enthusiastic cheers and chants of "Run, Jesse, run."

Though the media has portrayed Jackson solely as a champion of America's Blacks, his concept of a "rainbow coalition" included Hispanics, women, senior citizens, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, the young, and the poor, as well as Blacks. This philosophy served him well at the press conference that followed his announcement, during which he parried question after question with the exuberance and charm that have been his trademark. Jackson's candidacy made an impact on my professional career, as I was elected to be chair of the Jackson campaign in Columbus, Ohio, and Franklin County.

I was especially fortunate to have a talented, efficient, harmonious group to assist me. These dedicated ambassadors of goodwill provided a variety of services, including the preparation and house-to-house distribution of literature, letter-writing, preparing news releases and radio and TV announcements, providing visitors with appropriate information, making speeches, instructing citizens on how to register and vote, taking people to the polls on election day, organizing volunteers, and maintaining a climate of general congeniality. We were participating in a historic effort: Jackson was the first African-American "to attain credibility and political impact as a genuine presidential contender." And it was my first venture into a political arena of such meaningful proportions.

It was also about this time that I took the occasion to introduce Wintley Phipps to Jackson, which opened up wonderful opportunities for Phipps, propelling him into prominence and leading to singing appointments at the Billy Graham Crusade, the Democratic National Convention, Robert Schuller's *Hour of Power*, the White House, the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, and other places. The times God has intervened to open doors in the secular world are beyond calculation.

My 17 years full-time and six years part-time at Ohio State University offered me opportunities to enjoy the friendship and support of some of this country's most influential African-American leaders, including: Louis Stokes, Carl Rowan, Vernon Jordan, Mary Berry, Samuel Yette, Leon Higginbotham, C. Delores Tucker, Randall Robinson, Jesse Jackson, Samuel Proctor, Benjamin Hooks, Joseph Lowery, Wiley Branton, Molefi Asane, and Asa Hilliard.

Who would have supposed that a city and campus committee of 40 persons, including two Seventh-day Adventists, would sponsor a retirement dinner for me, but on December 4, 1988, that is indeed what happened. The dinner attracted 1,200 patrons, and 300 persons were turned away at the door. Once again it was an opportunity for me to cross paths with Jesse Jackson, as he was the keynote speaker for that wonderful occasion. There is no question that healthy secular relationships have been important in my professional career as well as allowing me to advance the causes that I have espoused.

### The Church and the World

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The scope and perspective of the gospel is so broad and so inclusive that it embraces all of the inhabitants and nations of the world. What a challenge! Many times the terms "world" and "worldly" are used in a pejorative sense by members of the Christian community. The world takes on the image of something unclean, something to be despised. This attitude is particularly prevalent among certain traditional members of the Christian community and their notion that the church should be exempt from anything that involves the social, political, and economic interests of the community.

Is it any wonder, then, that many in the secular community are exceedingly intolerant of religion because of the exclusivity that is so pervasive among certain churches and their adherents? They view the church as tiptoeing on issues that challenge the exploitative power brokers who are responsible for much of the human suffering that is so prevalent today. The critical factor, then, is whether the church is so preoccupied with its own parochial interests that its ears are deafened to the needs of the community.

This is a delicate stance that the Christian must take. While we are called to "separate from the world," we are also called upon to be instruments for its salvation. Jesus Himself established the *modus operandi*—He was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34, NKJV), yet He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26, NKJV). As Vance Havner states, there is no contradiction here: "We are not to be isolated but insulated." Warren

Wiersbe puts it even more succinctly in *The Integrity Crisis*: "Separation is contact without contamination."

It is difficult to escape the confusion, perplexity, and uncertainty of our times. It is easy for us to lose our sense of perspective in view of the dilemmas that we face on a day-to-day basis. Ambivalence seems to rule the day. Politicians can't agree on the right course for the country to take in meeting the needs of all of its citizens. Professors disagree over which is most important, research or teaching. There is no common bond among psychologists and psychiatrists concerning the basic premises of human nature. Clergy disagree over the validity and value of the very Scriptures that they are commissioned to uphold.

We are becoming bigger, faster, richer, and smarter on one hand, and more disrespectful, indulgent, cruel, greedy, and thankless on the other hand.

Fortunately, we do not live alone. We need people. We need each other. On paper this seems so simple, yet those of us who have lived long enough learn sooner or later that an epidemic of aloofness, alienation, and isolation raging in the world makes people feel unloved and unwanted. Our society encourages us to use people rather than to love them, to treat them as objects to be exploited in order to satisfy our own personal goals. We live—not isolated—but in contexts, and Seventh-day Adventists are no exception.

The contacts that we make on a daily basis with the secular world are many and varied: the grocer, the insurance broker, the realtor, the cosmetologist, etc. When all is said and done, there is no way that we can escape the contact or the influence of the secular world. But many issues loom larger than our traditional orthodoxy. There is the need to bring practical Christianity to bear on the dogma and doctrines of the Bible.

In our efforts to refrain from promoting unholy alliances between the "state" and the "altar," we are sometimes insensitive to such issues as the protection of human rights; the promotion of international and global understanding; the necessity to remove social, gender, and racial injustices; and the struggle against homelessness, hunger, poverty, unemployment, child abuse, alcoholism, crime, drug trafficking, and other maladies that plague society. The church cannot legitimately call itself Christian if it neglects its role and critical function as the moral arbiter and conscience of society. The church needs to be "up front" and without apologies on matters of human decency and dignity, and let the chips fall where they may.

This point of view speaks not to the secularization of Christianity, but to a progressive spiritual theology and creed that addresses the intimate needs of people. The time has come for the church to swim against the tides of provincialism, opportunism, intolerance, lethargic liturgy, ingenious and artless dogmatics, and mindless tradition that

compromises its ability to deal appropriately with questions of freedom, human rights, and intolerance.

The church's credibility is at stake. We do not deserve to be protected from criticism from within or without if we are preoccupied with organization, hierarchy, administrative authority, and the ecclesiastical trappings that hint of rigid legalism and arrogant complicity. The mission of the church has as one of its highest priorities the dispossessed, the exploited, the oppressed, the despised, the downtrodden, and the powerless. Thank God, such a mission has come to prevail as a significant ministry among at least some regional conferences and churches within the denomination.

Is there any extraordinary quality in our mission or witness that makes us utterly different, but at the same time vital to secular society? The Bible is replete with examples in both the Old and New Testaments of how God worked through people. But none of these people acted in isolation. Each had a personal relationship with God. Each acted as a member of a community. Abraham began his pilgrimage as patriarch of a Chaldean tribe. Moses was first a prince of Egypt and later the mediator who led God's people from bondage to freedom. Esther was queen of Persia when God moved to preserve His people from destruction. Daniel was a captive and a governor of Babylon while serving as ambassador of God's people in a strange land.

### Caution Has Its Place

Black Seventh-day Adventists, like their White counterparts, are very much aware of the erosion of religion in America as Protestantism has adapted itself too compromisingly to the world of the masses. Transformed and manipulated, many churches have lost the particularities of their original history and theology. The SDA Church takes special pride in maintaining its distance from the "world" and not subscribing to any cultural ethic or pattern at the expense of its theological particularity. This is not to say that individual members, confronted by a new and ever-changing environment, have not succumbed to the pragmatic relativism of community standards.

It is within the context of rising secularism and "religion in general" that the church has taken an evasive posture in any relationship that smacks of ecumenism. The Adventist Church has shied away because the ecumenical movement has often had the effect of "sanctifying the expedient" and "watering down" original Protestant Christianity. Thus traditionally the SDA Church has arched its back against any relationship that would lead to the decay of its teachings, doctrines, and practices. It winces at any compromise in the gospel to make it palatable for mass consumption.

But wait. The Christian can't stop there. The power of Christian love should be so strong that it can cross lines of ideological (religious or secular) differences. If the singu-

larity of our theology blurs our ability to witness in a world of defeatism and despair, we are no less rigid and inflexible than the despicable Pharisees to whom Jesus referred as tombs "full of dead men's bones" (Matt. 23:27).

There is something extremely durable about love that is not confined or shaped by the sovereignty of our overworked inhibitions. God is not the property of those theological pygmies who would dispense love and compassion only upon those who fit their carefully crafted notions of who is acceptable and who isn't. The world mission of the church should be neither dulled nor overdone by the pressures of our insecurities. We need not tear up our own roots to expand the concept of community. However, our Christian witness, if authentic, will not contradict the central theological core of our basic beliefs.

### Challenging Negative Attitudes

Two negative attitudes discourage Black Seventh-day Adventists from developing positive relationships in the secular world. The first is the "love not the world" attitude, and the second is the "we don't want folks to lose their way" mind-set. These negative attitudes need to be placed on the scales of analysis and challenged for their lack of validity.

*"Love not the world."* There is nothing so disheartening as Christians who are so fervent and devout in their religious life and practice that they hesitate to consider anything else of much importance. There is an unhealthy separation between in-church and out-of-church activities; church members are detaching themselves from the social conditions affecting their community. While we consider alcohol and drug abuse as crises in the home and the community, we sometimes give the impression that our witness is far more hortative than rehabilitative.

Generally the church has little difficulty in developing policies, resolutions, and recommendations concerning the burning issues of the day, but what about the social and civic dimensions of our practices? At times we seem to lack the serious commitment to deal with the issues and tensions of race and gender that are on top of the table in both religious and secular communities. Racial tensions abound, and sexism continues to restrict women. Is our vision of Christianity so saintly that we are compelled to "pass by on the other side" when confronted by those interlocking forces that would deny the dignity of humankind?

What kind of Christianity allows its adherents to become "shadow partners" to politicians who demonstrate little concern that the biosphere is being destroyed by pollution, that developing countries are being robbed of their minerals to feed the ravenous appetites of a wealthy upper class, that the earth's resources are being used up at cataclysmic speed, that the poor are being exploited and neglected even as white-collar crime goes virtually unnoticed, that the availability of

health care for all citizens is minimized, and that racial disharmony is being exploited through rhetoric, legislative agenda, and Supreme Court appointments?

True Christianity cannot exist in a void, quarantined from life. The two imperatives of Christianity are Go and Tell. We are to be part and parcel of all that is going on around us, motivated, of course, by Christian conviction and conduct. Jesus' life was a magnificent demonstration of the fact that He did not exempt Himself, as Hans Kung has said, from "intervening constantly and effectively for the socially neglected or ostracized groups of his time, and yet, at the same time, noting without prejudice the concerns of the ruling classes."

What we need is a more integrative vision of how the church can respond to the needs of the secular community. While an antithesis exists between Christians and the world, Christians have no biblical authority to turn their back on the worlds of history, art, science, music, and government. We can't be our "brother's keeper" and at the same time stay an arm's length away from those factors and experiences that affect his life. To do so would be heresy.

It is required of us that our spirituality penetrate the rational, scientific, moral, social, political, practical, and artistic fabric of our being. Such a distinctiveness would make the Christian community an open community, affirming the dignity of all human beings and, therefore, ministering, sharing, and involving itself in dispensing the intervening grace of God on all levels of life and thought. "Love not the world" takes on new meaning when we understand, as Vance Havner puts it, that "we are not to be isolated but insulated, moving in the midst of evil, but untouched by it." What a magnificent challenge!

*"We don't want folks to lose their way."* Most people have at one time or another been confronted by those conservative Christian stalwarts who assume that their major role is to make sure that church members never have doubts or questions concerning the official teachings and doctrines of the church. They consider it heresy to visit churches outside one's own denomination, or to invite preachers of other denominations to speak from their pulpits, lest by their utterances they confuse and corrupt the saints. There is something exceedingly fragile about a religion that is afraid to expose the validity of its propositions to the world.

Those who are always afraid that something is going to be said or written that could violate the tender nature of our beliefs must be "of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). If faith means anything, it means having the kind of durable confidence and assurance that undergirds our convictions and withstands the conflicts that face Christians on a daily basis.

Is there a risk of church members losing their way when they find significance in being involved in the affairs of everyday life? Is it possible for the church to reject its own

faith by its noncommitment *to* and *in* the world? If the church is to have any vitality at all, if it is to have any impact in helping to change people's lives, it must get out into the world beyond the church.

It might well be that Christians are more likely to find their way than lose it if they dare to identify themselves with persons and institutions deemed nonreligious. Jesus rubbed shoulders with persons who certainly would not be considered religious, establishment, or "in crowd" respectable types. He moved among the outcasts of society—lepers, prostitutes, the mentally deranged, racial minorities, vagrants, thieves, the sick and suffering, widows and orphans, political traitors. Misfits all. And still He was able to move easily among persons of stature—tax collectors, lawyers, military officers, the wealthy, and the clergy.

How is the church addressing the needs of rejected members of our society today? How is the church addressing the needs of a society in which civility and respect for individual differences are not always apparent? How is the church addressing the need for openness in a society that's becoming increasingly diverse, multiracial, and multicultural? How is the church expanding its mission as a proponent of excellence and productivity in science, art, government, literature, history, music, and the professions? Excellence, like spirituality, must be our profession of faith in whatever our hands find to do. With such a witness, both inside and outside the church, we will find our way, not lose it.

### **The Conflict Between Spirituality and Intellectuality**

At times in religious circles there seems to be a certain cynicism and/or hostility toward intellectuality. Such an attitude is reflected in such assertions as "You don't need a B.A. degree; you just need to be 'born again'"; "You don't need an M.S. degree; you just need to be 'master of self.'" Such dangerous rhetoric is dichotomous and disjunctive, forcing the listener to think of religion and education in either-or terms. One is to be trusted and the other distrusted. They fail to recognize the multidimensionality of Christ, who "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52, NIV).

Sometimes, intentionally or unintentionally, pressure is exerted against intellectuality. I have observed how defensive some clergy and veteran saints become when questions are raised about the Spirit of Prophecy, diet, divorce, Sabbath observance, dress, and other issues that cut across their established points of view. Some of these inflexible representatives of the "official position" on religious matters seem to feel that the exercise of the mind has something dangerous, wrong, and sinful about it, that some beliefs are so dangerous that we cannot risk seeing whether they might be true. They seem to want truth to be the exclusive possession of a privileged few—to be predigested

and prepackaged and distributed to an unquestioning and unsuspecting clientele.

Such a position flies in the face of intellectuality. To begin with, an intellectual is a person who is able to suspend her/his commitments while engaged in thinking. Such a person will approach a problem without insisting initially on a certain predetermined conclusion. Such a quality disturbs and upsets some people. It certainly is an intellectual quality to possess some degree of detachment as well as the ability to think hypothetically, to exercise the imagination for the sake of the imagination, to explore ideas, to plunge oneself into worlds of wonder beyond the prevailing conventions and provincialism of tradition.

The Christian is called to live a life of rich fulfillment in this world. To be so preoccupied with the religious routines of our biblical and traditional definitions of Christianity that we consider all other issues in our society marginal and peripheral is to cast the church in the role of having abandoned the very society that it has been commissioned to save.

Those who espouse a doctrine of "Christ against the world" define the world as a realm under the power of evil, a region of darkness into which the citizens of the kingdom must not enter. "It is a pagan society with its sensuality, superficiality, and pretentiousness, its materialism and its egoism," says C. H. Dodd in his book *The Johannine Epistles*. The dual commandment of love for God and love for one's neighbor appears to have undergone a certain transformation that separates the Christian from any obligation to his/her secular neighbor.

Proponents of the "Christ of culture" concept commit themselves to be believers in the Lord, while also seeking to maintain "community" with others. They seek to reconcile, within limits, the gospel with the contemporary issues of the day, adopting the premise that Christ belongs in culture, because culture without "sense and a taste for the infinite" becomes sterile and corrupt. Karl Barth emphasized a duality—the need to be Christocentric, while at the same time participating in the work of culture, the development of science, the cultivation of art, the ennoblement of family, and the maintenance of the state (see H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*). True Christians do not turn their backs on art, science, social studies, and history; the truly Christian person is a scientific person, an aesthetic person, a social person, and a practical person.

### The Impact of Racism

The secular charge, especially among African-Americans, that Christianity is "irrelevant" is rooted not only in history but also in personal experience. According to Ken Chafin, in his book *The Reluctant Witness*, many people do not think of the church as being plugged into life where they are.

African-Americans are not unmindful of the complicity of America's Christian churches, clergy, and churchgoers in the racism that has pervaded our culture. Forrest G. Wood's book *The Arrogance of Faith* provides an analysis of the church's position on race, beginning with the papal bull that authorized the opening of a slave market in sixteenth-century Lisbon through four succeeding centuries, when the preponderance of Christian thought and conduct in the New World buttressed racial oppression to the point of championing slavery as a means of saving souls.

Vincent Harding's essay "Black Power and the American Christ" underscores the concept and ideology of Blackness as growing out of the deep ambivalence of American Blacks to the Christ they have encountered. The current Afrocentric emphasis on searching for the "gods of our African ancestors" has exploited this ambivalence. Listen to Harding's summation:

"We first met the American Christ on slave ships. We heard His name sung in hymns of praise as we died by the hundreds while still chained in stinking corrals beneath the decks, locked in with terror and disease with no hope or hope of hope. We saw Him so unlike ourselves, painted white and pink, blond and blue-eyed and dominating religious paintings, stained-glass windows, Sunday school charts, and color plates within the New Testament pages of our Bibles. We felt condemned because of our blackness, our broad noses, our thick lips, our kinky hair, our flat feet and our singular and evocative way of expressing emotion in singing, preaching, and dancing. He was so sedate, so genteel, so white. So all through the nation's history, many black men have rejected this Christ—indeed the miracle is that so many accepted Him."

Gordon W. Allport's classic study *The Nature of Prejudice* demonstrates that the religious are far more racially and ethnically prejudiced than the nonreligious. Even among a sample of college students, those reporting that religion had been a marked or moderate influence in their lives showed a far higher degree of prejudice than those who reported that religion was either slight or nonexistent in their upbringing. Apparently belonging to or identifying oneself with a religious body in America certainly does not mean that one takes over the traditional Christian qualities of tolerance, brotherhood, and equality. "On the contrary, it appears that these values are more firmly held by people who do not affiliate with any religious group," states a team of scholars in their exhaustive work *The Authoritarian Personality*. As Hans Kung states in his book *On Being a Christian*: "It is entirely the fault of Christians if too little is changed in the world. Christians themselves are the strongest argument against Christianity: Christians who are not Christians. Christians themselves are the strongest argument for Christianity: Christians who live a Christian life."

### A Prescription for Positive Societal Relationships

I am not sure that I can offer a categorical formula for success in establishing vital and rewarding relationships in the secular community. This chapter has focused on the fact that one's religious affiliation need not be a deterrent to establishing healthy and contagious relationships among one's secular peers.

However, I wish to suggest some specific ways of developing harmonious relationships in the secular community.

1. It is important for Christians to be involved in areas outside of spiritual and nonpolitical spheres. Their influence will be negative and counterproductive if they are perceived as having no regard for society and the world.

2. Christians themselves are the strongest argument either for or against Christianity.

3. Christians and churches should not ignore their share of responsibility and remain inactive rather than dealing with the social, political, cultural, and moral issues that face people on a daily basis.

4. The gospel must no longer be diminished and distorted to the point where churches and Christians give excessive attention to the needs of the wealthy while ignoring the needs of the masses.

5. The church ought not to be so theologically burdened that it offers only frail platitudes when faced with issues of hunger, poverty, disease, infant mortality, illiteracy, marginalism, inequalities of opportunity and income, and disharmony among social classes and races.

6. Christians do not have the luxury of naive and unrealistic neutrality on the issues of our day.

7. The credibility of Christians is more powerful when their knowledge is perceived as being eclectic rather than narrow, parochial, provincial, and doctrinaire.

8. Professional secular people are more impressed and influenced by the positive relationships they have with Christians than with efforts to influence them through evangelistic recruitment strategies or authoritative preaching.

9. "Christianity is more caught than taught."

10. Social witness and social reform are positive factors in establishing meaningful relationships in the secular community.

11. Secular people are more apt to cooperate with those who accept them as they are rather than as "unsaved souls."

12. Secular people, like most of us, relate with people who share common interests.

13. The strategy of being involved in the struggles that people experience on an ongoing basis is the way that Christians demonstrate the relevance of Christianity.

14. God's temple is a sanctuary without walls, and sometimes Christians can be most effective by engaging secular people on their turf.

15. Accepting people where they are is indispensable to

developing positive relationships with people.

16. Secular people who see Christianity as anti-intellectual or antieducation need to be exposed to Christians who are intelligent and educated.

17. The efforts of Christians can be counterproductive if it is assumed that they are out to "win" someone.

18. Effective Christians articulate and champion the causes of people in the general population.

19. Effective Christians are characterized by a remarkable zeal to pursue excellence in every aspect of their lives.

20. Effective Christians should be the spiritual embodiment of that which they profess.

### Good News

In the happy home that I grew up in there were daily renderings from our old Victrola phonograph, which needed consistent cranking in order to maintain a steady rate and volume. But how marvelous was that antiquated musical box as it created moods of joy and exultation from such great artists as Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, and Dorothy Maynor. All of these artists penetrated the spiritual depths of the gospel, tried and tested in the crucible of Christ's suffering and death, making available to humanity the wonder, majesty, exultation, and all-encompassing beauty of His supreme sacrifice. These early foreparents would have declared with unabashed exhilaration, "Now, ain't that good news!"

My experience leads me to believe that as Seventh-day Adventists we sometimes suffer an image problem. There is a legitimate pride that we claim because of our serious attachment to Scripture, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the teachings and doctrines associated with our beliefs. Unfortunately, though, some among us are so wed to the mechanics of the Word that they have overlooked the very simple fact that the "gospel" means "good news."

There is no question that we need to maintain our own doctrinal and ideological independence on matters of Christian dogma. On the other hand, we need to be careful not to subscribe to a passive and stoic representation of life and practice that can lead inevitably to a warped and arrogant sense of self-sufficiency.

In one way or another, many live out their daily lives in fear, doubt, worry, frustration, and the poverty of pain and pessimism. The good news reminds us that just as Jesus identifies with our infirmities, we need to understand that we belong to each other and must be involved in each other's destiny. Actually, nothing is more generally neglected and disregarded than the good news of salvation.

As members we get caught up in a pattern of do's and don'ts, duties, obligations, and committee meetings, and in the process forget to utter even a hint about something good, great, and beneficial that God has done for us. The

Christian needs to set aside time to offer personal and ongoing testimony of God's goodness.

Our pastors must give us more than erudite thrusts and academic discourses containing facts, figures, and fanciful rhetoric that show little or no regard for the fact that good news is the heart and soul of the gospel. It was this gospel that causes others to report that members of the early church were guilty, if you will, of turning the world upside down. What a charge, what a triumph, what a challenge!

Christians are eager to share the good news. And yet many are so frightened of the tender nature of their beliefs that they find it difficult to establish even limited contacts or relation-

ships in the secular world. So they retreat and quarantine themselves into a religion of isolationism. Their attitude is somewhat like the old woman who, upon hearing the theory of evolution, said, "God grant that it isn't true, but if it is true, God grant that not many people will hear about it." Our faith is nothing if it cannot withstand the blasts of opposing forces.

The true believer, like the academic scholar, throws his or her convictions into the open competition of the marketplace with the assurance that at the end of the day victory will be achieved. That is the good news that has brought us thus far and that we must internalize as we cross over into the twenty-first century.

[Next >>>](#)

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND GOVERNMENT

by Clarence E. Hodges, Ph.D.

## Introduction

The United States Declaration of Independence states: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

It is clear from all legitimate perspectives that government is good and honorable in its proper role—and that Seventh-day Adventists are not to be excluded from this heaven-ordained function.

Some Christians have negative attitudes regarding government and politics. They fail to understand and comply with Titus 3:1: “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (this principle is confirmed in Romans 13:1).

There are persons who, because they have seen some corruption in politics, view all politics as corrupt. Others may, because they have seen some corruption in religion, view all religion as corrupt. Both are unreasonable. If all good persons abandon those institutions that have some corruption, then those institutions will shortly be totally corrupt. The enemy must not be allowed to take total control of our civil institutions. Like Daniel of old, we modern Christians can and must witness to the power of God in high places of government responsibility.

Government is defined as the system of political organization by which a nation, state, district, etc., is maintained. According to the *Working Policy* of the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the “civil government is ordained by God; that its divinely appointed function is to protect [people] in the legitimate exercise of their rights, to provide a suitable environment in which they can pursue the objectives set for them by their Creator” (pp. 259, 260).

Why, considering the above, should not Black Christians be directly involved in the God-ordained process by which they and their families are governed? My answer to this question was to engage in a long period of varied and personally fulfilling public service. In encouraging others to follow this path, I would like to offer in this chapter some

explanations of the political process and suggestions on how to enter public service.

## Citizenship and Government

Any citizen may participate in the governing process. Participation includes voting, petitioning, and service. In terms of the latter, there are three general forms of government service.

The first is classification as a nonsalaried appointee. While living in Lincoln, Nebraska, I was privileged to serve as a nonsalaried commissioner for the human rights commission of the city of Lincoln. I was appointed by the mayor, and my appointment was confirmed by the city council. The commission met once a month for about two hours to act on complaints of civil rights violations. We had the responsibility of protecting individuals from unfair treatment based on race, gender, religion, age, disability, or national origin. As a Christian I welcomed the opportunity to influence policy and protect individuals from the ugly problems of bigotry and discrimination.

On another occasion the mayor called to see if I would serve as a nonsalaried member of the city planning commission. This is one of those positions that without a doubt should be filled by a person of integrity. Corrupt individuals serving on planning commissions sell their influence to allow crooked developers and speculators to get rich. This is certainly an area in which Christians should get involved.

The second type of government service is that of salaried appointment. In addition to the nonsalaried appointees, the human rights commission maintained a paid career staff of civil servants, protected from politics, who perform the day-to-day duties of receiving and investigating complaints. In fact, most government employees are salaried career civil servants.

It has been my pleasure to serve in this way at the federal government level. I was appointed to three positions by the president of the United States, with two requiring confirmation by the United States Senate. Appointed officials usually serve at the pleasure of the official making the appointment and therefore can be replaced without cause or at the time the appointing official is replaced. Appointed officials usually manage the career civil servants, thereby exer-

cising considerable influence on policy and the distribution of resources.

The third option for involvement is service as an elected official. The elected official takes the greatest risk, makes the greatest investment, and has the greatest influence on government and public policy. Again it is most important to have persons at this level who have high moral standards.

Although there are a few nonpartisan political elections (such as certain judgeships, special district functions, and membership on school boards), elected officials usually come through the partisan political process, that is, the party system. Thus persons interested in serving in elective government positions will generally need to get involved in one of the two major political parties—Democratic or Republican (of course, one can get involved as an independent or in additional parties, but chances for success are limited).

In addition to the three types of service in government, there are three levels of government to consider. First is local or municipal government service, which is often the best place to start (county government may be included with local government). Second, the state level involves a larger circle of influence at a higher level. State level service—legislators, judiciary, and governors—has prepared many for high national elective and appointive service. Third is the national level, which is the most difficult, whether executive, judiciary, or legislative.

The federal government has two additional categories of service and opportunity. Senior executive service is the top managerial force, comprising both career opportunities and appointed opportunities. Persons at this level usually earn in excess of \$100,000 per year and can be moved around without their consent. These positions are primarily in the Washington, D.C., area; however, some are in the various agency regional headquarters in the 10 federal regional cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Kansas City, Denver, San Francisco, and Seattle. A few other such positions are in some of the other larger cities. The Office of Personnel Management in Washington, D.C., publishes a listing of these vacancies every other week.

The foreign service is for those who wish to serve in other countries. In addition to good salaries, there is free housing and special tax benefits. Most of these positions are with the diplomatic operations of the State Department. The positions include secretaries, security, communications engineers, personnel, budget and fiscal, ambassadors, and other lesser diplomatic officers. The Agriculture and Commerce departments also have a few foreign service positions, along with the U.S. Information Agency and Development.

In summary, the federal government has 1,980,000 full-time positions, including: the president, the vice president, 500 cabinet and subcabinet appointees (Executive Schedule), 1,600 Schedule C political appointees, 6,900

senior executive service employees, 120,000 GM-13 to -15 supervisors and managers, 1.3 million GS-1 to -15 workers, specialists, and technicians, and a few hundred thousand other government employees.

I have served as senior-level assistant to mayors and United States senators and presidents, and I have been a candidate for the U.S. Congress. As a Seventh-day Adventist I looked for opportunities to witness for Christ and advance the interest of my church as was appropriate. Opportunities presented themselves for me to distribute tracts, Bible correspondence school lessons, and Spirit of Prophecy books at every level, including the Oval Office of the White House.

As a Black Seventh-day Adventist I refused to allow work or officials to come before my religion, my family, or my race, and I declined to attend meetings, even with the president, on Sabbaths. Beyond that, I gave the best service that I could give, with His blessings. Through many difficult situations He has blessed me with tremendous satisfaction in my service, both personally and as a Christian.

This broad service has allowed me to see the political process at work and to participate with those who have mastered the art and science of politics. While I have decided elective office is not for me, I do not rule that out for other Seventh-day Adventist Christians who feel such a call. However, certain conditions must be addressed.

According to Hugh A. Bone, “an electoral party [a political party] facilitates citizen participation and recruitment of persons for public office. It helps certain party activists attain some of their goals, such as public office, policy objectives, or recognition. Persons with ambitions of this kind who are outside the structure very often find the party a mechanism for accomplishment and indeed may find their objectives achievable only by becoming active in the party.”<sup>1</sup>

The first consideration that all who aspire to elective office must address (except the H. Ross Perots of the world—those with personal fortunes equal to financing a political campaign privately) is finances. Fund-raising is often difficult and problematic, especially for Seventh-day Adventists, and even more so for African-Americans. SDAs cannot raise money easily from other SDAs, because such available money usually goes to the church. African-Americans, even those who have the resources, are not accustomed to giving to political campaigns, and the major political parties do not give them an opportunity for involvement at the financial level.

Second would be the choice of the type of service. There are three branches of government at each level—executive, legislative, and judiciary. The executive branch includes the president, governors, mayors, and county executives along with those in administrative functions and agencies. The legislative branch includes U.S. congresspersons, state legislators, city/county councilpersons, and county commissioners. The judiciary branch includes

judges and all other support persons for the courts and legal system.

If one wishes to serve in government, consideration should be given to all levels, branches, and categories. A career path should be planned if there are aspirations to ascend to higher levels of influence. Hard work, study, and preparation are vital for success, as is consecration of your life and service, as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, to God and His purpose.

### **Blacks and Government Service**

As an African-American it is useful to understand the history of Blacks in government service and the problems that are likely to be faced. In 1870 Hiram Revels, of Mississippi, was the first Black to be elected to the United States Senate. Blanche Bruce, also of Mississippi, was the second and the first to serve a full term. Bruce was born a slave in 1841 and elected to the U.S. Senate in 1874. The next Black, Edward W. Brooke, was not elected to the U.S. Senate until 1966—92 years later. He was defeated in 1978, and no Black was elected to the Senate again until 1992, when Carol Moseley Braun was elected from Illinois.

In the early sixties Blacks began in growing numbers to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. William Dawson and Adam Clayton Powell had served since the forties; Charles Diggs was elected in 1954. The seventies, eighties, and nineties saw the number approach 40.

The sixties saw Blacks first elected as mayors of major cities. These numbers also increased through the nineties. History was made by Carl Stokes in Cleveland, Richard Hatcher in Gary, Kenneth Gibson in Newark, Tom Bradley in Los Angeles, Maynard Jackson in Atlanta, Walter Washington in Washington, D.C., Harold Washington in Chicago, and David Dinkins in New York, along with others.

In 1989 L. Douglas Wilder was the first Black to be elected as governor of a state. His history-making election proved to Americans in general, to African-Americans in particular, and to the world that U.S. voters could do the right thing.

In 1984 and 1988 Jesse Jackson showed Black political aspirants that they too could dream of becoming president. The late Ron Brown, as head of the Democratic National Committee and later secretary of commerce, was credited to a great extent with putting together the political strategy that recaptured the presidency for the Democratic Party after 12 years.

Key Black appointees at the national level include Robert Weaver, first Black to serve in the Cabinet. He was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966 as secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In 1993 President Bill Clinton was the first president to name three Blacks to the Cabinet. President

Ronald Reagan appointed Gen. Colin Powell as the first Black to serve as assistant to the president for national security affairs, and President George Bush appointed Powell as first Black chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Historically, Blacks have been denied equal access to government service. However, progress has been noteworthy, and many opportunities exist. The challenge is real, but any political dream can be achieved with an effective strategic plan. African-American SDAs should know from the experiences of those who have gone before that success can be achieved and Christian principles need not be compromised in government service.

### **Career Opportunities and Challenges**

As we engage in public service—appointed or elected—we may anticipate challenges to our religious convictions. However, persons in career positions also face challenges. The experience of my wife, Yvonne Hodges, a social worker, teacher, and health educator, is instructive. She felt constrained to resign a position as health educator for the state of Nebraska rather than teach children how to engage “safely” in illicit sexual activity. Her conviction that children, especially, cannot engage in such conduct safely, even if they avoid sexually transmitted diseases, subjected her to intense pressure and harassment. This may be your experience.

Herbert Doggette, former deputy commissioner for the U.S. Social Security Administration, has shown that African-American SDA Christians, while serving in high governmental positions, can observe the Sabbath and engage in soul-winning pursuits at the same time. His personal leadership in his local church was never sacrificed to his demanding career.

Sandy Crank and Bert Reid, African-American SDA career executives in government, also are active in their local churches. Reid just completed a major project as church building committee chair for his church, which required considerable amounts of his time. He and the building committee completed a beautiful and practical church building in one of the most difficult counties in the U.S. to obtain construction permits, while at the same time being recognized for outstanding service in government.

### **Black Adventists Exceeding the Challenges**

Much can be learned from the attitude and working philosophy of faithful and effective SDA government public servants. Linda Ammons, executive assistant to the governor of Ohio, is one such example. She advises all to “look for the positive and make the most of it.” She is committed to making a difference through civic service.

Capt. Barry C. Black, chaplain in the U.S. Navy, is able to exercise a beneficial Christian influence through counseling, conducting religious services, and writing. In witnessing

to Navy personnel, he is continuing the work of Christ, who sought out men and women in government service.

Dr. L. Rudy Broomes, a psychiatrist at the Veteran's Medical Center in Dublin, Georgia, served as assistant commissioner of health for the state of Tennessee. His government service has emphasized helping individuals and families overcome the destructive powers of illegal substances.

Chaplain Herman Kibble, a captain in the U.S. Navy, is the highest ranking Adventist in the U.S. military. His service has benefited thousands of military personnel and their families. But for Adventists in the Navy, SDA chaplains help many remain faithful to their Lord and help protect their Sabbath privileges.

Eardell Rashford was recently appointed a judge in New York City, allowing her an opportunity to advance the cause of human rights, religious freedom, and integrity in public service. She had served as an attorney for the city of New York for some 20 years. Her life speaks for Christianity and Adventism.

Leon C. Schenck, a special agent for the FBI, lives by a motto that would be great for all Christians: "To not stand idly by and allow evil to triumph." As a supervisor in the FBI he has served in government with courage and distinction. Despite service in this challenging area, he has received an award as Adventist Man of the Year.

Mary Stovall, mayor of Hurtsboro, Alabama, is a successful businesswoman and a faithful Seventh-day Adventist. She puts people first, and for that reason the citizens of Hurtsboro have put her first.

Mildred Taylor is one of the few African-American SDAs serving in the United States foreign service. An executive in the U.S. Agency for International Development, she sees to it that millions of people in need are reached by compassionate development and relief services. Her government service is predicated toward one day hearing those words from her Lord: "I was hungry, and you fed me."

Attorney Elton Lester, legal advisor to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, helps make it possible for families and even the homeless to receive affordable housing; he also is charged with helping to protect taxpayers' interests. His knowledge and integrity have made his government service of great benefit to humanity.

Police lieutenant Horace L. Walker commands the Atlanta Homicide Task Force. A decorated police veteran, Walker has provided leadership in every area of police work in one of America's most challenging cities. Is there a more appropriate role for a Christian than that of upholding the law and saving lives. He urges all to exercise faith in God and show respect for humanity.

Thousands of Seventh-day Adventists of every race are serving in governmental agencies while living lives faithful to Christ and pointing others to Him. Teachers and other work-

ers in the areas of education, health, public safety, etc., daily make significant contributions to society and their church.

In 1994 history was made by Sheila Jackson-Lee, an African-American SDA. Jackson-Lee was elected to the United States House of Representatives by voters in the Eighteenth Congressional District of Texas, in the city of Houston. In January 1995, upon arriving in Washington, D.C., for her swearing in, Congresswoman Jackson-Lee was elected president of the Democratic freshman class and appointed to serve as freshman member of the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee.

Jackson-Lee is a member of the Committee on the Judiciary, the Crime Subcommittee, and the Committee on Science, where she serves on the subcommittees on Space and Aeronautics and Basic Research. She is a congressional member of the Human Rights Caucus and the House Democratic Caucus Task Force on Hunger.

Before her election to Congress, Representative Jackson-Lee was sworn in as one of the first African-American female at-large council members in the city of Houston. Prior to serving on the city council, she served as an associate municipal court judge for the city of Houston.

As a council member Jackson-Lee was instrumental in the passage of legislation dealing with human rights. In addition, she concentrated on such issues as homelessness, gun safety and responsibility, cable television regulations, and the revising of the traffic modification ordinance. The congresswoman was also involved with aviation, redevelopment, and revitalization.

Other outstanding African-American SDAs who have served honorably or are presently serving in government would include Judge Andrew A. McDonald, who served for more than 10 years as municipal court judge for the state of New Jersey; Dr. Celeste Ferguson, who serves as assistant commissioner of the Missouri State Department of Education; Augustus Cheatham, who served in several key health and education roles in presidential administrations, including principal deputy director of the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Henry E. Felder, who served as economist for the United States Government Accounting Office and as deputy assistant secretary for research for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; Dr. Wayne L. Greaves, who serves as visiting scientist for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and as a consultant for the United States Agency for International Development; Judge Marla Anderson, who serves the courts of Monterey County in California.

These are a few examples of government service by SDA Blacks. While providing outstanding public service, they have continued to maintain high Christian values. Their lives are witnesses for the cause of Christ.

I am pleased to have been able to mention those who serve

in judicial and elective positions. Too few Black Seventh-day Adventists have sought careers in these professions, which offer unmatched opportunities to do good for humanity—which should be our prime motivation for service.

To those persons contemplating public service, many kinds of careers may be pursued by African-American Christians. There is no limit except in our minds. Networking, career placement offices, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, and other personnel offices of various agencies and governments can help the individual identify his or her best area of service.

Congress has enacted numerous laws and procedures, including the concept of affirmative action, intended to remove discriminatory barriers from the career paths and plans of women, minorities, persons over 40, and persons with disabilities. Every avenue should be explored to achieve one's goals in this highly competitive environment.

### Church and State Concerns

Since Adventists should represent the highest quality of employees, serving with professionalism and integrity, their presence in government will be a benefit to whichever agency or office of government in which they are employed. The church also benefits by having persons in key places to aid in the communication process and to witness.

For example, when SDA educational institutions apply for government grants and assistance, it is helpful if there are persons who can give advice on the preparation of such applications or who may be involved in the process. While no unfair advantage should be sought, it sometimes takes effort to keep the playing field level. Otherwise, certain regions of the country tend to get more federal resources than others. In addition, minority institutions and groups tend not to get sensitive consideration, even when minorities are in the screening and approval processes. Again it can be shown that if good people stand back, the cause of right and fairness will suffer.

Adventists have a special appreciation for the separation of church and state concept. They understand the need for a delicate balance of constructive engagement and separation of influence. They also understand the need for compassionate services that promote individual independence.

The vice president of the country of Uganda is a Seventh-day Adventist physician, Dr. Samson Kisekka. He has made a significant difference in his country, standing for human rights and religious freedom. Working diligently for human and economic development, his life of personal sacrifice and of overcoming obstacles with faith and persistence inspires the best in his citizens. His service is a positive witness for his church.

### Adventists and Politics

For years there has been a debate regarding whether

Adventists should participate in partisan (party system) politics. Evidently we have accepted politics in the church, as we spend inordinate amounts of time trying to get persons elected or defeated in local church or conference constituency elections. And sometimes the approaches we use and statements we make are a bit embarrassing to those who think Christ should be our example.

As to individual involvement by SDAs in partisan politics, Ellen G. White states: "Those who teach the Bible in our churches and in our schools are not at liberty to unite in making apparent their prejudices for or against political men or measures. . . . The Lord would have His people bury political questions. . . . We cannot with safety vote for political parties; for we do not know whom we are voting for."<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that Bible teachers and persons who do not know whom they are voting for have some restrictions. However, for the well-informed Adventist electorate, that admonition does not seem to apply. In fact, that same author states to our youth: "You should be content with no mean attainments. Aim high, spare no pains to reach the standard."<sup>3</sup>

In the book *Education* she states: "The history of Joseph and Daniel is an illustration of what [God] will do for those who yield themselves to Him and with the whole heart seek to accomplish His purpose."<sup>4</sup>

Joseph and Daniel were both involved in politics and were used by the Holy Spirit while in government service. To show what can be accomplished by having Adventists in key areas of public service, I would like to offer some personal experiences.

While I was on special assignment in Singapore for the U.S. Department of State, the General Conference president called me with a special problem. Medical students in Japan could not complete their board examinations except on Sabbath. Thus they could not become licensed physicians.

I was able to confer with appropriate personnel in Washington, D.C., and our ambassador in Japan and secure official U.S. support for this human rights issue. The GC president went to Japan and, with U.S. government support, met with Japanese officials on this matter. With much prayer the problem was solved. Adventist students can now take these exams on Sunday.

While I was commissioner for the U.S. Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, I was responsible for funding for thousands of agencies covering such state programs as adoptions, foster care, Operation Headstart, homeless and runaway youth, child abuse and neglect, and the training of professional social workers.

In the course of my duties I was contacted by a civic leader in Chicago, Dr. Milton Curry, who was executive director of one of our associated agencies. I agreed to meet with him in my office, and eventually visited him in his office in the Windy City. During our discussions Dr. Curry

expressed some religious interest. I gave him some literature and introduced him to Elder Charles Joseph. Eventually Dr. Curry was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church and became a church elder. He remains politically active and has used his political contacts in Chicago to enhance our programs and to advance the cause of the church we love.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” is the advice I would give to anyone considering a career in politics. As He leads, proceed. Success is thereby guaranteed!

### **Youth No Barrier**

As a teenager I joined the U.S. Air Force. Tired of school rules and my small hometown, I wanted to take a giant step into my future, so I skipped college and soon found myself at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, where I was assigned to a barracks of 48 young men. Three days later the lead instructor called me into his office and stated that he had been watching us closely. He needed four leaders from among the recruits, each to lead a squad of 12. He decided that though I was the youngest, I would be one of the four squad leaders. I was given an armband with temporary stripes and placed in charge of the squad a few hours per day.

The military has provided opportunities for many young people to develop into leaders. I do not wish to overstate the power of a squad leader, but for me as a young person it was a confidence-building challenge.

We will always find ourselves in situations in which we are youthful in comparison to the rest of the group. That is no reason for anyone to lower his or her aspirations. Youth need not be a barrier to leadership or advancement, particularly in government service. Though it may take more time than you wish, patience will help you receive the recognition and rewards you seek.

### **“Thou Shalt Not Do Any Work”**

I was not born in an Adventist family; we learned of the Adventist Church when I was 11, and I was baptized at age 12. When I entered the Air Force, I was still not very knowledgeable about Adventism, but I knew that I was not supposed to work on Sabbaths, even in the military.

An Adventist chaplain stationed at Lackland would help Adventist airmen secure Sabbath privileges. But when I left Lackland Air Force Base to receive technical training, Chaplain Taylor was left behind. Soon I was assigned duty on the Sabbath; with God’s help I was able to exchange with another man who had duty on Sunday. The next week presented a greater problem, as I was assigned duty on Friday afternoon that extended past sunset. My sergeant told me I could work those two hours Friday night and be off on Saturday.

He considered that to be fair, but this was not my understanding of God’s Word. I offered to work six hours on Friday and a full eight hours on Sunday—just to be off those two hours on Friday evening! Normally that kind of offer would be accepted, but the sergeant was determined that I work the two hours.

So I was sent to see a special chaplain who obviously had been trained in psychological torture or warfare. He tried every argument and threat in the books to break my resolve. To me, Satan was warring against Christ, and I was caught in the middle. Should I abandon my convictions just these two hours? Would God understand? I certainly was not perfect, as the chaplain had reminded me. Why embarrass my family by disobeying a direct order and going to prison or getting kicked out with a less-than-honorable discharge? However, the Spirit continued to remind me of all my Saviour had done for me and that He wanted me to honor Him. I could not debate the chaplain, so I just prayed and kept saying “I can’t do it.”

After what seemed hours, the door to his office opened and his supervising chaplain, a major, walked in. “That’s enough,” he said. “I have heard all I can take. Young man, as long as I am in the Air Force you will have your Sabbaths off.” It was most unusual for a White officer to rebuke another White officer in the interest of a Black airman. This had been done by God’s grace, praise His name!

### **The Impossible Tasks**

In 1972 I was awarded a fellowship as a National Urban Fellow, an academic and career development opportunity designed to develop senior level administrators for urban America. Those selected would study part-time at Yale University and work part-time with the mayor of a major city. I was assigned to work with the mayor of Indianapolis, Richard G. Lugar, at the time 41 years of age with a bright political future.

Upon arriving for my first assignment, I was presented with a difficult problem. The sanitation workers had written him an ugly letter threatening to shut down the city with a strike designed to bring his political career to an end. This had happened in New York to Mayor John Lindsey and was happening in Memphis at the time Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. These workers had planned to ask Jesse Jackson to lead the same kind of marches in Indianapolis that Dr. King was leading in Memphis. The Teamsters Union had agreed to cooperate with the strike by refusing to deliver gasoline to city departments, including the police. The mayor expected me to find a solution that would avert this potential disaster.

I went to a meeting with the officers and stewards of the Sanitation Workers’ Union. These workers were responsible for solid waste collection and disposal, liquid waste

treatment facilities and processes, maintenance of the sewer system, storm water control, and control of dams and reservoirs. Most of the workers were Black, while management was White.

At this meeting I was given very cool treatment. Then the president of the local explained their attitude. Bill Smith, he said, was superintendent of the solid waste division and had long been a part of the problem, treating Black employees with a lack of respect. Smith had convinced them that this was just an effort on the part of the mayor to buy time and do nothing. He advised them to go back to work and stop complaining.

I had come to Indianapolis with a record as a civil rights activist, serving as president of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and as vice president of the St. Louis County NAACP at the same time. I did not intend for that reputation to be destroyed; meeting with the mayor, I told him he had a confidence problem. These workers had no confidence in their supervisor's willingness to improve working conditions for minorities. Lugar asked for my recommendation. I suggested that Bill Smith be removed from the position of superintendent and that a Black man be given that job. The mayor directed me to write the memorandum taking that action effective immediately. Carlos Groves, a Black man, was made superintendent.

Launching a major one-man investigation, I talked with hundreds of persons. Eventually I recommended other changes, which the mayor accepted. Within a few weeks we were able to work together with managers, workers, and the department directors to ease the situation. The attitude of the sanitation workers completely changed. God had blessed my efforts in behalf of the people of Indianapolis.

### South Africa Challenge

While in service as a State Department official I paid routine visits to the American Embassy in South Africa. During my briefing by the different sections and "desks" I was made aware of issues of interest to the U.S. government. I was alerted to problems and progress on racial/human rights issues. Visiting with officials of the Republic of South Africa, I would stress our concerns and what the president of the United States, the secretary of state, and the American people would like to see happen in that country. I would offer our support as appropriate for effecting change.

I would also meet with citizen groups and organizations to see how the people felt toward their government and toward the United States. I would talk with employees at our embassy at every level, including those who were citizens of South Africa.

At a luncheon the Americans started telling me how well the U.S. was received in South Africa and that the American Embassy was about the best place in the country

for South Africans to work—that is, it was free of racism and discrimination. However, I got different answers from Black South Africans and Coloureds who were working at the American Embassy.

You see, Americans will be Americans, whether in America or the Republic of South Africa. The Black South Africans were assigned the least favored jobs and given the lowest pay. They said they felt free to share with me what they could not share with the ambassador or others (one stated that they were just waiting for the day when they could push the Americans into the sea). Obviously, things were not right, and changes needed to be made.

Upon my return to Washington, D.C., I conferred with the secretary of state, George Shultz; special assistant to the president for political affairs, Mitch Daniels; and Senator Richard Lugar of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It was agreed that I would return to South Africa for an in-depth assessment of the situation.

Upon arrival in South Africa, I traveled from Johannesburg to Pretoria, Cape Town, Crossroads, Port Elizabeth, Soweto, and back to Johannesburg and Pretoria. I had delightful and informative visits in each city/township. I witnessed a riot and the burning of vehicles in Crossroads, which was probably the worst condition of all townships, with Blacks living in dirt-floor chicken-coop-type shacks.

I met with 100 Black college students at Vista College in Soweto. They were obviously angry. I knew they were not interested in listening to me, so I told them I came to listen to them. They were sharply critical of the U.S., some thinking that American Blacks were still in slavery. I shared with them my personal problems with discrimination, and they warmed up to me.

I also appeared on radio and TV, on their equivalent of *Sixty Minutes*. Speaking freely, and not the official line of the U.S. government, I called for full equality of all citizens and told of U.S. experiences that could remove their fears of a shift in power. I talked of unwarranted school desegregation fears in the U.S., and I appealed to the decency in human beings, letting them know that implementation of the "golden rule" can bring peace, harmony, and prosperity.

Upon my return, the report I made to the secretary of state, the president, and Senator Lugar contained enough information to influence changes in policy. They agreed to the need for the U.S. to send a Black American as ambassador to the Republic of South Africa. In the field of diplomacy, that would send the strongest signal that the U.S. favored change in South Africa's racial attitudes. The secretary of state also moved immediately to send more Black diplomats to South Africa.

Edward Perkins, an African-American career diplomat, was nominated and confirmed as ambassador to the Republic of South Africa. His presence made a difference.

His color gave hope to Black South Africans and helped convince Whites that change was necessary. Attitudes were prepared for Nelson Mandela and for freedom.

### How High Can Black Adventists Dream?

With the rise to prominence of Gen. Colin Powell, it is now acknowledged that an African-American can become president of the United States. Could a Seventh-day Adventist Black be elected president? Is it possible for a Seventh-day Adventist to serve as president and remain true to his or her convictions? Certainly it would be difficult, but not impossible.

A child from a very poor family was hospitalized. In his home they had had one drinking cup, which had rings around it. The rings let each family member know how far down they could drink. He would drink down to the first ring, his sister would follow, and his mother would drink last. In the hospital he was given a glass of juice, and the glass had no rings. He was puzzled. He did not know how far down he could drink. The nurse told him to drink it all.

In the same way, I would urge Black Adventists to grab the cup of success and drink it all. Achieve all that you can achieve. You owe it to yourself, your family, your community, and your God.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). My experience and that of my fellow believers who have been led by the Lord to serve the government lead me to conclude without a doubt that the God of Joseph and Esther and Daniel still prospers those whom He calls into His special service.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh A. Bone, *American Politics and the Party System* (New York: McGraw-Hill).

<sup>2</sup> E. G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1923), p. 475.

<sup>3</sup> ———, *Messages to Young People* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1930), p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> ———, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 57.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND MILITARY SERVICE

*by Capt. Barry Black, Ph.D.*

## Introduction

This topic is germane for several reasons. First, it's a neglected area of research. Many people assume that Black SDA military personnel have done little worthy of serious historical consideration. Second, this subject recognizes the position of noncombatant military participation, which is preferred by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Third, it gives overdue recognition to those who have given so much. Like the forgotten deeds of Mordecai in the days of Esther, which became a catalyst for the liberation of the Jewish people, the deeds of Black SDA military personnel have the potential of serving as a catalyst for modern African-Americans, who continue to reach back to name and claim their heritage.

As a Black SDA military officer with 19 years of service in the U.S. Navy I have witnessed firsthand the superb efforts of many of these individuals and am happy to provide an insider's perspective that casts light on the career of these individuals who served their country with honor and dedication.

As Blacks we applaud the sacrifices and commitment to service of such African-Americans as Gen. Colin Powell, Gen. Daniel "Chappie" James, and Jesse Brown, Vietnam veteran and first Black secretary of veterans' affairs. Many are familiar with the name Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., the first African-American to achieve the rank of brigadier general in the regular armed forces. A few may even know about the superb work of Samuel L. Gravely, Jr., the first Black admiral in the Navy. Some may have heard about the accomplishments of the Tuskegee airmen, an all-Black Army air corps flying unit that had many noteworthy achievements in combat against the Germans in World War II.

Few people would include on their list names of Seventh-day Adventist African-Americans who have made military contributions, for that is a long and distinguished list. Joseph Powell, Leonard Johnson, Herman Kibble, James North, Helena Dyson, Donna Phillips, Donald Walker, Terrence Simmons, Michael Dyson, Anthony Phillips, J. Paul Monk, Meretle Wilson, David Yates, and Gerald Jones, along with many others, have contributed to the strength of America through patriotic military service.

Like the saints who served in Caesar's household during the time of the early church, these persons have wielded a po-

tent influence in the armed forces household. They have kept alive the knowledge of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's unique historical involvement with the U.S. military, they have been resource persons for the church in the interaction with the government of its military units, and they have broken down stereotypes and paved the way for other Black and White SDAs to receive positions of greater responsibility.

Black SDAs have also made major contributions in the medical field and in military chaplaincy services. Adventist chaplains have been instrumental in sensitizing the armed forces to the unique spiritual needs of SDA personnel. They have also intervened to help extricate SDA military personnel, both Black and White, from potentially career-ending impasses related to Sabbath observance. They have made contributions in the areas of writing, evangelism, pioneering service, and training. These unsung heroes deserve their footnote on the pages of history.

## Chaplaincy Functions

Black SDA chaplains have been particularly active in our military history. They have helped to preserve the free exercise rights of all personnel, but Seventh-day Adventist service members in particular. The free exercise clause includes the freedom to worship in the manner one chooses. The nature of military service, however, sometimes makes this difficult. Personnel are often ordered on short notice to "hot spots" abroad, and in the process they may be denied the usual opportunities for regular worship. However, even under these circumstances military personnel can avail themselves of the services of a chaplain who will help ensure that their spiritual needs are met. When the chaplain is unable to meet their needs by himself or herself, referrals are appropriate and desired.

Through the years Black SDA military chaplains have played an important role in assisting Adventist personnel in their requests, but have gladly represented individuals of all denominations in this regard. When faced with a religious accommodation matter, most commanding officers need advice. And whether the issue involves a Christian Science practitioner, or a member of the wiccan faith, or someone from the Islamic tradition, Black SDA chaplains have stood by their plaintiff, ensuring that before religious accommodation deci-

sions are made, commanding officers consider such factors as unit cohesion, good order and discipline, the sincerity of the requestor, and the importance of the religious requirement.

Unfortunately, many non-SDA chaplains have limited familiarity with the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As a result, commanding officers have been given incorrect advice regarding requests from Seventh-day Adventists. Non-SDA chaplains and the military establishment often assume that SDAs keep Sabbath in the same way that other Protestants keep their day of worship. They expect that if an hour or two is given to attend church services, the needs of the SDA serviceperson have been met. They are unaware that SDAs cease from secular labors from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday. Black SDA military chaplains have been invaluable in correcting misperceptions and thereby salvaging the careers of thousands of SDA servicepersons.

Particularly significant are the religious services rendered by Black SDA chaplains for units that are stationed outside the United States. Here Black and White military personnel who are accustomed to a more celebrative style of worship find themselves drawn to the non-European approaches to worship employed by Black SDA military chaplains. Many SDA personnel on ships have had to wait until they reached the next port to attend an SDA worship service. And when there they've often found it necessary to worship where English was not spoken. Fortunately, enough Black SDA military chaplains deploy on ships or are stationed overseas to meet these important spiritual needs.

Early in their history SDAs grappled with the question of involvement in military service. While some advocated pacifism, the church eventually moved in the direction of noncombatancy. This enabled full cooperation with the government within all reasonable limits. Noncombatancy permitted SDAs to express their patriotism by serving in the military while avoiding the taking of human life, using instead the vehicle of medical and paramedical activities. This noncombatant philosophy was solidified by World War I.

When military people have inquired about what Seventh-day Adventists believe regarding involvement in combat, Black SDA chaplains and other personnel have been in a position to set the record straight. This has helped to remove negative stereotypes and provide a correct picture of the historical development of the SDA position of noncombatancy.

### **Under Fire**

The first Black SDA chaplain was Joseph T. Powell, who entered the U.S. Army as a chaplain on November 26, 1960. Chaplain Powell served during the turbulent days of the civil rights movement, when tensions were high within and without the military. He also served in Vietnam, bringing a sense of Christ's love to personnel confronted with the horrors of war.

Black SDAs who followed in military chaplaincy, serving in the Navy and Air Force, include James North, J. Paul Monk, David Yates, Meretle Wilson, Herman Kibble, Milo Allison, Charles Robinson, Ron Walker, Tiffany Hardy, and the writer.

Long before annual Black History Week celebrations were popular, Black SDA military personnel served as resource persons to provide information to their White colleagues about the contributions of Black Americans in military history. What they transmitted, to the surprise of many, is that Blacks have given their blood in every war this nation has fought.

During the Revolutionary War the list of battlefields on which Blacks fought included Lexington, Concord, Ticonderoga, Bunker Hill, Long Island, Trenton, Princeton, Bennington, and many others critical to that conflict. According to John Hope Franklin, in his book *From Slavery to Freedom*, 38,000 Blacks lost their lives in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> The mortality rate of Black soldiers was 40 percent higher than that of White troops.

Blacks also gave valiant service in World Wars I and II and the Korean conflict. They did so pointing out with bold gratitude and sorrow that these contributions were made by men and women who were often subjected to racial segregation and discrimination at home. And while Black Americans comprised only 15 percent of the total armed forces present in Vietnam, 22.4 percent of all Army troops killed in action were African-American.<sup>2</sup>

More recently Black SDA servicepersons have been prepared to remind their counterparts of the African-American contributions made during Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf and Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti. Blacks, who make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, made up 24.5 percent of military personnel deployed to the Gulf. In the Haiti operation, Blacks were also disproportionately represented. African-Americans have done more than their fair share, and they deserve our gratitude for serving and our assurance that Black and White Americans will note their sacrifice.

### **With Pen as Well**

One of the unique contributions of Black SDA military personnel has been in the area of journalism. J. Paul Monk, a writer of considerable talent, later became the editor of *Message* magazine, the leading SDA African-American religious journal. James North, SDA Air Force chaplain, authored a particularly influential article entitled "The Chaplain and Equal Opportunity." The article made such an impact that it was later published in the *Joint Command Magazine* and has effected improved race relations throughout the military.

Among other notable contributors is Herman Kibble, Black SDA Navy chaplain, who wrote as a doctoral project the paper entitled “Enhancing Philippine Identity Amid Cross-cultural Loyalties.” This paper has assisted many Navy chaplains in providing more effective ministry to Philippine military people and their families.

Through the effective use of writing, Black SDA military personnel have made a difference, influencing attitudes, enlightening minds, removing stereotypes, and presenting the gospel with the flavor and perfection of the eschatological emphasis of the third angel.

### **Training Others**

A number of Black SDAs have been involved in the world of military training. Among them are James North, the first Adventist to teach at the Air Force Chaplain School and the first officer under the rank of major to be given that assignment; Anthony Phillips, a major in the United States Army and a professor of military science in Savannah, Georgia, who makes the Advent message appealing by his words and life; and J. Paul Monk, who as an Army chaplain established traditional Black worship style chapels that served as a model for other chaplains in ministering effectively to the spiritual needs of Black personnel. (Monk’s model has since been adopted by all the armed services. Before Monk, African-Americans of all faiths were forced to worship in settings with a European style of praise.)

Since 1991 it has been my privilege to serve at the U.S. Naval Academy as assistant director of training for the Navy Chaplain Corps, where my obligation is to help train chaplains to care for the spiritual needs of our military personnel around the world. That this prestigious position in the military training world is occupied by an SDA Black is evidence of the high esteem in which the military holds SDA servicepersons.

As part of their philosophy of military training, Black SDA military people have conducted five-day smoking-cessation programs, helping hundreds defeat their addiction to nicotine. In the area of training they have made a difference.

### **Effective Witness**

Thousands of persons have been baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of the labors of Black SDA military people. These baptisms came not only because of the work of chaplains but also because of the courageous stand for principles made by many Black SDA soldiers and sailors.

When Capt. Donald Walker decided to give up a 10-year Army career rather than break the Sabbath, one incredulous officer asked him, “You mean you’re going to give up the opportunity for a 30-year career because of a single day?” Walker did resign, but was never unemployed. The day after

he left the Army he was hired by Pine Forge Academy and launched into a fruitful career in the SDA denomination.

Walker’s witness during the late fifties and early sixties is illustrative of the will and courage exercised by faithful military personnel—both volunteers and enlisted, officers and ordinary troops—through the decades. His stand for right and that of a multitude of others has spoken well of SDAs in the military, while providing an effective witness by which multitudes have been led to Christ.

### **Early Contributions**

Ironically, African-American SDA military personnel have done much to pave the way for White SDA servicepersons to experience improved conditions in the military. Because of the government’s insistence on fairness, Herman Kibble became the first SDA chaplain in any service to earn the rank of O-6, the equivalent of colonel. He was also the first SDA to serve on an aircraft carrier. Before Kibble was assigned to a carrier, many thought SDAs were too provincial for such an assignment. After Kibble paved the way, a White SDA chaplain was assigned duty aboard an aircraft carrier.

As has been mentioned, African-American SDAs have served trailblazing appointments at the Air Force Chaplain School, the Naval Academy, and the Atlantic Fleet Chaplain Department. Doors opened by these pioneers have permitted many others to follow. A few weeks after Kibble was promoted to O-6, a White SDA was similarly promoted. Clearly because of the sterling performance of its Black SDA military pioneers, the Adventist Church is more favorably viewed by the defense establishment.

### **Medical and Dental Work**

As might be expected, the medical field is one in which SDAs have flourished. In fact, one SDA Army medic, Desmond Doss, won the Congressional Medal of Honor. In this vital area scores of African-American SDA physicians and nurses have made and are making a vital difference. One of the most celebrated Black SDA military physicians, Leonard Johnson, achieved the rank of full colonel in 12 years, becoming at the time the second-youngest colonel in the United States Air Force Medical Corps.

Johnson also earned a master’s degree in public health from Harvard University and was the first Black physician to become certified in the specialty of aerospace medicine through residency training. He also held the aeronautical rating of chief flight surgeon, the highest flying rating for a physician. Black SDAs have made their mark in the military medical field.

SDA African-American military personnel have also contributed in the dental field. Major Donna Phillips is one example of the excellence of SDA African-American den-

tists. Phillips, a dentist at an Army base in Savannah, Georgia, seeks always to witness to those who inquire about her faith. She has served her church as a Pathfinder leader, Adventist Youth leader, health and temperance leader, school and church board member, and usher board member. Like so many other Black SDA military personnel, Phillips shares her special dental knowledge in the civilian sector, edifying the body of Christ and empowering God's people to prosper and be in health.

While most Americans have heard of Gen. Colin Powell, few have heard of the faithful servants of God and

country whom we have mentioned. But these persons and their colleagues have left indelible footprints in military history. They have made rich contributions in counseling, lobbying, advocacy, writing, training, teaching, evangelism, medicine, and witness in general. Pioneering and persevering, they have fought "the good fight of faith" and are worthy of our gratitude.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Hopc Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 510.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND INTRAETHNIC RELATIONS

by Roy Malcolm, Ph.D., and Emmanuel Saunders, Ph.D.

## Introduction

“In malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (1 Cor. 14:20). Blacks in America represent many cultural backgrounds. Consequently, within any segment of the population, while adapting to local customs, there remains the innate desire to hold on to certain beliefs and practices. It is said that we are at any given moment the result of our past experiences. In the passage cited above, we are admonished to forget differences as naturally as children do, but to exercise mature thinking and understanding in human relations.

The primary intent of this article is to analyze a few of the historical forces that have shaped the cultures of Black Adventists in the U.S.A. and to suggest ways of achieving harmony, that is, unity in diversity. The chapter addresses a limited group—African-Americans and English-speaking peoples of Caribbean background. Limited reference will be made to Blacks from Africa, Latinos, and French-speaking West Indians.

## Definitions of Terms Used

*Culture:* Learned standard forms of behavior that one uses and others in one’s group expect and recognize. Among the distinguishing marks of a culture are foods, music, religion, dress, and language.

*Harmony:* A pleasing relationship among peoples of varying backgrounds.

## A Common Heritage

Since the end of World War II demographic data reveal a distinct “browning” of the American population. This continuing trend suggests a more diverse and multicultural synthesis of the population, which will be different from the traditional White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant bedrock of American society.

The United States of the twenty-first century will be more culturally complex. Therefore, if sociopolitical stability is to be achieved, unity in diversity will have to be the goal toward which we strive.

Historians have correctly pointed out that Blacks in the Caribbean and the United States have shared a common experience born in slavery and shaped by Anglo-Saxon racist values. The slavery experience in both regions bore a strik-

ing resemblance in terms of their slave codes, racial values, and master-slave relationships. On the common heritage of slavery, U. B. Philips wrote: “As regards to Negro slavery, the history of the West Indies is inseparable from North America. In [the West Indies] the plantation system originated and reached its greatest scale and from them the institution of slavery was extended.”<sup>1</sup>

African-Americans and Afro-Caribbean peoples have much more in common than that which separates them. One distinctive bond was the system of Black Codes, by which the slave plantations were governed. These codes, introduced in the English colonies as early as 1667, set the cultural agenda for slavery in both the United States and the British Caribbean. Their primary objective was social control of the slave population, accomplished through fear. Slavery and its psychological aftermath have left a common imprint on these two groups of New World Blacks.

## The Church

In any given culture the church, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is a microcosm of the wider society. Whether such a society is slave-oriented, segregated, or multicultural matters little. When one analyzes the cultural practices and mores of Adventism in the United States, it comes as no surprise that such cultural elements as race relations, segregation, etc., have been integrated into the church.

Most directly, the Black church in the United States has succeeded in establishing its own cultural identity, having been subjected to various forms of overt racism by the majority culture from slavery days and the postemancipation years that followed. The church, like the other facets of society, was segregated in the United States.

Prevented from joining the “master’s” church, the slaves modified what religion was granted them. The Black church, therefore, emerged from what might be termed the “rejection syndrome.” The slaves turned the few rudiments of Christianity allowed them into a religion that was both practical and psychologically functional, a religious experience that was homegrown, suitable to the slaves’ peculiar needs.

Resentful of being rejected by the dominant class, the slaves made their religious experience into a form of *protest, resistance, and emotional demonstration.*

Characteristics of the plantation church included: (1) the praying ground, (2) the hush harbors, (3) the stomping, (4) the clapping, and (5) the shouting. Slave worship came to be identified with unrestricted movements, which are a part of the Black church today.

But even though some masters made some allowances for “freedom” of worship, slaves still sought an uninhibited environment to have their “own church” in which they could create the unique mannerisms that today are identified with the Black church in America.

### **Black Adventism**

Black Adventism, as practiced in the United States, is not a universal phenomenon. In the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America one does not find a separate Black church as such. This results in part from the different sociopolitical circumstances—colonialism and minority rule—in the islands and Africa.

For example, in the English-speaking Caribbean, Black Adventists have been strongly influenced by White American missionaries. Over time the White missionaries were able to establish the parameters of Adventism in terms of its liturgical style from their perception of White Adventism in the United States. Having been schooled into believing that the missionaries’ brand of racial harmony is a distinct feature of the church and that cultural differences are marginal within Adventism, Black Adventist immigrants to the United States were therefore ill-prepared to identify with the racial dichotomy that is to be found within the Adventist Church in America.

It is imperative, then, that an understanding of the cultural heritage of both sides be a fundamental requirement for cultural harmony within the church. This reality must be redefined by an open-minded approach as one analyzes the history of both groups. It is most important, however, to bridge the current cultural fissures and to develop a sense of Black solidarity within Black Adventism.

The most fruitful place in the United States for the study of how the various Black ethnic groups cooperate with one another is Oakwood College, in Huntsville, Alabama.

### **Cultural Synthesis at Oakwood College**

Over time the pioneers and their successors have quietly reached beyond regional boundaries to circumvent notions of xenophobia and craft at Oakwood College, an international center of higher education par excellence. In support of the church’s world vision, the current mission of the college defines its role in our multicultural society as one that provides for the “spiritual development for its students who come from diverse geographical, cultural, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds.”<sup>2</sup>

But that was not always the case. The number of inter-

national students studying at Oakwood during the first four decades of its existence was so small that their cultural mix was insignificant. A close analysis of the available statistical data reveals that these students were mostly from the Caribbean or Panama. The building and completion of the Panama Canal by a Caribbean workforce opened windows of opportunity for Black immigrants to the United States. Many persons seeking educational and economic opportunities abroad began leaving the islands in spite of the tightening of immigration laws in the 1920s.

During and immediately following World War I, the Woodrow Wilson administration was confronted with a series of anti-Black bills, one of which called for an end to all Black immigration to the United States. Though most of these bills failed in Congress, those that were passed failed to prevent “Jamaicans” (a euphemism for all West Indians) from immigrating to the United States.

These Caribbean immigrants could be viewed as part of the Black exodus from the South to the urban and industrial centers of the North. This post-Reconstruction demographic shift actually reached its apogee around 1916 when European immigration dropped dramatically because of the war. It is not unreasonable to assume that the fallout from the Panama connection or the West Indians’ desire to immigrate made an impact on enrollment at Black institutions of higher learning such as Oakwood College.

In the Caribbean the colonial system of government discouraged education for Blacks beyond the elementary level. Before the 1940s a college degree for a Black person in the Caribbean was tantamount to the weakening of colonial control. It was not until the mid-1950s that the first university-level institution, the University College of the West Indies, was established in Jamaica. The two Adventist colleges, West Indies College in Jamaica and Caribbean Union College in Trinidad, staffed at first by White Americans, were equally insensitive to Black higher education. And it must also be conceded that at the time even a secondary education was still the preserve of the small Black bourgeoisie and the sons of the planting class in the islands.

But more than anything else, the appalling economic condition of the Black masses in the Caribbean predicated the limits of Caribbean students going abroad to study. Even the privileged few who escaped in search of a college degree had to do so by winning government scholarships. England was their preferred choice. In the case of Black Caribbean Adventist students, it was the White colleges to which they were directed, not Oakwood, which until 1942 was still a junior college.

By the 1950s a cultural realignment was becoming obvious. In fact, as early as 1944 international students had begun making Oakwood their first choice. This was the

beginning of a trend that blossomed during the Rock administration (1971-1985).

The three international students listed as attending Oakwood in 1944 were Emerson Cooper, from Panama; Moses Mayne, from Jamaica; and Carmen Phipps, from Santo Domingo. They had chosen Oakwood College instead of such schools as Atlantic Union College or Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University). Generally the first international students to attend Oakwood were mature students. In some cases they had been drafted into the armed forces. However, having shared common racial indignities with their African-American counterparts, they were now ready to identify with a Black college culture.

In the 1950s international students from the English-speaking islands who left to go abroad to further their education were often introduced to Atlantic Union College or Emmanuel Missionary College by alumni of these institutions who were teaching in the Caribbean. Oakwood College was stereotyped and often maligned as a pariah institution of Blacks, whose academic and intellectual stature were substandard.

But the attraction of a common cultural heritage soon overcame the negativism surrounding Oakwood College. In 1954 and 1955, when the total enrollment of Oakwood College was only 252, 11 students were listed as coming from foreign countries. Among them were Sylvanus Merchant, Panama; William Grant, Jamaica; Victor Castello, St. Vincent; and Ethel Richardson, Trinidad. By the late 1960s the international students' base had widened to include one student from China and one from Ghana. However, the overwhelming majority of the 69 international students were still being drawn from the Caribbean region, 16 from Bermuda, 12 from Jamaica, and 10 from the Bahamas.

In the 1970s the trend continued. Between 1971 and 1975 students from three African countries attended Oakwood: one from Uganda, two from Liberia, and five from Nigeria. In 1974 some 18 clubs were represented at the annual International Day celebrations. That year the *Spreading Oak* (the campus newspaper) reported that during the Saturday night program the "air was alive with West Indian calypso, African 'high life,' Jamaican reggae, and Bermudian pop music." The special guest to this international jamboree was James L. F. Simelane, the ambassador from Swaziland.

In the 1980s President Calvin B. Rock made a conscious effort to internationalize the campus—to transform it from the "Mecca of Black Adventism" to a highly competitive academic center of higher learning. He achieved this by recruiting a number of international staff and faculty, most of whom had earned terminal degrees. While this unquestionably was the singular legacy of the Rock era, a few apologists of the pre-1950s continued to reminisce of Oakwood's

past, dreaming nostalgically of the "good old days," even arguing that the college had lost its spiritual luster at the cost of internationalization.

Today one finds a richly woven fabric of different cultural identities on Oakwood's campus. On any given day it is possible to hear Jamaican or Nigerian accents or smell the aroma of such ethnic cuisine as roti and peas and rice. This is the way it ought to be, because in the process closed minds are opened and fresh horizons are visualized, resulting in less stereotyping of other cultures. And for a student body that is basically Black American, such cultural exposure directly enhances the learning experience (see Appendix 1).

It is still true that even in the present atmosphere of forging cultures, the closest relationships are with friends from one's home country and often even from one's home city or tribe. This is seen in association patterns in the college cafeteria, in church seating, in the choice of dorm roommates, and in athletic events such as soccer, which is enjoyed by international students but few Americans. And there have been days of tension when misunderstandings, criticisms, and feelings of neglect have demanded of deans, teachers, and administrators conscious efforts at education and peacemaking.

That the fusion of cultures at Oakwood is healthy, however, is demonstrated in a number of ways, including the frequent election of international students to Student Movement leadership, the choice of marriage partners, association in singing groups, and the successful hiring of students from all over the world as pastors, teachers, secretaries, accountants, nurses, etc., in Black conferences, schools, and churches. Truly, the cultural composite at Oakwood College is the sum total of shared experiences of its international character.

An important consequence of this process over the past 25 years is the distinct moderation of the negative rhetoric voiced by some of the older Black immigrants from the islands. Genuine respect now exists for Oakwood's academic style. More and more international students choose Oakwood College. Oakwood's Black international student body compares favorably with that of the other schools of higher education in the North American Division, enrolling for the past 15 years 150 to 185 foreign Blacks each semester.

### **The Afro-Caribbean Bond**

As the twenty-first century begins, Oakwood College finds itself a polyglot of cultures originating in Africa and the Caribbean, as well as England, Canada, and Australia. By the 1970s the influence of the college had extended to almost every continent, with an assemblage of students from more than 20 countries. However, students from the English-speaking Caribbean traditionally make up the majority of international students on campus.

As mentioned before, Caribbean students have come to identify with Oakwood College, a predominantly African-American institution, largely because of a common history, that of a culture of slavery under Anglo-Saxon dominance. The cultural profile of the African-American community can be easily identified with the historical evolution of the slavery experience shared by the former slaves in the Caribbean. In many ways the cultural mix on the Oakwood campus tends to reinforce this historical truism.

In both the North and the South the pervasive Jim Crow environment led to the founding of such institutions as Tuskegee, Hampton Institute, Oakwood College, and Howard University. While Howard University became an incubating center for a core of international professionals and a sizable segment of the African-American intelligentsia, Oakwood College was doing the same for Blacks within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From their beginnings both Howard University and Oakwood College experienced cultural links with the Caribbean at both the student and the faculty levels.

As Oakwood College graduates impact on the Afro-Caribbean and African-American communities, they carry with them the "Oakwood experience." Today churches in such cosmopolitan areas as New York City and Washington, D.C., feature a distinct blending of cultures. At the Oakwood College church recent trends suggest that the first and second generations of the older immigrants have now marginalized the old cultural divide by their participation in such African-American liturgical traditions as mass choirs and hand-clapping.

Integration into the religious cultural experience of African-Americans by Afro-Caribbean peoples is becoming more the rule than the exception not only at Oakwood church services, but in many local churches as well.

### **Toward Greater Diversity at Oakwood College**

Oakwood College has traditionally stressed the importance of cultural diversity and the contributions of minorities and the majority to our society. But given the history of race relations in the United States, it does not seem possible that the short-term prospect of a significant increase in White students is likely (see Appendix 2).

The very name *Oakwood College* has perhaps kept White students at a distance. Black ethnocentrists will be quick to point out that Oakwood should remain culturally a Black school—to include or increase Whites would fault the philosophical agenda of Oakwood's founders. But however psychologically soothing to the Afrocentrist's ideals this argument might sound, the realist will contend that increased White enrollment will have a positive impact on the future solvency of Oakwood College.

If only for the sake of cultural diversity, Oakwood's re-

cruiters should go beyond the limits of the Black constituency for the next generation of students. At the same time, perhaps lower the Afrocentric decibels a little at church gatherings and other functions. In so doing, it might be possible to increase the percentage of White students, thus reflecting more realistically the cross-cultural image of the real world that is America.

This reality is becoming more and more an imperative as we approach the new century in an America that is moving away from its Anglo-Saxon heritage. This is not happening because the American society necessarily wants it to, but because the new ethnic configuration leaves society with little choice.

Would the Black ethnic composite at Oakwood accept a significant White presence in its student body? Indications are that it would. Alabama A&M University, a historically Black institution also in Huntsville, Alabama, traditionally enrolls not only hundreds of Africans, but hundreds of White Alabamians as well. In fact, its summer graduations, the products of its evening and night school programs, have on occasion provided diplomas to more Whites than Blacks. And evidence at Oakwood itself is encouraging.

James Roddy, a White Mississippian, was highly successful as chair of the Physical Education Department at Oakwood College for more than 20 years. Sandra Price, at this writing, has served as vice president for academic affairs for several years. Caucasian leadership in other departments—history, English, music, art, nursing, and physics—has been well accepted and effective (see Appendix 3).

By accentuating the positives of other ethnic variations in our society, Oakwood College can contribute meaningfully to the reshaping of some of the frightening ideas that are distressing modern society. The future of our society, and indeed the quality of our leadership, rests squarely on the shoulders of our college-trained young people, who accept tolerance and respect for others as absolutes. As we move into Oakwood's second century, the only realistic alternative to racial unrest, smoldering mistrust, and division within and without the church is to accept the realities of a multicultural America.

### **Caribbean Contributions to Cultural Harmony in the U.S. Society**

Through the years many Afro-Caribbean people were motivated to attempt to initiate changes in the socioeconomic landscape of predominantly Black neighborhoods in New York City, Philadelphia, and New York, where they settled. In fact, as early as pre-Revolutionary America, and before slavery ended in the Caribbean, some of the pioneers in the American antislavery movement were immigrants from the islands. Prince Hall, a freedom fighter from Barbados, participated in the American Revolution and

later, because of the racist policies of the Masons at the time, founded the African Grand Lodge for Blacks in the United States.

In 1822 Denmark Vesey became the principal plottor in the abortive slave rebellion in Charleston, South Carolina. John Russwurm, a Jamaican, coedited the first Black abolitionist newspaper in the United States, *Freedom's Journal*, in 1827. He was also one of the first Blacks to graduate from an American college, in 1826. These and other West Indian social activists left a legacy for such later leaders as Marcus Garvey, William Bridges, W. A. Domingo, Cyril Briggs, and David E. Grange, who became vice president of the International Seamen's Union in the United States.

In an article entitled "The West Indian Influence," writer-editor Charles Whitaker, of Chicago, cites Caribbean Blacks for enriching life in the U.S. with "their artistry, industry, intellect, and flair."<sup>3</sup> According to Whitaker, West Indian Blacks have contributed significantly in numerous ways to the American society. For example: Mervyn Dymally (Trinidad) was the first Black lieutenant governor of California; Basil Paterson (West Indies) was a New York state senator; Ronald Blackwood (Jamaica) was the first Black mayor of Mount Vernon, New York; Arthur Lewis (St. Lucia) was a political economist at Princeton and a Nobel Prize winner; Roy Innis (St. Croix) served as director of CORE; Claude McKay (Jamaica) was a prominent member of the Harlem Renaissance (1920s).

In sports and entertainment, Whitaker names such West Indian personalities as Patrick Ewing of the New York Knicks; singer Harry Belafonte; actor-producer Sidney Poitier; actors Madge Sinclair, Cicely Tyson, and Calvin Lockhart; and writer Susan Taylor of *Essence*. In the military, Gen. Colin Powell, of Jamaican heritage, served with distinction as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

### Challenges to Harmony

Harmony among people is most often undermined by passive cultural characteristics such as stereotyping, speech, accent, and foods. Cultural differences tend to generate distorted stereotypical images that constrain meaningful dialogue and understanding. To achieve cultural harmony among Black Adventists, attempts must be made to address such negative beliefs as: (1) African-Americans viewing Black immigrants as aggressive alien usurpers; (2) Black immigrants often stereotyping African-Americans as having failed to maximize opportunities provided by their country.

The question of worship style by African-Americans also presents some concern for Black immigrants. The wor-

ship styles of Afro-Caribbean people differ sharply from that of their European-American counterparts. Black religion in the islands has been affected from the "missionary syndrome," in which the missionaries attempted to stifle any form of religious syncretism on the part of their parishioners. Whether it was the Anglican priests, the Catholic Mass, or the White Adventist missionaries and vegetarianism, they all demanded an orthodox style to which the indigenous worshipers conformed. Consequently a distinctly Black church in the Caribbean comparable to the Black church in the United States never emerged. On the other hand, for the African-American, emotional expression in worship is a religious tradition encouraged as a distinctive feature of the Black church.

R. F. Johnson contends that Black religious emotionalism results mainly from socioeconomic frustration: "Emotionalism is a very desirable thing. It engenders spiritual warmth and corporation. . . . It is a traditional religious expression. Take it away and the race will die. Some groups are subject to economic and social pressures. They are suppressed and frustrated. The church is where they can release pent-up emotions. The manifestation of emotion is valid. . . . The church should encourage it for their emotional needs."<sup>4</sup>

Cultural differences based on worship style should not be the basis for any form of plurality among Black Seventh-day Adventists. Instead, they should be the building blocks upon which unity in diversity is achieved, as is clearly demonstrated at Oakwood College. Both faculty and students show a rich cultural tapestry that has catapulted the college into an international center. Now it is Black Adventism that must catch up.

Cultural harmony within Black Adventism should be actively pursued by all Blacks, having shared a common heritage of slavery and social deprivation, the end product of Eurocentricism. It matters little whether we are from the Caribbean or the United States; we may have come over in different ships, but we are now all in the same boat.

As we move into the twenty-first century, with its multicultural and bilingual mix of varied minorities, described elsewhere as the "browning of America," Black Adventism for once should lead the way in making unity in diversity a reality.

<sup>1</sup> U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York).

<sup>2</sup> *Oakwood College Bulletin*, 1995-1997, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> C. Whitaker, in *Ebony* magazine, May 1986.

<sup>4</sup> R. E. Johnson, *The Religion of the Negro Protestants* (New York, 1956).

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

#### Enrollment

International students have historically played a prominent role in all aspects of college life, and represent a significant part of the enrollment:

Year	Total Enrollment	Internationals
1980	811,263	151
1981	821,395	269
1982	831,419	338
1983	841,465	364
1984	851,331	322

Since 1985, enrollment figures count internationals who are permanent residents with U.S. citizens.

Year	Total Enrollment	F-1 Students
1985	861,147	132
1986	871,003	126
1987	881,075	113
1988	891,234	104
1989	901,223	116
1990	911,268	130
1991	921,245	134
1992	931,334	174
1993	941,467	169
1994	951,534	177
1995	961,626	172

Information provided by Oakwood's Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 1996.

Several international students have served as presidents of the student body over the years, indicating that Christian charity knows no bounds of national distinction.

## Appendix 2

## ETHNIC BREAKDOWN FOR SDA COLLEGES—1994

Percentages

(Taken from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*—May 24, 1996)

College/University	American Indian	Black	Asian	Hispanic	White	Foreign
Andrews University	0.4	14.6	7.9	6.5	52.4	18.1
Atlantic Union College	0.8	37.9	2.9	15.7	42.7	0.0
Columbia Union College	0.3	42.1	7.3	4.9	40.8	4.7
Florida Hosp. College of Health Sciences	0.3	1.1	0.8	1.9	94.9	1.1
Kettering College of Medical Arts	0.3	3.7	4.2	2.1	89.6	0.0
La Sierra University	0.5	6.6	25.6	19.1	38.9	9.2
Loma Linda University	0.5	4.1	21.8	8.1	55.3	10.2
Oakwood College	0.2	87.0	0.1	0.5	0.5	11.7
Pacific Union College	0.4	4.0	18.0	10.9	66.7	0.0
Southern College of SDA	0.2	5.9	3.5	7.3	77.7	5.5
Southwestern Adventist College	1.7	10.0	4.7	14.2	63.4	5.9
Union College	0.7	1.0	0.7	3.1	85.2	9.3
Walla Walla College	0.6	1.6	3.6	4.6	83.8	5.8

### Appendix 3

## PLACE OF ORIGIN OF DEPARTMENT CHAIRS (1996)

<b>Department</b>	<b>Country</b>
Biological Sciences	Trinidad and Tobago
Business and Information Systems	Jamaica
Chemistry	Zimbabwe
Education	Panama
English and Communications	Grenada
Family and Consumer Sciences	U.S.A.
History	Trinidad and Tobago
Mathematics and Computer Science	Trinidad and Tobago
Music	U.S.A.
Nursing	U.S.A.
Physical Education	U.S.A.
Psychology	U.S.A.
Religion and Theology	U.S.A.
Social Work	U.S.A.

The above chart shows that department chairs are evenly divided among U.S.-born citizens (50 percent) and internationals, particularly from the Caribbean. It should be noted, too, that internationals dominate the natural sciences, mathematics, and business areas.

### NON-BLACKS

During the past four years (1993-1996), a Caucasian (female) has served admirably as vice president for Academic Affairs. For the past 15 years the art program has been under the leadership of Caucasians. Currently the Physical Education Department is chaired by a White male.

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND AFROCENTRISM

by Carol Cantu, Ed.D.  
with Andrew Harewood, D.Min., and William Frazier

## An African-American Looks at Africa

James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* gave me the answer to a question I have long pondered: Are other races of people as "hung up" on "ethnic culture" as we Black people are? We always had nicknames for each other based on our skin color. Every neighborhood had a light-skinned boy named Whitey and a girl referred to as "high yellow." People were referred to as "reds," "chocolates," and "midnights."

We unconsciously aimed for consistency in speech and style—we didn't want to be criticized if we didn't "talk that talk and walk that walk." We have our specialized vocabulary, favorite "soul" foods, and our own body language. The complexity of the Black subculture indicates that there is much more to being Black than meets the eye.

James Weldon Johnson, who passed for White and at times even Spanish, admitted that he loved being Black because the others just don't experience who they are in the fullness of style like Black folk.

As a product of this subculture, I recognize that my natural curiosity led me years ago to yearn for knowledge and truth about people who are so intensely aware at all times, in all situations, that they are "Black." To do this, I felt that at some point in my life I had to live in Africa, which I did for seven years. I traveled among Black people who looked like me and whom I learned to admire, respect, listen to, and love—but who, I came to realize, were very different. And I experienced frustration, culture shock, and disappointment upon returning home and encountering Afrocentrism.

The purpose of this chapter is not to condone, advocate, or endorse Afrocentrism. Nor is it to condemn Afrocentrism or suggest that Black SDAs have no part to play in this modern movement. My purpose is simply to share my search for a personal role in the ongoing, never-ending Black consciousness movement.

## The African Experience

Crises in our lives tend to bring out our innermost feelings, desires, and ambitions. My crisis was sudden blindness in my left eye, the result of a rare blood disorder. The diagnosis? A left central retinal arterial occlusion. No cure, no treatment. The time in the hospital was spent mainly try-

ing to save the eyeball. The gloomy prognosis was the eventual loss of vision in the right eye, also. Among my thoughts at that time: *How will I ever experience Africa in its fullness if I cannot see?*

My burning desire to see Africa had been with me since I was in high school. I even applied to the Peace Corps when I graduated from college. I was going to Africa, but first I had to fulfill an obligation to teach school. Years passed, other things intruded, and somewhere along the line the dream of living in Africa faded. Then suddenly, with the blindness, my hidden desire for Africa resurfaced.

Somewhere along the way I had substituted involvement in the civil rights movement and identifying with my brothers and sisters here in America for the experience of Africa. The sixties and seventies were exciting times. "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud" was not just a slogan, but a life-changing revolution experienced deeply by those of us who were moving in harmony with the Black consciousness movement. For some the Afro hairdo was just a style, but for many of us it was a statement of relevance and identity.

We saw a relationship between Black identity and self-esteem, and consequently a relationship between self-esteem and success in life. Much was going on during these times. More books were published during that era with relevance to Black consciousness than at any other period in American history. Colleges began Black studies departments, Black History Week grew to Black History Month—it was an exciting time to feel "young, gifted, and Black." But the seventies faded, and those of us still wearing Afros were beginning to look odd. The anger and the rhetoric died down as the Black Panthers died out.

The 1980s, when I suffered the attack of blindness, was a period few Blacks exhibited any overt manifestations of Black consciousness. That was when I again longed to see Africa. My miraculous recovery of sight triggered an urgency to bring the dream to fruition. My husband, daughter, and I left America in 1987 to live in Africa for seven exciting, revealing years.

My time in Africa began as a search—not just for spiritual meaning in that part of the world, but for personal identification and a cultural connection. I wanted to feel like a long-lost sister who was coming home. But the longer I

lived in Africa, the more American I felt, and the less important seemed my heritage or anything that had previously seemed so important.

My Americanization caused me some discomfort; I was afraid that there in the homeland I was losing my Black consciousness that I had valued for so many years. My husband (who was the first person in the world I ever saw with the Afro hairstyle and who endeared himself to me all those years ago because of his intellectual insights into the Black movement), who had seemed in the late sixties to be a Black revolutionary, was feeling the same.

James Baldwin experienced this same phenomenon and expressed it movingly and explicitly in his book *Nobody Knows My Name*.<sup>1</sup> He tells of leaving the U.S. after becoming fed up with American racism, and living in Europe for a while. Attending the first Pan-African conference held in Africa, Baldwin felt an uneasiness as he realized that the only thing he really had in common with his Black brothers, other than the color of his skin, was that they had all suffered from oppression. That is significant, but not enough to make them truly one. In many cases their values, understanding, and innermost spiritual concepts were totally different.

Eddy Harris, who begins his book *Native Stranger*<sup>2</sup> with the words "I am not African," experienced the same basic alienation one feels when customs, practices, and lifestyles are so different. Even more significant, however, is the fact that the reasons for the differences are deeper, more complex to rationalize than the differences themselves.

We are not the same simply because we look the same, nor are we the same because we have common ancestry or because we fight a common enemy. We are the same when we interpret basic concepts of love, loyalty, spirituality, and purpose of life through the same value system. And that common behavioral pattern is inherently understood and appreciated the same way.

Living in Africa was sometimes difficult because I wanted to belong, and at best I could be only a welcomed, well-treated, befriended, and even loved foreigner. This was not the fault of the Africans, who are most courteous and kind to guests. This was the result of my naïveté.

Africa is a continent of many tribes of Black people within many countries, and the Africans' understanding of who are one's brother and sister transcends the African-American concept. A brother or sister is the person who speaks the same language and who understands another soul's expressions, the crying out from that person's innermost depths, which can be expressed only in the native tongue. That includes only that person's tribe. Those of us who speak more than one language realize that when we are very emotional, either happy or sad, we express ourselves best in our native language. Language and culture that we learn before the age of 11 determine our innermost selves,

and these shared experiences determine who is our brother and sister, in a social sense.

After coming to grips with the fact that I am American, I became more resolved to accept who I am. And as I talked to more and more Black Americans living in Africa, I realized that the majority felt the same. My African friends who were comfortable enough with me to be honest, even when it might not be what I wanted to hear, confessed that for me to call myself an African-American or even Black was condescending to them. While I wore African-style clothing more often than they did, it appeared superficial to them because, for example, they never saw me barefoot outside of my house, and seldom inside (my house had a carpet, and I had special house shoes). I ate the same food the White people ate, and deodorant seemed so very important to me, just as it seemed to the White person. Why did I think I was African? Many Europeans who remained in Africa from colonial times were more African in their White skin than I could be in seven years in my Black skin.

Sadly, to be African is not necessarily to be a brother or sister; one often must be a member of the same tribe to be truly accepted. This explains why Blacks can kill other Blacks, as has happened in Rwanda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Somalia. The hatred between different tribes can be as strong as the hatred exhibited by the most extreme, radical, hate-mongering groups in the U.S.

### Reflections Back Home

On returning home, I encountered an America greatly changed from the America I had left seven years before. Afrocentrism was not even a word when I left; it was "the word" when I returned. I had read international news magazines and talked with visitors from America while in Africa, so I knew the word, but I experienced culture shock when I began living in a society in which Afrocentrism was intensely important.

I found two groups of Black people in the Black community and in the church. One group called themselves "Afrocentrists"; the other I will call "Traditionalists." One group was trying to push the African perspective in Black American culture; the other was trying to maintain the status quo of the eighties. Both groups were suspicious of the other. The Afrocentrists seemed to view the Traditionalists as uninformed, unenlightened, and "wanabees" (a new term for me on returning to the U.S.). The Traditionalists seemed to view the Afrocentrists as reverse racists, illusionists, radicals, anti-American, and a threat to the church. I saw myself outside of both groups.

I saw myself as a part of a third group of Black Americans who have lived outside the country and have returned. This is a group whose experiences have enlightened them and whose bout with reality has awakened them not

simply the idea that Africa and persons of African descent must be seen as proactive objects of Western triumphalism.

In this view the land of Africa, as outlined in ancient maps and historical data, is not severed by the Suez Canal (which now separates the Sinai and Arabian peninsulas and the so-called Holy Land from the mainland), but rather embraces the whole of the geographical area. In this light, biblical Afrocentrism is a much wider and more authentic concept than that provided by contemporary users of the term.

A second point of clarification concerns the expression “peoples of Africa.” Here again a biblically influenced understanding of the term is expansive in comparison to contemporary usage. That is because Scripture does not delineate peoples and groups who had their origins in the geographic land of Africa. In this view, Africa embraces the Afro-Asiatic land and its people as well as the territories we generally reference.

Afrocentric scholarship seeks to accomplish three primary goals: (1) celebration of the achievements of African peoples and cultures, (2) analysis of the hegemony of the Eurocentric worldview and the educational systems that have served the interests of racial oppression, and (3) construction of an alternative framework for understanding and evaluating human experience.

Biblical Afrocentrism recognizes the importance of education, especially as regards biblical events, which have often been slanted. A biblical Afrocentric hermeneutic demands that historical facts be represented with accuracy. A case in point is the preparation of Moses for leadership. Moses, a special individual who gave us the first five books of the Bible, including the Creation story and the history of the beginning of the human race, was educated in Egypt, a part of Africa. Jacob and his family were Jews upon entering Africa, but when they left 400 years later they included a large, racially mixed multitude. Yes, they were children of Abraham, but they were also African citizens.

Yet another slice of significant biblical history is the New Testament saga of Philip and the Ethiopian finance minister (Acts 8). What bears mentioning in the context of this discussion is the fact that this African officer was reading from the scroll, where the prophet Esaias was speaking (verse 28). A critical analysis of the text would suggest that when Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, he meant the meaning of the text, not the language itself. The minister’s response was “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (verse 31). This Philip did. Then as soon as the chariot came to a body of water, the African minister exclaimed, “Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (verse 36). This citizen of Africa, educated in the culture and language of the Old Testament, was led to Christ through the written Hebrew word.

How does biblical Afrocentrism enhance one’s self-

image? This task is accomplished by developing a fuller understanding of the critical role that persons of African descent have played in biblical history. An important part of this process is bringing clarity to the so-called curse of Ham. Note that a close analysis of the biblical text (Gen. 9:18-27) reveals that Canaan was cursed—not Ham. However, throughout history it has been the way of Eurocentric theology to place the curse on Ham and his descendants.

Blacks are now inquiring and hearing about the place and people of ancient Nubia at Qustul,<sup>4</sup> they are interested in writings that examine history’s elaborate system of religious belief and practice,<sup>5</sup> and they are desirous of knowing more about the two different lands of Cush, the “sustained intermingling” of them, and how and why White historical research seeks to separate the “queen of the south” (the queen of Egypt and Ethiopia) from the “land of Sheba.”<sup>6</sup>

A primary obstacle to effective employment of biblical Afrocentrism is that Blacks too often forget their past and are forced to repeat history. Gayraud S. Wilmore is correct when he observes remembering the past as the only way to effect “the possibilities of a radical theology within the black church that would incorporate the passion and experience of the black masses . . . within the structure and institutions of a white-dominated society.”<sup>7</sup>

Afrocentrism may have some problems or vagueness; however, when the question is enlarged to biblical Afrocentrism, its benefits are clear. Afrocentrism does carry with it great value for Black Seventh-day Adventists and for the church as a whole: the challenge of achieving a relationship to God that compels us to contribute to the empowerment of all people through sharing bread rather than crumbs.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Prophetic Significance of Afrocentrism**

Black Seventh-day Adventists possess prophetic significance. Today’s humanistic Afrocentrism is providing Black Adventists with a device to see themselves, but this humanistic mirror is not perfect, and we must compensate for distortions. This is accomplished by a prophetic understanding of Afrocentrism.

Prophetic Afrocentrism is important to Black Adventists, who, through their emphasis on Bible prophecy, know the end from the beginning. Adventists have the prophetic advantage of the Spirit of Prophecy, the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, the precise order of end-time events, and what the future life will be like during the millennium and beyond.

But the question for many is What is the prophetic significance of Afrocentrism? Afrocentrism is not an event, a process, or a place. Afrocentrism is an idea, a way of looking at life. A worldview. It is a vision of salvation for the peoples of Africa and the African diaspora. We may or may not be into Black consciousness or our African heritage, but any claim about salvation gets our immediate attention.

By ignoring or rejecting revelation, humanistic Afrocentrists are forced to look to African history for insights and inspiration to bring about victory in the Black liberation struggle. On the contrary, today's biblical Afrocentrists are looking to the future as described in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and the Spirit of Prophecy for insights and inspiration to bring about victory in the Black liberation struggle.

There is a legitimate place in Adventism for biblical Afrocentrism. It is through this medium that focus can be placed on the prophetic significance of Adventism in general and Black Adventism in particular.

---

<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Random House, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Eddy Harris, *Native Stranger* (New York: Random House, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Skinner, *How Black Is the Gospel?* (Philadelphia: Holman Co., 1976).

<sup>4</sup> Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> G. S. Wilmore, "Black Power, Black People, Theological Renewal," *A Documentary History* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 125, 126.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135, 136.

Next >>>

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND FEMALE MOBILITY

by Rosa Taylor Banks, Ed.D.

## Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, cofounded by a woman, Ellen G. White, and ably served through the years by many notable women, has not equitably included women in church structural leadership positions. However, changes in policies, procedures, and attitudes in the past few decades have impacted upon the role of women in the church, resulting in an abundance of women in secretarial and clerical positions, and a growing number in middle management. Nevertheless, there remain few women in officer-level positions, and a thick glass ceiling continues to prevent women from reaching senior management, including the office of president.

From a general perspective, this barrier exists for all Adventist women, even if eminently qualified for the position. However, in those areas in which small advances can be charted, whether in leadership or on decision-making committees, White women, to the exclusion of minority women, have largely been the beneficiaries.

At this writing only one woman officially occupies the chief executive officer's chair in one of the church's institutions of higher learning. In 1990 J. Lynn Behrens became the first female president of Loma Linda University. Three women have gotten close enough to the "glass ceiling" of General Conference leadership positions to actually see it from up close. Each served as General Conference treasurer—Adelia Patten Van Horn (1871-1873), Fredricka House Sisley (1875-1876), and Minerva Jane Loughborough Chapman (1877-1883). Since 1883, though, no woman has been elected to an executive officer position of the General Conference.

In the face of such small progress, mainly benefiting Caucasian women, I would like to offer four reasons for focusing on the mobility of women of African ancestry: (1) the dearth of information addressing how African-American women have fared in employment in the Adventist Church; (2) the need for Black SDA women to have basic information on how their culture impacts their relationships within the church; (3) the need to collect, organize, and share information on where Black women are currently serving in the employment and volunteer sectors of the Adventist Church; and (4) the need to encourage Black women to develop and use their gifts and talents.

Have women of African ancestry made a significant contribution to the life of the Adventist Church? If so, who are these women, and what are their attainments? How do we obtain information about them? What about African-American women in service today? And more important, what about those whose achievements have merely slipped through the cracks? Before the current focus on Adventist women's ministries, Black women began their search for a vehicle for fellowship and communication, for answers to questions that involve their place in church life. This chapter will attempt to address these questions and concerns.

While Black Seventh-day Adventist women have not yet entered the doors of administrative world church employment, God has raised them up through volunteer leadership service at the local church level. And wherever we find them scattered throughout Adventist churches and the lower levels of the church administrative structure, they are forging their niche and making their mark. They are paying their dues at a premium rate where doors have been opened for them to serve.

In this chapter we will share stories of Black SDA women who blazed trails of service during the early history of the Adventist Church, women who are making history today, and a look at the next generation of Black female trendsetters and newsmakers.

*Mobility* as defined in this study is "the capacity or facility of movement." It suggests organizing and putting into motion, circulation, using people and resources for active and immediate service. A nation that excludes the majority of its population from full and active participation in all aspects of its life is a nation that is doomed to fail. An organization that does not capitalize on the resources of all its members is an organization that is destined to fail. A church that does not mobilize *all* of its human resources in following God's commands is doomed to fail.

To paraphrase a quote from Juergen Moltman: "There can be no hope for humanity without a new collective identity of the people out of the various nations, languages, races, [and genders]. Exclusion is one of the worst seductions. It is an instrument of domination by which one people can be incited against another."<sup>1</sup>

At the time of writing, women constitute 62 percent of

the membership of the North American Division, or approximately 499,100 persons, and more than 50 percent of the membership of the church worldwide. In some conferences the percentage of females is as high as 80 percent. Black women comprise the second largest female resource group within the church in North America, 146,320 out of a total female pool of 499,100.

Despite these figures, women of every race have clearly been excluded from full and active participation in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, women in the North American Division can take comfort in the significant progress of the past few years, which indicates that full equality in service may be on the horizon. As the church moves rapidly toward the end of the history of this world, the final elimination of human barriers must soon take place.

In the past Black women were not unduly stirred by issues regarding the role of women: ordination, administrative positions in the church, etc. Instead, Black women have chosen to serve quietly in their churches, where they have filled numerous roles admirably since the establishment of the first Black Adventist church in Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, in 1886.

And even today when sexuality and gender issues are the most emotional subjects facing Christian churches and the society itself, Black women are not making a great deal of noise as they forge ahead. They are not asking for an elevator ride to administrative level positions in the church. All Black women want is their place on the ladder, and they don't want to be barred from making that first step.

Since the church has made progress in recent years in righting wrongs so far as female exclusion is concerned, it is now time for Black women to reassess the approach they have taken over the years. As a whole, we have spent far too much time in the background with respect to representation in employment and on decision-making committees of the church. In doing so, we give tacit agreement to the thinking reflected in our society and possibly in the church—that Blacks and women do not have what it takes to fill top administrative positions.

In almost every area of the church in which one's presence and participation directly impact its mission, Black women have experienced token representation or less when compared with their sisters of other races. In terms of inclusion in roles that have a significant impact upon the growth of the church, we can go no other direction than up.

Most Black SDA women would agree with Maya Angelou that we must rise and continue to rise. We would also agree with the principal objective of Operation Reach Back that we must *reach back* and carry another person with us as we rise. Hence we shift from the individual "I" of selfishness and forgetfulness to the collective "we" of the

"good Samaritan" mentality as we rise up, "leaving behind nights of terror and fear [to move] into our daybreak that's wondrously clear."<sup>2</sup>

### Black Female Contributors to Gospel Progress

Much in our past and present history encourages the recommendation and utilization of the varied talents of Black women. This section highlights Black women from the past to the present and focuses briefly on how and where these women served.

*Black female activism in Bible days.* I was watching a large pageant held in another country. Consisting of more than 100 participants, it highlighted women of the Bible. Modern-day faces portrayed women of yesterday such as Ruth, Naomi, Esther, Deborah, Mary, Elizabeth, Mary Magdalene, and many more. As I watched the performance, I couldn't help wishing that Bible women of color were also highlighted. Mental pictures started forming in my head.

Pharaoh's daughter, the Hamitic Egyptian princess whose name was *Thermuthis*, according to the historian Flavius Josephus, was the Black woman who saved the infant Moses by pulling him from the Nile River. If she and others like her had been featured, with Black women to represent them, the presentation would have been more inclusive.

As the women made their entrance and exit, I thought of *Zipporah*, the daughter of Jethro, who married Moses and bore him two sons. Because she was not a Hebrew, it was a while before she was accepted by Moses' sister, Miriam. But she was accepted by Moses and God. Needless to say, *Zipporah* did not make her debut on that stage.

My mental scroll again stopped when I saw the entrance of *Hagar*, the Egyptian slave girl whom Sarah later sent away, but not before she bore a son for Abraham and named him Ishmael. The woman who played the role of Hagar was White.

*Rahab* was next to walk upon my mental stage, that Canaanite woman who rose from obscurity to prominence because she hid the two spies sent by Joshua. God rewarded her by sparing her life, by giving her a husband and a home among the Jews, and by making her an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Her character was not portrayed by a woman of my ancestry. Here again she was represented by a White woman.

I thought of the many Black queens who walked this earth during Bible times and longed for a place for them on the stage. The Ethiopian *queen of Sheba*, who took the Jewish teachings of Solomon back to the Ethiopians so her people could read, believe, and rise. Of this Black woman Jesus made a notable commendation, declaring her worthy to be remembered by all women today (see Matt. 12:42).

*Queen Candace* of Ethiopia was credited with sending her treasurer to Jerusalem to seek information concerning the teachings of Christ. As a result of an encounter with

Philip the evangelist, that man accepted the Jewish religion and was baptized (see Acts 8).

These are just a few of the many Black women who are named in the Bible and about whom we must not keep silent. They are our blood sisters, and we must tell their stories so that our daughters will know of their wonderful heritage and know that they too are esteemed highly by God.

With so much evidence in the Bible of the acceptance of Black people with God, no Black child should grow up today believing that there is no Black female presence in the Bible that is worthy of commendation. Whenever women of the Bible are paraded before the church, program coordinators should make an effort to ensure that the presentation is balanced, that examples of Black female activism in Bible times are included.

*Notable Black women achievers in early church history.* Early Adventist Church history records a number of names of Black women living and contributing during the lifetime of our prophet, Ellen G. White. Among these women were Sojourner Truth, Jennie B. Allison, Rosetta Douglass Sprague, Anna Knight, Etta Littlejohn, Dr. Lottie Isbell Blake, and Mary Britton.

*Sojourner Truth*, renowned antislavery crusader, was born Isabella Van Wagener in the late 1700s. She spent half of her life in New York State and New England, where she visited two Millerite camp meetings in 1843. Sojourner Truth identified herself with Adventism from then to the end of her life. Known as an itinerant exhorter and lecturer, on occasion she represented women's rights and temperance.<sup>3</sup>

*Jennie B. Allison*, born in 1858 near Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, was among the first Black women to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Jennie was a member of the first Black company of believers that was organized in 1886 in Edgefield Junction, Tennessee. But she had met earlier with a biracial company of believers in the same town in 1883. Ellen White was an occasional guest in the Allison home.

On one such occasion Jennie confided to Ellen that two of her children had strayed from the church—a daughter who was a contralto singer and a son who was a baritone. Both seemed to be gravitating toward the glitter of the entertainment world. Ellen advised Jennie to go to Chicago and bring her son and his wife back to Tennessee. Jennie did this, and pretty soon her son became a minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When Jennie asked Ellen if her daughter would return to the church, Ellen took her aside and confided sensitive information that Jennie never revealed. However, she ceased chiding her daughter about not attending church.<sup>4</sup>

*Rosetta Douglass Sprague*, daughter of the prominent antislavery lecturer Frederick Douglass, with whom Sojourner Truth on occasion shared a platform, was also an early Black female Seventh-day Adventist. Rosetta held

membership in a Washington, D.C., church. She is reported to have been fellowshipping there in its new quarters, purchased in 1893.<sup>5</sup> The date of her baptism, thought to have occurred earlier than 1893, is not available. Research does not connect her with Ellen White, but she was a contemporary of the prophet and could have met Mrs. White at some point in her life.

*Anna Knight* (1874-1972) was an educator, missionary nurse, Bible and departmental worker, and author. In 1901 she was appointed as a missionary to India, where she served for six years. In 1909 she was called by the Southeastern Union to work in Atlanta. Her duties included nursing, teaching, and Bible work. When the Southeastern Conference and Southern Conference merged, she served in the educational department until regional conferences were formed, at which time she retired.<sup>6</sup> In her autobiography, *Mississippi Girl*,<sup>7</sup> Anna mentions in her final chapters the presence of Ellen White on the Oakwood College campus and quotes statements made by Mrs. White regarding the origin and purpose of the school.

*Etta Littlejohn*, a convert of the *Morning Star* boat mission of Ellen White's son James Edson White, was one of the first 16 students to enroll at the Oakwood Industrial School, forerunner of Oakwood College. She completed high school there. Her nursing education was completed at New England Sanitarium in Massachusetts. Mervyn Warren, chair of the Religion and Theology Department at Oakwood College, records the following about Etta Littlejohn:

"Etta became one of the sanitarium students assigned to care for Ellen White. . . . The fledgling nursing student felt privileged to care for her church's prophetess, and Sister White must have been pleased to see evidence that the inspired counsel she shared on working for Blacks was bearing excellent results."<sup>8</sup> In 1905 Etta married Robert Lee Bradford, a musician and ministerial student. Their son, Charles Bradford, is a former vice president of the General Conference and former president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Their grandson, Calvin Rock, currently serves the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a general vice president.

*Lottie Isbell Blake*, M.D., was another contemporary of Ellen White. The first Black SDA physician, Dr. Blake was born on June 10, 1876, in Appomattox Court House, Virginia. She labored as director of Rock City Sanitarium in Nashville, Tennessee, which was the forerunner of Riverside Sanitarium and Hospital.<sup>9</sup> According to her grandson, Paul Brantley, professor of education at Andrews University, Dr. Blake's treatments involved natural remedies that were patterned after those used by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, of Battle Creek, Michigan. Ellen White came to her sanitarium for treatment of a knee problem, and while there blessed Dr. Blake's baby daughter, Frances.

In 1904 Dr. Blake was the only Black female physician with a practice in Birmingham, Alabama, and she made frequent trips to Huntsville to organize a nurse's training program at what was then the Oakwood Manual Training School.<sup>10</sup>

*Mary Britton*, editor of a newspaper known as *The Standard*, was a Seventh-day Adventist contemporary of Ellen White. Mary's newspaper promoted vegetarianism and health care.<sup>11</sup>

These and other Black women were visible in early Adventist Church history. Although a careful search of SDA books and periodicals reveals a dearth of information about who they were and what their accomplishments were, the work that they accomplished helped the church as it accomplished the purposes of God. Their lives and deeds are not forgotten.

### Notable Black Women Achievers Since 1940

In this section we look at Black female achievers in the middle and latter part of the twentieth century. Norwida A. Marshall, in her book *A Star Gives Light*, lists the names of 23 African-American women achievers since 1940, with a description of their accomplishments. Following are excerpts from these biographies.

#### Bible Instructors

*Ida M. Hanks*, of the Northeastern Conference, was blessed with hundreds of baptisms.

*Ola Mae Harris* was known as an excellent preacher.

*Mildred P. Johnson*, of the South Central Conference, guided hundreds of souls to Christ.

*Rosa Lee Jones*, of the Northeastern Conference, saw nearly 1,000 people added to the church during her tenure.

*Celia M. Cleveland's* ministry resulted in more than 3,000 persons joining the church. She has also trained many of the Bible instructors now serving the church.

#### Educators

*Natelkka E. Burrell*, Ph.D., cited by her church as one of its 10 most outstanding women, served as a college educator for many years. After retiring, she and Ethel Young coedited the Scott-Foresman reading program for SDA schools in 1963.

*Eva B. Dykes*, Ph.D., served as professor of English at Oakwood College from 1944 until 1975, when she retired for the second time. Eva was the first Black American woman to qualify for the Ph.D. degree.

*Bernice H. Ford* taught at the Bethel SDA School in Miami, Florida, and served as a member of various General Conference and union conference committees, one of which oversaw the development of the new SDA Life Reading Series.

*Chessie Harris*, educator and humanitarian, founded the Harris Home for Children in Huntsville, Alabama, where more than 900 children came to live. Today many of these individuals are making contributions to society. She has received honors for her work from the president and from local, state, and government agencies.

#### Health Professionals

*Naomi Bullard*, a nurse/administrator, in 1967 accepted a call to French-speaking Rwanda, in central Africa, to establish a nursing program at the Mugonero Hospital.

*Thelma Bruner Harris*, a dietitian at the Riverside Sanitarium and Hospital, had a health column in *Message* magazine for many years and published a cookbook titled *Good Food for Good Health* in 1972.

*Marvene C. Jones*, lecturer, researcher, and author in the field of nutrition, took her health ministry to low-income families, where she taught people with limited funds how to prepare well-balanced, healthful meals.

*Ruth N. Stafford* directed the health services program at Oakwood College for a number of years and also took charge of the prenursing program at Oakwood in its formative years.

*Ruth J. Temple*, M.D., the first Black to graduate from Loma Linda University (1918), served as a health officer in south Los Angeles for 20 years.

*Alma Foggo York*, the first Black instructor of nursing at Boston Hospital for Women, had input in major legislation that affected school busing, health care, and reorganization of government. She served as head of the Nursing Department at Union College before coming to Oakwood College and serving as director of nursing.

#### Musicians and Communicators

*Alma M. Blackmon* conducted the renowned Oakwood College Aeolians for 12 years. Under her tutelage the Aeolians toured extensively across the United States and in Russia, Romania, the Netherlands, England, Canada, Bermuda, the Bahamas, and the Virgin Islands.

*Inez L. Booth* taught at Oakwood College for 46 years, serving as instructor, professor of music, and later chairman of the Music Department.

*Alyne Dumas Lee*, an internationally renowned vocalist, joined the Oakwood College faculty as "artist in residence" in 1966. She also served as visiting professor of music at Alabama A and M University in Normal, Alabama.

*Eleanor Wright*, composer, vocalist, and pianist, was a member of the General Conference ad hoc committee for the study of music trends in Black churches.

#### Civil Servants

*Mary Kate Stovall* is currently serving as the mayor of

Hurtsboro, Alabama. Mayor Stovall is owner and director of the Stovall Funeral Home, a family business since 1928. She is also a well-respected news correspondent, retired educator, and humanitarian.<sup>12</sup>

### *Church Administrative Employees*

*Anna Knight* was the first Black woman to serve on the payroll of the General Conference and on local and union conference payrolls.

*Geneva Bryan*, the second Black woman to serve the church prior to the establishment of regional conferences, was invited in 1942 to the General Conference Negro Department as an assistant. The action pertaining to her employment as obtained from the GC Committee minutes is as follows:

“With a view to carrying out the recommendation of the Spring Meeting that a qualified nurse be employed to connect with the General Conference Negro Department to work under its secretary and the General Conference Committee, a committee had been appointed to suggest a nurse for this work. On recommendation of this committee, it was voted to invite Miss Geneva Bryan, of New Orleans, to connect with the General Conference Negro Department as an assistant in the department to promote medical and educational interests among the colored churches.”<sup>13</sup>

*Mary Morrison* served the Northeastern Conference in 1945 as assistant publishing director.

*Vesta Scott* was appointed in 1947 as acting director of the Book and Bible House in the Southwestern Mission, now known as the Southwest Region Conference.

*Helen Wiggan* was appointed director of the Sabbath School Department of the Southwestern Mission in 1947.

*Mabel L. Barber* was appointed assistant publishing director of the Northeastern Conference in 1948.

*Martha M. Ligon* was appointed press relations director of the South Central Conference in 1952.

*Mrs. C. R. Graham* became press relations director of the South Central Conference in 1953.

*Mrs. Doris Meredith* became press relations director of the South Central Conference in 1954.

*Mrs. M. L. Dennis* became the assistant publishing director of the Northeastern Conference in 1957.

*Lona Nell Lea*, in 1958, while employed as a secretary in the treasurer’s office in the Southwest Regional Conference, served as director of the Book and Bible House.

*Mrs. M. L. Davis* began her service as assistant publishing director of the Northeastern Conference in 1961.

Following these pacesetters, an increasing number of Black women are yearly emerging as leaders within their church and society, yet there still seems to be a lack of knowledge about who and where these women are when churches celebrate the accomplishments of contemporary Adventist women. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary

of Adventism, a historical celebration was held at the Sligo SDA Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, on September 24, 1994. One hundred fifty Adventist women who have served the church in various areas of the pastoral ministry were recognized for their accomplishments, 14 of whom were women of color. Eleven of these women were African-Americans, and three were Black women from other divisions. The Black women cited were:

*Annette O’Bannon*, a Bible instructor and soul winner in the Southeastern California Conference.

*Wanda Grimes Davis*, manager of pastoral care and volunteer services at the Regional Medical Center, Memphis, Tennessee. She has been on that staff since 1984.

*Olive J. Hemmings*, teacher of religion at West Indies College in Mandeville, Jamaica.

*Hyveth Williams*, senior pastor of the Boston Temple SDA Church and former associate pastor of the Sligo SDA Church in Takoma Park, Maryland.

*Jane Sally Kiasiong Andriamiarisoa*, associate pastor in the Mauritius Conference.

*Gloria Joshua*, coordinating chaplain at the Southwestern Regional Center in Ontario, Canada.

*Bernardine Archer*, the first SDA woman hired as a prison chaplain, serving in New Haven, Michigan.

*Phylis Mosely Ware*, secretary-treasurer of the Central States Conference. She served as interim president of the conference in 1994, the second woman known to have served in that capacity in some 95 years.

*Ifeoma Kwesi*, pastor of the Oak Park SDA Church in San Diego, California, and former associate pastor of the All Nations SDA Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

*Lolita Spight Reed*, an M.Div. student at the SDA Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

*Laura E. Gonzalez*, lay evangelist in the Caribbean Union Conference.

*Angel Johnson*, an M.Div. student at the SDA Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

*Gloria McLaren*, chaplain at the Hospice of the Florida Suncoast, Largo, Florida.

*Joyce Webb*, chaplain at Christ Hospital Medical Center in Oak Lawn, Illinois.

We must congratulate these Black women who are blazing paths of service in the pastoral ministry. If Sojourner Truth was indeed the first Black woman in her day to “captivate any audience”<sup>14</sup> at camp meetings and other gatherings, scores of Black women can be seen preaching from Adventist Church pulpits today. And generally they are very much welcomed by their congregations.

Black Adventist women are filling positions of leadership in women’s ministries on all levels of the church. More than 20 Black women have served or are currently serving as directors of women’s ministries at the union conference

level, and more than 1,000 Black women have served their local churches in 1995. These women are receiving their training thanks in part to the church's focus on developing the gifts and talents of women.

Women's ministries directors at the church, union, and conference levels provide leadership, encouragement, and training for women to use their unique gifts in the work of God. Black women who currently serve, or have served, as directors of women's ministries at the union and local conference levels are:

*Junell Vance*, Atlantic Union Conference; *Cynthia Prime*, Lake Union Conference; *Jean Parchment*, Canadian Union; *Norwida Marshall*, *Rosa Banks*, Southern Union Conference; *Vivian Barron*, Southern Union Conference.

*Sandra Hayden*, *Gladys Brooks*, Allegheny East Conference; *Donnis Johnson Allen*, Allegheny West Conference; *Doris T. Williams*, *Mirielle St. Pierre*, Northeastern Conference; *Judith Kerr*, Bermuda Conference; *Jean Parchment*, Ontario Conference; *Renata Taylor*, Southwest Region Conference; *Carolyn Monk*, Central States Conference; *Deborah Harris-Evins*, *Carolyn Hinson*, South Atlantic Conference; *Patricia Allen*, *Iris Vanessa Melton*, Southeastern Conference; *Laura Smith*, South Central Conference.

In addition to these women, the Oakwood College Archives lists the names of more than 120 contemporary women who have made stellar accomplishments in volunteer and church employment service covering a gamut of careers. Space does not allow us to list their names and highlight their contributions, but the mission of the church is advanced by the involvement of these and all women in the service of Christ.

We salute all women engaged in volunteer and paid church leadership positions. They contribute in every aspect of church life. Though for the most part they continue to be unacclaimed and unsung, no earthly commendation can excel what will be theirs to experience and enjoy when God's faithful servants everywhere hear the Master say, Well done!

### **Survey of Black Women in Volunteer and Employment Service**

In this section we shall focus on the results of the survey of Black women in volunteer and employment leadership service within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America and their perceptions and projections concerning the social issues and challenges Black women face today.

*Description of the study.* The research was conducted through the auspices of the Center for Human Relations, the research and development component of the North American Division Office of Human Relations. Statistical calculations indicated that 500 women would constitute a

sample strongly representative of Black women in the North American Division, however, a total of 1,000 women were surveyed. This number was divided as follows: 100 women from each of the nine regional conferences and departments of the church who are in volunteer service at the local church level, and 100 women who are employed by the church.

Titled "Black Women in Leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Perceptions and Projections for the Future," this survey was developed entirely by the author, though a few of the items were adapted from a 25-item social science questionnaire titled "Attitudes Toward Women Scale." The reason for this inclusion and adaptation was to determine to what extent attitudes toward Black Adventist women may be related to attitudes of women in general. The majority of the statements dealt with women and their relationship to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The survey consisted of 20 statements, of which five appeared in the section titled "Personal Data" and related to the length of church membership, church position held, employment position held, qualifications for employment or volunteer service, and mechanisms for training.

Fourteen statements appeared in the section titled "Perceptions," to which the women were asked to choose one out of five possible Likert scale responses: "strongly disagree," "somewhat disagree," "uncertain," "somewhat agree," or "strongly agree." This section asked women to list at least five of the most critical challenges that Black SDA women face in the home, community, and church that must be addressed by women, the church, and/or both to enable Black women to participate more fully in the mission of the church. This question generated considerable comment; however, women did offer suggestions and recommendations throughout the study.

Two pilot tests were conducted before the general administration of the survey, one in Nyack, New York, at the Berea Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the other at the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brooklyn, New York. Afterward the instrument was revised sufficiently that in its final form it became a two-page questionnaire rather than a three-page instrument, as was initially prepared.

It should be noted that some respondents were disturbed by certain words used in the survey: "Black," "women in leadership," "women's rights," "women pastors," "Black women versus White women," "ordination," "employment," to name a few. In fact, one respondent was so adamant about the use of the term "employment" that she asserted, "Women should never consider being paid for their service to the church; they should serve the church for free." While one might assume that she meant women should not be paid for their volunteer service, her comment was placed under the section for employment service.

Therefore, because of the strong reservations expressed about the use of certain terms, the final draft of the survey took some drastic turns to make it acceptable to the general audience to whom it would be sent.

Along with the questionnaire, the 1,000 women were sent a stamped, addressed envelope for their convenience in responding promptly. Those who did not respond within three weeks were sent a reminder. Sixty-two percent of the women in volunteer service returned their questionnaires, while 73 percent of the women in active employment service returned theirs. Both levels of response indicate that the concerns addressed on the surveys were of strong interest to Black Seventh-day Adventist women.

*Findings of the study.* Fifty-five percent of the women responding to the survey had been members of the SDA Church for more than 20 years. Almost 100 percent had held some volunteer position in the church at some point in their church lives. Fifty-four different positions were identified, with some of them being mentioned several times. The ones mentioned most were Sabbath school superintendent, church clerk, Sabbath school teacher, and Vacation Bible School director.

Only 8 percent of the women in volunteer service reported that they had also held an employment position within the church. Although secretarial and hospital positions were identified, the majority of these women had worked in church educational institutions. One of the women was a superintendent of schools.

Women were divided as to the level of training available on the job for their position, but agreed that they were well qualified to hold the positions. The provision of training mechanisms or the lack of such did not hinder them from doing satisfactory service.

## Perceptions

The survey first asked the respondents to choose from 14 statements compiled under three specific headings: (1) "Attitudes Regarding Women in the Home Versus Women in Church Employment," (2) "Barriers and Hindrances to Church Employment and Volunteer Service," and (3) "Attitudes of Women About Women Who Serve in Non-traditional Volunteer and Employment Leadership Roles."

*1. Attitudes regarding women in the home versus women in church employment.* Questions 6 and 7 addressed beliefs of women about their role in the home versus their role in church service and church employment. For Christian women, the home is traditionally their first priority. While the prominence of the home has not changed, the respondents didn't see the home front as their only option today.

Seventy-two percent felt that many times only single women were considered for leadership and service positions, forcing married women to concentrate their energies

in the home. They felt that women should be given a choice, and that given that choice, they will know how to balance their energies.

*2. Barriers and hindrances to church employment and volunteer service.* Five major barriers were mentioned that are considered obstacles to successful entry of women into employment and volunteer service: (a) male domination, (b) racism, (c) lack of adequate preparation, (d) absence of information about qualified Black women, and (e) attitudes of men toward women in employment and volunteer service.

*a. Male domination.* Fifty-seven percent agreed that the attitudes of males needed to change if women were going to rise into leadership roles, 30 percent disagreed, and 13 percent were uncertain. Comments ranged from the fear of certain males to share positions with women to the belief that women should not assume roles that have traditionally been held by men. Some women believed the role of women should be restudied by the church from theological, ecclesiological, and financial perspectives, since they believe each to have some bearing on the role of women.

*b. Racism.* Question 8 related to racism being a hindrance to leadership positions in the SDA Church. Forty-four percent agreed that it is a major factor, 30 percent disagreed, and 26 percent were uncertain. While some preference may be given to Black women when one minority is needed on a committee or in employment, respondents felt discriminated against even when competing with White women for positions and committee assignments when it is apparent that one woman is needed to "integrate" a certain setting.

*c. Lack of adequate preparation.* This concern was addressed consistently by an overwhelming number of women. Calling for balance, they expressed concern that women must qualify themselves if they expect eligibility for administrative jobs. Talents must be developed by the Holy Spirit and by other means to which He guides God's willing women.

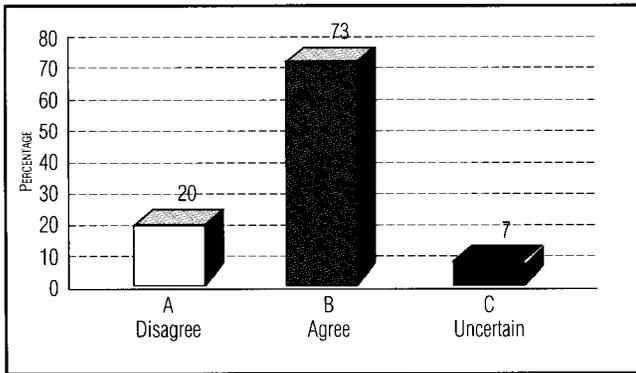
*d. Lack of information about qualified Black women.* This was the major expressed hindrance to the employment of women of color. If no one knows your name when a position becomes available, you are not likely to be considered as a candidate for the job. Women feel that a mechanism should be developed whereby names of qualified Black women can be available where jobs are opening up in the church.

*e. Attitudes of men toward women in employment and volunteer service.* Women generally felt that the attitude of men toward women in administration has to change if there is to be a significant increase in women in church leadership roles in the future. The low comfort level of some men around women in nontraditional positions poses a threat to the success of both genders in places of employment. Respondents suggested that education be provided both men and women so that both genders can grow as the church moves forward.

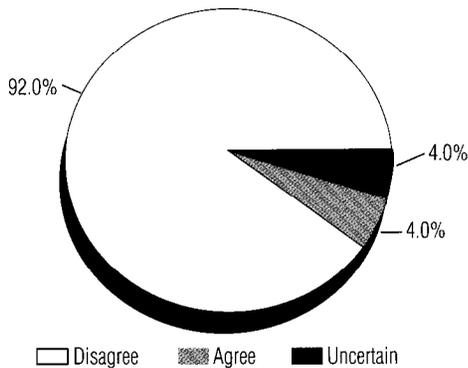
3. *Attitudes of women about women who serve in non-traditional volunteer and employment leadership roles.* Questions 10-19 relate to how women feel about their service and the service of other women. To Question 10, 73 percent of the respondents felt that women, married or single, should assume their rightful place in business and in all professions along with men, 20 percent disagreed, and 7 percent were uncertain (see Chart 1). Responses to Question 11, regarding the intellectual leadership of the church, indicated that 92 percent of the respondents did not believe the intellectual leadership of the church should be largely in the hands of men, 4 percent disagreed and 4 percent were uncertain (see Chart 2).

did not agree that women were less capable of contributing to economic production than men, 8 percent agreed and 4 percent were uncertain (see Chart 4).

**Chart 1**  
Should Women (Married or Single) Assume Their Rightful Place in Business and All the Professions Along With Men?

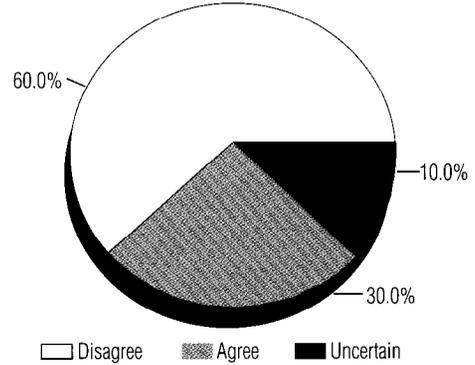


**Chart 2**  
Should the Intellectual Leadership of the Church Be Largely in the Hands of Men?

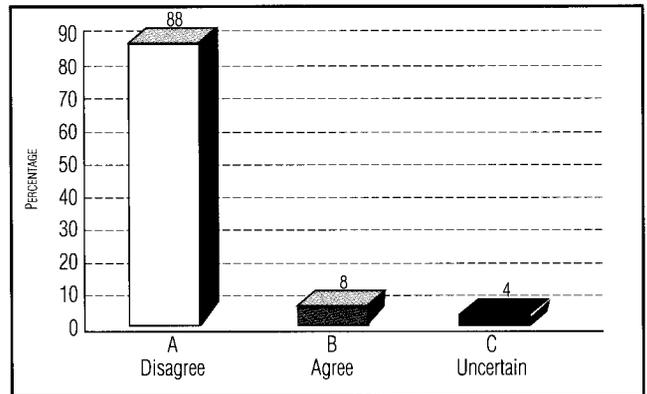


To Question 12, "Do you think there are jobs in which men should be given preference over women in being hired or promoted?" 30 percent agreed, while 60 percent disagreed and 10 percent were uncertain (see Chart 3). In responses to Question 13, 88 percent of the women surveyed

**Chart 3**  
Do You Think There Are Jobs in Which Men Should Be Given Preference Over Women in Being Hired or Promoted?



**Chart 4**  
Should Women on Average Be Regarded as Less Capable of Contributing to Economic Production Than Men?



Question 14 addressed the general concern of women facing hindrances when it comes to employment within the church. Sixty-six percent agreed that Black women faced hindrances, while 24 percent disagreed and 10 percent were uncertain (see Chart 5). Question 15 asked: "Is there untapped leadership among Black females in my local church?" Sixty-two percent agreed, 28 percent disagreed, and 10 percent were uncertain (see Chart 6). To Question 16, "Should women serve their local church in any capacity if elected by their congregation," 96 percent said yes, 2 percent said no, and 2 percent were uncertain (see Chart 7).

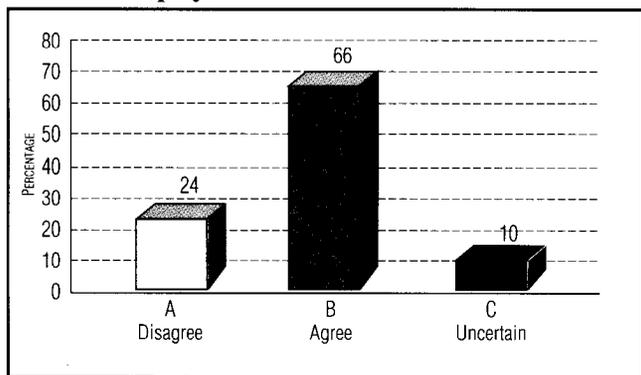
In responding to Question 17, 96 percent of the women also agreed that women should be employed in any capacity if elected or appointed by the appropriate body or church

committee, 2 percent disagreed, and 2 percent were uncertain (see Chart 8). Ninety-six percent of the women agreed that women may speak on religious topics before mixed groups (see Chart 9). When asked if women should use their knowledge, gifts, and skills in the building up of the church (Question 19), 96 percent of the women responded

yes, 2 percent said no, and 2 percent were uncertain (see Chart 10).

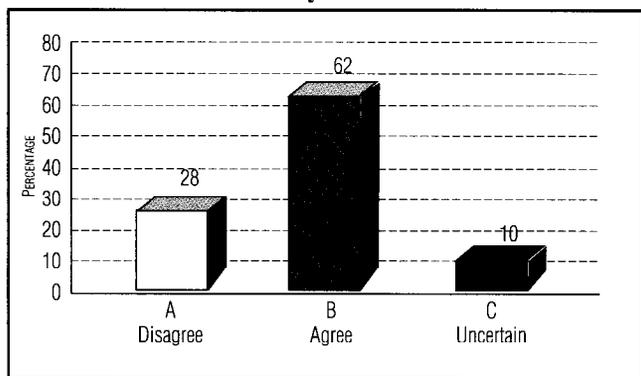
**Chart 5**

**Do Black Women Face Hindrances When It Comes to Employment Within the SDA Church?**



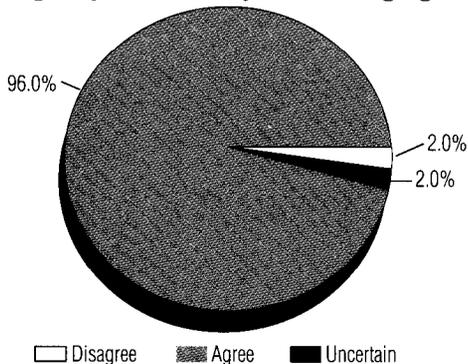
**Chart 6**

**Is There Untapped Leadership Among Black Females in My Local Church?**



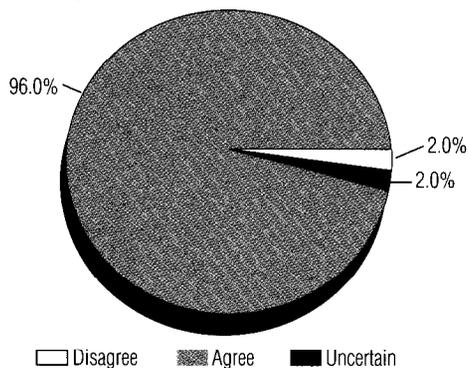
**Chart 7**

**Should Women Serve Their Local Church in Any Capacity if Elected by Their Congregations?**



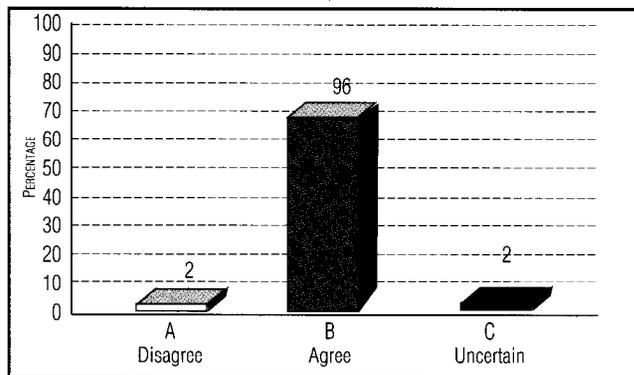
**Chart 8**

**Should Women Be Employed in Any Capacity if Elected or Appointed by the Appropriate Body or Committee of the Church?**



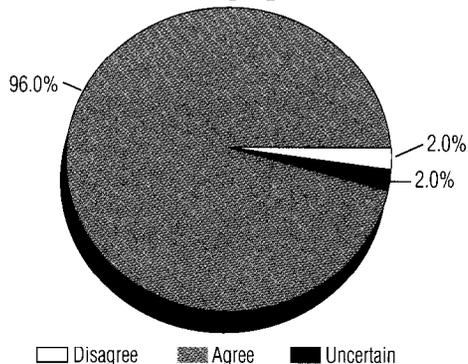
**Chart 9**

**Should Women Speak on Religious Topics Before Mixed Groups, i.e., Preach From the Pulpit, Teach Sabbath School Classes, Give Devotional Talks, Etc.**



**Chart 10**

**Should Women Use Their Knowledge, Gifts, and Skills in the Building Up of the Church?**



No specific question was asked regarding the ordination of women to pastoral ministry. However, women did indicate acceptance of their sisters in nontraditional roles, if they are qualified. Whether or not they wanted them as pastors of their churches was a consideration to which many had not given much thought.

### Projections

In this section of the survey respondents were requested to list five of the most critical challenges that they believe must be addressed by women and/or the church if Black women are to participate fully in the church's mission in the twenty-first century. Sixty-three challenges were mentioned, which are summarized under five major headings: (1) abuse, (2) poverty, (3) education, (4) spirituality, and (5) health.

1. *Abuse.* Spousal, child, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse are critical issues that the church must address. Many Christian women today report abuse at the hands of spouses and relatives, many of whom are members of the church. Also, abuse on the job and in the educational setting continue to be high on the list of key concerns that many women face.

The self-esteem and emotional and physical well-being of Black women are seriously affected when abuse is going on in their lives. One woman wrote: "We no longer live in an age when it is acceptable for men to beat their wives at home and have power over women in employment." Note that the church is already addressing sexual harassment and misconduct, and it is hoped that this focus might at least eliminate much of what may be taking place in the workplace and worship environment.

To be addressed, too, are the attitudes of women toward their role and place in society. Women must believe that God loves them and that they were not created to be dominated by males. One woman confided that it is the will of God that women be beaten by their husbands, that women are "nothing." Another woman stated that "women are not to perform any service in the church—they are only there to lift up men."

This rejection of the equality of women to men in the sight of God is a prevalent attitude among many women. As long as women feel they are second-class citizens, they will not take their place alongside men in the service of the church. Submissiveness and subjection must be addressed by the church in ways that make it clear to women and men that males do not dominate women with God's approval.

2. *Poverty.* Respondents commented that since most Black women come from poverty, they are disadvantaged from the start. The church needs to address this critical issue and find ways to help these women, particularly when it comes to education. Local churches need to provide opportunities for women in poverty. Black single women tend to be

among the poorest in the nation. Homelessness was mentioned as being more common among Black women and their families than most members realize. We as a church must do a better job in this area than we have done in the past.

3. *Education.* The majority of Adventist women worldwide consider illiteracy a number one concern that should be addressed by the church. Included with this challenge is concern about the high rate of illiteracy among Black women, especially young single mothers. In 2 Timothy 2:15 we are admonished to study the Scriptures, but how can a woman study and have spiritual discernment when she cannot read?

With the question of education comes the issue of opportunity. Respondents felt that opportunities to serve the church must be made available through educational opportunities, coupled with some form of affirmative action so that Black women may prepare to avail themselves of openings for employment. Most of the leadership positions of the church require qualifications that women have not possessed in the past. Hence the church should put into place a comfortable entry level for Black women into the work of the church, along with programs to help them grow.

The respondents felt that education is vital and that women who do not prepare should not criticize the church for not opening the doors. They felt that if more women were educated and trained when the opportunity presented itself, they could move readily into positions of church volunteer or employment service.

4. *Spirituality.* According to respondents, the primary goal of women should be to prepare to meet Jesus when He comes. Hence they felt strongly the need to study the Bible more and learn the will of God for their lives. Most saw spirituality at the heart of all their other challenges. One could sense a great commitment on the part of the women in the study to draw closer to God so they can be the best that they can be in their church life, their home life, and their work life.

5. *Health.* In a country that focuses nationally on health care, it is not surprising that Black women would be concerned about health issues. Balancing work and family is a greater challenge today than ever before. Black women are concerned about their physical, mental, and emotional health and that of their families. They believe that the superwoman syndrome must be addressed today so that women will come to realize that they might not be around to enjoy the future if they don't take better care of their bodies today.

Thus the need for balance and rest is a major concern for Black women. Also a health concern is the rising use of drugs and alcohol, which has become a problem the church must address. Of special interest are sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. People are able to speak more

openly today about their health needs. One woman suffering from AIDS openly exposed her life story and begged the church to recognize that there are AIDS victims in the pews who need the church's support.

Many SDA women are afraid to admit the need for special help for fear of being disfellowshipped. Many are seeking help in other places and other churches that they feel are more sensitive to their needs. Many see the need for the church to address the issue of homosexuality in ways that will be more meaningful than simply to tell them that homosexuality is a sin and that AIDS is the penalty one who transgresses pays.

### Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventist Black women have been in church volunteer leadership positions possibly longer than women of other ethnic groups, if you consider volunteer service at the local church level leadership. Where did they get their training? Through males who have believed in equal opportunity and through Women's Day programs that gave them opportunities to be "leaders for the day." Such opportunities gave them the confidence that they needed to serve in areas where they had never served before.

An overwhelming percentage of Black SDA Church membership is and has always been Black women. These are the last days, and God is calling all members to use their gifts and talents to spread the gospel around the world. Black Adventist women today want to find their rightful place in God's great plan of salvation; they want the church to go on record as proclaiming an end to barriers, to lead out in tearing down dividing walls. They want the church to address all issues that could result in a greater mobilization of all segments of SDA Church membership.

Black women don't want to do the work of the Lord with distracted minds; they do not want to do less than their best. For it is in doing our best that we will continue to rise until we reach the level where God wants us to be. "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for [all] His children."<sup>15</sup>

To paraphrase Gen. Colin Powell in his commencement address at Howard University in May 1994, we are privileged to be members of a division like no other in the Adventist Church—a division with opportunities for service available to women like no other division in the General

Conference. What will be asked of us is hard work. Nothing will be handed to us as women, even as Black women. We must use our education and our successes in life to help ourselves and those who are still trapped in cycles of poverty and violence. We must bring them into the fold. We must never forget from whence we came. As we climb upward we must reach back. As we rise we must lift. And above all, we must never lose faith in our church. Its faults are ours to fix, not to criticize.

Black Adventist women of the nineties must make a difference. We must get behind the changes that need to be made so that inclusion and full participation of all neglected groups in this division come true for more of our sisters. We must get behind the changes that must be made to free more of our women by unleashing their productivity. We must get behind the changes that will allow all Black women to experience inclusion and find the happiness that goes with self-respect. To these challenges Black SDA women must give more than lip service.

Black SDA women must sing up, sign up, stand up, pray up, and yes, pay up! But never must a Black woman give up, back up, or shut up, until our church is a loving, caring, and inclusive body in which unity and oneness dwell.

<sup>1</sup> Juergen Moltman, "Nations," in Lloyd Cory, *Quotable Quotations* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1983), p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> Jessie Carney Smith, *Epic Lives: One Hundred Black Women Who Made a Difference* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1993), p. ii.

<sup>3</sup> Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1984), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 110.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin B. Rock, "They Without Us Shall Not Be Made Perfect" (address to the Operation Reach Back Conference, Nov. 3, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> *SDA Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1996), vol. 10, p. 873.

<sup>7</sup> Anna Knight, *Mississippi Girl* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), pp. 208-213.

<sup>8</sup> Mervyn Warren, "The Legacy of Etta Littlejohn," *Adventist Review*, May 24, 1990, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Norwida Marshall, *A Star Gives Light* (Decatur, Ga.: National Graphics, 1989), p. 244.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> From information supplied by Minneola Dixon, Oakwood College archivist.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall, pp. 169-339.

<sup>13</sup> GC Committee Minutes, July 30, 1942, p. 529.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 8.

Next >>>

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND STRUCTURAL ACCOMMODATIONS

by Calvin B. Rock, Ph.D.

## Introduction

In the past those who have defended the principle of structural accommodations (Black/regional conferences) in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists have done so with the following rationale:

1. Black conferences enhance vertical mobility among Black workers.
2. Black conferences enhance lateral mobility among Black workers.
3. Black conferences enhance relevant planning for Black churches and communities.

More and more, however, this approach is being questioned by those who ask:

1. In spite of the role they fulfilled in the more openly segregated society of yesteryear, are we not now compelled by the voice of reason and the principle of unity to dispose of these structural accommodations?
2. Have not the attitudes of society and the church progressed beyond the racist policies that justified Black conferences during the earlier decades of the century?
3. Are not Black conferences an embarrassing statement about the inability of White and Black Adventists to work together?
4. Since heaven will have no structural accommodations, why do we need them down here?
5. If Black conferences are permitted to continue, will we not soon also have Hispanic and Asian conferences?

A key to relaxed objectivity regarding these questions is an understanding of the sociological linchpin of ethnic relations in the United States of America—the sociological reality of cultural pluralism.

The first and major part of this chapter reviews the fact that Black Americans are a clear exemption to the assimilation process that characterizes the acculturation of ethnics in the United States. Black America has functioned in the past, and operates still today, as a separate wheel and not a dissolvable part within the mainstream of American culture.

The second emphasis of this chapter explains Black America's social distance, caused by the push of discrimination and the pull of cultural identity, which has eventuated in demographics that necessitate accommodations in gospel programming.

The third focus is on the view that the New Testament provides as a remarkable parallel to the issue at hand and that its model of organization is relevant for our conclusions.

## Patterns of Acculturation

Social scientists generally agree that the three major theories or models of assimilation in American society have been those of Angloconformity, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism.

*Angloconformity*, a term introduced by Steward G. and Mildred Wiese Cole in their book *Minorities and the American Promise* (1954), denotes complete renunciation of the ancestral culture of the immigrants in favor of the behavior and values of the Anglo-Saxon core group. Angloconformity has total faith in the desirability of maintaining English-oriented patterns as dominant and standard in American life, and embraces related attitudes of "Nordic" and "Aryan" superiority.

No less a liberal soul than Thomas Jefferson helped lay the foundation for this social axis when he wrote, concerning immigrants: "They will bring with them the principles of the government they leave, imbibed in their early youth. These principles, with their language, they will transmit to their children. In proportion to their numbers, they will share with us the legislation. They will infuse into it their spirit, warp and bias its direction and render it a heterogeneous, incoherent, distracted mass."<sup>1</sup>

Samuel Rea, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, expressed similar sentiments when he said in a leaflet published in the early part of this century: "They [the foreign born] must be induced to give up the language, customs, and methods of life which they have brought with them across the ocean, and adopt instead the language, habits, and customs of this country, and the general standards and ways of American living."<sup>2</sup>

The "melting pot" theorists differ from the Angloconformists in that they opt for biological as well as cultural merger. They envisage all immigrant groups and minorities as eventually blending into the indigenous Anglo-Saxon American type. Angloconformity was the assimilation ideology of America's earliest settlers, but the melting pot theory has been a competing strain from the eighteenth century onward.

Ralph Waldo Emerson gave this theory its clearest expression when in 1845 he wrote in his journal: "Man is the most composite of all creatures. . . . Well, as in the old burning of the Temple of Corinth, but the melting and intermixture of silver and gold and other metals as new compound more precious than any, called Corinthian brass, was formed; so in this continent, asylum of all nations, the energy of Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, Cossacks, and all the European tribes, of the Africans and of the Polynesians, will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting-pot of the Dark Ages."<sup>3</sup>

Frederick Jackson Turner, best known for his book *Frontier Hypothesis*, became renowned in sociological circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for his bold predictions of cross-fertilization and "amalgamation of all American stock," which he hoped would be productive of a new national stock and world brotherhood.

In 1908 a man named Israel Zongwill produced the drama *The Melting Pot*. In this play, very popular at that time, David Quixano, the young Russian Jewish immigrant who falls in love with a beautiful, cultured Gentile girl, delivers himself, saying: "Yes, East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross—how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup>

The romantic idealism of those liberals (White and Black) who have advocated the foregoing theories have, it must be admitted by all fair-minded individuals, failed insofar as Blacks are concerned. That the realities of assimilation for Blacks in America have been neither Angloconformity nor the melting pot is abundantly demonstrable.

The fact is that neither system was designed with Blacks in mind. Some Blacks have gained Angloconformity both culturally and biologically, but always with the risk that news of their African ancestry, be it ever so distant, will be leaked, thus locking them perceptually into the Black minority no matter how indistinguishable their features from those of the "melted" majority.

A few theorists (Emerson, etc.) did consciously include the Black race in their design for cultural assimilation, but most of the literature in our formative days shows no concern for inclusion of Blacks in Angloconformity or biological melting. As the owners of slaves could preach that "God has made of one blood all nations" and pray "Our Father, which art in heaven," and never perceive the Black race as part of the family, so could generations of their descendants theorize about a "melted America" and take for granted that the Black race was something separate and apart.

Not that Blacks haven't tried. Inundated by the psychological and material rewards of meeting the Anglo-Saxon

"ideal type" of facial features, hair texture, and skin color, they have bleached their faces, straightened their hair, and made Madame Walker, the originator of cosmetics that mute the African identity, rich by buying anything thought helpful in approximating the Anglo-Saxon model.

Further, Blacks have sought to infiltrate or integrate every estate of society in hopes of sharing the American dream. With the notable exceptions of the Marcus Garveys and Elijah Muhammads, Black leaders, in their basic preachments in the decades since freedom, have acquiesced to one or the other of these two theories. Like the hopeful suitor, Blacks have constantly rationalized in demeaning devaluational comparison only to discover that nature prohibits physical conformity without literal disappearance as a race.

As we cross over into the twenty-first century, it is clear that after 250 years of slavery, 90 years of Jim Crow, and five decades of "White flight," the invitation to melt was never really meant for Blacks and that, in spite of what the law now says, massive "grass-roots" assimilation is for them not a likely reality in America.

The third association pattern is cultural pluralism. In such matters as politics, religion, and language, cultural pluralism is an acceptable and legitimate American expression. And while the constitutional forebears resisted the idea of most other kinds of permanent diversity, cultural pluralism has existed from our very beginning in ethnic enclaves built by the various waves of newcomers to these shores. Cultural pluralism has always been a reality in American society.

Although evident long before World War I, it was about that time that John Dewey articulated the principle of cultural pluralism before the National Education Association. Norman Hopgood, a prominent author of that day, wrote of America as "a democracy which tends to encourage differences, not monotony, a place where we ought not to think of all people being alike."<sup>5</sup> Randolph Bourne, a contemporary of Dewey and Hopgood, contributed to the movement when he spoke of a "transnational" America, a nation having threads of living and potent cultures striving blindly to weave themselves into a novel international nation, the first the world has seen.<sup>6</sup>

But it was Horace Kallen, a Harvard-educated philosopher whose articles titled "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," appearing in *The Nation*, championed the cause of cultural pluralism. In his articles he spoke of "cooperative harmonies of European civilization," "affirmation to be different," "creation as a result of diversities," and "the American way—the way of orchestration."

Kallen's happy state of relations has not been fully realized, but his general theory has. America is highly pluralistic. In terms of religion, we have a wide variety of denominations; in terms of politics, we have two major parties and several minor parties; and in terms of demography,

or living patterns, we still have Polishvilles, Russianvilles, Little Italy, Dutch Pennsylvania, Chinatown, Little Harvard, and the Irish side of Boston, where rudiments of the lifestyle of early immigrants are still very evident. Will Herberg, in his book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, describes the process whereby most immigrant groups (vis-à-vis individuals) are assimilated as the “transmuting pot,” in which most elements of regional ethnic lifestyles are subsumed into the mainstream of society, but certain cultural enclaves remain as exceptional but impressive phenomena.

But for minorities identified by color—that is, Blacks, Indians, Mexicans, and Orientals—cultural pluralism is not occasional; it is the overwhelming reality, and the darker the skin, the more obvious that reality becomes.

What has guaranteed the individuality of all minorities identifiable by color (especially Blacks) are the boundary-maintaining mechanisms that the majority core group imposes upon them. In his book *Minorities*, B. Eugene Griessman presents two major mechanisms designed to hold minorities out of the core culture: (1) physical boundaries (zoning and political restrictions) and (2) social boundaries such as sanctions against private clubs and intermarriage.<sup>7</sup>

The boundary-maintenance mechanisms that are largely responsible for Black America’s hardy individuality have resulted in what social scientists call “structural separation,” a situation in which secondary contacts—the kind one has with the mail carrier, the bus driver, or the other person in the lunch line—may abound, but not primary contacts, such as with church members, club members, or members within a family unit. Primary contacts between the races are exceptions rather than the rule, first, because they are born of “voluntary” relationships, not involuntary relationships. Second, it isn’t possible for the masses of Blacks to move from their inner-city locations into White churches and neighborhoods. Third, in those instances in which Blacks do join a neighborhood or church or club in significant numbers, White flight generally results.

Since it is by means of extensive primary contacts only that societal assimilation is possible, and since it is by societal assimilation only that Angloconformity or the melting pot can take place, cultural pluralism is predictably here to stay.

Restrictions upon educational, occupational, geographic, and social mobility have, in addition to minimizing the exposure of Blacks to circumstances that might have dissipated their tendency to group, forced them to structure primary relationships chiefly within their own subsociety, thus strengthening and perpetuating their ethnicity.

Migrdal, Steiner, and Ross (1944), and later Bobchuk, Thompson, and Orum (1962 and 1966), describe this as the “compensation hypothesis”: “Since Negroes are deprived of the usual social and psychological satisfactions of everyday life, they are compelled to seek such satisfaction collec-

tively through other means. Opportunities for association are restricted by explicit or tacit observance of segregation in public places of entertainment. The oppressive atmosphere of slum dwellings also does not offer a congenial environment for social activity. Quite naturally, then, clubs and associations become focuses for Negroes’ social life.”<sup>8</sup>

It may well be, however, that cultural pluralism is not altogether the result of external forces. Ethnicity may be an innate characteristic of humans. Weber talks about humanity’s consciousness of common origin, Geerty speaks of “primordial group attachment,” and Isaacs writes of “basic membership groups,” all hinting that even if a society could be totally receptive to all immigrants and minorities, there would exist a degree of ethnic communality, that “birds of a feather flock together.”

### The Morality of Structural Accommodations

Clearly, ethnic difference for Blacks is very real. More than merely distinguishable by skin color, Blacks are a distinct social and cultural unit, a historic group for whom color is an identifying symbol that intensifies their sense of solidarity. Stated otherwise, because of both the negative push of structural separation and the positive pull of group attachments, Blacks have developed a distinct, compartmentalized, subnation status in America.

This situation has strengthened the need for Black churches, in which music, preaching, and programming fit their tastes; for Black families, in which socialization of children and companionship of parents can take place along sociocultural lines of commonly shared values; and for Black higher education, in which the student can, if one chooses, earn an intellectual passport to respectability in a familiar atmosphere.

There is a pronounced migration of Blacks into the middle class of America, which gives the appearance of a weakening or dissipation of Black cultural solidarity. That, however, is a surface view. The truth is that most Blacks whose education and income provide transport out of the lower-class status of their origins do not join the “conformed” or “melted” middle class of majority America. In most cases it is the Black middle or upper class to which their upper social mobility eventuates. Further, it cannot be overlooked that the Black lower class, generally locked in the concrete jungles of large metropolitan areas, are themselves not only perceptually distant from the White middle classes of America, but increasingly estranged from the developing middle class of their own ethnic group.

While racism is chiefly responsible for the creation and maintaining of this social distance, it is neither racist nor capitulation to program our gospel endeavors in the light of this very obvious and overwhelming reality. Neither the death knell to “separate but equal” (1954) nor the mercurial

growth of the Black middle class in recent decades has changed the facts as outlined by the Kerner Commission: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one White—separate and unequal."<sup>9</sup>

In this connection, structural integration—the kind that allows Blacks to be placed in prominent jobs and provides them access to public accommodations—must not be confused with massive, personal, social integration. The masses of Blacks still live together, worship together, study together, and play together, thus perpetuating a culture distinctly different from that of majority America. More Blacks are now living in isolation in America than in 1954, when the concept of "separate but equal" schooling for Blacks was overturned by the United States Supreme Court.

Those who would ignore America's historic and present realities and hold doggedly to their dreams of cultural oneness in this country would do well to consider the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who, in his book *Ethics*, makes the following illuminating comment on "acting in correspondence with reality": "For the responsible man the given situation is not simply the materials on which he is to impress his idea or his programme by force, but this situation is itself drawn into the action and shares in giving form to the deed. It is not an 'absolute good' that is to be realized; but on the contrary, it is part of the self-direction of the responsible agent that he prefers what is relatively better to what is relatively worse and that he perceives that the 'absolute good' may sometimes be the very worst. The responsible man does not have to impose upon reality a law which is alien to it, but his action is in the true sense in accordance with reality."<sup>10</sup>

Those who think that the racial and political patterns of the church are different from those of the larger society are either naive or blithely unaware of history's teachings in this regard. To assume that structural accommodations in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination are evil ignores the fact that structuring to the best good of those who are apparently irrevocably locked into second-class citizenry is better than programming "as if" the realities of socially separate cultures did not exist.

Cultural pluralism should not be seen as separatism (i.e., exclusion of other ethnics from one's church or conference or family); this position views desegregation or an open society as essentially good. Neither should it be seen as ignoring the need for social contact and understanding. Cultural pluralism neither prevents fraternity nor discourages contact. It simply organizes what already exists—"grassroots" diversity—for the sake of gospel proclamation.

Many who believe that the government's enforcement of civil rights during the last decades of the twentieth century is the beginning of Angloconformity or the melting pot experience for Blacks in America should reexamine the

Kerner Commission's report. The battles in Boston's Irish and Catholic communities, Chicago's suburban wars against open housing, and the rapidly increasing (not declining) density of America's Black ghettos give ample reason to believe that cultural pluralism is here to stay.

Those Whites and Blacks who wish to hold on to their dreams of an assimilated society are entitled to the privilege, but must the work of God suffer while we vainly work and wait for societal realities to change? Those who say that Blacks should surrender structural accommodations for the purpose of energizing Whites with Black enthusiasm, or forcing them to deal with Black primary relationships, or proving that the gospel does away with cultural differences, must remember that charity begins at home. Much work remains to be done in the Black community and the Black church. If Black leaders and members were to surrender these units, they would be disobeying the scriptural command to energize Jerusalem and the immediate community before going to Judea and Samaria and the surrounding ethnic provinces.

Black conferences are a type of accommodation, but in Adventism there is nothing new about that. The Black constituency is accommodated at union elections, when after considerable negotiation agreements are wrung out that provide x number (a quota) of positions for Blacks; to ensure this, only names of Blacks are placed in nomination (the one way, it seems, to guarantee success in secret ballots in which the majority votes). Black Adventists are accommodated at General Conference sessions, where, for the same reason, Black North American Division delegates on the nominating committee meet to care for those positions in the NAD generally reserved for Blacks. The two unions in the United States that do not have Black conferences accommodate their Black constituency by hiring Black affairs coordinators; sponsoring Black convocations, camp meetings, retreats, etc.; printing newsletters for Black members; and having Black workers' meetings.

These and other measures have been employed with good intentions, but don't solve the problem. Blacks are still unhappy, because much of such structuring is obviously contrived and persons elected under these circumstances are often restricted in authority.

Black conferences are thus not morally retrogressive. They do not exist because of lack of love or retaliation for past injustices. They are not ego trips for power-hungry people. Nor are they structural withdrawals from the mainstream. They are, rather, a practical, dignified way of addressing serious logistical needs. Black conferences admit to cultural pluralism inside and outside the church. Blacks are not a part of the American process of Angloconformity or the melting pot, and candid acceptance of this reality via this authentic structuring of the gospel work is infinitely better than expenditure of energy and resources in denial.

Segregation says, “We’re better, so ours will be an I-it relationship” (racism); ethnocentricity says, “We’re right, so do it our way” (Angloconformity); romantic idealism says, “We love each other, so let’s all pattern the idéal construct” (the melting pot); cultural pluralism says simply, “We’re different, so we will accept and respect our cultural variety and program for the best good of the people affected; we will be comfortable in our diversity.” Cultural pluralism does not deny spiritual unity. What it does deny is the wisdom and justice of sacrificing all the good that Black conferences provide in the determined effort to fulfill a view of unity that circumstances contradict.

One might, of course, argue that what our church really needs is a commitment to alter the basic situation, to attack so vigorously the existing social systems that the body of Christ will exhibit, in contrast to, and as an example for, the public, a truly assimilated society. That task is highly unlikely considering the perceptual separateness of the races and the density of Black ethnicity. Further, it is unnecessary considering Milton Gordon’s definition of pluralism as “a complete and honest respect for culture variation. . . . The right of diverse cultures to exist side-by-side and to preserve whatever they wish as long as they do not interfere with the rights of others.”<sup>11</sup>

Or better yet, we might consider Eugene Griessman’s definition: “Relations among groups can be visualized as a continuum, with separation at one end and complete assimilation at the other. Pluralism is located between these poles. Pluralism implies pride of group, but it probably is true of groups, as for individuals, that respect for others is impossible without self-esteem. Admittedly, group pride can lead to tribalism; but it need not if it can be coupled with tolerance.”<sup>12</sup>

### The New Testament Model

This positive concept as applied to church organization is explicated in various ways in the New Testament writings of Paul. Analyzing Paul’s thought regarding early church structure, John Yoder states: “In sum: the fundamental issue was that of the social form of the church. Was it to be a new and inexplicable kind of community of both Jews and Gentiles, or was it going to be a confederation of a Jewish Christian sect and a Gentile one? Or would all the Gentiles have first to become Jews according to the conditions of pre-Messianic proselytism?”<sup>13</sup>

Paul’s counsel regarding the relationship within the church of dialectical elements—circumcised and uncircumcised, slave and master, bond and free, parent and child, male and female, husband and wife, Jew and Gentile—is a recurring reminder of his attitude regarding legitimate plurality.

What is evident, first, is that *Paul consistently recognized the diversity among believers in matters of culture as well as roles and functions.* This is demonstrated forcefully by his

running polemic with Judaism (Judaistic Christianity in particular). As evidenced in the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans, he honors the fact that there are no national, social, racial, or other anthropological prerequisites imposed by the gospel and that it embraces all classes (see Gal. 3:28). Paul’s use of “temple,” “household,” and particularly “body” as imagery in addressing their relationships speaks eloquently to the unity in diversity principle. Characteristic of the apostle’s language in this regard are his repeated references to the “many” (1 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 12:5).

*Second, rather than encourage the existing structure toward a circumstance itself alien to reality, the apostle’s thrust was that of reevaluating or reinterpreting existing roles and relationships.*

What is remarkable is not that Jews and Gentiles experienced meaningful integration at the level of primary relationships; this simply did not happen. Nor, as this paper seeks to demonstrate, is it likely to occur meaningfully today with the strongly contrasting cultures we have examined.

What is most remarkable, however, is that in the early church widely differing cultures were uniformly affected by the gospel, that Jews and Gentiles were separate and autonomous culturally and to a great extent structurally, while yet maintaining consensus and unity in doctrine and brotherhood.

The structurally integrated denominations that today house the 10 percent of Black Christians who do not belong to Black-administered denominations need not apologize because they recognize the right of that minority to maintain its culture and the resultant need of that minority to exercise modified self-determination. The New Testament is a constant reminder that such a posture does not prevent harmony in matters of institutional purpose, doctrinal unity, and, as in the case of the good Samaritan story, full fellowship when contact is generated.

*Third, Paul’s Gentile focus accommodated an organizational emphasis quite distinct from the emphasis of those who evangelize among the Jews.*

Hans Kung, in *The Church*, makes a persuasive case for the existence of two major forms of organizational development within the New Testament church: (1) the Jerusalemic-Palestinian conception seen in the book of Acts, which was developed by the original disciples and followed a constitution that tended toward presbyterial or episcopal forms and (2) the Corinthian-Gentile conception, which was structured in Pauline Epistles and tended toward lines of charismatic leadership. Kung states: “It is necessary to accentuate the contrasts in the New Testament constitution of the church, and to stress certain features, in order to be able to draw important distinctions in our examination of the historical reality.”

Having drawn these distinctions, Kung gives four com-

mon features that he views as uniting the idea of ministry exercised by special appointment (Jerusalem-Palestinian) with that of one inspired by the free gift of the Spirit (Corinthian-Gentile), and that allowed diverse, distinctive operations to coexist within the church: (1) belief in the original witness and commission of the apostles, (2) faith in the gospel, including receiving of baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper, (3) the spiritual nature of all the ministries of the church, and (4) the subjection of the church's ministries to the discernment of the community of believers.

Kung concludes: "These are the common features which enabled Jerusalem and Corinth, the Jewish and Gentile Christian churches to live together in one church rather than being mutually exclusive; despite the very considerable differences in the constitutions of these churches, they were in communion with each other through the communion of the Lord's Supper. These common features explain why, when the later church came to decide on the New Testament canon, it accepted and included non-Pauline as well as Pauline writings (or alternatively included Pauline as well as non-Pauline writings), as a valid and genuine testimony of its own origins. Finally, these common features are the reason why the church of the present does not have to make an exclusive choice between two alternatives. If an exclusive choice of this kind had been made by those responsible for drawing up the New Testament canon, it would have ignored the history of the church, in which both kinds of constitution coexisted and indeed increasingly influenced one another; and to make an exclusive choice would again be to ignore the history of the church's origins."<sup>14</sup>

*Fourth, the apostle taught that the church's witness of unity in diversity is its primary critique of society's social injustice.* By use of the word "body," Paul denotes the necessity of a visible manifestation of the unity of the church (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:4, 5; Eph. 4:16). We are not simply the "many," but the "many in one." "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ (1 Cor. 12:12).

Again quoting Kung: "It is not necessary for this diversity and variety to breed dissensions, enmity, and strife. In certain cases, some characteristics or individual peculiarity can be sacrificed for the sake of peace and love, and mutual concessions made. As long as all have the one God, Lord, Spirit, and faith and not their own private God, Lord, Spirit, and faith, all is in order." "Unity is only endangered by co-existence which is neither cooperation nor support, but basically a hostile confrontation. It is not the differences in themselves which are harmful, but only excluding and exclusive differences."<sup>15</sup>

Thus the very existence of the church wherein Jews and Gentiles who walked formerly after the beggarly elements of the world lived together in peace is a proclamation of the

Lordship of Christ. Praising God, singing psalms, and sharing a common hope (but not a common culture), each group had its lifestyle leavened by the common denominator of the gospel of Christ. It was this that made the early church a spectacle, the visible manifestation of that mystery that for ages had remained hidden, not their having developed a homogeneous lifestyle and/or organization.

Not to be overlooked, of course, is the need for ethnic cross-cultural fertilization. The races have much to teach each other. Does this model of modified autonomy accommodate a quality of social exchange that will permit mutual betterment. Yes, but only by well-defined and highly intentional planning and implementation. The "sixteen points" document, developed as an alternative to Black unions during the debates on that subject in the late sixties and throughout the seventies, was such an attempt. Its provisions, however, were never well popularized, and are now largely forgotten. Perhaps as we launch into the twenty-first century, the time has come when another attempt should be made. If so, there are a number of practical considerations available (see appendix).

The principle of action that allows the diverse parts to live in harmony between the extremes of discrimination and amalgamation is love, a gift that converts simple accommodation into glorified companionship, because it involves what Yoder calls "radical subordination" of each to the other. This peaceful coexistence of disparate cultures who enjoyed a spiritual unity within the household of faith was, in the absence of alternatives, the most revolutionary demonstration available to the early believers, and was the natural result of being in Christ. "When anyone is united to Christ," Paul explains, "there is a new world; . . . a new order has already begun" (2 Cor. 5:17, NEB). Thus slaves and servants render faithful service, but are received as companions; the Christian Jews cannot force the converted Gentiles to be circumcised; the Gentiles will cease eating meat offered to idols. All will avoid the appearance of evil.

Furthermore, leaders of the various ethnic groups can go to Jerusalem for counsel and debate, and return to their separate cultural enclaves diverse in folkways and mores, but one in faith and belief. Not an altogether surprising development in the history of a people whose foundation was laid at Pentecost, when each heard the gospel "in his own language" (Acts 2:6).

Given existing social and political structures, as well as the church's eschatological expectations—"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17)—we can understand why the apostle had no concept of any premillennial revolution of the social order. An important question for us is Should we?

The church's alternatives for social protest have greatly

expanded since Paul's day, but the signs of the times make even less probable space for the changing of the social order toward which we must program. That fact makes even more reasonable our satisfaction with being a people of spiritual oneness while honoring cultural and, when necessary, structural diversity.

### Conclusion

Thus considered, structural accommodations such as Black conferences or Hispanic conferences or that of any other ethnic or racial group grown large enough to have this need are not resigned accommodations to the tenants of racism. They are rather a bold, practical process, the actualization of which in the contemporary community of faith makes us, as it did the early church, a model of "unity in diversity" and a flaming protest against the immorality of indefensible separatism on the one hand, and

unachievable assimilation on the other.

<sup>1</sup> In Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: 1964), pp. 90, 91.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene B. Griessman, *Minorities* (Hinsdale, Ill.), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> In Charles M. George and Gaitz Antunes, "Ethnicity and Participation: A Study of Mexican-American Blacks and Whites," *American Journal of Sociology* 80, No. 5 (1975): 1194.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: 1968), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: 1955), pp. 227, 228.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Griessman, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: 1994), p. 220.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Kung, *The Church* (Garden City, N.Y.: 1976), pp. 536, 538, 539.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 356, 357.

## APPENDIX

### PROPOSAL FOR CROSS-CULTURAL FERTILIZATION

#### I. Local Churches

	<b>Present Practice</b>	<b>Suggested Practice</b>
<i>Membership:</i>	All churches open to membership to all races	Present practice to be continued.
<i>Educational Facilities:</i>	All elementary schools open to enrollment to all races	Present practice to be continued.
<i>School Boards:</i>	Voluntary union of churches of different local conferences in same city to support local city elementary schools and high schools	This effort should be intensified with the encouragement and advice of the Union Conference and the North American Division Department of Education and reports should be made by that department to NAD year-end meetings.
<i>Community Fellowship:</i>	Spasmodic and rare attempts at joint efforts in public evangelism, inner-city (ghetto) welfare efforts, etc.	This effort should be intensified with the encouragement and advice of the North American Division department that heads that function and that reports should be made to each NAD year-end meeting.
<i>Spiritual Fellowship:</i>	Occasional joint programs and endeavors	That there be one citywide love feast (Communion service) per year jointly conducted by the local pastorate, that it replace one of the three regular Communion services, and that, as far as facilities will allow, it be rotated among the various church buildings. Where no existing facility is deemed large enough, an adequate facility be borrowed or rented.

#### II. Local Conferences

	<b>Present Practice</b>	<b>Suggested Practice</b>
<i>Boarding Academies:</i>	All academies open to all races	Present practice to be continued.
<i>Academy School Boards:</i>	Membership almost exclusively those of conference operating academies	Where significant numbers of Blacks are in attendance, the president and/or educational secretary of the Black local conference concerned be invited to attend as advisors.
<i>Ministerial Fellowships:</i>	Spasmodic attempts to join in pulpit exchanges and organized pastoral discussions	This effort be intensified under the advice and direction of the General Conference Ministerial Association and that reports be made at the Annual Council of the North American Division on administration each fall.
<i>Black Conference Financial Responsibility to Higher Education:</i>	Specific percentage of tithe allotted to the college operated by the union of which conference is a member	That since Blacks will continue to attend these institutions in significant numbers, this level of support to the college involved be continued.

#### III. Union Conferences

	<b>Present Practice</b>	<b>Suggested Practice</b>
<i>Institutional Boards:</i>	All local conference presidents are members of hospital, publishing house, college, and university boards within a given union territory.	Black local conference presidents should be appointed to membership on all institutional boards that operate in those states or adjacent areas where said operation is likely to affect Black patronage.

#### IV. North American Division

*Education in Cultural Awareness:*

**Present Practice**  
Applied in cases where requests are made or problems have arisen

**Suggested Practice**  
That a "cultural awareness" department be established for the purpose of originating and fostering programs of brotherhood throughout the Seventh-day Adventist community of North America. Such a department or commission should consist of at least three persons—one White, one Black, and one other minority. At least one of these three persons shall be a female. The commission or department should be tenured and elected or appointed as is any other group reporting directly to the president of the North American Division. This commission might accomplish its work by such means as presentations at workers' meetings on all conference levels, programs in institutions (i.e., college campuses and hospitals), visits to camp meetings and special seminars for leadership on all levels. The commission or department should be financed so as to be able to produce varied literature, films, newsletters, and perhaps an intercultural journal or magazine.

#### V. General Conference

*Department of Black Affairs:*

**Present Practice**  
None

**Suggested Practice**  
There should be reinstatement of the Regional Department, with the responsibility to assist, coordinate, and advise the North American Division in the direction of the Black Seventh-day Adventist Church structure in North America.

*Oakwood College:*

**Present Practice**  
Oakwood College is a General (World) Conference institution administered and financed by that body.

Present practice to be continued.

*Department of Education Cross-cultural Initiatives:*

**Present Practice**  
None

The North American Division Department of Education should coordinate a program of long weekend student exchanges between Oakwood College and its companion institutions in Canada and the United States. This program should be especially directed at college seniors who are likely future leaders of the church (teachers, ministers, etc.). The objective is to provide meaningful interaction between the races on our campuses.

1. The long weekend shall involve a visit of Friday through Monday by a selected number of Oakwood students to the various other schools and vice versa.
2. Priority should be given to institutions that have minimal Black enrollment, such as Walla Walla College, Union College, and Canadian Union College, but all schools shall be included.

*Cross-cultural Component of Ministerial Internships:*

**Present Practice**  
None

One of the stipulations of the General Conference internship plan should be that the local conferences be required to appoint no less than 50 percent of its General Conference interns to a period of apprenticeship in a conference not of its majority racial makeup for a period of not less than 30-60 days. This apprenticeship may be implemented in the local church or the local conferences. Salaries and expenses shall be cared for by the sponsoring conference. Failure to comply would result in the discontinuation of General Conference internship funds.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION

by Ricardo B. Graham, D.Min.

## Introduction

One lingering challenge that will continue to cast a shadow upon the Adventist denomination in the twenty-first century is the phenomenon of racism. In an attempt to be authentic biblical Christians, Black Adventists must summon the courage to confront racism in society and in the church, to strive for racial reconciliation.

Interesting things are happening among some Christian groups relative to racial reconciliation in America. In 1995 the 15.6 million-member Southern Baptist Convention apologized publicly to African-Americans for not opposing slavery and for not struggling against its own legacy of racism. On May 30, 1996, the Baptist World Alliance convened a Summit on Racial Reconciliation in Orlando, Florida. Black and White Pentecostal churches have admitted publicly to their racist attitudes of the past and are working to merge their separate denominations from top to bottom. The interdenominational Christian men's group Promisekeepers has boldly announced a goal of bringing men of all races together.

Yet our beloved Adventist Church is largely silent—internally and externally—on the issue of racial reconciliation. Today Christianity in general, and Adventism in particular, is separated by an invisible wall of race. Blacks and Whites have been coconspirators in the dividing and weakening of the church by allowing this wall to continue to exist. From the General Conference to the pulpit, race divides. The result is a weakened church with a weakened witness to a sick and dying world.

This chapter reviews a classic definition of racism, documents its prevalence in our society as well as our church, explores why it appears to be comfortably at home in the remnant church, and suggests viable methods to expunge it, under God, from Adventism.

## Definition of Racism

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines racism as "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race."<sup>1</sup>

Racism appears to be born of prejudice and ethnocentrism—prejudice being a preconceived idea or an opinion

that exists in the mind without adequate information, and ethnocentrism being the idea that one's own group, race, or ethnicity is the standard by which all others are judged. While prejudice is often based on ignorance, the practitioners of prejudice, when given adequate information contrary to the position held, are not inclined to change their viewpoints. Prejudice forms the basis of racism.

Racism is an ideology of superiority or supremacy that places a negative meaning on biological differences that results in unequal treatment purely on the basis of the accident of birth. It uses skin color, hair texture, and other physical features to determine the value of a person. Racism allows for the domination and control of one class or group over another, because of one class or group being thought inherently superior and the other inherently inferior.

"Racism is a system of domination and oppression. The sin of racism of the society and church in which we participate is that which places an uncritical priority on being white. Because whites control most of the organizations, major financial institutions and levers of power in our society, white racism is a special curse of our society. Institutional racism can be understood as the way organizational, institutional, societal, political, economic, and even religious structures and activities serve to perpetuate racial injustice apart from the question of individual attitudes or intentions. Intended or not, the mechanisms and functions of these entities may serve to perpetuate racism."<sup>2</sup>

Racism is overt and covert; it is maintained both consciously and unconsciously by all systems in our society—legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, and military. It confers particular privileges on the dominant group. It also interacts with two other noxious "isms" designed to oppress and exploit large groups of people: classism and sexism. Regardless of educational attainments, vocational abilities, or skill or talent level, the victims of racism are excluded because of the color of their skin.<sup>3</sup>

George D. Kelsey presents a more encompassing definition of racism: "Racism is a faith. It is a form of idolatry. It is an abortive search for meaning. Racism is especially problematical not only because of the peculiar nature of the racist faith, but because it is a 'Trojan horse' within organized Christianity and Christian civic communities."<sup>4</sup>

Kelsey states further that racism cannot exist without the ability to personify itself. There must be some system or apparatus in place to actualize its ideas, for “hands and feet” to carry out its will. This is accomplished through the manipulation and control of such societal institutions as the military, the body politic, and those religious and educational entities that are under the control of the dominant people of any given society.

A rather modern phenomenon, racism rose out of the technical, economic, and political realities of colonialism and slavery, facilitated by the religious intolerance of the Middle Ages. Christians and Muslims attempted to subjugate and enslave each other, seeing one another as infidels.

The dividing line was applied to Africa, with dark-skinned people being the out group, not because of their skin color, but because they were thought to be without religion, morals, or law. The fact that Africans were not White was not the primary issue at that time. Africans were enslaved because they were neither Christian nor Muslim. This enslavement was sanctioned by the Catholic Church; in the fifteenth century Pope Nicholas V issued a papal bull permitting Portuguese slave traders to enslave “the enemies of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> This enslavement was to be followed by conversion and emancipation.

The shift from religious intolerance to racial superiority was a gradual one. Shifting political-economical realities in Europe necessitated an evolution in the rationale for slavery, as the Christian-heathen concept was not broad enough to legitimize the economic benefits of slavery. A new justification of slavery was needed, and a convenient explanation was available: the enslaved peoples were Black, and the conquerors were White.

“Since the white people possessed a superior economic and military technology and were therefore able to conquer and enslave people of color, it was a simple matter to explain the superiority of the cultural apparatus in terms of a superior human endowment. In other words, the exploiters read from right to left—from a cultural effect to a natural or congenital cause. Thus modern racism emerged as a sort of an afterthought, a by-product of the ideological justification of European political and economic power arrangements over colored peoples—the justification of a set of advantages that medieval religious sanctions could no longer sustain.”<sup>6</sup>

Racism serves its devotees by defining their identity in acts of self-exaltation and self-deifying pronouncements. Simultaneously, racism seeks to destroy the personhood of members of other races through deprivation and vilification. Ultimately racism, according to Kelsey, involves alienating humans from one another.

The racist holds the belief that he or she is superior, that he or she is the supreme manifestation of humanity and has the right, therefore, to dominate those peoples or races that

are inferior. “The fundamental racist affirmation is that the in race is glorious and pure as to its being, and out races are defective and depraved as to their being.”<sup>7</sup> Racism assumes that some humans are subhuman—that they are missing essential elements needed to be classified as fully human and equal in nature to those who possess those elements.

However, “since for Christians all being is from the hand of God, racism . . . calls into question the divine creative action.”<sup>8</sup> By implication, racism questions the creative activity of God. The natural extension of White racism, for example, is that God erred in creating non-White races, or that they are the result of another fall besides that of Adam and Eve. For instance, Blacks, according to one theory, were the result of a union between Cain and an ape in the land of Nod (there is, of course, no scriptural documentation for this).

In further defining racism as a faith, Kelsey quotes H. Richard Niebuhr’s definition of faith: “Trust in that which gives value to the self.” “It is loyalty to what the self values.”<sup>9</sup> Since the racist values his/her own group above all else, he/she gives it his/her trust and is loyal to self above all else. Thus racism is an idolatrous faith system that replaces God in the mind of the racist with self-adulation and worship of race. “The god of racism is the race, the ultimate center of value.”<sup>10</sup>

This racist view of the order of things may lead its devotees to what may appear to be a logical conclusion: genocide (“The only good Indian is a dead Indian”). Ruth Benedict explains: “It is the dogma that the hope of civilization depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure.”<sup>11</sup> This is precisely because that which is wrong with the “out group” is its ontology, its very essence and being. Since the “out group” is defective, the problem that their being creates cannot be resolved by mere segregation; extermination is the only solution. Without this option the racist lives with the fear that the “out race” will infiltrate his/her race by miscegenation.

Racism, in order to function, must have the privileges of power. Political action is bound and woven inextricably throughout the fabric of racism. Thus to be truly racist, by definition, one must have, in addition to the hatred of others because they are different, the ability to act, the power to direct the destiny of the “out group.”

African-Americans control no organizations or institutions in this country. The power in the U.S.A. and its institutions is unarguably in the hands of Whites. Thus African-Americans and other minority ethnic peoples resident in America have no power with which to give life to their hatred. They lack the ability to exercise their will to segregate, isolate, or kill with impunity, a component of racism.

African-Americans, in many instances, display a distrust and even hatred of Whites based on actions that have

historically been perpetrated upon them: segregation, domination, and isolation as social pariahs. However, to theorize that these negative feelings exhibited by African-Americans are the result of “reverse racism” is to make the ‘victim guilty of the crime perpetrated against him or her. This understanding of racism reveals the concept of reverse discrimination for what it is: a fallacy.

This does not mean that African-American attitudes do not take the form of prejudice and bias. Nor does this indicate that Whites alone are responsible for the imperfect relations between the races. It merely indicates that to confront racism in our society and the church, one must fully understand the problem.

### Racism in America

The fact that African-Americans remain substandard in quality of life, health care, education, and economic status provides evidence that racism continues to be practiced in the United States in the 1990s.

Donald F. Blake, director of education at the Hartford Insurance Group in Hartford, Connecticut, in an article titled “The Black Male: An Endangered Species?” (published in the Jan. 1991 issue of *Message*), shares the following statistics: the homicide rate for African-Americans is more than seven times of that for Whites; one African-American male in three will die a violent death before he reaches the age of 30; 23 percent of all African-American males between the ages of 20 and 29 are incarcerated or on parole.

Karl Grossman, in an article titled “Environmental Racism” (*Crisis*, Apr. 1991), which quoted extensively from a report by the Rev. Benjamin Chavis, Jr., titled “Toxic Waste and Race in the United States,” stated the following points:

1. Race proved to be the most influential among variables tested in association with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. This represented a consistent national pattern.
2. Communities with the greatest number of commercial hazardous waste facilities had the highest composition of racial or ethnic minorities.
3. Although socioeconomic status appeared to play an important role in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities, race still proved to be more significant.
4. Three out of every five African-American and Hispanic Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.
5. African-Americans were heavily overrepresented in the population of metropolitan areas with the largest numbers of uncontrolled toxic waste sites: Memphis, Tennessee; Houston, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; and Atlanta, Georgia.

Robert F. Drinan, professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C., in an article

titled “Civil Rights and the Thousand Days of the Bush Administration,” points out that while some employment opportunities have opened up for African-Americans, the gap in wages between Whites and African-Americans has not lessened in the past decade. Quoting from “Lost Opportunities,” a report issued by the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights, Drinan adds that African-American men in 1991 earned only 74.8 percent of the wages of White men, the present life expectancy for African-Americans has dropped to a four-year low of 65 (White men can expect to live to 72), and the infant mortality rate for African-Americans (17.9 out of 1,000 births) is more than twice that of Whites. Health care is a lingering problem for African-Americans, with 43.8 percent of African-American children receiving inadequate medical attention.<sup>12</sup>

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that African-Americans and Hispanics are denied mortgage loans at a much higher rate than are Whites with comparative incomes. Forty-one percent of loan applications received from African-Americans were denied, compared with a denial rate of 18 percent for White applicants. Thirty-seven percent of applications made by Hispanics were rejected.<sup>13</sup>

When racism spreads unchecked, it becomes institutionalized, filling entire entities with its pervasive and pernicious effects. Institutionalized racism affects the basis for employment, education, promotion, and the selection of personnel to fill leadership positions. Racism becomes a self-perpetuating and systematic use of power by one ethnic group over another.

### Racism in Christianity

Christianity as practiced in Western society is not exempt from the reality of racism. The Christian religion, generally speaking, has absorbed the racist norms of the society in which it is found. Rather than being able to infiltrate and influence the society at large with its unique values, the church seems to have been taken captive by the principles of the world. Unfortunately, this appears to be the case within Adventism.

The existence of racism in the church is so terrible because it is diametrically opposed to the most fundamental principle of Christianity: love. Love is acceptance; racism rejects. Love unites; racism divides. Racism weakens the church and limits or shackles the operation of the Holy Spirit. Christianity in general, and Adventism in particular, suffers under the influence of racial prejudice.

James Dittes, in his book *Bias and the Pious*, states that although White Christians often denied prejudice or racism, “what people actually said and did remained consistently on the side of exclusion.”<sup>14</sup> According to Dittes, there is a “persistent exclusion of black people from situations under the control of whites. . . . We almost always end up with the

same result: the races are separate, and blacks are limited in their access to situations and goods which whites control.”<sup>15</sup> On the basis of studies made within the Lutheran community, Dittes contends that there is more racial prejudice found inside Christianity than outside.<sup>16</sup>

In explaining this phenomenon, Dittes explores the parable of the prodigal son, found in Luke 15:11-32, where he finds two forms of religious expression presented—the contractual and the prodigal. Practitioners of contractual religion tend to limit their experience to the terms of a contract: service and obedience. In other words, if a person serves and obeys his/her parents, then he or she can expect to be rewarded, as the older son in the parable expected. If Christians serve and obey God, they expect God’s reward. If not, they fully expect God’s punishment, which they believe they deserve.

Those who practice a contractual form of religion can be referred to as “legalists,” which in this context means to be dependent upon the fulfillment of the claims of the law, or in the words of Dittes, meeting the obligation of a contract. The father in the parable is “impulsive and extravagant in his outpouring of love and forgiveness.”<sup>17</sup> The father is accepting and affirming rather than judgmental and censorious. This is a demonstration of prodigal religion, in which the elements of compassion and forgiveness, acceptance and love, are emphasized over condemnation and faultfinding.

Arnold V. Wallenkampf, in his book *What Every Adventist Should Know About 1888*, shares valuable insights as to why the Adventist Church found itself in the contractual mode of religious expression rather than the prodigal mode. Central to early Adventist preaching was the imminent, literal, bodily return of Christ and the desire to live in obedience to His commandments—including the Sabbath commandment—while they waited for Him. There was no particular need to preach salvation by faith. The emphasis was on what was omitted in the preaching and teaching of other denominations. “It was an unspoken premise that there is no salvation apart from Christ and His sacrifice for man’s sins. That was axiomatic among them; it needed no specific mention. And so in early Seventh-day Adventist sermons, books, and periodicals there is but scant mention of justification by faith and salvation by grace.”<sup>18</sup>

Another suggested reason early SDAs allowed legalistic thinking to predominate within their ranks was that they allowed their critics to order their priorities: “Early Adventists were fiercely attacked by other Christians. To defend some of their beliefs—such as the binding obligation of the Ten Commandments, with the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath—they turned to the Bible. It was easy for them to find Bible texts that firmly tied their faith in Jesus to obeying all the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment. . . . Adventists gradually shifted

from love and an intimate fellowship with Jesus to the keeping of God’s law.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus because of a highly defensive posture in the teaching and preaching of Seventh-day Adventists, their religious emphasis became contractual rather than prodigal.

The contrast between the two forms of religion is significant to this study for at least one reason: racism is more closely associated with the contractual form of religion than with the prodigal form. A religious experience that is primarily contractual in form seeks to escalate obedience to laws or to the performance of good works to a higher position than those things deserve. There is a reliance upon these commodities to supply salvation an assurance that they cannot deliver.

According to Dittes, contractual religion compresses all that is majestic and mysterious about God and His relationship with humans into a deed or a series of deeds, objects, or rules that aren’t so mysterious or majestic.

In exercising racism, individuals collapse the “unfathomable mysteries of other persons into stereotypes or pictures or labels that can be managed to our benefit, but which bear little resemblance to the real persons. The prejudiced mind and the contractual mind—like the elder brother of the parable—constrict their experience and their world to narrow and familiar boundaries that they can patrol and control.”<sup>20</sup>

Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart suggest that there are specific characteristics of the church that make SDAs particularly impressionable in regard to racism, including: a “desire to remain aloof from social problems”; the basic policy relative to separation of church and state; the fact that the race issue was subordinate to the “greater good of the church”; and the fact that “Adventist leaders believed it was to their advantage to accept the racial policies that existed in America and later to adopt them for their own use.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Racism in the Adventist Church**

In an attempt to gauge the level of concern in Adventism toward racism, a set of questions was developed and used as the basis for the following interviews. A slightly different set of questions was developed for ministers, conference administrators, and departmental workers. Several different representative groups of Seventh-day Adventists were interviewed: African-Americans attending predominantly African-American churches, Whites in White congregations, African-Americans attending White churches, and Whites attending African-American churches.

Four White pastors, four African-American pastors, and two departmental directors, one African-American and one White, were interviewed. All of the aforementioned interviews were conducted on the telephone and recorded with the knowledge of the interviewees, with the exception of the African-American pastors, whose interviews were

conducted in person and were accompanied by a written set of questions.

### **African-American Pastors**

The African-American pastors who were interviewed perceived the presence of racism to be real, deep, and strong. They cited the practice of pastoral placement and the perception of the lack of financial support as indicators. All of them were in favor of some type of affirmative action policy in the church, citing the neglect and unfair and unjust treatment that African-Americans have historically received in the SDA denomination.

One interviewee, citing Acts 10:28, 34, in which the Jews “had to be made to be equitable,” saw a biblical precedent for affirmative action. Three out of four had preached a sermon equating racism with sin. Only one characterized himself as having a problem with prejudice, though he had White people attending his church. He attributed his attitude to his upbringing in the South as a victim of racism.

These pastors also viewed the current state of race relations in the SDA Church in an unfavorable light. Their comments included: “distant due to cultural differences and fears”; “not good”; “poor but tolerable”; and “distant; reluctant to unite.” They perceived harmony to exist only in isolated areas. All of the African-American pastors interviewed believed institutional racism to be alive and practiced in the SDA denomination.

The African-American pastors involved in the interview process all indicated that racial attitudes revealed, in their opinion, a person’s spiritual character development. A person who was accepting of others as one’s equals gave proof of spiritual maturity, in their opinion.

### **White Pastors**

A White assistant pastor in a primarily Caucasian congregation felt strongly that there should not be any differentiation made between African-Americans and Whites. He had preached sermons condemning racism and prejudice. It was very important to this pastor that the leadership reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the denomination. He was convinced that Adventists were not adjusting fast enough to changes in the ethnic mix of the church, which is becoming increasingly multiracial and multicultural.

He believed the local conferences were going to have to educate the pastors as to the importance of recognizing ethnic diversity. He also believed the conferences needed to be persistent in seeking racial/ethnic leadership, of which he saw little happening. This pastor had seen racism in action in the denomination. While a member of a large church in another state, he recalled that an African-American family had requested membership in that church. The membership had voted against this request, stating openly that race was

the sole reason. He had also seen what he considered racism in efforts by African-American Adventists to gain greater separation between the races.

He did not consider himself to be racist, and had African-American friends. Regarding affirmative action in the church, this pastor felt that the church leadership needed to reflect the racial/ethnic mixture of the membership. On the other hand, he felt it unfair to ethnic groups just to fill slots because of their ethnicity. “Excellence can be found if searched for,” he said. In regard to interracial dating or marriage, this pastor would prefer his daughter to marry “a good African-American man rather than a mediocre to horrible White person.” He would not counsel his daughter against an interracial marriage, but in the terms of the type of things that could hamper their relationship. This pastor contended that the churches of various races needed to work together more.

Another White SDA minister had pastored many years in an area with regional churches and felt that the relations between African-Americans and Whites needed to be closer than they were. He had pastored churches in which African-Americans made up part of the predominantly White congregation. He saw it as “healthy” for the churches to show the true cosmopolitan nature of a world church: “When we are one ethnic group, we lose it.”

He had preached sermons on the equality of the races and had condemned racism, and found that they were “approved very heartily” by the non-White members and a number of the Whites. He felt that racial understanding strengthened relationships within the membership of the church: “If we can’t work in harmony here, we can’t do it in heaven, either.”

As for institutional racism, this pastor had not seen it on the upper echelons of the church, though he had heard of its existence in the denominational structure. It was imperative to him that all races “be identified at all levels of the church, because it is impossible to do the work or prepare for heaven without diversity being there.”

Diversity was important to him, and he felt there was no place in the church for racism. He hoped that he was not a racist. He was willing to try affirmative action because he felt it was “absolutely mandatory” that all members were included in the selection process. “It is not a White church; it is God’s church,” he added.

This pastor saw some dangers in interracial marriage, but had no problems with it as long as the parties involved were aware of the difficulty that society has with it. He didn’t believe that God had any problems with it. A person’s view of race relations revealed his/her spiritual growth, in the view of this pastor.

A White pastor of a semirural, predominantly White church thought things were fine among the different racial

groups in the church. He had heard rumors, however, that there were problems in other areas. He had never preached a sermon on the equality of the races, but had denounced prejudice and racism in sermons. He was not personally aware of institutional racism, but hoped that it didn't exist, while conceding that it was possible.

It was important to him that the organization represent all races. He had African-American friends and socialized with them when distance was not a factor. He pointed to his actions and words as indicators that he was not racist.

He was in favor of affirmative action and, while aware of problems, felt interracial marriage to be workable. He saw problems with the children of interracial marriages being treated differently. Racial attitudes were an adequate indicator of a person's spiritual development, in his view.

Another minister pastored a large church that was mainly Caucasian. He viewed race relations between African-American and White SDAs from the perspective of having attended an integrated Adventist academy. He said that there were several Asians and African-Americans attending the school in the early sixties. His family's relocation to a multiracial community turned out to be a rewarding experience for him. The move helped him to learn about other races and not have a limited view shaped by bigoted people.

Though he had not preached a sermon on prejudice and racism, he had talked, throughout his entire ministry, about everyone being equal in the sight of God. He had not witnessed racism in the church, but personally knew people who had felt it. He saw it as important for all to be represented in leadership, but was not in favor of choosing persons of different race or ethnicity just to have diversity in administration.

He had African-American friends and socialized with them when the opportunity presented itself. He did not view himself as a racist; he believed that a person's actions were a barometer of whether or not a person was indeed a racist. "If we are Christ's children, we have to accept each other as His children, and all are equal in His sight, equally loved by God." If affirmative action could be facilitated in such a way as to not have people kicking and screaming against it, he could support it. To him, prejudice, racism, and bigotry showed a narrow, unacceptable attitude with God.

He felt that as people grew up together and learned to appreciate the differences among them, it would become natural for them to intermarry, unless they had been taught to discriminate against each other. Those considering intermarriage needed to be made aware of the extra challenges to their marital union. He also felt that there was not enough interaction between the African-American and White SDA churches: "We have blinders on, focused on what is important to us; we need to work together, fellowship together, and understand each other better."

### **African-American Members in African-American Churches**

An older African-American layperson raised in the church saw the church as primarily segregated, even though it claimed to be integrated. He attended a large church with fewer than five White members. He saw no progress at all in terms of the relations between African-American and White Adventists in the present system. According to him, the church was at a standstill in terms of race relations, separate though claiming to be integrated.

In the view of this interviewee, the conference administration needed to take the lead in bringing about change in the race relations of the church. He suggested that administrators implement a program whereby White pastors and congregations are counseled on the prevalence of racism in the church. He also felt that there should be an exchange of pastors along or across racial lines. He was unconcerned about interracial dating or intermarriage.

A young African-American Adventist female found relations between the races to be impacted by the region of the country in which one found oneself. She stated that the different areas of the country in which she had lived—the Midwest, the South, and the West—presented variations on the theme of racism. In the areas of the country in which there were regional conferences, there was no contact between African-American and White Adventist churches. This interviewee stated that even though she now resided in an area in which there was an integrated conference structure, there still was no measurable difference in the relations between the groups.

She also stated that there seemed to be resentment on the part of some Whites with whom she had interacted through the local Adventist church school, operated jointly by two African-American churches and a White church. Having belonged to White congregations in the past, she stated that she never heard a White pastor talk about racism or define it as sin.

### **White Members in White Churches**

A Caucasian male interviewee said he felt that general relations between African-American and White Adventists were "OK," though he had never heard sermons that dealt either with the equality of the races or condemned racism as sin. He had friends who were African-Americans. He felt that while there was "some" institutional racism in the church, he did not believe that the administration or departmental leadership of the conference needed to reflect the racial diversity of the conference as a whole. He believed that the best person for a position should be in the position regardless of race and had no confidence in affirmative action, stating it had "gone too far."

Interracial dating was not right for him, but he would

leave it up to other people as to how they would deal with it. He felt that if someone viewed another race as inferior, this would “hinder” a person’s spiritual development. He also felt that the local SDA churches could develop a better working relationship.

A White female Adventist viewed race relations as problematic. Her church is 99 percent White, and she had never heard, to her recollection, a sermon on the equality of the races or a sermon that condemned racism as sin. While she had acquaintances of another race, it was not important to her that the racial diversity of the membership be reflected in leadership. She was not, in her opinion, a racist. She was for affirmative action. The closer a person was to Christ, the less likely he/she was to be concerned with a person’s color, she felt.

### **White Members in African-American Churches**

A young Caucasian Seventh-day Adventist recently transferred her membership from a predominantly White church to an African-American church. She believed that relations between the African-American and White Adventists could be better. She had heard a sermon condemning racism and prejudice as sin. She admitted that there “probably” was institutional racism in the church, saying that the “White class and the African-American class tend to have their own convocations, women’s retreats—everything seems to be separate—and the offices held to do those things are held by people of the race that is doing it.”

She felt that the denomination’s administration should reflect a diversity of people to make the various groups feel included. She likewise believed that she was not a racist, because she “treats everybody the same.” She didn’t care for affirmative action and didn’t think it had a place in the church.

An older Caucasian Adventist woman viewed the African-American-White relationship through the experience of having been raised in another country that was dominated by Blacks. She was taught by her parents that all people were to be respected and treated right. Intermingling with Black people all her life has helped her to respect them. She had two daughters who were married to African-American men, with her approval.

Though she could not remember hearing a sermon that said racism or prejudice was a sin, she had heard that Christians were not to practice racism, “because Jesus made us all alike.” She had no personal knowledge of institutional racism. While she felt it to be important for the leadership of the church to include all races, she was against any type of affirmative action. She said she was not a racist, because she had found good people in each race and believed that people of various races could work well together.

### **African-American SDAs in White Churches**

An African-American member of a large predominantly White SDA church, this interviewee was a teacher at an Adventist elementary school. She was previously a member of another denomination. Her family was the only African-American family in her church, and she considered race relations in her church to be fine. Dealing with people as individuals and not as “colors,” she said she had “found no problems.” “I have not experienced any prejudice or antagonism because of my race.” Though she did not remember hearing a sermon that dealt with the equality of the races, she had heard sermons that denounced racism, bigotry, and prejudice.

Since her knowledge of the church beyond the local level was minimal, she was not aware of institutionalized racism. She had observed discrimination on the basis of class distinctions of employment, education, and the like. It was important to her that the church have representatives from all races included in leadership. She felt that she was not a racist and socialized with Whites outside the church setting. She supported affirmative action, although she felt methods of implementation sometimes caused problems.

Having a teenage son who had dated White girls and having had stepchildren whose father, her ex-husband, was African-American and whose mother was White, she expressed no problems with interracial dating or marriage if the persons were “emotionally together.” She believed that a person’s racial attitudes had something to do with their spiritual development. To her it was inconsistent to present oneself as a godly person while having racist views and attitudes.

An older African-American male had been a member of the SDA denomination for 17 years. This man had very positive views about race relations in the SDA Church. He was not in favor of affirmative action, stating that it was “not fair to Whites.” By attending a predominantly White church, he felt he could “help Whites with their prejudices” toward Blacks, but could not help Blacks with theirs toward Whites. He felt that though problems had arisen, the majority of people with whom he dealt seemed willing to communicate with one another and to work problems out. He felt that African-Americans were equally to blame for the existing problems in society and the denomination regarding race relations.

He said he was not aware of institutional racism, but could “perceive that there are people who have not grown beyond it.” Although he had never heard a sermon against racism, he had always felt welcome in White churches. The fact that he attended a church with a White membership indicated to him that he was not racist. He had many White friends and associated with them outside of church services. He saw nothing wrong with interracial dating and marriage (his ex-wife was White), if the couple realized that they may

have to invest extra energy to deal with the problems that others have with it. He wished that all churches would work together more.

### **Local Conference Departmental Directors**

A Caucasian male departmental director who had served in his position for four and a half years felt that there should be more integration in the churches, but was not happy with the conflicts that he had seen in the church over the issue of race relations. He didn't like power struggles and felt that some African-Americans seemed to make the race issue a "hobbyhorse."

He felt that SDAs needed to come together more. He was against interracial marriages because the children tended to face difficulties with acceptance. He had never preached a sermon on the equality of the races or that condemned bigotry, prejudice, or racism as sin. He believed there was racism in the church and felt bad when African-Americans faced resistance from other ethnic groups. However, he believed that in America African-Americans had excelled. He found it unpleasant, though, when African-Americans complained that they hadn't had the same chances, or allowed racist feelings to surface in conversations.

He believed that the leadership needed to reflect diversity because it is a world church. He didn't have any African-American associates, nor did he consider himself a racist. Though he sometimes "demonstrated racism," he was wrestling with it. He did not favor affirmative action, feeling that the best person for the job should get the job. He believed that cultural mores and norms had made it difficult for African-Americans and Whites to work together.

He had grown up in an area in which he had to drive 80 miles to see African-American people, and believed the color of the heart rather than the color of the skin to be the criterion by which people should be judged.

A Black departmental director had held his current position for four years. He believed that African-Americans in the regional conferences viewed race relations in the church differently than African-Americans in the integrated conferences. He felt that African-Americans were more suspicious of Whites, while Whites didn't even think about African-Americans until they came in contact with them. Also, that there was tension between African-Americans and Whites, but that this tension was reduced the more the racial groups came into contact with one another.

He saw things from the pragmatic standpoint of the church not being perfect, saying that Adventists had gotten better over the years in terms of their racial dealings. While pastoring, he had never preached a sermon on the equality of the races, though he had preached that bigotry, prejudice, and racism were sinful practices. He did believe that there

was institutional racism in the church, which reflected society.

He considered decision-making power to rest almost exclusively in the hands of Whites and felt it extremely important that the leadership of the church reflect the racial composition of the church. He had no White friends, but did not consider himself a racist.

He was in favor of affirmative action giving preference to qualified minority racial/ethnic groups. He saw nothing wrong with interracial marriage, but recognized problems, obstacles, and barriers to a successful marriage. He felt that as people of different races interacted, their racial views would be. He suggested the need for developing strategic methods of working together.

### **General Conference Personnel**

Warren S. Banfield, an African-American SDA pastor, served for 12 years in the General Conference as director of the Regional Department and then as director of the Office of Human Affairs. The Regional Department served as a forum for the African-American presidents of regional conferences to promote their needs at the General Conference level, allowing the African-American membership to work in a united manner and put pressure on the denomination for Black SDA causes.

According to Banfield, as the church carried on its program of evangelization in large urban communities in the U.S., increased diversity began to appear in the church. However, the church had no mechanism to deal with the problems that arose. When in the seventies the Regional Department at the General Conference was closed at the request of the Black presidents, the Office of Human Affairs was inaugurated at the GC to address matters of diversity in the church.

Though positive about the future of race relations in the church, Banfield believed that "as long as we are on this earth there will be racial problems, and how the church deals with them is important to its success." Under Banfield's direction a plan was developed to help educate the members of the denomination about racial tolerance. Unfortunately, said Banfield, that program became "the best-kept secret of the church."

Rosa T. Banks, Ed.D., a former college professor and administrator, and director of the Office of Human Affairs since 1988, said the office has been adversely affected by severe cutbacks in funding and personnel, as mandated by the process of trimming the costs of operating the church at all levels. Her staff has been cut from five people to one. She also serves as associate director of the department at the North American Division level.

Banks viewed Adventism as "mirroring society at large," and therefore felt that "some of the same values that

are found in society are found in the church.” According to Banks, any “upsurge in racial tension in the society . . . is more exalted in the church.” She recognized these racial tensions to be the work of “the enemy.”

Banks pointed out that there was no specific program in place in the denomination to deal with racism, although her department attempts to address it. She cited the need for a proactive program that confronts racism, and looks forward to developing such a program, using resources and personnel outside the General Conference office staff. At present the program consists of emphasizing such things as Humanity Day and Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, while emphasizing love and unity.

Banks pointed to a sense of denial at the top: “People don’t want to address it [racism].” She felt that “most White older SDA ministers do not have a grasp of the sociological issues that affect the church, although the younger ministers seem to have a better understanding of this issue.” Banks conceded that Adventists were doing better, attempting to mix more, and that the employment profile was no longer “lily-White” at the top.

E. E. Cleveland, retired GC Ministerial Association secretary and teacher of evangelism at Oakwood College, has had rich experience as an evangelist, having held public meetings on every continent in the world. Cleveland saw Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White as the basic guidelines for race relations in the church: “Jesus taught that race is not the major factor in the qualification for the kingdom of God. The disciples were slow to learn the lesson, and Jesus actually took them into the ghetto of Samaria to help them deal with their racism.”

Cleveland emphasized that Christians needed to treat all people as equal family members, with *agape* love, goodwill, toward all persons. He believed that prejudice had to be educated out. Cleveland expressed a positive stance toward the future of race relations in Adventism, citing improvements in this area over the years.

### Interview Summary

These interviews were of value because they revealed a cross section of attitudes among various groups in the SDA denomination. Although limited in number, the author believes that they are representative of what would be found on a broader scale.

The interviews indicated that a large segment of the African-American clergy is disenchanted with the current state of race relations, feeling that there is racism in the SDA Church. They are in favor of affirmative action in terms of job placement within the church. While only one of these African-American pastors openly admitted being prejudiced, the African-American ministers in the Northern California Conference who were interviewed have little to no dealings

with White SDAs, either clergy or laity. They did not express a desire to interact or to intermingle with them.

Their perception seems to be that Whites are responsible for racial problems in the church and that it is their responsibility to initiate a change in the sad state of race relations. They felt that Whites are not willing to share the decision-making process, keeping all the real power to effect change to themselves. There is an emerging hostility between African-Americans and Whites, and these African-American pastors seemed to take a proactive stance in regard to addressing racism.

White pastors claimed little personal knowledge of any race problems in the church and were quick to characterize themselves as not being racists. In fact, none of the interviewees would admit to being racist, although one said that he sometimes acted in a racist way. All of the White pastors felt it important for African-Americans and other racial ethnic groups to be reflected in the leadership of the organization. Only one of them was in favor of affirmative action being used in the church to achieve parity or equal representation in administrative positions.

African-American laypeople also seemed disappointed with the status of race relations in the denomination. Some saw no progress for many years, and a majority felt the racial climate to be cold. Some just didn’t want to be bothered with White folk at all. Some Blacks, however, saw positive things in the area of race relations in the denomination.

Whites, both clergy and laity, had a more positive view. Some, as members of African-American churches or of churches that are mainly White, felt that there were no problems, while others sensed a deep division. While most African-Americans were in favor of some type of affirmative action, the majority of Whites interviewed, even those who attended a predominantly African-American church, were quick to denounce it.

Apparently African-Americans and Whites are not talking to each other about the perceptions of racism in the church. Both groups are viewing the same situation from their own experiences, and there is a need to open dialogue on the subject. Many people not included in these interviews felt that the state of race relations in the SDA denomination is negative, while many feel positive about the future.

### African-Americans:

#### Organizing to Face Racial Separation

Compared with churches that chose complete separation, the African-American segment of the SDA denomination took a different approach to the problem of discrimination and segregation.

It is fair to say that the Black Adventist leadership early on agitated for total and complete integration. Failing to achieve that goal prior to the 1940s because of the near

monolithic resistance of White leaders and the general membership, many African-American SDAs accepted a partial separatist status as a means of working successfully for the Lord among their own people. This idea was first presented as early as 1929 by J. K. Humphrey, but was rejected by White leadership. By 1944, however, things had changed.

The difference between 1929 and 1944 was that with the passing of time and with the intense evangelistic efforts of Black SDA evangelists, there were now more Black people in the denomination. These people desired to make their presence felt.

According to excerpts from a lecture presented by Roy Branson on March 29, 1974, at Loma Linda University, entitled "Minorities in the Church," many Blacks had the benefit of higher education and organized themselves to present to the General Conference leaders in Washington, D.C., a petition titled "Shall the Four Freedoms Function Among SDAs?"

This large group of African-American SDA ministers and laypeople met with J. L. McElhany, president of the General Conference. Interestingly enough, their petition did not request the organization of Black conferences; it recommended the eradication of discrimination at all Adventist institutions. They also asked for a full accounting of the money that Black people were contributing to the denomination and requested that their Black leaders be treated with courtesy.

The denomination's response, not exactly what Black ministers and laypeople expected, was a proposal to formulate segregated units of organization, and thus were born the Black conferences. It is important to emphasize that the formation of Black conferences was proposed by the White leadership as a response to Black SDAs' request for integration.

In the main, African-American Adventists have always desired to follow what they consider to be the model of the Bible when it related to race relations among Christians. However, lacking full and complete inclusion, Black SDA leadership has made the best of the situation. They settled for "self-determination" and have opted to take full advantage of the separation that was foisted upon them by White leadership.

Viewing it as a natural progression of the current situation, many within Adventism have promoted further separation in the form of Black unions, which are the next unit of management above the local conference. In the late 1970s the regional conference presidents appealed to the General Conference to establish two Black union conferences, to which the local regional conferences would belong. The request was voted down. Since then the regional union concept has not been vigorously promoted.

Of current importance to the African-American SDA Church is the Black Caucus. The caucus, made up of the presidents of the regional conferences, along with the editor of *Message* magazine, the president of Oakwood College,

and others, meets regularly to discuss relevant concerns of the Black church and to monitor and report on the state of race relations within the denomination. What is missing, though, is a "national caucus" of African-American SDAs that is constitutionally mandated to work to secure full and complete integration within the denomination.

### **Acknowledging the Existence of Institutional Racism**

The first step in improving race relations in the SDA Church is for the denomination to acknowledge that there is a serious problem. In regard to racism in the SDA denomination, there is a strong sense of denial. This is because the church has never, in its publications or programs, admitted to the existence of racism within its confines, nor has it devised programs or strategies to deal effectively with racism.

Before there can be a change in behavior, there first must be an acknowledgment that there is a problem. There needs to be a mature inquiry and a straightforward diagnosis and prognosis of the malady. This process has been missing within Adventism on any broad scale. One reason is that there is pain involved in this process, the pain of admitting that the "true" church has been "untrue" with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To avoid this pain, the SDA denomination has engaged in a form of self-deception in the field of race relations. Leaders and administrators throughout the church have avoided addressing this issue effectively, thus weakening the witness of this denomination.

### **Better Communication**

A serious hindrance to solving the race problem is communication, or lack of it. When people fail to have meaningful dialogue and exchange of ideas, stereotypes and myths are allowed to proliferate and adversely affect the relationship. Where there has been little communication between racial groups, avenues of interaction must be cultivated.

To construct a culture in which racial reconciliation can thrive, White Adventists need to be educated as to the lifestyle and culture of Black Adventists (Blacks are familiar with White culture just by living in the majority-dominated society). When Blacks and Whites truly begin to learn to dialogue with one another, the ground will be set for change to take place. Such an understanding is important for pastors, teachers, and administrators as they fulfill their roles as change agents for racial reconciliation.

Cross-racial communication can inspire an atmosphere of unity and wholeness, which will bring the denomination into a truly biblical position relative to race relations. Unless SDA Blacks and Whites risk changing the focus of race relations in this church, the status quo will remain intact. Ethnic and racial groups will continue to lose confi-

dence and trust in the denomination, and Whites will continue to embrace the mistaken view that all is well.

### Strategies for Fostering Racial Reconciliation in Adventism

Following are suggestions by which the Seventh-day Adventist Church may move toward the objective of being a racially inclusive denomination.

1. *Editorials.* An editorial team can be composed to write editorials for the major publications of the church, such as the *Adventist Review* and *Ministry*, and to other magazines that have a large Adventist readership, such as *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*. The purpose of the editorial team would be to challenge the church to move toward a new reality in the area of race relations by keeping the issue public within the church.

2. *Working together.* In cities and towns in which there are SDA churches of different ethnic groups, the churches can enter into joint projects and enterprises, such as evangelistic series or health fairs. This would allow them to become acquainted with each other in a working capacity.

3. *Pulpit exchanges.* Pastors of African-American and White churches can exchange pulpits and preach on multiculturalism or some related Bible subject.

4. *National symposium on race.* A national SDA symposium on the state of race relations in the SDA denomination could meet annually to review accomplishments in creating the new reality of a nonracist church.

5. *Children's programs.* Since most people receive their views on race at an early age, a national program to educate children regarding the value of all races and persons may be designed for the Sabbath school.

6. *Sabbath school quarterly materials.* The General Conference Sabbath School Department should devise lessons for a biblical study of race relations to be used for all levels of the Sabbath school.

7. *Budgeting and funding.* Various entities of the denomination—the General Conference, North American Division, unions, and local conferences—should fund programming for the purpose of educating the members regarding racism.

God has high expectations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, the church has not yet met the goal of being a totally inclusive body, even though Adventism is making strides in that direction. It is hoped that the information presented herein will provide valuable assistance in creating a church with a new vision of itself as a model on earth of what God can do when humanity maturely faces its challenges.

<sup>1</sup> *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, tenth edition, p. 962.

<sup>2</sup> *Racial Justice in the 1980s: A Comprehensive Strategy for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* (New York: Council on Church and Race, n.d.), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>4</sup> George D. Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Race: Science and Politics* (New York: Viking Press, 1947), p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> *America*, June 8, 1991, pp. 624-626.

<sup>13</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 13, 1991, p. A2.

<sup>14</sup> James E. Dittes, *Bias and the Pious* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1973).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> Arnold V. Wallenkampf, *What Every Adventist Should Know About 1888* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1988), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Dittes, p. 77.

<sup>21</sup> Malcom Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Pub., 1989), p. 201.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND SINGLE PARENTHOOD

*by Deborah M. Harris, Ph.D.*

## **Introduction**

This chapter will explore the status and impact of African-American single-parent households in this country and within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the context of results from a nationwide study of African-American Seventh-day Adventist single-parent households. Particular emphasis will be given to the challenges and needs of these families along with the role of the church in responding to these needs. Finally, a single-parent family agenda for the church will be proposed.

## **The Single-Parent Family**

Society continues to be challenged by the enigma of single-parent families and the effects these families have on the lives of children. How do we respond to the needs of single-parent families, as well as develop strategies to reduce the growing numbers of such families?

In the past single-parent families resulted most often from wars, natural disasters, and other calamities that separated adult males from their families.<sup>1</sup> Today, however, most single-parent families result from out-of-wedlock births, separation, and divorce. Regardless of the cause, single-parent households have long been recognized as a major cause of school failure, family poverty, and juvenile delinquency,<sup>2</sup> problems that intensify as the numbers of single-parent families increase.

The United States leads all other industrialized nations in the number of single-parent families.<sup>3</sup> In the United States one out of every two children will spend a portion of their childhood in a single-parent home.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of children in the United States living in single-parent homes increased from 9 percent in 1960 to 24 percent in 1986.<sup>5</sup> The 1990 census reported that between 1980 and 1990, single-parent homes headed by females increased 35.6 percent and homes headed by males increased 29.1 percent.

These unsettling data underline the need to move beyond mere rhetorical responses to a realization that we are facing a national epidemic that demands a concerted and aggressive response. While single-parent families seem to be an inevitable occurrence in society, the negative impact of such families can be minimized if federal and state government agencies, private foundations, special-interest groups,

community volunteers, and churches band together to respond to the crisis.

The family has long been accepted as the backbone of society: if the family weakens, then society crumbles. That dysfunctional families create a dysfunctional society has been well established in the studies of social analysts.<sup>6</sup> Of particular concern, then, is the disproportionate representation of African-American single-parent families.

## **African-American Single-Parent Households**

In 1988 African-American single-parent families comprised approximately 80 percent of households living in poverty, according to the Bureau of the Census. During that same time period nearly 50 percent of all children living in poverty were African-American. Entering the nineties, more than 50 percent of all African-American families were headed by single females.<sup>7</sup> Single parenting undermines the economic potential of a family while depriving children of economic, educational, and community resources, all of which undermines their chances of future success.<sup>8</sup> Considering these outcomes, the future of the African-American family and its community appears grim.

I. Gellineau and others suggest that the current status of African-American families is the continuation and result of specific strategies designed to seize and maintain control over the Black race. Since our introduction to American soil, African-American families have been ripped apart and manipulated by outside forces that, perhaps fearing the strength they observed in African families, were seeking to maintain slavery and domination.

According to Gellineau, the first step in achieving such domination was to break up families. Slave fathers were often sold off, leaving the mother to carry on, which set in place a cycle of poverty, low self-esteem, meager provisions, and educational failure that has continued throughout history. Certainly African-American families today remain vulnerable to the dismal outcomes related to household breakup.

## **Single-Parent Households and the SDA Church**

Single parents (especially African-American single parents) often rely on churches or clergy as coping strategies.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, however, many individuals report increased

stress and disappointment with how churches responded to their needs as single parents.<sup>10</sup>

This disappointment can perhaps be explained by the tendency for churches to limit their assistance to single-parent families in their particular congregation. Single parents are hesitant to express their needs to fellow church members because (1) they fear public exposure of their personal business and (2) they wish to avoid being pitied. This leads the church to respond inadequately, because its response is based on the person's expressed needs rather than his/her actual needs. Consequently, single parents who rely on the church as a coping mechanism experience frustration and increased stress because of the church's response.

When churches work independently of other agencies or with a limited population, a limited perspective of single-parent family needs is maintained, resulting in inadequate response to the problem. The church has an essential role in addressing the needs of single-parent families. However, these needs cannot be adequately addressed without fully understanding the problem.

According to Ellen G. White, "the first work of Christians is to be united in the family."<sup>11</sup> She also notes that "the more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence . . . outside the home."<sup>12</sup> "A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion."<sup>13</sup> "The family tie is the closest, most tender and sacred, of any on earth."<sup>14</sup>

In these quotes Ellen White speaks to the importance of the family in maintaining a relationship to Christ. The family was designed as a blessing to humankind. However, "family" has taken on a different meaning for many Seventh-day Adventists in general and African-American Adventists in particular.

One reason that the church has been slow to respond to the dilemma of single-parent families is the lack of substantive documentation. For this study a nationwide survey was conducted to determine the status of single-parent families among African-Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

A packet of 20 surveys and a letter describing the study were mailed to church clerks of all churches in the regional conferences. Each clerk was asked to distribute the surveys to single parents in their church. The single parents were instructed to seal their completed surveys in the envelope provided and return them to the clerk the following week. Each clerk was provided a large, self-addressed, stamped envelope to return surveys to the investigator. For informational and support purposes, pastors received a copy of the survey and a cover letter. They were also asked to encourage single parents to respond.

Approximately 500 surveys were returned, 394 of

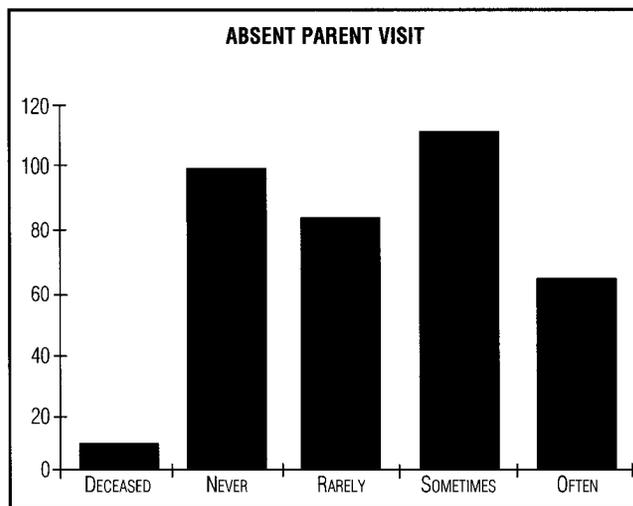
which were usable. Given the distribution procedures, an accurate return rate could not be determined. Nonetheless, the data from this survey closely align with data already reported in the literature. While caution must be exercised, one might conclude that the respondents of this study are representative of the larger population.

Demographically, our respondent group was comprised primarily of females. However, there were 18 male respondents. The average length of time as a single parent was 10.5 years. Most of the respondents (52 percent) were single parents as the result of divorce. The never-married category comprised 31 percent of the respondents. Education achieved ranged from seventh grade to the doctoral level, and the mean level achieved was the twelfth grade. The majority of the respondents (55 percent) lived in rented property. As children the majority of these respondents (60 percent) did not live in single-parent homes.

The average number of children for respondents was two, constituting 328 males and 347 females. The average age of the children was 10 years old, and parents reported that the majority of these children were faithful members of the SDA Church. Forty-eight children were reported as having a specific disability.

Chart 1 displays the responses to the question "How often do your children see/visit the absent parent?" The majority of the responses (78 percent) ranged between "never" and "sometimes."

Chart 1



Charts 2 and 3 display graphically the age and income ranges of African-American single-parent families who completed this survey. The majority of the respondents were primarily between 36 and 45 years old, and the majority of these earned less than \$10,000 a year. While the age range data differs slightly, the income data reported in this

study parallel perfectly the 1990 census data on marital status and living arrangements.

Chart 2

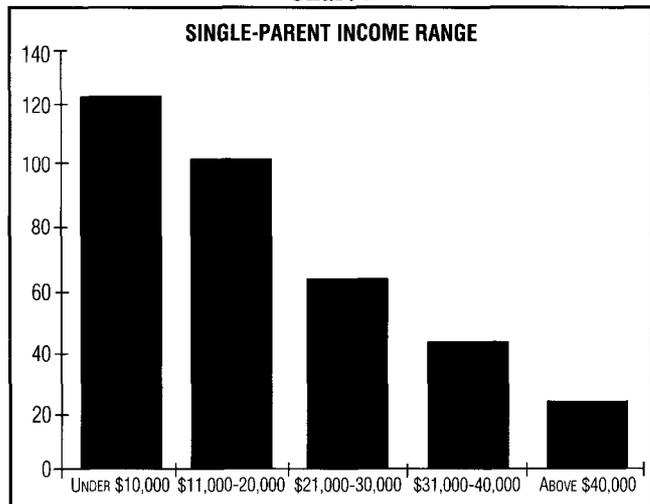
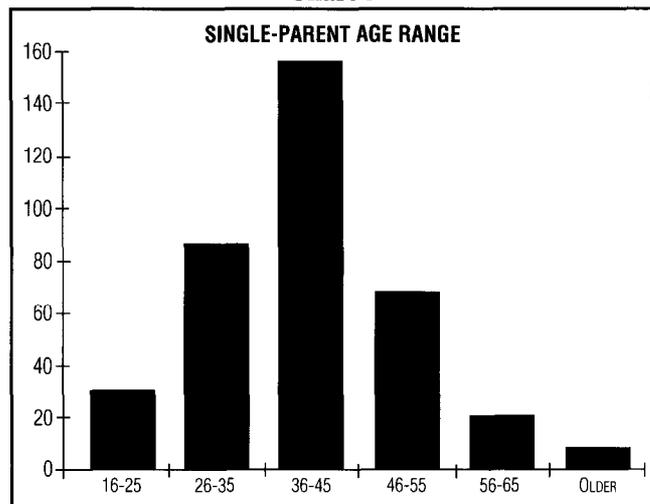


Chart 3



Many consider ages 36-45 as the prime years for establishing socioeconomic stability.<sup>15</sup> By this time adults have completed all educational pursuits, established seniority in the workplace, and begun to stabilize their families. Poverty can greatly undermine the achievement of these common life goals, and the majority of the single parents in our survey live in poverty. As a result, single parents experience less educational achievement and more unstable employment and family life. Some argue that it is difficult to assist persons who are needy yet in the prime wage-earning years—which may help explain why churches often do not respond to the financial needs of single-parent households.

## Negative Consequences

*Lower educational attainment.* Among the effects of single-parent households on children, the most prevalent outcome is the diminished educational attainment of children. The dropout rate of children from single-parent homes is almost double that of children from two-parent homes.<sup>16</sup> This high dropout rate may be because single parents are less likely to live in neighborhoods that promote educational achievement, their children are less likely to associate with other children who have positive attitudes toward education, and single-parent families tend to be more mobile.<sup>17</sup>

*Low self-esteem.* The greatest factor, however, is the effect of low self-esteem on the child's educational achievement. Children from single-parent families have less self-esteem than children from two-parent families.<sup>18</sup> They struggle with their worth as a person and sometimes feel abandoned and rejected, much like the divorced single parent.

Children of single parents suffer more from low self-esteem because single parents themselves suffer more from low self-esteem. It is difficult to feel good about yourself when you feel like a failure. If a parent is not confident in his/her abilities, it is unlikely the child will be confident. Single parents who responded to the survey reported low self-esteem as one of their greatest challenges, indicating a need for consistent support and encouragement of African-American children from SDA single-parent homes.

The self-esteem of African-American children in particular is crucial to their success in school. Gerardi states that for African-American students, self-esteem is a better predictor of school achievement than IQ scores.<sup>19</sup> It is no wonder that African-American children of single-parent homes experience significant failure in school.

*Emotional trauma.* Children of single-parent homes tend to suffer more from depression, anger, and guilt.<sup>20</sup> They often bear emotional scars that leave them frightened and consumed with feelings of alienation. The younger the child, the more adjustment problems the child will experience.<sup>21</sup> Younger children also tend to withdraw, while older children tend to be more aggressive.

*Gender effects.* Males tend to be more handicapped by divorce, need more attention, perform more poorly in school, and take twice as long to adjust, which often leads to alcohol and drug use.<sup>22</sup> Males are often concerned about their mother's ability to protect the family, and inadvertently place themselves in the role of family protector. This can cause extreme challenges for the healthy development of a young male, given the magnitude of responsibility inherent in protecting the family.

Females feel the impact of economic insecurity more, have difficulty maintaining positive relationships with males, and tend to seek inappropriate ways to get attention from males.<sup>23</sup> Often the "daddy's girl" stage, established at

a young age, is missed when fathers are absent from the home, causing girls from single-parent homes to yearn for male attention more than girls from two-parent families.<sup>24</sup>

To summarize, children of single-parent families experience more educational failure, lower self-esteem, increased adjustment problems, and less community involvement, leading to dependent individuals who create negative cycles that can last for generations. These individuals will soon comprise the majority of SDA Church membership. As a church we can choose to counterbalance the effects of single-parenting on the lives of children now or find ourselves constantly reacting. Someone once said, "It is easier to build children than to repair men."

### Positive Consequences

Much has been written about the negative effects of single-parenting on children. Following are several positive aspects, as communicated by single parents with whom I have interacted over the years.

*Individual tenacity.* Children of single-parent families are often strong, able to deal with disappointment, and are not as quick to give up in the face of adversity. Perhaps this is because they must make so many adjustments. They learn the art of survival via daily experiences.

*Faith in God.* Children from single-parent homes seem to learn valuable lessons that produce strong faith at an

early age. Depending on the spiritual condition of the single parent, many children learn very early how to depend on God.

*Personal accountability.* Exposed earlier to home-care responsibilities, children of single-parent homes acquire money-management skills well beyond their years. It is not unusual for a 10-year-old to prepare dinner on a daily basis or take care of younger siblings for extended periods of time. While some may view this negatively, these children learn skills that many of their counterparts learn much later in life, if at all, allowing them to adequately address similar challenges in adulthood.

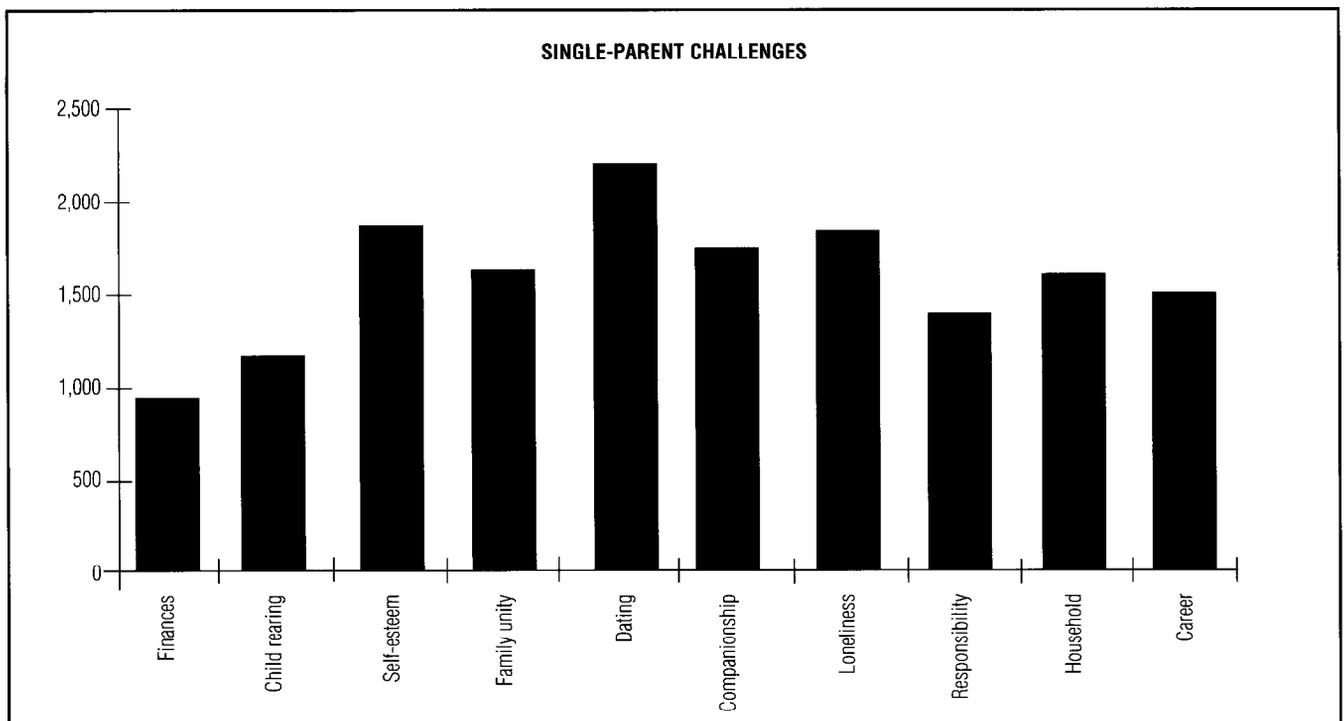
*Familial bonds.* Finally, children from single-parent homes tend to have stronger familial bonds, resulting perhaps from a sense of having to stick together in order to make it. These children are more protective of one another and the parent with whom they live.

These positive aspects of children from single-parent families can be maximized with consistent and appropriate support for the children and their single parent.

### Challenges of African-American Single Parents in the SDA Church

Each respondent to the survey was asked to rank his/her greatest challenges as a single parent. Chart 4 shows their responses.

Chart 4



*Loneliness.* Respondents to this survey see dating as their greatest challenge. Many single parents struggle with whether or not they should date, and if they choose to date, the effect their dating may have on their children. Influencing the desire to date was loneliness and the need for adult companionship, which constituted the second and third greatest challenges of single-parenting.

If other avenues for companionship are provided on a regular basis, perhaps dating would not be of primary concern to single-parent respondents. Single parents may not necessarily be looking for a date, but rather wholesome adult friendship and fellowship. Church singles organizations assist in providing opportunities for companionship, but they are usually made up of young, never-married, childless individuals who have a difficult time relating to single parents.

*Finance.* The respondents in this survey ranked finances as the least among the 11 challenges listed, which represents an interesting paradox. The financial challenge of single-parenting is well documented. Does this mean that the respondents are not challenged by finances to the degree they are challenged by other factors? Probably not, since the majority of the respondents reported their income as being below \$10,000. Perhaps the respondents from this study have simply accepted the inevitable condition of “poverty” as a single parent and have consciously chosen to focus on challenges they feel they can address adequately.

*Child rearing.* The low ranking of child rearing is also surprising. This response warrants concern that African-American single parents who responded to this survey may not be aware of the negative effects of single-parenting on children, or they may be unable to address the problems that arise from growing up in a single-parent home.

It is difficult to understand what it is like to live in a single-parent home if you have not experienced that as a child. I am reminded of the lesson my daughter taught me regarding her experiences in our single-parent home. I was trying to help her understand that her father loved her even if he didn’t respond in ways she wanted and needed. Noting her frustration, I told her I understood how she felt. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, “No, you don’t. You can’t understand what I am feeling, because you have never lived in a single-parent home.”

Given that the majority of respondents did not come from single-parent homes, it is likely that they do not fully understand what their children need for healthy development in a single-parent home. Single parents must be aware of the effects of single-parenting on children, especially male children.

Another concern has to do with what appears to be a pattern in responses—the highest-ranked challenges relate directly to the well-being of the single parent (i.e., self-es-

teem, loneliness, companionship, etc.); the lower rankings are challenges that do not necessarily undermine the personal well-being of the single parent (i.e., finances, child rearing). This may indicate that single parents in our survey are more concerned about their own well-being. While the well-being of the single parent is crucial, caution must be taken to ensure that the needs of children are not neglected.

Finally, the low rating of child rearing as a challenge may imply that single parents are comfortable rearing children alone. As a society we tend to buy into the fallacy that mothers primarily rear children; therefore, single-parenting is nothing really new. However, research consistently documents the importance of two parents to share in the work of child rearing. This is God’s plan, and when that is not possible, God has charged the church to respond.

The problems of single-parenting are exacerbated during particular times of the year. Respondents were asked to identify their most difficult time of the year as a single parent. Most indicated that the winter holidays (Christmas, etc.) were the most difficult because they reminded them of their “incomplete” families and increased their desire to be a “complete” family. (Single-parent families can be complete if God is the head. However, society as a whole tends to refer to single-parent homes as incomplete.)

Respondents reported that the winter holidays also resulted in increased despondency and thoughts of suicide. This time of year brings an increase in financial and work responsibilities. Increased heating bills, Christmas shopping, and other expenses were noted as major stress factors. Holidays in general were noted as difficult periods for single parents and their children.

On the other hand, the survey respondents were asked to identify their greatest joy in being single parents. Following are a few representative statements:

1. “My children and I are safe and free.”
2. “I am able to teach my children about Jesus without a fight.”
3. “There is no confusion.”
4. “It is peaceful.”
5. “I have learned to depend totally on God.”
6. “I am more focused on God.”
7. “My child and I are growing together.”
8. “My children and I are very close.”
9. “Realizing I can handle responsibility is great.”
10. “I am achieving against the odds.”

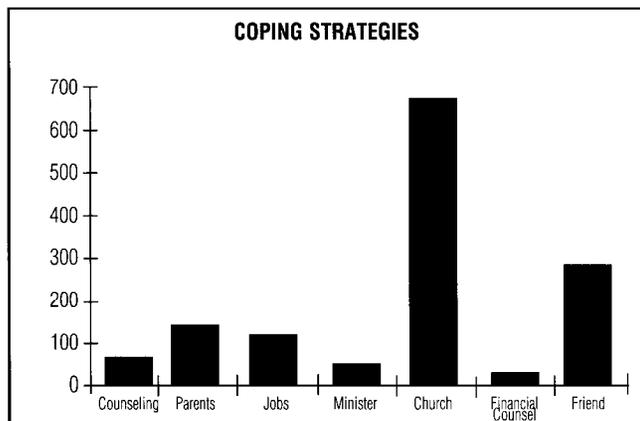
The majority of the responses that referenced positive aspects of single-parenting mentioned child rearing prominently. The second most emphasized relationship in this type of response referenced God, and the third was a peaceful homelife. Several respondents stated that there was *no* joy in being a single parent. Those individuals who are able to identify some positives amid so

many negatives are probably using a myriad of effective coping strategies.

### Coping Strategies

Respondents were asked to check the coping strategies they have utilized as single parents. Chart 5 shows that the number one coping strategy is the “church.” The second most used strategy is confiding in a friend. Turning to the church for strength and guidance is comforting; however, the response of the church to the needs of single parents, according to survey respondents, has been disappointing.

Chart 5



When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of various strategies used, respondents reported that the church was the most disappointing. Churches were not interested, would not give of their time, and participated extensively in gossip. Why the lack of appropriate church support? First, many SDA churches have a difficult time accepting the deluge of single-parent families. Because the church has been slow to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem, appropriate responses are lacking. In addition, many churches claim a lack of understanding of the needs of single parents.

Single parents often tire of having to ask people for assistance, so they retreat in hopes that someone will perceive their need without them having to ask. Unfortunately, many churches are not able to perceive the needs without being directly informed. As churches embrace single-parent families, they will come to understand the needs. Until that time, single parents and churches have to be willing to come together, talk about the needs, and work collectively to respond to those needs.

The primary needs of single parents in the SDA Church are for encouragement and acceptance. The following comments epitomized this need:

1. “I just want the church to treat my children as members.”

2. “Just be there and offer support.”
3. “Don’t offer support, then charge me.”
4. “Just listen to me.”
5. “Recognize I am a part of the family of God too.”
6. “Don’t judge me.”
7. “Don’t assume I am man hungry.”
8. “Don’t make me feel so ashamed of being a single parent.”
9. “Don’t pity us or make us feel like second-class members.”
10. “Accept me as a whole person, even if I don’t have a husband.”

These statements are reflective of SDA single parents. Unfortunately, many single parents are not able to recover from the rejection they feel from their church and leave. This might explain in part why most of the respondents on this survey reported that they relied more on non-Adventist friends as confidants.

The needs of single parents in the church present a tremendous opportunity for ministry, but we must first understand ways we as a church can help. Chart 6 displays additional data from single parents who were asked to rank ways the church can help. These ranged from providing house repair services to establishing support groups. Note that financial support is not among the top five suggestions, helping to dispel the myth that single parents just want a handout.

As stated earlier in this chapter, most single parents do not want others to “take care of them.” Rather they are in need of occasional support, most often in the form of donated time or minimal services such as house and car repair. Single parents often feel overwhelmed by their daily challenges. Having a day to themselves or being invited to another family’s home for dinner would go a long way in supporting the single-parent family. The suggestions in this survey would take little effort, but would make a tremendous impact.

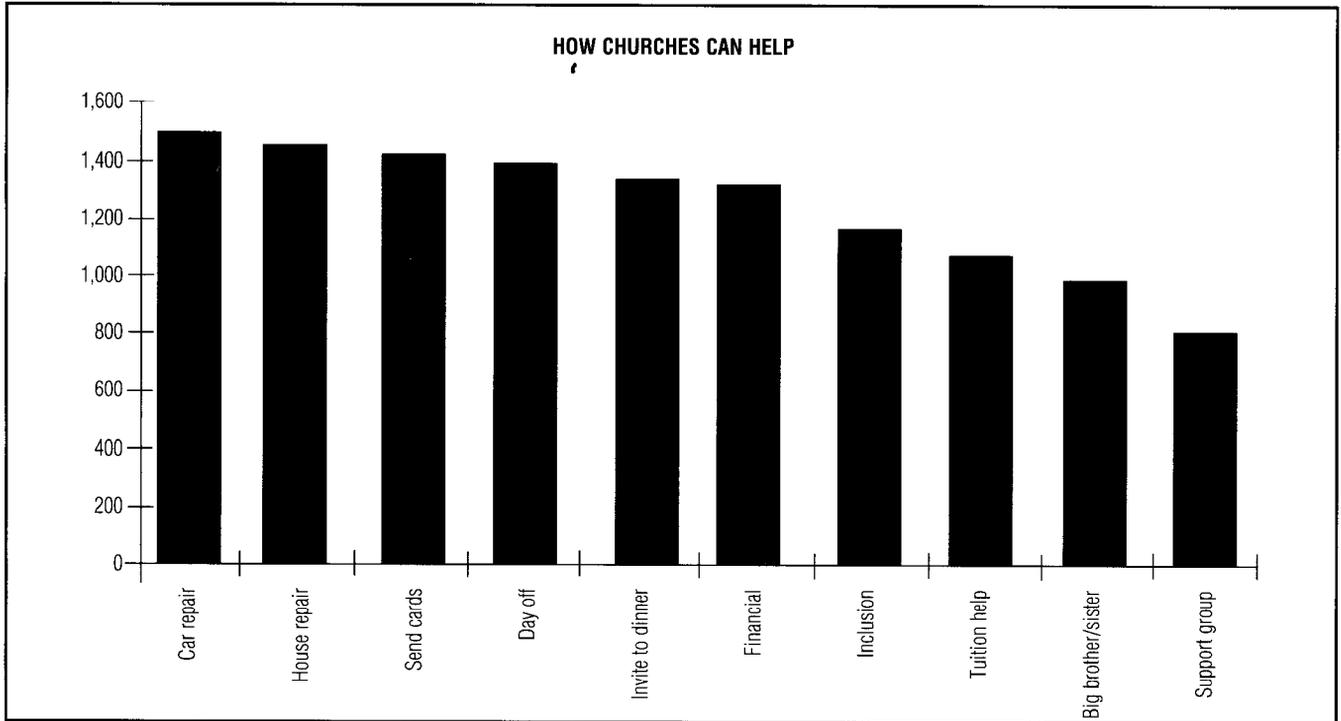
Following is an agenda for the church as it responds to the needs of single-parent families. While applicable to all single-parent families, this agenda is particularly important for African-American SDAs and may be implemented at various levels within the church.

### An Urgent Appeal for Church Support for Single-Parent Families

#### A. General Conference, Division, Union, and Local Conferences

1. Conduct research on Adventist single-parent families (the more we know, the more we are able to deal with the problem).
2. Publish articles, materials, magazines, and books to help single-parent families (these should include information on parenting skills, strategies, and support networks from a Christian perspective).

Chart 6



3. Allocate funds for camps, retreats, and seminars on parenting (single parents need “retooling” opportunities but can rarely afford the luxury).
4. Provide financial help to students from single-parent families attending Adventist schools (many parents in our survey expressed frustration about wanting their children to attend Adventist schools but not being able to afford the cost; many felt a Christian education would help minimize the negative effects of single-parenting).
5. Encourage the church family to support the single-parent family (church laypersons gain from their pastors and administrators priorities for action within the church community).

#### B. *The Local Church*

1. Organize enrichment programs for single-parent families.
2. Establish support groups.
3. Plan recreational activities for parents and children of single-parent families.
4. Organize help for unexpected emergencies such as car problems.
5. Host a “fix-it” day (single parents bring their cars and/or appliances to the church parking lot for simple repairs by church members).
6. Assist with child care (baby-sitting, etc.).
7. Organize a coparenting program (parents in the

church are on call and available to assist single parents with tough parenting problems).

8. Establish a big brother/sister program.
9. Preach truth, not opinion (many single parents are condemned weekly by sermons steeped in personal opinion versus Bible principles).
10. Remember birthdays and holidays (establish a committee to send single parents flowers, cards, etc.).
11. Facilitate a conducive environment (often insensitive things are said and done that are devastating to single-parent families, such as father/son camp-outs or mother/daughter banquets; also, asking children to stand up in church and give their father a hug on Father’s Day may present an awkward situation for children).
12. Listen, pray, and act!

While implementing the above suggestions can help improve relationships between the church and single-parent families, single parents must also help themselves. Many tend to wallow in their pain, but they must move forward for the well-being of their children. As quickly as possible the single parent must also create a stable homelife by (1) maintaining a daily routine, (2) allowing children to remain children, and (3) converting minuses into pluses. Single parents must learn to look out for and assist one another, to exchange responsibilities, to develop support groups, and to engage socially without strings attached.

The challenges faced by African-American single parents and their families can be best addressed by persons who understand the challenges of being African-American. We as a people have historically enjoyed strong familial bonds. Our efforts to support one another have kept us strong. Our foundation was constructed on the belief that "it takes an entire community to raise a child." We have always taken responsibility for our own, and to ignore that call now is to ignore who we are as a people.

We are family, connected and strengthened by a common bond that has mystified others for generations. Millions have struggled to understand that deep bond. However, we betray that bond when we do not respond to the needs that threaten the stability of our "family." The African-American SDA Church has a mission that cannot be accomplished by anyone else but themselves.

We can make a difference in the lives of single-parent families. It has been said that the church is slow to respond to the needs of single parents because the church is not in touch with reality. I wonder if it is not more relevant to say that we are not *in* touch because we are not willing *to* touch. To get intimately involved with others is truly the work of Christ.

<sup>1</sup> A. Burns and C. Scott, *Mother-headed Families and Why They Have Increased* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> S. McLanahan and G. Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Burns and Scott.

<sup>4</sup> I. Garfinkel and S. McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> P. Glick, "Fifty Years of Family Demography," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 50 (1988): 861-874.

<sup>6</sup> Debra Friedman, *Towards a Structure of Indifference: The Social Origins of Maternal Custody* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter Publishers, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Burns and Scott.

<sup>8</sup> McLanahan and Sandefur.

<sup>9</sup> T. D. Yawkey and G. M. Cornelius, eds., *The Single Parent Family for Helping Professionals and Parents* (Lancaster, Pa.: Technomic Pub. Co., 1990).

<sup>10</sup> J. M. Hogan et al., "Single Parenting: Transitioning Alone," in H. I. McCubbin and C. R. Figley, eds., *Stress and the Family 1: Coping With Normative Transitions* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Mulroy, *The New Uprooted: Single Mothers in Urban Life* (Westport, Conn.: Auburn House Pub., 1995).

<sup>16</sup> McLanahan and Sandefur.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> T. Parish and G. Nunn, "Children's Self-Concepts and Evaluations of Parents as a Function of Family Structure and Process," *Journal of Psychology* 107 (1981): 105-108; V. Horns and G. Abbott, "A Comparison of Concepts of Self and Parents Among Elementary Schoolchildren in Intact, Single-Parent, and Blended Families (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Education Researcher's Association, 1985, Biloxi, Miss.).

<sup>19</sup> S. Gerardi, "Academic Self-Concept as a Predictor of Academic Success Among Minority and Low Socioeconomic Status Students," *Journal of College Student Development* 31 (1990): 402-407.

<sup>20</sup> Neil Kalter, "Long-Term Effects of Divorce on Children: A Developmental Vulnerability Model," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 57 (1987): 587-600.

<sup>21</sup> J. Kelly, "The Effects of Parental Divorce: Experiences of the Child in Early Latency," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 46 (1976): 20-32.

<sup>22</sup> C. Wilkinson and W. O'Conner, "Growing Up Male in a Black Single-Parent Family," *Psychiatric Annals* 7 (1977): 50-59; see also McLanahan.

<sup>23</sup> C. Kestenbaum and M. Stone, "The Effects of Fatherless Homes on Daughters: Clinical Impressions Regarding Paternal Deprivation," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 4 (1976): 171-190; see also McLanahan and Sandefur.

<sup>24</sup> C. Eberhardt and T. Schill, "Differences in Sexual Attitudes and Likelihood of Sexual Behaviors of Black Lower Socioeconomic Father-Present Versus Father-Absent Female Adolescents," *Adolescence* 19 (1984): 99-105.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THE FAMILY

*by Lenore Brantley, Ed.D.*

## **Introduction**

The Black SDA family is in trouble—or is it? Apart from a few devotional articles, almost no scholarly attention has been given this important institution of Black Adventism. This chapter is designed to help generate serious interest in this long-neglected topic. First, a brief historical overview of the Black family will provide an overall perspective. Next, the discussion will attempt to identify strengths and dysfunction impacting Adventist African-American homes. And finally, we will conclude with a set of recommendations, including a call for the kind of focused attention that can inspire the Black Adventist family to reach its God-given potential.

## **African Traditional Families**

To understand the dynamics of the Black American home properly, one must go back in time to Africa. Tracing roots to West Africa, source of most African-American importation, reveals a tradition of strong family ties. When a couple married, more than just two people were united; two families were joined, with a network of extended kin who exerted great influence upon the new family. The extended family took responsibility for the new family's development and well-being.<sup>1</sup> As in Bible times, family approval had to be sought before entering into or dissolving a marriage.

The father played a strong role in the care and protection of the children and wife. Warmth, trust, and affection were evident in family relationships. The father was responsible for moral, civic, and economic training. He tended to be strict in exacting obedience, and the children in turn respected their father. The mother-child relationship was strong, as the child was not weaned until age 1 or 2. The small child was almost never without its mother, and the strong attachment to the mother carried into adulthood for both men and women. Grandparents provided family history, folklore, and affection.<sup>2</sup>

That the Black American family survived the trauma of slavery is a marvel in itself. At the auction block family members were stripped apart from one another. Sometimes they were transplanted to nearby plantations where they could see each other only during special holidays each year. At other times the worst-case scenario played out as kin

were sent “down the river” hundreds of miles away, where the separation would become permanent.

Surprisingly, after slavery the Black family remained much more resilient than many supposed. Throughout the latter portion of the 1800s most Black Americans lived in two-parent households. From Ohio to Pennsylvania to Virginia, local studies confirm that the most common family form among Blacks was the two-parent nuclear family. Guttman's review of U.S. Census data between 1850 and 1880 indicated the proportion of Black fathers in the family ranged from 70 percent to 90 percent.<sup>3</sup> As recent as 1940 the percentage of births to Black single mothers was only 15 percent!

But during the postwar years the Black family experienced its greatest trauma since slavery. Blacks moved en masse to the cities after World War II, and during this move severe family formation problems began to emerge. Between 1960 and 1986 female-headed families grew from 20.6 percent to 43.7 percent of all Black families, compared to growth from 8.4 percent to 12 percent for White families.<sup>4</sup> At that time government policies encouraged a “welfare mentality,” while the entertainment media promoted materialism, immorality, and a quick-fix lifestyle.

In recent years J. W. Wilson has argued that increased levels of unmarried-couple and female-headed households may have resulted from high levels of economic dislocation experienced by lower-class Black men.<sup>5</sup> Because of joblessness and high rates of incarceration and premature mortality, there are fewer marriageable Black men who are able to provide the economic support needed to sustain a family. According to Claudette Bennett, as of March 1993 more Black women than Black men were employed in the work force.<sup>6</sup> Marriage rates among Black women have plummeted to record lows.

In March 1986 Bill Moyers, then a CBS news correspondent, hosted a controversial documentary on the vanishing Black American family. Moyers interviewed Black teenage mothers as well as jobless males who had fathered multiple children.<sup>7</sup> More than 20 years earlier U.S. senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, using census data documenting a rapidly deteriorating Black family, recommended controversial and far-reaching social policies designed to change the direction of Black family dysfunction.

Unfortunately, some of what Moynihan predicted in 1965 has materialized. The 1993 U.S. census indicates that the percentage of single-parent Black families was 63 percent, compared with Whites at only 24 percent. The proportion of births to single Black mothers approaches 60-65 percent. The single-parent home is associated with the all-too-frequent combination of welfare dependency, male irresponsibility, and juvenile delinquency. These statistics paint such a grim picture of the African-American family in the United States that much of contemporary American policy is established around the pathology of the Black family.

Without denying the precarious position of the Black home, contemporary studies in general overlook the incredible strength found within the African-American community. Moreover, of more than 3,500 studies on the American family, only 107 focused on Black families.<sup>8</sup> Few studies were designed and conducted by Blacks.

But the picture may be changing. Since 1990 a group of researchers, headed by Black family authority Robert Hill, has produced an extensive series of studies that provides a more balanced perspective than the pathology model of earlier investigations.<sup>9</sup> In addition to family problems, Hill identified five strengths: (1) strong kinship bonds, (2) strong work orientation, (3) adaptability of family roles, (4) strong achievement orientation, and (5) strong religious commitment.

To what extent are these strengths reflected in African-American Christian homes? Gene Oler collected demographic data on 285 African-American church members from three major denominational groups: Baptists comprised 33.3 percent of her sample; Seventh-day Adventists, 31.2 percent; and African Methodist Episcopalans, 30.2 percent. The sample was 70.2 percent female and 29.8 percent male. Her results indicated that 72.6 percent of the sample had some college work, with 38 percent having graduated with at least a bachelor's or master's degree. Furthermore, nearly 70 percent earned at least \$20,000 per year, and 31 percent earned \$35,000 or more each year.<sup>10</sup>

An interesting point in this study was the marital status of this sample. Only 21.1 percent were single, never married, and 52.3 percent were married. Only 19.3 percent were divorced or separated, and 7.4 percent were widowed. In this sample of African-American Christians, most had intact homes even in 1995.

### **The African-American SDA Family**

But what about the African-American *Adventist* family? Is the situation of the Black Adventist family a mere photocopy of Black society, or does Adventism make a significant difference in the battle against dysfunction and moral deterioration? Is the Black SDA family in trouble? In a recent study (1994) conducted by the family ministry committee for the Southeastern California Conference of

Seventh-day Adventists, researchers identified some of the issues that are now facing Adventist families. The sample included 62 percent Caucasian, 18 percent Hispanic, 11 percent African-American, and 6 percent Asian/Pacific Islanders. These percentages represented the percentage of those groups in that area of the United States.

The evidence of family crises included the following: 24 percent divorced or permanently separated, 30 percent physically abused at home before age 18, 16 percent experienced incest at home before age 18, 13 percent abused drugs or alcohol, 37 percent lived with a drug or alcohol abuser, 7 percent attempted suicide, 35 percent know someone who is HIV positive or has AIDS, 27 percent had suicidal inclinations, 45 percent have a close relative or friend who is homosexual, and 3 percent are or have been practicing homosexuals. While there is no breakdown of the African-American group, this study clearly indicates that we as Adventists are experiencing some of the same problems as people in the general U.S. population.<sup>11</sup>

Just as there is comparatively little research on the Black family, virtually no research has focused specifically on the Black Adventist family. However, there are indications that Black Adventism is indeed a stabilizing force. Many Adventist families have struggled to ensure that their children and grandchildren would have the education and opportunity to be successful contributors to the African-American community and to their church.

Fred and Ruth Harris, of Fayetteville, North Carolina, have nine children. In order to enable Ruth to remain at home with the children, Fred served in the armed forces, drove a taxi, worked as a tailor sewing jackets for new Army recruits, and even worked on weekends as a door attendant at a local social club. With the nurturing and motivation provided by Fred and Ruth Harris, among their children, one is a pediatrician, one is a dentist, and one is a professor with a Ph.D. degree; three have completed master's degrees, and the other three have done postgraduate work.

George and the late Helen Sampson, of Long Island, New York, made it possible for 11 of their 12 children to graduate from Pine Forge Academy and for all to attend Oakwood College. Four of the children are medical doctors, two are nurse practitioners, and six have degrees in educational psychology, journalism/communication, and business administration. The Holland family of Indianapolis, Indiana, sacrificed so that their 16 children could attend college. Both the Sampson and Holland families were featured in the August 7, 1989, edition of *Jet* as among the Black families in the United States having produced the most college graduates in one family.

Catherine Bland, Bible worker for the Lake Region Conference, recalls the family worship times that strengthened her spiritual life as well as those of her eight brothers

and sisters. Her mother, Victoria Bland, emphasized family unity back in the difficult 1920s. "Togetherness was stressed in those days," Bland remembered. "We had to stay together during church services. . . . This togetherness started in the home, as parents first prayed together during the early hours of the morning, then worshiped with the children before they went to school."

When asked how her parents managed to pay church school tuition for a family of nine children, Bland explained that those who did not have any children readily helped those parents whose children were enrolled in the church school. Families helped each other, and the children benefited the most. She added: "In those days family worship and the church school were two great stabilizers of SDA families."

Alice White (in her 70s), Jane McGaddy (85), and Victoria Bland (97) all agreed that the love felt within the family circle, added to the love for God that was taught to the children during family worship, are the cornerstone of Black Adventist family strength. Yes, times were difficult—McGaddy remembers her mother transforming feed bags into dresses for school and church! Yet in spite of difficult times, all three felt the love of a supportive family.

Thelma Allison remembers how in the 1930s her father would "have us all . . . listen to him while he told us stories about the old times. We played games and had fun. We didn't need to listen to the radio. Daddy was our radio. Families spent more time with each other, and togetherness was also greatly stressed." There were 11 children, and she emphasizes that there was no need for outside entertainment at home.<sup>12</sup> Many other Black Adventist families could serve as testimonies of the positive power of family, strength, and community pride in contributing to the upbuilding of the Black Adventist work.

### Interviews of Black SDA Family Life Counselors

As mentioned earlier, one of the five strengths of the African-American family was that of a strong religious commitment. Are Black SDA families able to survive better in the American culture than African-American families in general? Ten well-known African-American SDA family life counselors were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the critical challenges or greatest needs of the African-American Adventist family. Following are eight themes that emerged from their remarks:

1. Black males' lack of identity and involvement in the family. Because of many circumstances, the Black male is often not present in the family, and his involvement in the family is not what it should be.

2. Rise of single-parent households. There are limited marriage opportunities for Black Adventist females because women greatly outnumber men in the church.

3. The fight for economic survival. Despite changes in

our American society as a result of legislative opportunities in the sixties and seventies, Black Adventists still feel they lag behind White counterparts in terms of economic advantages.

4. Need for premarital counseling. Even in an Adventist home there seems to be a general family breakdown through separation and divorce. Premarital counseling and family-life training would be helpful to African-American Adventist families.

5. Negative effects of media. Black SDA families are being controlled by negative influences in the media that go counter to our Adventist values.

6. Parent-child conflict. There is a great amount of parent-child conflict and a great need in Adventist families for training that follows biblical principles and concepts.

7. Substance abuse. Programs need to be developed that are based on the Bible and designed to help alleviate substance abuse and addiction problems.

8. Lack of spirituality. There is a great need in African-American families to encourage a strong spiritual relationship with God while avoiding pressures of secularism and worldliness.

### The Valuegenesis Study

The Valuegenesis study (1990) was the largest empirical study ever conducted in Adventism and one of the largest social science surveys conducted on any Protestant church. The research study database of some 12,000 Adventist youth, parents, teachers, and pastors allowed me to compare the responses of 788 Black Adventist youth with those of 4,800 of their White counterparts on items having to do with family life. Although the Black subsample was not necessarily representative of Black SDAs as a whole, some interesting trends emerged.

First, it was surprising to note that there are many more similarities than differences, as is noted on Table 1, labeled "Items With Family Life Similarities." In each of the 10 categories noted, the percentages are almost identical, suggesting almost no difference between the two groups. Of particular note is the perception of both groups pertaining to family income. From what was reported by the young people, both groups appear to be at approximately the same income level. Additionally, it is significant to note that the majority of both groups participate often in some form of worship and would likely still be Adventist by age 40.

Although both Black and White Adventists have many similarities, there are some noted differences, as indicated in Table 2, "Items With Family Life Differences." There is quite a large margin, 21 percentage points, between the two groups on number 292, "Parents often require children to do chores." This can probably be coupled with number 320, "Mother working while child growing up," with a margin of 29 percentage points between the two groups.

Table 1

ITEMS WITH FAMILY LIFE SIMILARITIES VALUGENESIS SURVEY			
Item #	Item	Black % n=750*	White % n=4,800*
156	Families with income > \$25,000	75	71
280	Tend to agree or definitely agree family life is happy.	72	73
281	Tend to agree or definitely agree a lot of love is in family.	80	78
282	Tend to agree or definitely agree they get along well with parents.	75	71
286	Had at least three good conversations with parent during the last month.	62	70
287	Parent would be extremely upset if child was caught drinking.	84	82
321	Fathers have at least some college.	70	76
322	Mothers have at least some college.	81	77
323	Student aspirations for college and graduate school	81	77
374	Likelihood of being an SDA at age 40	64	72
457	Participates often in worship.	69	65

Because there is a much greater percentage of mothers working in the Black SDA homes, it is possible that Black children must take a greater responsibility in the home up-keep. This suggests a positive trend in the development of a work ethic among Black SDA youth. Significant margins are also noted in items pertaining to the frequency with which mothers and fathers talk to their children about their faith, and the frequency of and participation in family worship (numbers 300, 301, 305, and 317). These items may suggest a more visible faith development in the Black SDA home.

Table 2

ITEMS WITH FAMILY LIFE DIFFERENCES VALUGENESIS SURVEY			
Item #	Item	Black % n=750*	White % n=4,800*
292	Parents often require children to do chores.	68	47
300	Fathers talk about their faith at least 2-3 times per month.	46	31
301	Mothers talk about their faith at least 2-3 times per month.	60	40
305	Family worship at least once per week.	60	40
317	Youth reads something in worship.	35	13
320	Mother working while child growing up	55	26

\* approximate n's

### Oakwood Valuegenesis Study

Given the rich spiritual heritage at Oakwood College, a Black SDA institution in Huntsville, Alabama, the Valuegenesis research project was partially replicated by Melvin Davis, Ph.D., director of institutional research, for this college population during the winter 1990 and 1991 school terms to note some comparisons (see Table 3). This survey indicated a stronger religious influence among Black college students than was shown when compared with the total NAD Valuegenesis sample.

When one compares the "family effectiveness factor" between the two groups, striking differences are noted. The OC sample had a higher percentage response in each of the four areas reported. Responses in the four categories—"Mother often talks about her faith to student," "Mother and student often talk faith together," "Father often talks about his faith to student," and "Father and student often talk faith together"—seem to suggest a positive transmission of "faith" from parent to child resulting from an open dialogue between the two parties.

Table 3

Family Effectiveness Factors Comparison of Oakwood College students with national high school sample Valuegenesis survey—OC test administration			
Item #	Item	OC sample	NAD sample
301	Mother often talks about her faith to student.	41%	25%
300	Father often talks about his faith to student.	28%	8%
457	Mother and student often talk faith together.	34%	20%
458	Father and student often talk faith together.	19%	13%

To another question asked elsewhere on the survey, "Do you think you would still be a member of the SDA Church at age 40?" 52 percent of the OC sample answered "strongly agree," compared to 27 percent of the total NAD Valuegenesis sample. Might this response be influenced by parental professions of faith?

Another item in the family effectiveness category, "Parents enforce popular SDA culture standards," brought a 34 percent positive response, compared to 20 percent in the total NAD sample. (Positive SDA culture standards include such things as not wearing jewelry, not listening to rock music, not watching movies in movie theaters, not dancing, not engaging in competitive sports, not wearing a wedding ring, and not using drinks with caffeine.) It appears that Black SDA parents are more strict with their children about SDA standards.

### General Conference Church Ministry Family Study

Results from a research study conducted through the GC Institute of Church Ministry of Adventist families around the world included a Black American subsample. Unfortunately, only five Black churches were included out of 13 originally requested in the North American sample. One church refused to complete the survey, and seven others never sent their surveys back to the researchers. With such a small sample, the results must be interpreted with caution.

For the African-American portion of the sample, 27.3 percent were never married, 55.9 percent were married, 10.5 percent were separated or divorced, and 6.3 percent were widowed (compared with 47.5 percent married in the general population). In terms of education, 31.5 percent had some college, 15.4 percent had four-year degrees, and 5.4 percent had at least a master's degree (compared with 13 percent of Blacks with degrees in the general population). When asked the question "How would you compare yourselves financially with others in your community?" 28.7 percent responded, "Better than most"; 59.3 percent, "About the same as most"; and 12 percent, "Worse off than most."

The responses of this group were very similar to those reported in the Gene Oler study. Again it is interesting to note that more than 50 percent were from intact homes even in 1995. Could such marriage stability be true of African-Americans in general and Black SDAs in particular? Perhaps further research can answer that important question.

### Under Attack

The family as an institution is under attack. Blacks—even Black Adventists—are vulnerable. Although problems abound, in our search for solutions we should not overlook the strengths. The extremely well-disciplined Million Man March, conducted in 1995, in which thousands of Black men gathered peacefully to affirm the importance of community, reflects the continued determination and hope nurtured by a group of people who for centuries have been struggling just to survive. Regardless of its controversial nature, it is evident that a sense of commitment and a feeling of urgency regarding family and community pervaded the atmosphere on that momentous occasion.

The Black family unit will undoubtedly benefit from the strengthening of bonds between Black men and women as they work together in a positive way for the betterment of family, community, and race. Black women in and out of the Adventist Church have taken positions of advantage in the home, church, employment, and society, while Black men too often remain on the sidelines. On the other hand, Black men have misused positions of power at the expense of Black women.

What is needed is a spiritual renaissance on the part of all groups. The Black church can make an impact on all of

society, causing deep-seated changes in the following ways:

1. Rejection of the welfare mentality. The message of Adventism is a message of discipline and self-control. We need to teach our children how to work productively. There is research to suggest that children who learn to work at home tend to achieve at a higher rate in their professions. Again and again Ellen White emphasized the role of work in education. We promote a welfare mentality by coddling and indulging our children. They need to learn how to work against the odds and cope with the rigors of life.

2. A call to spirituality. We need to recommit ourselves to God and His standards for morality, integrity, and excellence. Because the fear of God is the introduction of wisdom (Prov. 15:33), we must recognize that our success as Black Adventist families is directly determined by how well we experience and practice God's truth in our lives.

According to the results of the Valuegenesis study, the faith development of our children is 10 times stronger in families where the home, the school, and the church work together than when none cooperate. Of the three, however, the home is the strongest determiner of faith in our children. As such, it is imperative that Black SDA parents take back their responsibility as spiritual nurturers in the home. According to the Valuegenesis report, less than 8 percent of Adventist homes have family worship on a regular basis.

We as parents cannot afford to leave the responsibility of the spiritual training of our children solely to the church and the church school. The primary responsibility for spiritual upbringing rests with the parents. The church and the church school are agencies to complement what we do at home. The Valuegenesis study further points out that more than 50 percent of the factors that contribute to the faith development of our children are found in the home.

Henry Allen says: "God desires a cadre of Black men and women whose ambition is to serve our community and not neglect it for the temporal luxuries of our adversaries. We need Black women and men with the character and courage of the biblical Esther to do whatever is righteous to preserve our families before God."<sup>13</sup>

3. A call for research. Finally, Black Adventism needs to examine itself. There has not been one comprehensive research study on the Black Adventist family. With our emphasis on education, spirituality, and better living, perhaps we are Black America's best-kept secret. Research should be spearheaded so that the message can be gotten across that God's way is the best way when it comes to family relations.

Many questions and untested assumptions need to be examined. First, what actually is the economic status of the Black SDA family in comparison to its White counterpart and to Blacks in the general population? What is the single-parent percentage in SDA homes? Is this percentage increasing over time? How prevalent is divorce and separation

in Black SDA homes? Do Black SDAs have a higher proportion of professionals than other Black groups? How do Black youth compare to other groups in terms of church retention? Are Black homes more committed to spirituality? What strategies can help increase this commitment?

A comprehensive study based upon valid research methodologies necessitates a sizable financial commitment on the part of the church and its supportive organizations. Such an initiative could benefit the church by providing basic information regarding family relations within the church while highlighting to the larger society the positive effects of Adventist principles on family relations. May we and our families become, as a result of our combined efforts, part of the everlasting family of God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Elsie Jackson, "Examining the Patterns of African-American Family Life," *Celebration*, February 1993, pp. 20, 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> G. D. Sandcu and M. Tienda, eds., *Divided Opportunities: Minorities, Power, and Social Policy* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> J. W. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Claudette E. Bennett, *The Black Population in the United States: March 1993-1994* (United States Bureau of the Census).

<sup>7</sup> Delbert Baker, "A Manifesto for the Black Family," *Message*, September-October 1992, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Harriette Pipes McAdoo, *Black Families* (Newbury Park, N.Y.: Sage Publications, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Robert B. Hill, *The Strengths of Black Families* (New York: Emerson Hall Publishers, 1972).

<sup>10</sup> Gene Oler, "Relationships Between Religious Coping Strategies, Religious Orientation, and Measures of Adjustment."

<sup>11</sup> Fred Kasischke and Audrey Johnson, "Adventists and Family Crisis," *Adventist Review*, Aug. 11-25, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Fisher, personal interviews, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Lee N. June, *The Black Family: Past, Present, and Future* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), p. 28.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND HEALTH ISSUES

by DeWitt S. Williams, Ed.D., and Donna Davis Cameron, Ph.D.

## Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the health status of Black Seventh-day Adventists within the context of being Black in America. Included are roots of health behavior for Blacks, the increased need for health awareness in the Black community, and some early contributions of Black pioneers in the SDA medical work.

The chapter also provides background information on the health of Black Americans in the general population as a backdrop for the Black SDA health experience. Some alarming statistics are provided concerning the overall health of Black Americans, and explanations are offered for the differences between the health status of Blacks and Whites. Some of the many interesting programs and activities of the Black SDA membership are examined, including information about a new phase of the Adventist Health Study, in which Black California Adventists will take part.

The last part of this chapter is an appeal to readers to earnestly consider their health behavior in light of what has been discussed. Some viable recommendations are offered for solving health problems of church members and the organization.

## Historical Influences on Blacks' Health

Many health professionals believe that the experience of slavery has had a profound effect on the health of Blacks in America. It is difficult to assess the exact impact of years of poverty, hard work, and abuse. However, according to researcher Richard Williams, privation and suffering have indeed taken a toll on the health of Black Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Stolen from homeland and family, African slaves endured a tragic 10-week trip across the Atlantic Ocean. Packed in tightly and chained to the bottom of the ship, the slaves could not sleep on their right or left sides. There was very little fresh air and no sunshine in the crowded quarters. The foul smell and high levels of carbon dioxide made breathing difficult.

Nearly all suffered from yellow fever, measles, malaria, leprosy, smallpox, pains in the head and back, chills, fever, nausea and infections. The death rate reached 16 slaves per 100 on average. Each slave was given one-

half pint of water a day. In spite of dehydration and illness, most miraculously survived.

On the plantation the slaves were forced into negative lifestyle habits—including insufficient time to sleep, inadequate meals, unbelievably stressful situations, and other health-destroying experiences. Slaves ate the fatty and undesirable parts of animals (for example, chitterlings, which are the intestines of hogs).

Slave mothers used their creative talents and blended the fatty meats with the meager vegetables they were given to make somewhat tasty meals. It took ingenuity to take foods that were mostly rejected by Whites and prepare tasty meals of such food items as pickled pork, salt bacon, blackstrap molasses, cabbage, peas, onions, cornbread, corn soup, cornmeal mush, and hoecake. Very few slaves were allowed to eat a variety of fruits.

Many of these harmful habits have persisted in the Black community. For example, many Blacks do not drink enough water. Slaves worked in the field under the hot sun and were usually allowed only two breaks a day for water and food. In summary, the conditions under which the slaves were brought to America, their inhumane treatment, and their inability to decide their own destinies all predisposed Blacks to poor health practices.

## Health Awareness in the Black SDA Church

The roots of health awareness for Black Seventh-day Adventists can be traced to Ellen G. White and the pioneers of the Adventist Church. Early in the church's history Ellen White made urgent appeals about the plight of Blacks in the South. At first her appeals were largely ignored, but later health reform became an integral part of the Adventist message. The body was emphasized as being the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Table 1 provides a time line of important dates and activities in the history of health awareness among Black SDAs. The table includes some of the significant events in the church's health history, including Ellen White's first vision outlining health reform issues, along with accomplishments of Black SDA workers and information on health institutions.

The SDA Church was officially organized in May 1863. Ellen White was given her health vision just a few

weeks later, in June 1863, the same year the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect. During the years immediately following the Civil War, the infant Adventist Church had few ministers and even fewer dol-

lars to send workers south to labor among the recently freed slaves. More established denominations sent teachers south, but the newly formed Sabbathkeeping church was struggling for survival.

**Table 1**

**A Time Line of Historical Events in Black Seventh-day Adventist Health**

<b>1848</b>	Ellen White receives temperance vision about harmful effects of tobacco, tea, and coffee.
<b>1863</b>	Ellen White receives major vision on health at Otsego, Michigan.
<b>1865</b>	First book on health, <i>Health, or How to Live</i> , is published by Ellen White.
<b>1866</b>	The church's first health paper, <i>The Health Reformer</i> , is published. The church's first sanitarium, the Western Health Reform Institute, is established in Battle Creek, Michigan.
<b>1879</b>	The American Health and Temperance Association is organized.
<b>1883</b>	The nursing course is established at Battle Creek Sanitarium by Dr. Kate Lindsay.
<b>1894</b>	James Edson White sails down the Mississippi on the <i>Morning Star</i> , taking the gospel and the health message to Southern Blacks.
<b>1895</b>	The American Medical Missionary College is founded in Battle Creek, Michigan, with 40 students.
<b>1897</b>	Medical work is begun in Cape Town, South Africa, by Dr. R. S. Anthony. A school of nursing is organized in South Africa by Dr. Kate Lindsay.
<b>1901</b>	Anna Knight sets sail for Calcutta, India, as a missionary nurse.
<b>1902</b>	Dr. Lottie Blake, first Black Adventist physician, graduates from American Medical Missionary College in Battle Creek, Michigan.
<b>1903</b>	Dr. Lottie Blake begins sanitarium treatments in Nashville, Tennessee.
<b>1905</b>	A school of nursing is organized in Loma Linda, California. The Medical Missionary Department of the General Conference is organized.
<b>1909</b>	The first graduation exercise is held for nurses at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.
<b>1914</b>	Hadley Hospital opens as a clinic in Washington, D.C.
<b>1927</b>	Mrs. Nellie Druillard opens Riverside Sanitarium, Nashville, Tennessee.
<b>1934</b>	The Medical Cadet Corps is organized.
<b>1935</b>	Riverside Sanitarium is donated to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.
<b>1943</b>	Lucy Byard is denied treatment at Washington Sanitarium and Hospital when it is discovered that she is Black. She dies of pneumonia.
<b>1947</b>	The American Temperance Society and International Temperance Association constitutions are adopted.
<b>1948</b>	<i>Listen</i> , official magazine of the American Temperance Society, is launched.
<b>1952</b>	Hadley Hospital opens as a full-service medical and surgical hospital.
<b>1959</b>	The Five-Day Plan to Stop Smoking is developed.
<b>1976</b>	Samuel DeShay, M.D., is first Black American to head the General Conference Health Department.
<b>1983</b>	Riverside Sanitarium is sold to a non-SDA group.
<b>1985</b>	The first infant heart transplant surgery is performed at Loma Linda University Medical Center.
<b>1992</b>	Hadley Hospital is sold to a non-SDA group.
<b>1995</b>	The Adventist Church is operating approximately 167 hospitals and sanitariums, 17 food companies, and 340 dispensaries and clinics worldwide.

It was providential that James Edson White, son of James and Ellen White, experienced at age 44 a notable transition in his religious life. Although in business for himself, he sensed a tremendous urgency to do something for the recently freed slaves in the South. Together with Will Palmer, from Battle Creek, Edson envisioned a missionary journey that would take the gospel of salvation to the people of the South. He had a love for boats and thought that a missionary steamer could be prepared.

In March 1894 they started work on a steamer to be called *The Morning Star*. The General Conference finally sponsored the project and assigned them to work in the area of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Although many of the newly converted Black Adventists became healthier as a result of adopting a way of life that excluded alcohol and tobacco, they often didn't fit into the social settings that they had formerly espoused. In addition, the dietary restrictions of Leviticus 11 prohibited them from eating pork, crabs, and other unclean animals.

Louis B. Reynolds uses the story of Anna Knight's early experiences to illustrate the awkward position many people face when they try to adopt new eating patterns. Anna Knight, a Black SDA pioneer, was thrust into such a position when she joined the church in the early 1890s. Her family members in Mississippi were not able to understand her religion. Loud family quarrels erupted over her refusal to eat like everybody else. Many Black Adventists were forced into similar positions.<sup>2</sup>

A major health reform movement gained interest beginning around 1830 and continuing into the 1840s and 1850s. Sylvester Graham, William Alcott, Horace Fletcher, James C. Jackson, and Russell C. Trall did much to promote interest in health. However, the Civil War soon preoccupied Americans, making it

difficult for health reformers to gain the ear of the people.

In the 1860s and 1870s interest in health reform appeared to wane. During that period Ellen White was shown the harmful effects of tobacco, tea, and coffee. She was also shown that the people waiting for the coming of the Lord should spend their precious dollars on spreading the gospel rather than on these toxic substances. Besides these economic and health arguments, Ellen White added a spiritual perspective—tobacco impaired the mental faculties and could jeopardize one's ability to respond to the Holy Spirit.

A longer, more detailed vision was given to Ellen White on the evening of June 5, 1863, at a friend's home in Otsego, Michigan. The vision lasted about 45 minutes and outlined the Adventist health message. Liquor was to be abandoned. A meatless diet was shown to be most healthful. Relationships between physical, mental, and spiritual health were described. Sometime after this vision Ellen White wrote: "Whatever injures the health not only lessens physical vigor, but tends to weaken the mental and moral powers."<sup>3</sup> "The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. . . . Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death. . . . Courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, promote health and prolong life. A contented mind, a cheerful spirit, is health to the body and strength to the soul."<sup>4</sup>

### The Relationship Between Biblical Health Principles and Health Outcomes

The SDA Church believes in the Bible as a rule of faith and accepts both the Old and New Testaments. Many Old Testament principles expound on health. For example, Exodus 15:26 promises that if the Israelites

would follow the principles that God gave to them, He would "put none of these diseases" on them that He had put on the Egyptians.

The Israelites stressed the health ideals of the Bible. Genesis 1:29 and 3:18 pointed out that God gave humans an original vegetarian diet. When after the Flood they strayed from these principles, He allowed them to include meat in their diet. But He laid down certain safeguards. For example, no blood or fat from the animal was to be consumed (Lev. 3:17; 7:22-27; 17:10-14; 1 Sam. 2:16). These rules helped protect the Israelites from disease, and the same principles were taught by early Adventist believers.

Many of the proscriptions of the Old Testament included laws designed to reduce the spread of diseases carried by infectious microorganisms. Attention to such laws would have prevented numerous deaths from infectious diseases in the United States during the nineteenth century. The first column of Table 2 provides a summary of the leading causes of death in America in 1850. During that year all 10 leading causes of death were from preventable infectious diseases.

With the development and use of vaccines and other defenses against infectious diseases, the death rates from those causes began to decrease. As noted in Table 2, infectious diseases were the top three leading causes of death in 1900, with diphtheria, another infectious disease, at the bottom of the list.

Health researchers today are following an alarming trend in the death rates of Americans. No longer are people dying of preventable illnesses caused by microorganisms that we can control. Instead, people are making "lifestyle choices" that are negatively affecting their health. To illustrate, half of the 10 leading causes of death in 1990 have much to do with lifestyle practices. Heart disease, cancer, chronic obstructive lung disease, HIV infection, hyperten-

**Table 2**  
**A Comparison of the 10 Leading Causes of Death**  
**in America From 1850 to 1990**

1850	1950 (rate/100,000 deaths)	1990 (rate/100,000 deaths)
1. Tuberculosis	1. Pneumonia and influenza (202.2)	1. Heart disease (702.0)
2. Dysentery	2. Tuberculosis (194.4)	2. Cancer (174.0)
3. Malaria	3. Diarrhea, enteritis, ulceration of the intestine (142.7)	3. Cerebrovascular diseases (43.5)
4. Typhoid fever	4. Diseases of the heart (137.4)	4. Accidents (33.6)
5. Pneumonia	5. Intracranial lesions of vascular origin (106.9)	5. Chronic obstructive lung diseases (28.1)
6. Diphtheria	6. Nephritis (81.0)	6. Diabetes (15.7)
7. Scarlet fever	7. All accidents (72.3)	7. Suicide (11.2)
8. Meningitis	8. Malignant neoplasms (64.0)	8. Cirrhosis of liver (9.5)
9. Whooping cough	9. Diseases of early infancy (62.6)	9. HIV infection (7.9)
10. Smallpox	10. Diphtheria (40.3)	10. Pneumonia and influenza (2.3)

sion and stroke, and cirrhosis of the liver are often directly related to poor dietary choices, physical inactivity, use of tobacco and/or alcohol, and stress. It is estimated that by 2010 cancer will be the leading cause of death in America. The lungs, colon and rectum (colorectal cancer), breast, prostate, and pancreas are the six sites where cancer develops most frequently.<sup>5</sup>

Black Americans, in particular, need to give attention to biblical laws and health. For example, the link between diet and certain forms of cancer has been scientifically documented in numerous studies of religious groups throughout the world.<sup>6</sup> According to studies cited in David Nieman's book *The Adventist Healthstyle*, the lowest risk of fatal heart disease occurred in SDA men and women who practiced the vegetarian diet from an early age. Risk of developing cancers of the pancreas or prostate were decreased in individuals who consumed higher amounts of dried beans and fruits, as well as vegetable protein products.<sup>7</sup>

Table 3 gives a summary of SDA health principles and how they relate to the leading causes of death among Blacks, according to the *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health*.<sup>8</sup> The eight health principles of the Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle include proper diet, exercise, pure water, exposure to sunlight and fresh air, adequate daily and weekly (Sabbath) rest, self-control, and trust in divine power.<sup>9</sup> The leading causes of death among Blacks in America are cardiovascular disease and stroke, conditions related to chemical dependency, cancer, diabetes, homicide, unintentional injuries, infant deaths before the first birthday, and AIDS.<sup>10</sup>

Turning our attention to Table 3, we notice that cardiovascular disease risk is related to seven of the eight principles. In other words, individuals who follow the seven

principles that are marked in the column labeled "cardiovascular disease and stroke" can greatly reduce their chances of premature illness, disability, or death resulting from these conditions.<sup>11</sup>

Based on the available data on why people die in America, it is clear that the Bible's guidelines for healthful living are urgently needed to improve both quality and length of life. In his book *How to Be Filled With the Holy Spirit and Know It*, Garrie F. Williams explains that our purpose in obeying health laws is not to increase our longevity; nor is it a ticket to heaven. Rather, healthy choices improve our ability to respond appropriately to the Holy Spirit. "When I realized that the only way the Holy Spirit can have access to my life is through my brain cells, I decided to observe the eight laws of good health that have brought vitality to the body and clarity of mind to millions of people."<sup>12</sup> He quotes Ellen White's statement in *Counsels on Diet and Foods*: "God cannot let His Holy Spirit rest upon those who, while they know how they should eat for health, persist in a course that will enfeeble mind and body."<sup>13</sup>

#### Early Black SDA Medical Pioneers and Institutions

*Anna Knight*. The first Black missionary to be sent to India by a mission board of any denomination was Anna Knight, of Laurel, Mississippi. Knight was befriended by John Harvey Kellogg, who influenced her to consider service as a missionary nurse. He invited Knight to attend the 1901 General Conference session in Battle Creek, Michigan. While there she heard that J. L. Shaw and his wife were going to India and needed two nurses to assist with their medical ministry. Knight answered the call.

In India she extracted teeth, lanced boils and abscesses, and did bookkeeping, besides teaching Bible and English

**Table 3**  
**Relationship Between Biblical Principles of Healthful Living**  
**and Major Killers of Black Americans**

	Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke	Various Cancers	Chemical Dependency	Diabetes (Obesity)	Unintentional Injuries	Infant Mortality	HIV/ AIDS
Proper Diet	●	●		●		●	
Physical Activity	●	●		●	●		
Water	●						
Sunlight							
Fresh Air	●						
Self-control	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Rest	●	●					
Trust in Divine Power	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

and supervising a vegetable garden. After she returned home, she received a letter from the Southeastern Union Conference proposing that she come to Atlanta to become medical matron of a new sanitarium established to reach the local Black population. She tried it for some months, but the idea did not catch on. Atlanta was too sophisticated to resort to such simple treatments as hydrotherapy.

Knight organized a local branch of the YWCA and used the sanitarium facilities to teach home nursing, healthful cooking, and first aid. She also conducted Bible studies. Through her contacts at the YWCA and the sanitariums she was able to double the membership of the church. In the community she was recognized widely as the nation's first Black missionary to India. As a result, she was frequently called upon to give lectures on its people and customs.

*Founders of Riverside Sanitarium.* Another Black SDA medical pioneer was Dr. Lottie Blake. Dr. Kellogg urged Dr. Blake to go to the South to establish a sanitarium for the Black population. She began her work in the city of Nashville, Tennessee, in 1903 by opening a sanitarium and a treatment room. Her facilities were often compared with those of larger, more prestigious institutions. Her simple treatments with water and natural remedies were questioned by the sophisticated community. Many people distrusted a female medical care provider. Eventually she was forced to move her operation to another section of the city.

Nellie H. Druillard, a wealthy White woman, had heard Ellen White speak of the terrible health conditions of the people of the South and had promised to build a sanitarium. However, she became so busy with other work that she forgot her promise for a dozen years. Finally an automobile accident put her on her back, and she remembered her pledge. She promised the Lord that if He would restore her health and usefulness, she would proceed with the sanitarium. After a few obstacles were removed, she purchased a piece of property on Young's Lane, at a bend of the Cumberland River. Thus the facility was appropriately named Riverside Sanitarium.

In the early years of the hospital's existence training was given in hydrotherapy and nursing. Riverside soon became an established institution, but Druillard, at 80 years of age, found directing a sanitarium too demanding. So in 1935 she gave the institution to the church. Between 1927 and 1935 she had spent more than \$250,000 of her personal funds for the operation of Riverside. Cottages, hospital units, and a chapel were also added during that period.

Unfortunately, Riverside fell into financial straits during the 1980s and was eventually sold in 1983. Riverside Sanitarium was a great loss to Black Adventists, since it was one of the few institutions in which Black medical workers could be trained to face the unique problems found in the Black urban community.

*Hadley Hospital.* Another SDA hospital operated by

Blacks was Hadley Memorial Hospital, in Washington, D.C. This facility was established as a training ground for Black hospital administrators and doctors, and as a place to minister to Blacks in the surrounding community. Today Hadley is a nonprofit 103-bed general hospital with more than 350 employees.

Hadley Hospital began as a clinic in 1914. Dr. L. E. Elliott established the institution as a training center for postgraduate nurses and foreign mission appointees. Five years later Dr. Henry G. Hadley and his wife, Anna, purchased the clinic. Their vision of building a large hospital became a reality in 1934 when they added a new wing for offices, X-ray equipment, treatment rooms, a small operating room, and a laboratory.

Through the years the small hospital grew into an 80-bed acute-care facility that was eventually owned by the Columbia Union Conference. The hospital was purchased by PACIN Health Services in 1992. The sale of Hadley marked the end of Black SDA ownership of medical facilities in the United States.

*Black SDA medical missionaries to Africa.* To name all the Black Adventists who served in overseas medical missionary service is beyond the scope of this chapter. Black student missionaries, volunteers, and paid workers have served distinctively in African medical facilities through the years. However, several key contributors to this field of endeavor deserve mention.

Dr. and Mrs. Samuel DeShay served at Ahoada Hospital in Nigeria. Despite personal danger, they remained at their post until the Nigerian civil war forced them to flee. Instead of returning to the United States, the DeShays served the Ile-Ife Hospital in Nigeria for several years and the Masanga Leprosy Hospital in Sierra Leone for two years, devoting a total of 13 years to foreign medical missionary service.

Among those who gave admirable service as nurses were Greta Graham, at Ankole Hospital in Uganda; Caddie Jackson, Ruby Graves, and Claudia Ann Gordon, at Ile-Ife Hospital in Nigeria; and Gloria Mackson and Naomi Bullard, at Mugonero Hospital in Rwanda. Bullard served also as a teacher/tutor and director of nurses. Gloria Mackson was a nurse/teacher in Tanzania.

Dr. George Benson served at the Benghazi Adventist Hospital in Libya until the government nationalized the hospital. The Bensons ended their term of overseas service at the Gimbie Hospital in Ethiopia. Other doctors who served short-term medical relief stints at Ile-Ife Hospital were Warren Harrison, J. Mark Cox, John R. Ford, and Carl A. Dent.

Dr. Earl Richards inaugurated a flourishing dental practice in Nairobi, Kenya. Mrs. Richards, a registered nurse, gave valuable assistance to the clinic and the church. In 1980 Loma Linda University honored Dr. Richards as Alumnus of the Year.

### Current Health Status of Black Americans

Since Black Adventists in the United States are members of the larger community of Black Americans, it is important to view SDA health challenges in the light of the wider Black population. From the arrival of first Blacks in this country in the 1600s until now, the health status of Black Americans has been considerably poorer than that of White Americans. In spite of advances in health science and medical technology, 60,000 deaths in 1985 would not have occurred if Blacks exhibited the same death rates as Whites, according to Dr. James Mason, U.S. assistant secretary for health.

In 1985 Margaret Heckler, then secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, commissioned a one-year study of the health status of minorities in America. *The Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health* identified six priority areas in which excess deaths occurred among Blacks and other minorities: (1) certain types of cancer, (2) cardiovascular disease and stroke, (3) chemical dependency, (4) diabetes, (5) infant mortality, and (6) homicide/unintentional injury ("excess deaths" are those experienced by Blacks beyond what would have been expected if Blacks had the same death rates as those of Whites).<sup>14</sup> Since the publication of that report, AIDS has also been established as a priority cause.

The first national probability sample of Black America was conducted early in the 1970s by researchers at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center.<sup>15</sup> Results of that extensive survey are now available in *Life in Black America*, edited by James Jackson (1991). From this and many other sources of data, here are some alarming statistics about the health of Black Americans:

1. In 1993, 58,538 AIDS cases were reported to the Centers for Disease Control. Sixty-six percent of those cases (38,544) were among Blacks. Of the 38,544 cases in Blacks, 532 were in children.<sup>16</sup>
2. Obesity occurs twice as often in Black women over age 44 as it appears in White women of the same age group.<sup>17</sup>
3. In 1993 the AIDS rate for Black females was 15 times greater than the rate for White females.<sup>18</sup>

### Why the Disparity Exists

*Lifestyle practices.* Lifestyle practices such as smoking, eating foods that are high in fat and cholesterol, and being physically inactive are generally more prevalent in Black communities, according to information from the National Health Interview Survey.<sup>19</sup> The negative consequences of these behaviors may help to explain our health status.

*Poverty.* Poverty is a possible determinant of the poorer health status of Black Americans. Dr. Harold P. Freeman, director of the Department of Surgery at Harlem Hospital in New York City, describes poverty as a proxy term for a series of negative social events such as low educational level,

inadequate social support network, unemployment, and diminished access to health care.<sup>20</sup>

If poverty is indeed a factor in explaining the health disparity, the percentage of Black SDAs living in poverty should be less than that for Black America in general, since the SDA membership is typically more affluent than the national average. This conclusion notwithstanding, we cannot ignore the problem of poverty as an issue in improving Black SDA health status. Culturally ingrained health habits attributable to poverty, such as a high-fat, low-fiber diet, may persist, especially in new converts and among older members.

*More roots from slavery.* One theory holds that hesitancy among Blacks in seeking medical care may also have its roots in slavery. Access to health care was a privilege offered by the owner of the plantation, a privilege that slaves tried not to abuse. Slaves didn't want the master to think they weren't good workers. Also, male slaves often waived this privilege in favor of needy women and children. Deemed at that time a sign of manliness, this notion persists even today among some Black men.<sup>21</sup>

*Inferior care.* According to some research, Blacks who enter the health-care system face a number of negative circumstances that influence their willingness to seek help. First, some members of the medical establishment appear to favor patients who are wealthy and/or White. The May 2, 1990, issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that Black men, more susceptible to a certain type of heart attack than White men, were less likely to get special X-rays and a third less likely to undergo bypass surgery.<sup>22</sup>

*Data shortages.* Decisions about allocating financial and human resources are based on statistical information and the results of previous research. Securing data from residents of rural areas, the homeless and indigent, and the incarcerated is difficult, and these groups—which include many Blacks—are often omitted from the data-gathering process. Thus a shortage of accurate information may have grave effects on the health-care availability of certain segments of the Black community.<sup>23</sup>

### What's Being Done About Disparity Issues?

As a result of the 1985 report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health, considerably more attention has been placed on the health of Black Americans. Strategies for reducing the gap are carried out by community-based organizations and federal, state, and local governmental agencies. The immunization of school-age children against certain infectious diseases is an example of a regulatory approach to reducing preventable illness and deaths among Black and minority children.

Where individual behavior cannot be regulated, aggressive health policy changes are needed. Researchers agree that until certain socioeconomic barriers are addressed, the

gap between Black and White health in America will continue to widen. Some of these barriers include low levels of formal education, low income, and fragmented political structures in Black communities.<sup>24</sup> An example of a health policy issue might be discouraging alcohol and tobacco companies that target Black communities with aggressive marketing campaigns.

Other efforts to reduce deaths in Black communities are church-based. Communications networks within churches are often tapped to inform people of a health service and to encourage education and screening activities. Church volunteers are trained to take blood pressure and refer individuals with elevated levels to appropriate health-care providers.<sup>25</sup> Usually the success of organized health education efforts within the church depends on the support of the pastor and church staff.<sup>26</sup>

### **Current Health Status of Black Seventh-day Adventists**

The health status of Black SDAs has been shown to be superior to that of Blacks in the general population. The report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health indicates that deaths related to chemical dependency are priority areas for prevention, treatment, and education. The church's proscription of alcohol and other harmful substances places church members who follow the principles of healthful living at low risk of death from cirrhosis of the liver, drug overdose, and respiratory diseases such as emphysema.

However, more study needs to be done in this area. Inadequate documentation often leads to generalized, one-time programs that lack the background necessary to meet specific health needs. The lack of documentation also makes it difficult to justify and evaluate programs, because there is no baseline from which to assess change. Following are summaries of major studies on the health of Black SDAs in North America.

*The influence of lifestyle on longevity among Black Seventh-day Adventists in California.* In a doctoral dissertation on the influence of lifestyle on longevity among Black Seventh-day Adventists in California, Dr. Dale Sumbureru studied: (1) data from the 1976 Adventist Health Study; (2) data tapes from the National Center for Health Statistics' 1979 Wave I of the National Survey of Personal Health Practices and Consequences; and (3) a 1973 study of Black Adventists and Black non-Adventists in Alameda County, California.<sup>27</sup>

Results of Sumbureru's analysis showed some fundamental differences between Black Adventists and Blacks in the general population: (1) Black Adventists tend to be more educated than Blacks in the general population; (2) rates of church attendance tend to be similar in both groups; and (3) Black SDAs sleep fewer hours per night and visit doctors less frequently than other Blacks in the U.S.

When Sumbureru compared mortality differences in

Black and White Adventists, it was noted that the Black Adventist community includes more converts than the White Adventist community. The negative effects of lifestyle habits developed before conversion to the SDA lifestyle may help to explain excess mortality among Black SDAs. The study also examines various lifestyle practices such as beef, vegetable, and coffee consumption, exercise habits, and obesity with risk of mortality.

*Vegetarianism, blood pressure, and physical activity.* Dr. Chris Melby, a graduate of the Loma Linda School of Public Health, hypothesizes that Black Adventist vegetarians who exercise regularly have the secret of better health for minority groups in America. According to Dr. Melby, a plant-based diet could enhance prevention and treatment of hypertension and cardiovascular diseases in Black adults despite their greater susceptibility to hypertension.

To examine this hypothesis, he studied a group of Black Adventist vegetarians and compared them to a group of Black Adventist nonvegetarians. He also sampled groups of White vegetarians and White nonvegetarians from the same geographical area in the United States. Using a comprehensive questionnaire, the research team was able to access nutrient intake.<sup>28</sup>

Dr. Melby's study showed that Black SDA vegetarians exhibited significantly lower systolic blood pressure than Black SDA nonvegetarians, even when age and gender were taken into account. However, the systolic and diastolic blood pressures of Black vegetarians were still higher than the blood pressures of both White SDA vegetarians and White SDA nonvegetarians. Forty-four percent of Black nonvegetarians were hypertensives, compared to only 18 percent of the Black vegetarians. Compared to White vegetarians, Black vegetarians had a significantly lower average intake of potassium, calcium, vitamin D, and magnesium, all of which are inversely related to normal blood pressure. His study also showed that both White and Black vegetarians had significantly less body fat than nonvegetarians.

Exercising vegetarians have a prevalence of hypertension three times lower than sedentary nonvegetarians. Also, the combination of a vegetarian diet and regular exercise is associated with a lower risk of hypertension than either of these factors alone. Dr. Melby found that Blacks reporting at least two sessions per week of leisure-time physical activity exhibited significantly lower blood pressure than those who were sedentary. These results indicate a clear need for further research of the health status of Black SDA members.

*Causes of death for Black Adventists in Atlanta.* In a pilot study of the mortality profile of Black Seventh-day Adventists residing in Atlanta, Georgia, researchers gathered death certificates of Black SDAs.<sup>29</sup> Seventy-seven percent of the 110 deaths that occurred between 1980 and 1987 were from cardiovascular diseases, and 8 percent were from cancer. The

study raised two important questions for future research:

1. Could the lower cancer rate be explained by the members' abstinence from tobacco and alcohol and a low-fat vegetarian diet?

2. Was the high proportion of cardiovascular disease deaths among this group a result of the large number of elderly persons in the study group, or could the results be explained by differences in dietary practices?

*A pilot study of Black Adventists in California.* Because Adventists in California share a number of desirable research characteristics, the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health has been funding research on health-related outcomes of the SDA lifestyle since 1958. The Adventist Health Study, conducted by researchers at Loma Linda University under the leadership of Gary E. Fraser, M.D., Ph.D., has included Black SDAs in California in every phase. Approximately 10 percent of Adventists in the earlier studies were Black.

The next phase of the Adventist Health Study will include approximately 10,000 Black church members, 20 percent of the total number of Adventists in the upcoming study. The first part of this study will fund the development of a valid, reliable tool for measuring certain dietary, exercise, and other lifestyle practices among Black SDAs in California. Researchers randomly selected members from 30 Black churches in the Pacific Union to participate in this initial phase. It is hoped that a subsequent large study of cancer and other chronic diseases in California SDAs will follow. The study hypothesis will associate diet, exercise habits, psychosocial and demographic attributes, obesity, and medical history with cancer and other chronic diseases.

### Activities Promoting Health in Black Adventists

In spite of the dearth of reliable health data on Black SDAs, many Black SDA pastors and church members are involved in educating their churches and communities about healthful living. In this section is a sampling of available health promotion and disease prevention programs.

Blacks in the Washington, D.C., area have access to Dr. Samuel DeShay's PLUS 15 program, a 15-day, medically controlled lifestyle approach to the treatment of high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol, without the use of drugs. Built on health principles gleaned from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, PLUS 15 has benefited thousands since it began in 1985. In 1990 a book was published with the same title. Plans include the sale of PLUS 15 franchises nationwide.

According to Joy Peterson, a registered dietitian, recent studies show that potassium has a protective effect in the regulation of blood pressure. The recommended daily allowance of potassium is approximately 4,000 milligrams per day. However, the average American consumes about 2,500 milligrams of potassium per day. Dr. DeShay has observed

that Blacks who experience a severe type of hypertension consume as little as 1,600 milligrams of potassium a day.

Fast foods and foods that are high in fat do not provide as much potassium as we need, according to Peterson. As Americans consume greater quantities of fast foods, convenience foods, and foods that are high in fat, we can expect an increase in high blood pressure and other cardiovascular problems. Nutritionists are recommending an increase in consumption of baked potatoes, broccoli, and other dark, leafy green and yellow vegetables, as well as bananas, apples, figs, strawberries, legumes, and other fruits as good sources of potassium.

The link between diet and disease has been identified through numerous epidemiological studies of populations throughout the world. An estimated 10-70 percent of all cancers are related to dietary factors.<sup>30</sup> To understand more about the relationship between diet and cancer, the National Cancer Institute has awarded grants to nine recipients nationwide. NCI's 5-a-Day program is designed to promote the increased intake of fruits and vegetables.

Differences in age-adjusted rates for cancer in African-American and White North Carolinians led to a decision to target this population with a 5-a-Day program. A consortium proposed to use the Black churches in the affected counties as channels to reach the African-American population with a program to increase awareness of the diet-cancer link. The research project, Black Churches United for Better Health, recommends five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Dr. Bethany Jackson, a Black SDA at the University of North Carolina, plays a key role in this important study.

*The Seventh-Day Diet*, a resource book coauthored by Chris Rucker, a Black SDA health educator, and Jan Hoffman, contains practical ways to live healthfully and happily and includes numerous recipes for healthful foods. Physician and writer Donna Willis serves as a medical news editor for NBC's *Today*. Many SDA health and temperance leaders have ongoing projects to assist members and their communities.

### Recommendations to Improve Health in the Twenty-first Century

*Establishment of networks of Adventist health professionals.* It is recommended that networks of Adventist health professionals be formed in metropolitan areas nationwide. Health training and certification would be a primary focus of these networks.

One disturbing reality about health education in the Black Adventist organization is that we no longer have a strong health and temperance system, and that lack of emphasis has had negative results. For example, even though we claim that only about 10 percent of our church members use alcohol, when this is stratified according to age, it be-

comes alarming. Statistics from the Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency at Andrews University show that approximately 25 percent of members who are under the age of 25 use alcohol.<sup>31</sup>

As we compete with the media for our youths' attention, the voices of our health and temperance leaders are becoming more and more silent. Two of the nine unions in the North American Division are without health and temperance departments and directors. Many of the conferences have no health directors, and those conferences that have directors sometimes require that they have many other roles, thus limiting the amount of attention that can be given to this area of responsibility. A survey of health and temperance directors showed that most have difficulty putting in five hours a week on purely health-related work.

Our colleges and other institutions could benefit by forming links with our churches. The colleges usually have behavioral science, nutrition, and other departments that would make good alliances for creating networks of Adventist health professionals. Churches are being forced to think more about their ministries and focus on the needs of the whole community rather than on the needs of their own congregations.

Therefore, we recommend a resurgence of involvement and interest in such activities as yearly temperance oratorical contests held on the elementary, junior high, high school, and college levels. Vegetarianism and other health concepts should be among the topics addressed by students. Also, health and temperance departments should be strengthened in every regional conference of the North American Division, and partnerships may be formed among the church's institutions.

*Outreach activities.* Many Black Americans deal daily with prejudice, stress, undesirable living quarters, domestic conflict, violence, and general unhappiness. Life's burdens can seem overwhelming. Prayerful, person-to-person outreach activities—such as demonstrations of simple food preparation and natural remedies, health fairs with planned follow-up activities, and small group studies of the Bible's wholistic health principles—can bring hope to the troubled and burdened. Church members, neighbors, coworkers, and friends can benefit from spreading health-related messages of hope.

An often-cited study by Lester Breslow and colleagues at the University of California at Los Angeles showed that one of the most significant indicators of good health is a person's attitude. In summary, it is not just what we put into our mouths that affects our health; it's also what we put into our minds. Outreach activities could focus the mind on building a positive outlook through improved health habits.

### Recommendations for Individuals

*Preparation.* The first phase in making changes in an in-

dividual's personal health, the "preparation" phase, is perhaps the most challenging and the most rewarding. First, find a quiet place with as few distractions as possible and pray for the courage to confront whatever challenge or health problem that you are facing. Make an honest appraisal and admission. Say: "This weight, or craving, or food obsession, or unhealthy relationship, is out of my control. In this area of my life, all my willpower and resolve have proved ineffective and left me disheartened from failed attempts."

Preparation is letting go of the tendency to do things our way. It is "giving in." Ellen White put it this way: "The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld. He has unrestricted access to Him in whom all fullness dwells."<sup>32</sup>

When preparation is accompanied by earnest prayer and self-disclosure to the God who knows our every weakness, we are ready for the second phase, prioritizing.

*Prioritizing.* The prioritizing phase is one of hope. Preparation may leave us feeling somewhat empty.<sup>33</sup> After all, our culture rewards behavior and attitudes that reflect self-reliance and self-confidence.<sup>34</sup> However, giving up control of our lives to the power of God does not mean that we cease to take responsibility for our lives and our actions. It means that we set a new goal: to take God at His word and trust Him to guide us in our journey toward optimal health.<sup>35</sup> Prioritizing allows us to form the foundation for success. We place our faith in God's ability to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We enter a partnership with the divine.

Ellen White makes two important statements about "perfect health": "Perfect health depends upon perfect circulation"<sup>36</sup> and "In order to have perfect health our hearts must be filled with hope and love and joy."<sup>37</sup> So good health does not refer only to good eating habits.

*Personal inventory of health habits.* The third phase involves taking an inventory of our health habits. In the context of His love and acceptance of us, we can begin to access our current health status through dietary evaluation, blood pressure and/or cholesterol screening, lung function, physical fitness testing, or an inventory of lifestyle stressors (under the care of a health professional). Sometimes this assessment is just what is needed to motivate one to positive health behavior change.

Christian professionals in psychology and other helping professions provide a valuable resource in assessing one's current state of health affairs, especially in regard to psychological issues that may underlie a health problem. For example, the problem of being overweight is often more than just a matter of imbalance between caloric intake and energy expenditure. A counselor may assist individuals in

determining whether overeating results from associating food with comfort or is a stress-management technique, then help the individual find alternative ways of obtaining comfort or managing stress.

*Planning.* Actual successful change occurs over time, one behavior at a time, often including relapses. Thus the "planning" phase might include arranging rewards as incentives for the desired behavior changes. For example, some people promise themselves a weekend vacation if they accomplish a certain health goal within a certain time frame.

Planning may also mean adding the desired changes to your daily schedule. Making space for your new behavior in everyday activities helps validate your choice to succeed. Writing down advantages and disadvantages of the desired behavior works well for some people. Organizing a network of supportive family members, coworkers, friends, and neighbors is a strategy that has proved effective in behavior change. A phone call to a support person at the time of a crisis can make a big difference. Careful observance of these phases, with prayerful dependence on God, can help us to achieve our health goals.

## Conclusion

In the past few years leading medical and scientific authorities have noted a difference between the occurrence of disability and death among Adventists and their cohorts in the general population. Adventists have lower risk of death from certain types of cardiovascular disease and cancers of the stomach, colon, prostate, breast, and lung. The lower risk of death and illness from these diseases has been associated with the avoidance of tobacco, alcohol, and beverages containing caffeine. In addition, approximately 50 percent of all Adventists follow a diet that excludes eating meat.

Some researchers have hypothesized that this lower occurrence of disease and death exists also in Black Adventists, compared to Black Americans in the general population. However, since few studies have compared the health attitudes and practices of Black Adventists to Black non-Adventists, this hypothesis is still unsupported in the scientific literature.

Along with the positive outcomes of the Adventist lifestyle, SDAs have another important reason to follow the health principles outlined in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White. Our major objective should be to allow the Holy Spirit to have full access to our lives through the "avenues to our souls" (the senses governed by the brain). Garrie Williams says it well: "While no one is going to earn his or her way to heaven by drinking six glasses of pure water per day, the lack of proper fluids in the body will cause a deterioration to certain organs and a clouding of the mind that will make it difficult to perceive spiritual things and spiritually dangerous situations."<sup>38</sup>

As we approach the twenty-first century, Adventist individuals and organizations that are directed by the Holy Spirit have an opportunity to make a profoundly positive difference in the health status of Black Americans. Ellen White writes: "God cannot let His Holy Spirit rest upon those who, while they know how they should eat for health, persist in a course that will enfeeble mind and body."<sup>39</sup> Much can be accomplished on a personal and organizational level to promote improved health in our communities. May God help us to meet this challenge.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Williams, *They Stole It, but You Must Return It* (Rochester, N.Y.: Hema Publishing, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>5</sup> M. Messina and V. Messina, *The Simple Soybean and Your Health* (Garden City Park, N.Y.: Avery Pub. Group, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> J. S. Levin and P. L. Schiller, "Is There a Religious Factor in Health?" *Journal of Religion and Health* 26 (1987): 9-36; R. L. Phillips, "Role of Lifestyle and Dietary Habits in Risk of Cancer Among Seventh-day Adventists," *Cancer Research* 35 (1975): 3513-3522.

<sup>7</sup> D. C. Nieman, *The Adventist Healthstyle: Why It Works* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1992), pp. 39, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), vol. 1.

<sup>9</sup> White, p. 127

<sup>10</sup> *Black and Minority Health*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Garrie F. Williams, *How to Be Filled With the Holy Spirit and Know It* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1991), pp. 148, 149.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1938), pp. 55, 56.

<sup>14</sup> *Black and Minority Health*.

<sup>15</sup> H. Neighbors et al., "Stress, Coping, and Black Mental Health: Preliminary Findings From a National Study," *Prevention in Human Services* 2 (1983): 5-29.

<sup>16</sup> "Current Trends: AIDS Among Racial/Ethnic Minorities—United States 1993," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 43 (1994): 644-655.

<sup>17</sup> *Black and Minority Health* (1990).

<sup>18</sup> "Current Trends."

<sup>19</sup> National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, *Diabetes in Black Americans* (Bethesda, Md.: National Institutes of Health, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> "Poverty, Race, Racism, and Survival," *Annals of Epidemiology* 3 (1993): 145-149.

<sup>21</sup> L. Wilkerson and A. Mitchell, "Staying Alive: The Challenge of Improving Black America's Health," *Emerge* 2 (1991): 24-32.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Black and Minority Health*.

<sup>24</sup> S. Thomas, "Community Health Advocacy for Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the United States," *Health Education Quarterly* 17 (1990): 13-19.

<sup>25</sup> E. Eng et al., "Institutionalizing Social Support Through the Church and Into the Community," *Health Education Quarterly* 19 (1985): 81-92.

<sup>26</sup> K. Robbins, "Heart, Body, and Soul," *Hopkins Medical News*, Spring 1991.

<sup>27</sup> D. Sumbureru, "The Influence of Lifestyle on Longevity Among Black Seventh-day Adventists in California."

<sup>28</sup> C. Melby et al., "Relation Between Vegetarian/Nonvegetarian Diets and Blood Pressure in Black and White Adults," *American Journal of Public Health* 79 (1989): 1283-1288.

<sup>29</sup> F. Murphy et al., "The Mortality Profile of Black Seventh-day Adventists Residing in Metropolitan Atlanta," *Journal of Public Health* 80 (1990): 984, 985.

<sup>30</sup> R. Doll and R. Petro, "The Causes of Cancer: Quantitative Estimates of Avoidable Risks of Cancer in the United States Today," *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 61 (1981): 1191-1308.

<sup>31</sup> P. Mutch et al., *Alcohol and Other Drug Use Among College Students* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific

Press Pub. Assn., 1898), p. 300.

<sup>33</sup> Friends in Recovery, *The Twelve Steps for Christians* (San Diego: RPI Publishing, Inc., 1994).

<sup>34</sup> S. Arterbum and J. Felton, *Toxic Faith: Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> Friends in Recovery.

<sup>36</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1951), vol. 2, p. 531.

<sup>37</sup> ———, *Counsels on Health* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), p. 587.

<sup>38</sup> Garrie Williams, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, pp. 55, 56.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND CONCERNS FOR YOUTH

*by Susan M. Fenton Willoughby, Ed.D.*

## **Introduction**

“How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?” (Matt. 18:12).

About a decade ago, as I was seated in a baptismal service next to a beautiful young woman, I heard her mumble to herself, “If I backslide and then get rebaptized, they might know that I am here.” A young woman about her age had just been baptized and was being welcomed into church fellowship with embraces and handshakes. Since then I have been collecting information on ways in which the church might better serve its young people, and I have found that the expressed needs have no racial polarization. Through this chapter I will share some of my findings and thoughts as I outline some of the challenges and opportunities that face us while we pursue our global mission.

We live in an expanding multicultural society, and according to current trends, few racially homogeneous societies are likely to survive. Because involvement is one of the key elements for retention of youth in the church, and because societies are becoming primarily heterogeneous, Black parents, teachers, pastors, and other leaders will need to focus on the goal of preparing Black youth to function as part of the decision-making of the church.

We need to explore ways of retaining or regaining our youth so that when we are faced with the question “Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?” (Jer. 13:20) we will have a ready reply. The youth born of Seventh-day Adventist parents who themselves become church members should not be overlooked or taken for granted.

Church leaders would do well to encourage members of this group to consider reasons they are Seventh-day Adventists. SDA young people fall into two categories: those who have chosen to become SDAs after having experienced “the things of the world,” and those of untried virtue who were born of Adventist parents and have experienced little outside of the Adventist community. Many in the latter category leave the church as soon as compulsory obedience in the home environment no longer exists. These young people have never internalized the meaning and love of Adventism. They know the behaviors they are not to par-

ticipate in, but they don’t understand why. They also do not fully understand the love of God! Church leaders, therefore, have a dual task of retaining and also regaining our youth. Youth must be aided in developing the kind of lifestyle that will enable them to function effectively on earth as they prepare for Christ’s second coming.

In this chapter we will explore three dimensions through which this may be accomplished: educational, religious, and social. Within this framework we will become further exposed to the problems of our youth—from their perspective. We will then attempt to outline some means of resolution, with a vision for the future.

## **The Educational Dimension**

If a common denominator for humankind exists, it is that Jesus loves us all and has gone to prepare a place for all of us (see John 14:1-3). However, in order for all of His children to occupy that same “home,” the church must have some common ground rules. Our lifestyle as Adventists should reflect our obedience to those rules (God’s laws). “Lifestyle” in this context is defined as “behavior in relationship to the society in which we live, as we prepare for heaven.”

Since we live in a multicultural society, the probability is high that persons of different races and cultures will live in the same neighborhood (distinct groups may not be completely homogeneous; for instance, not all Blacks have the same culture). Thus outreach strategies—educational, religious, or social—that we utilize will of necessity be diverse. Education must be multidimensional not only in terms of race and culture but also in terms of the “generation gap.” Changes occurring in society must also be reckoned with.

If as Seventh-day Adventists we understand and believe in our church and its mission, then we must recognize that there is a constant passing of the torch from one generation to another. Therefore, preparing that next generation should be one of our major responsibilities.

Primary socialization occurs in the family; secondary socialization follows closely in the school and the church. It is in these settings that we give our children space to grow. For many young people the value system developed in the home, school, and church has been a savior, which is one reason that we cannot afford to withhold the “safety net” of

Christian education from our children. Our schools should be places where “the excellence of the past is blended with the promise of the future to meet the needs of the present.”<sup>1</sup>

Since education does not take place only within the four walls of the church or school, we must be role models for our youth. For example, if you wish to teach your children about tithing, you don’t have to give a lecture about how Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20), or that the tithe of all of our increase must be used to support God’s work (Deut. 14:23, 28), or even to remind them of the blessing they will receive from tithing (Mal. 3:10). Just develop a simple household budget with them, putting the tithe first, then freewill offerings, then mortgage, tuition, etc. Character is caught, not taught.

Yes, modeling is a very important dimension. Adventist youth are well aware of the expected lifestyle, because many have enjoyed both primary socialization at home and secondary socialization in our academies. However, in areas such as dress, music, and health rules they still tend to look for role models. They want us to talk with them, listen to them, exchange ideas with them, understand how they feel, and at least try to appreciate the fact that they are attempting to give an explanation for their behavior. If we accept the concept that our actions might be the only yardstick for some youth grappling with a problem, we will want to be certain that we are providing the correct measurements—will we not?

Modeling often produces a desirable interaction with young people, creating a chain reaction of talking and listening. Listening is one of the best ways to retain our young people in our church. In my work as lecturer, counselor, and teacher I have talked extensively with young people and found that they have much to share. They clue me in to the latest fads and colloquialisms, and I clue them in on which of “the latest” are appropriate for us as Christians.

The longer we live, the more we think we have to say, and therefore we tend to want to do most of the talking. But when a young person gains the courage to “open up” and begins to talk, the best way to show concern and caring is to listen. This is not the time to match thought for thought; it is not the time to compare their experiences with those that occurred in “our day.” It is time to listen to them.

Some young people in serious trouble will normally talk only to other young people (for some, if you are over 30 you are old). So if you model the art of listening, you may not only be helping to retain youth in the church; you might also be saving lives.

In creating educational opportunities for our youth, we need to provide an environment conducive to preparation as well as practice for meaningful involvement. Although environment alone cannot complete the task of preparing our youth in such a manner that they not be lost to the church,

neither should this important task be ignored. Any environment designed to promote growth should contain a “thinking climate.” We must not allow our youth to become caught in the quagmire of mediocrity.

Too often we function under the illusion that our youth are infants who must be spared the pain of reality. Many individuals interpret this attitude as love. Rather we must show them how to change obstacles into opportunities, to stop giving up and start growing up. Our youth are not helpless children. Let us help them to understand what is happening in the world and assist them in their preparation to choose wisely.

By virtue of our global mission and the changing society in which we live, we will need to teach our youth to develop organizational ability and to recognize hierarchical structures within organizations. Because we live in a democratic society, our Black youth will have some opportunity to participate in decision-making. We must train them to recognize the importance of leadership and to develop that kind of self-image that allows them to benefit from leadership training.

Part of educational preparation is to be aware of the context in which one must function. Our denomination is large in terms of membership, but small in terms of opportunities for participation in decision-making. But times have changed, and our denomination is also changing as it attempts to relate to an increasingly diverse and multicultural membership. Therefore, many minority groups—ethnic, gender, elderly, disabled, etc.—will compete for opportunities for involvement in our denominational decision-making. As a result, we must not rely on the likelihood that Black youth will be participants in decision-making, because less need is seen for minority representation.

No organization has to be concerned about being harassed for tokenism anymore; there are too many minorities from which to choose without ever including a Black individual. Therefore, in helping our youth to function ably within various settings, we need to help them see themselves as persons who are prepared to function as part of a multicultural organization. With this kind of strength and involvement, our Black youth will be able to respond to a multicultural, global governance as authentic participants. The gale winds of global involvement—therefore competition—should encourage us to prepare for our long-term future.

To ensure a strong generation to whom to pass the gospel torch, the semicongenital attraction for self-destruction that so many display can no longer be tolerated. With Christlike parents (caregivers) and with Christ-centered education we can blend the socialization processes necessary to produce youth who are prepared and willing to carry the gospel torch.

What kind of vision for educational preparation do Adventist youth have? Young people in the North

American Division have shared with me the following insights, some of which will be given in summary form, but in some instances in direct quotations.

Youth in the SDA Church are thinkers who express their ideas on different levels. From an educational perspective—since this is the segment with which we are dealing—our young people are very much interested in “Christian” education and feel that this is one of the best ways for retaining them in the church. Their major concern is the “financial situation” and the need for the church to invest in its youth through its educational facilities. Although young people recognize that education in general is costly, they feel that if the church cared for them and recognized that being educated in an Adventist institution would contribute toward their remaining members, the financial cost would not be seen as being so great. The denomination, many young people feel, should absorb more of the cost of a Christian education and provide more financial assistance. Currently our young people are forced to borrow large amounts of money to finance their college education and thus must attempt to find a high-paying job, generally outside of denominational service, to pay off educational debt. Many times that is the first step toward leaving the church.

Young people, of course, should understand that the denomination cannot provide positions for all of its graduates. This is one reason that internalization of proper behavior is important. Behavior that occurs only while one is being supervised is really not behavior by choice. In our educational institutions, where young people are essentially captive audiences, much should be done to discover whether what is being taught is being internalized—especially on the religious level.

Another thrust of the young people’s comments is the perception of “favoritism.” Their perception is that the young people who are able to attend SDA schools are mostly “well off” or sons and daughters of SDA workers. The young people are saying that to ensure opportunities for all Adventist youth, there should be a more balanced work/study program in which all students can find work.

Lay members must take more responsibility for the young people in their local churches, counseling them toward embracing Christian education and encouraging the church to do more in helping them financially. Some of our educational institutions are providing full tuition for children of employees, and that is noteworthy. However, since receiving high grades and being on the dean’s list is what draws attention to a student or to a graduating senior, those students who must work full-time to obtain money to pay their tuition will be at even more of a disadvantage if someone doesn’t step in and fill the gap. As time passes, the chasm gets wider and deeper for “disadvantaged” youth. Laypeople in the local churches will do well to help unearth these “diamonds in the rough” and help to finance them toward a Christian education.

Students who attend SDA schools and who’ve shared their views with me have been impressed with the quality of education and expressed their appreciation for Adventist education’s being Christ-centered.

### **The Religious Dimension**

Working with many people is difficult, because their “minds are like concrete, all mixed up and permanently set.” Young people have not yet gotten to that stage, so there is time for any necessary intervention. Too often from a religious perspective the first category of caregiver considered is the pastor. But we need to remember that caring for the spiritual needs of youth should be a shared responsibility. Pastors regulate the pulse of the membership—they stimulate the church to higher levels of functioning. They ignite the church and enable it to move forward. But pastors and laypersons are partners in the cause of God.

Pastors and lay members must be sensitive to the special needs of each person in the congregation. A mother shared the following with me: “I am the mother of three youths . . . raised in this church. My son, just coming back after dropping out for a few years, went to a Revelation Seminar. I went with him. The pastor took no special notice of him, even though he went night after night.” Pastors—and the church as a whole—must be aware so that this need never be said of a young person seeking the truth.

Most pastors are also parents and therefore, along with other parents, should spend as much time as possible with their children—especially when they are young. Some pastors spend so much time solving everyone else’s problems that they sometimes do not even recognize those that are developing in their own homes. All caregivers need to understand that when it comes to religious exposure and the development of religious experiences for the youth, we are all partners with Christ.

Too often when consideration is being given to programs for the youth, church members who are not parents are inclined to remain neutral as decisions are being made (especially if finances are involved). But such neutrality is misguided. Retaining our youth is easier than regaining our youth. Investment in our youth will pay off handsomely as we help them to understand the loving, caring power of God. It is crucial, therefore, that religious training be seen not as something that a pastor does, but as an opportunity given to us all to invest in our youth.

Considering the difficult domestic and international situation we face today, some might ask, “Why should we invest?” We should realize that “a nation’s most important asset is the skills and learning of its work force.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise, religious preparation of our youth is the lifeblood of our denomination. The future of our youth lies with caring adults who are willing to succor them today and give them reason

searching for things to do, think what is going through their minds on Saturday night—after a restful Sabbath.

While it is true that youth must be exposed to the facts of life, that we cannot be expected to shelter them, we ourselves sometimes made the wrong choices when faced with problematic social alternatives. Many people helped us along the way. In providing “guided” forms of social interaction, we are making use of the “prevention path” in our effort toward retaining our youth in the church.

It is in social settings that the youth find refuge and love and build friendships. Without these social settings the youth tend to find their partners and their fun in the “world.” Sadly, in some churches there are no youth programs at all. One young person said, “I think the church needs to implement more programs for the youth of the church. It seems that after the age of 16, the youth disappear. There are programs for the younger ones, like Pathfinders, but nothing substantial for the 16- to 25-year-olds.” The church should provide social programs for its youth so that they do not feel the need to go out into the world to find entertainment.

One of the ways to encourage our youth is to engage them in the planning stages for their own activities. After all, it is during these activities that they get the opportunity to meet other Christian young people.

Most of us know that we are part of the decision-making process when we are part of the committee in charge of planning and organizing the event in question, when our vote has weight in determining what direction the project will take. We are then more likely to feel responsible for the implementation of that project. We are living in changing times. Let’s give the youth the opportunity to plan and organize social activities, to see the trust we place in them. If they have internalized the value system of the home and the church, and are allowed to accept the challenges of today, they will be appreciative of what is being done for them. In the same vein, adults need to be ready and will-

ing to assist the youth as they are requested to do so.

Of course, let’s keep in mind the various asymmetries—the generation gaps and the cultural gaps. Cultural gaps can exist even between parents and children. With these differences, we must be prepared for possible polarizations. Youth are trying hard to gain independence, and adults are trying just as hard to preserve their authority.

Our tasks, therefore, must include:

1. Making Christian education available at least through high school for all children of SDA parents, with preparation in skills as well as preparation for college, and also offering career counseling.

2. Providing forums through which youth of different races and genders can interact and thereby learn to understand, appreciate, and accept one another.

3. Participating in the SDA networking project, which would facilitate the denomination in making available courses in higher education that might not otherwise be available.

4. Encouraging churches to develop mechanisms that would help prepare young people to function in the larger society without succumbing to non-Christian values.

5. Teaching the youth to appreciate the sacrifices that have been made to create the foundation upon which they can build, helping them to appreciate their government and the sacrifices that have been made to preserve their homeland.

6. Helping the youth to recognize the limitless power of God. “Are we fully awake to our privileged responsibilities? Are we wholly aware of the unusual position that we occupy in God’s scheme of things? . . . Are we, because of misplaced values and lack of vision, frittering away the thrilling destiny that God has ordained for us?”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Winstone A. Richards, *The Pastor’s Desk* (St. Croix, Virgin Islands, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Reich, “Why We Should Invest in Human Capital,” *Business Week*, Dec. 17, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin B. Rock, *Our God Is Able* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970), p. 16.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND COUNSELING AND THERAPY

*by Alex Swan, Ph.D.*

## **Introduction**

The White supremacy assault upon the African-American psyche has been the cause of many of the psychological ills among African-Americans today, symptoms of a people who have been taught self-hate. This same assault is evident in the religious community and has resulted in a religious culture of imitating Whiteness. The longing and desire by Blacks for approval and acceptance by Whites has motivated Blacks to copy the habits and styles of the Euro-American church, forsaking the rich heritage of African-American worship.

The task of the Black church congregation as a “collective support system” is to establish ways to heal the spirits of Black people and overthrow the effects of years of negative social programming. The task is to move African-Americans beyond pretense and denial to genuine identity and authenticity, freedom and liberation.

The purpose of this presentation is not only to examine the nature of the White supremacy assault and its effects upon the African-Americans, but to project spiritual models for the elimination of such effects in our midst.

“We are not well.” In Acts 16 Paul and Silas encountered a demon-possessed slave girl, who, upon seeing them, shouted, “Amen! Praise the Lord!” This she did for many days, but finally, in a marked demonstration of the power of God, Paul healed her in Jesus’ name and Satan came out of her (see verse 18). This and other such encounters in the Scriptures remind us that society in Bible times was rife with mental and emotional disease. The population to whom Paul witnessed “was not well,” and neither are we today!

For every 20 persons in psychiatric hospitals, there are 20 similar ill persons out in society, 10 of whom may be in the church. This is significant for the gospel cause, because when the church becomes disorganized, members become disoriented. When the church loses its focus, members become careless and spiritually and mentally weak. When there is confusion in the church, members become unstable and lose their emotional equilibrium. “We are not well.”

Many in the Black church face a variety of social, emotional, psychological, mental, and behavioral problems common to the general society, including drug and alcohol abuse and homosexuality. Also, many in the Black church

experience shame, personal and collective guilt, damaged identity, lack of self-appreciation, absence of joyful self-acceptance, and lack of authentic self-esteem, necessary for a genuine sense of celebration.

In addition there are relational problems that are the result of the negative racial ideology that the organized church has embraced and used to define its relationships, interactions, and perceptions of Black people. In other words, the Black church suffers from sociosomatic illnesses that cause behavioral symptoms resulting from unresolved social, interpersonal, and internal conflicts.

## **Sociosomatic Illness and Psyche Assaults**

“Sociosomatic illness” is social suffering evident in the emotions, behavior, attitudes, and dispositions of individuals in their relationships with other racial groups (interracial), members of their own racial group (intra-racial), and with themselves as human objects. The illness results from an unintended hatred of self, the source of which is not clearly identified, legitimized, or dealt with. A common perception among African-Americans is that there is little or nothing of value about ourselves as a group or as individuals. The outcome is that we seek to improve the external somewhat to the exclusion of enhancing and developing the internal.

The collective racial experience of Black people—the lies and distortions perpetuated about who we are; the Eurocentric images of God, Jesus, and other Bible characters—have caused many Blacks to become confused as to who they are and what they represent in God’s human variety plan.

“We are not well,” because we have not truly studied the Word of God to determine the truth about our role and purpose. From early childhood through adulthood, in most Bible illustrations or Bible picture storybooks we see Christians represented in White skins only. The church’s representation of God has forced us to ask the question “Is God fair?” We have been misled for so long by these pictures that we have been unable to focus on the truth about our presence and purpose in Bible history and in God’s plan. Black people are documented in Scripture from cover to cover—from Genesis to Revelation. But one would never know this by the way our Sabbath school lessons are taught,

sermons are preached, and religious literature is illustrated.

We are commanded by God to “know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Second Timothy 2:15 says we are to study the Word. It is in the Word of God that we find the truth about our role and purpose. “We are not well” because we don’t really know the truth and its freedom value. Hosea 4:6 states: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Further, “we are not well” because we are asking the wrong questions. We are asking, “Are Blacks in Scripture?” The question we should be asking is “What is the role and purpose of Blacks in God’s plan for human variety?” We have blithely accepted the biblical interpretation of others, and “we are not well.”

Although some Blacks have challenged the status quo and demanded apologies and corrections of the lies and distortions, they are still in vogue. The result is damaged identities, low self-esteem, low self-worth, and experience-related cognitive and emotional difficulties, problems that other racial groups do not encounter.

In an attempt to address the racial issue in the setting of the church, some have resorted to the argument that color or race does not matter, that being Black, White, Brown, Red, or Yellow is not important in Scripture. While the Bible affirms that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gal. 3:28), it does not dispute the fact that in human society ethnic differences are highly operative and must be approached practically. The point in Scripture, in this regard, is that we should not allow racial and ethnic distinctions to interfere with the higher level of relating as brothers and sisters in Christ in the family of God. However, racial and ethnic distinctions in the church do mirror those of general society.

The church’s portrayal of Jesus as White, with blond hair, blue eyes, and a Gentile nose, is symptomatic of this evil. This is no accident. If color or race does not matter, why are biblical characters always portrayed as White? If color or race does not matter, why do our thought leaders go to such lengths to depict men and women who were historically people of color as White?

The intentional omission, distortion, misrepresentation, and even lies about Black people and their contributions and presence in Scripture predate the Adventist Church and were originally designed to devalue and degrade Black people. Color or race in Scripture does matter, because God created race as a part of His plan for human variety.

These racist practices of the church have had a devastating effect on a vast number of Black people, because they were not able to reconcile their apparent exclusion from Scripture. Ham is erroneously said to have been cursed and his descendants relegated to servitude. In fact, Genesis 9:25 says Canaan, the son of Ham, was cursed. However, according to all we know about biology, a Black person could not have been produced from two White persons. By

spreading lies and distortions about Blacks, the church has distorted God’s plan for human variety, and in the process the identities of thousands are being damaged, resulting in sociosomatic illness.

Many predominantly White religious institutions, including theological seminaries, have taught that Blacks descended from Ham, who, as was pointed out, was said to have been cursed. Consequently, it was thought that the entire race of Black people was cursed. As recent as 1993 a prominent White theologian confessed that he believed and taught this lie.

When God created the earth, He planned for human variety and placed in the one man, Adam, everything needed to carry out His divine plan. God went to the soil once and never went back in another act of creation; He placed in Adam’s body all that was necessary for the execution of His plan for human variety.

What are you? Negro, Colored, Black, African-American, African? Who are you in Scripture, African people? Who are you in God’s plan for human variety? This is the heart of the matter for African-American Christians in general and for African-American SDAs in particular.

When ministering to the shame, social guilt, and problems of devalued self, damaged identity, depressed spirit, resulting from the negative racial ideology that the church has embraced, we have to teach the truth about God’s human variety plan. We have to seek ways to heal the spirits of Black people and overthrow the effects of years of social programming so that we can be set at liberty.

The task of Black SDA professionals in counseling and therapy, then, is to bring African-Americans beyond pretense and denial to genuine identity and authentic racial and personal wholeness. We have the responsibility of healing so we can become all that God wants us to become.

### **The Nature and Character of the Black Congregation**

The Black church represents (1) a collective effort of Black people to find and experience spiritual, social, and personal value in our understanding of the historical redemptive acts of God, and (2) our proper response to His acts in terms of our current personal and social behavior. Within this collective context, Blacks search for meaning and relevance, assurance and reconciliation, healing and wholeness. The context of their search is conditioned by the unique anomalous content of the collective experience of Blacks in a capitalistic, colonial, and racist society.

By projecting the humanizing brand of Christianity taught by Jesus, which takes into account the social, economic, and political aspects of the social order, the Black church presents the whole life to God in celebration of His redemptive act. The gospel as preached by the Black church does not promote a dichotomy of social-religious, earthly-

heavenly, spiritual-temporal, and secular-sacred. Worship in the Black church reflects an openness and a free style that affirms the absence of such a dichotomy. All come together to affirm God's wholeness, His Lordship over all of life, and the ideology of the unity of life.

The Black church brings into question not only the institutions and the arrangements of the society but also the arrangements of the institutional church. The Black church pronounces judgment on the social order and the liberation of the individual from its oppressive conditions. The Black church preaches deliverance from sin (inherited and cultivated) and from the false leaders who control the church and the pharaohs who rule the arrangements of the society. Consequently, the struggle is dual in nature.

### **The Role and Mandate of the Collective Church**

The church has an obligation to treat the problems faced by the membership. In fact, the church is commissioned to do the business Jesus declared for Himself: heal broken hearts and set at liberty those who are oppressed and made captives (see Luke 4:16-18). God has never given a task to His people without equipping them with the abilities, skills, and content for its execution.

Since the majority of the problems faced by members of congregations are social in nature, it is important to realize that there are Christians who are trained in the social sciences of human behavior. Science of a social-psychological nature can be fully appreciated only when viewed from a spiritual standpoint. Therefore, we have to allow divine insights to inform our interpretations of social-psychological situations, conditions, and circumstances. Then we can be assured that our conclusions, decisions, and choices are within God's will and purpose for those being served.

It is never enough to tell people to pray hard and long, and somehow their problems will go away. We cannot simply assure them that if they keep coming to church, God will deliver them, while as the body of Christ we offer them little assistance in counseling and therapy. Although our people need systematic and sustained assistance, they often must continue to struggle alone with their issues and problems, whether they remain in the church or not. We fail to develop programs for them or teach them the part they must play and the effort they must put forth in achieving recovery and wellness.

Let us examine two Bible events that suggest the role and mandate we have in administering social and emotional healing. The first is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus, first and foremost, was interested in restoring families. He had counseled previously with Mary and even prayed with her several times. Now she, Martha, and Lazarus were forgiven, given a new beginning, and enjoying a more

healthy family. But let us focus on the point in this story that makes the account relevant—the death of Lazarus.

The story of the death of Lazarus, Jesus' friend, is one of disappointment and despair, triumph and vindication. We can imagine how Lazarus must have felt. He had a Friend who he knew could make him well, and now the Friend seemed to have let him down. We can also imagine how Mary and Martha must have felt when they made an urgent request and Jesus didn't come.

Considering his terminal condition, do you think Mary and Martha told their brother that Jesus wasn't coming? Lazarus had a point of view with which we all can identify. Jesus was his friend. They had a good relationship. Yet when Lazarus' sisters sent for his Friend, Jesus did not shut down His operation and rush to Lazarus' bedside. Instead, for two days after He got the message, He delayed. He was healing and ministering to others with whom He did not have this special relationship. When He did arrive He gave no explanation; He simply asked, "Where have you laid him?"

They told Him that the situation was now hopeless, that the problem was impossible to deal with, that the difficulty was now a dead issue and out of the bounds of rescue. But Jesus wanted them to realize that nothing is impossible with God.

Once Jesus did arrive, Lazarus' problem was no longer death, because Lazarus was now alive. After the stone was removed, Jesus did what He alone can do—He gave Lazarus life again. But Lazarus still had a problem. He was still bound in graveclothes. Graveclothes are those things that keep us from living full lives in Jesus, full in our freedom in Christ. Great numbers of people in the body of Christ are alive; they have been given new life, but they are not living the abundant life God wants them to live. Jesus did not come simply to bring us up out of the grave of sin and death; He came to give us the gift of life and living.

Every week people come to the body of Christ bearing issues of racism and exploitation, of discrimination and oppression. They come with personal problems that have shackled them and bound them for years, and all too often they leave our congregations disappointed because they receive nothing that addresses their issues, nothing that is of any help. Some leave never to return.

Many come aware that Bible history occurred between the Nile and Euphrates rivers. The Bible's new converts are given pictures of Adam and Eve, and of John, who wrote the book of Revelation. They see pictures of Jesus and His all-White disciples, and now they are confused as to how it is that such persons belong between the Nile and the Euphrates. So they leave the services with a damaged identity and a wounded spirit.

This is a special problem faced by Black SDAs, because, in addition to the pictures presented in the Bible, the

Sabbath school quarterly and the other publications continue to promote the distortions and lies. And although we have prayed to Jesus because we are hurting, and although it seems as if He has delayed His response to our request for deliverance, and although He is seemingly giving others attention and is treating our request as secondary, we have to teach and preach an understanding of God that makes it clear that He knows exactly when and how to respond to our requests.

Some of us are not where God wants us to be because we are still in graveclothes. Because we are alive, we are tempted to believe that there is nothing wrong with us. We think that now that we have been converted and have accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord, everything is all right. The danger is that we have had the graveclothes on for so long that the smell does not offend us as it does others who come in contact with us. Jesus said something about Lazarus, but not to Lazarus. "Loose him," He said.

God's power is demonstrated in human weakness. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but the miracle that raised him did not loose him from the graveclothes in which he was bound. Lazarus had to be loosed if he were going to live the way God wanted him to live. Jesus did not perform another miracle to loose His friend, nor did He say to Lazarus, "Now that you are alive, loose yourself!" Jesus said to those around Him who were loose, "You loose him."

People who are bound cannot loose others or themselves, but we who are loose have the divine responsibility to loose others. Jesus gave the responsibility to the church to loose those to whom He gives life. Counseling and therapy is a loosing business. The Black church is crowded with folk who are alive but still in graveclothes. Nobody really wants to touch graveclothes or associate with people wretchedly bound. But Jesus says to all those who are loose, "After I have given you life, you have a role in helping others live the way I want them to live."

Many people are so bound by their problems when they join the body of believers that they experience great difficulty getting loose without help. If not enough people are being loosed in the church today, it could very well be that too many members are still bound themselves. Members of the body of Christ have the task of assisting each other in removing the graveclothes of sin, racism, oppression, mental and emotional pain, and the resulting attitudes and dispositions that bind them.

One way of loosing our people is by preaching and teaching the truth about who Black people are and their role in God's plan for human variety on earth. No real healing of the spirit, no recovery from damaged identity, no building of self-esteem and collective self-worth, will be realized until the truth is told. White members of the church also need to be loosed in order to feel good about who they

really are relative to Black people. The Bible makes it plain that the truth has freedom value.

The other event in Scripture that speaks to the responsibility of the church that professional therapists and counselors might help to address is recorded in Matthew 17. Here a father brought his afflicted son to Jesus and explained: "I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't cure him" (verse 16, TLB).

"Oh, you stubborn, faithless people! How long shall I bear with you?" Jesus responded. "Bring him here to me" (verse 17, TLB). Jesus rebuked the demon in the boy, and it left him, and from that moment the boy was well.

This man knew the disciples (the church) ought to be able to deliver his son. He had a serious problem that, he concluded, needed divine intervention. He saw the church as having sufficient power and authority to assist his demon-possessed son. The man was correct. The church has the power, but in this case it was not doing its business.

Kneeling before Jesus, the man said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and sore vexed. I brought him to the church, but they could not cure him."

It is gratifying to know that this father knew where to take his son when he had a problem for which he had no solution. The church is commissioned to heal broken hearts and spirits, and set free those who are bruised and oppressed. Jesus gave the church power and authority to accomplish its task (Mark 3:14, 15). Therefore, if the church is not fulfilling that task, it is by no means doing its business.

### **The Church: A Source of Healing**

The church has had many opportunities to conceive a comprehensive plan for doing the business of setting free the oppressed through counseling and therapy. But the body of believers has failed to set up such a program. In this the church is no better off today than the disciples were in Jesus' time. Members do not seem to believe beyond that which they can see. The vision of church leaders must be broadened to perceive the great possibilities for marvelous and miraculous service to the body of believers and to the larger community.

Jesus made it clear in John 14:12 that the church will do greater things than He did. But today the church is halted by unbelief and doubt. We will be much stronger and more active when members and leaders stop doubting the possibilities of the Holy Ghost. There is no doubt that God will do through dedicated members of today what He did through men and women in the early church.

When the man brought his demon-possessed son to the church, its members had no power to help him. It is evident that they were deficient in power and authority because their praise and prayer life was lacking. This is also a real problem of the church today. Members who spend little

time in prayer, Bible study, and praise have no power to heal. We cannot as a church depend only on what we get from our pastors at the 11:00 hour—many pastors have become careless and indifferent to the task of organizing the church for setting people free and feeding the flock. The church must involve itself in building and establishing relationships among members through which we can extend love and mercy to each other—a liberating experience.

The disciples asked, “Lord, why couldn’t we do it?” Jesus responded by calling them a “faithless and perverse generation” (Matt. 17:17). Why would Jesus refer to the church in this way? Could it be that Jesus sees the church today as wallowing around in disbelief and doubt, and is displeased with its powerlessness and posturing? God has given the church great opportunities, but it has lost its authority and power to set free its people.

### Tools for Accomplishing the Task

It is evident that there are some social-psychological facts we need to learn about human social behavior. This theoretical and methodological knowledge is important to being effective as Christian counselors and therapists. We must have some understanding of human social problems, how they arise, the context of their emergence, and how they might best be resolved. There must also be a familiarity with counseling skills and techniques, and a manifestation of certain qualities in the character of the therapists and counselors. The primary sources and examples, however, are in the Word of God, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the love of Jesus, who is the best model of an effective counselor and therapist.

Jesus used a variety of counseling techniques, depending on the situation, the nature of the issue, who the counselee was, and the specific problem. At times He listened to people carefully and without giving much overt direction. On other occasions He taught decisively, accepting people who were sinful and needy, but also demanding repentance, obedience, and action.

In *Mind, Character, and Personality*, by Ellen G. White, the point is made that the “true principles of [social] psychology are found in the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>1</sup> Later the author makes the point that “the Christian alone can make the right use of knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

Biblical principles are to be used in making application to problems of a social nature. Such principles as “By beholding we become changed” (see 2 Cor. 3:18) and “As [a person] thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7) are examples of biblical principles that must be used as counselors and therapists execute their responsibilities as professionals within the context of the church as a collective support system. For discovery and application, we must be guided by the Spirit of God.

*Selected Messages* provides us with a formula for operation: “When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man’s best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit.”<sup>3</sup> The formula for success is: human effort plus divine intervention equals success. The Bible puts it this way: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). “With” is a preposition of participation.

When we allow divine insights to define and inform our perceptions and interpretations of situations, conditions, and circumstances, we are assured of making appropriate decisions and choices, which will give rise to behaviors and actions that are within God’s will and purpose for our lives.

The Bible is a divine library that reveals to human beings the mind of God, the state of humanity, the destiny of believers and sinners, and the plan of salvation. Those counselors and therapists who apply Bible principles to human situations will find the Bible a light to direct us, comfort us, cheer us. It is a treasure mine of information on maintenance of mental and physical health.

Persons suffering from loneliness, fear, abuse, feelings of inferiority, frustration, burnout, persecution, mistreatment, emotional pain, anxiety, and stress must be administered to by persons whose orientation embraces a social-psychological perspective and training that is grounded in biblical foundations. Seeking help from secular professionals who are not led by the Spirit of God is dangerous. Prophecy and the Bible must be the essential and imperative sources for Black SDA professional counselors and therapists.

God has given talents, abilities, and gifts to people in the church. However, that does not preclude the need for training. Care must be exercised in selecting the sources and content for training, planning, and execution. Human beings live group-life, and it is the very nature of group-life that human beings seek to fit their actions to the actions of one another. Problems, challenges, conflicts, and difficulties emerge within the context of group-life, thus it is important to have an understanding of disciplines that generate knowledge and information on human behavior in group-life. It is crucial to understand the interpretations, meanings, decisions, choices for behavior, and actions made within this context. However, since the struggle is not simply physical, but spiritual, divine insights and intervention are also imperative.

### Counselors and Therapists and the Dilemma of Psychotherapy

Because of the scarcity of SDA professional therapists, members have had to be referred to and rely upon secular professionals who do not make application of biblical principles to problems of living. In the absence of a biblical per-

spective, the field of individual and family counseling and therapy has not yet found its theoretical and therapeutic self.

Since making the American scene in the 1920s and 1930s, family counseling has developed rapidly and unevenly. Various attempts have been made to describe and analyze the field. The practice has emerged as a significant movement, with a variety of professionals claiming to be experts at delivering services to families that seek their services. The field mushroomed during the seventies and gained credibility as a viable treatment approach for most mental health problems. Starting in the eighties, the field attempted to develop integrative conceptual models, utilize clinically relevant assessment techniques, conduct systematic outcome outreach, and develop preventative and enrichment programs.

Some works attempt a critique of the twin streams of marital and family therapy, noting the efforts to achieve integration. Other works have focused concerns largely on portraying the practical field as it exists and the practical questions and issues relating to professionalism, organization, training, theoretical orientations, values and ethics. The works demonstrate a concern for bringing these two areas together, with coordination and cooperation in one and integration in the other.

If the field of marital and family therapy is to mature and have scientific and clinical stature and effectiveness, many problems must be addressed, some of which are seemingly being avoided, while others are not being addressed seriously enough. The majority of individuals entering the practice continue to do so without any formal academic training in family and family relations (this number is decreasing). Some academic programs have no courses on marriage and/or the family, and almost none have courses in parenting. Very few mention socialization and resocialization. Thus most therapists in the field have no theoretical or methodological basis within which to function, nor an understanding of the client/families and the social context of the various problems that they bring. Some operate only on the basis of commonsense knowledge, without knowing how to combine commonsense knowledge with scientific knowledge generated in the process of discovery. Many treat symptoms as real problems, not having the diagnostic or assessment mechanisms for discovering the real problems of their clients.

Presently psychotherapy is experiencing serious problems, and those who do not understand the reasons tend to blame the field of counseling and therapy. Today most clinicians who label themselves as "in the therapeutic field" do so by using "psychotherapy." Many psychologists have labeled themselves "community psychologists," and some psychiatrists are using the label "social psychiatrist" in an attempt to capture the social nature of their theoretical and

therapeutic concerns. Social workers who have come to believe that their academic background is akin to that of persons trained in sociology flirt with the "psychotherapy" label, but do not ground their activity in either sociological content or a social-psychological context. They all make the same mistake of viewing human behavior in strictly individual terms. This mistake is the essence of the dilemma, which has dire consequences for understanding and treating human social problems. The dilemma is theoretical, methodological, and therapeutic.

To seek to understand the setting or context of human behavior is not to blame the context for the behavior. To understand the sociocultural and structural arrangements, restraints, and constraints out of which choice is made and behavior emerges is not to blame those constraints. The context contains, in addition to the individuals who have come together, certain potent forces (cultural prescription and social structure) that people interpret, to which they assign meaning and make choices for action and behavior. Behavior is always contextual, but the behavior belongs to the individual. Still, the behavior is social in nature because it emerges from a social context and is expressed or finds expression in social settings and situations created by the individuals who have come together in the settings.

The individual dynamic of behavior is that the individual makes the choice and executes the choice in the form of action. Behavior is the result of choices made and dictated by the interpretation of social situations and settings that are influenced by a set of experiences and characteristics of the individual and sociocultural restraints and constraints relative to the possible available and acceptable alternatives. Therefore, social settings plus individual interpretations (influenced by a set of experiences) equal choices, which result in action or behavior (given the possible available and acceptable alternatives). This describes the sociological-social-psychological perspective of human behavior, which is absent in psychotherapeutic understanding. Consequently, this theoretical perspective does not influence the methodological activities of those presently dominating the clinical field. Although choices are owned by the individual, the focus of discovery, assessment, and intervention should not be only on the individual's behavior but also on the context out of which the behavior emerges.

When we examine the basic assumptions explicit in the philosophical positions of the popular therapeutic modalities, it seems true that the theoretical perspective of the clinician determines what he or she looks for and what he or she sees. This is the case for psychoanalytic, Adlerian, existential, person-centered, rational-emotive, gestalt, transactional analysis, behavior, and reality therapy. These modalities are too limited and skewed to be effective. When we embrace a particular psychotherapeutic perspective of human social

problems, we are bound by its goals and intervention and application strategies. To view individuals and their situations from the particular therapeutic approach of the therapist with predetermined explanations and goals is to stifle the process of discovery and to exclude possibilities that might be beyond the dimensions of the particular approach. The clinician confines himself/herself to the theoretical limitations of its dictates and is forced to seek and achieve goals that might not be appropriate to the problems of the clients.

Further, it stifles the grounding of the problems in the social context of the clients, which makes adequate discovery virtually impossible. The context of the clients' problems must be located, determined, and understood if the treatment (therapy) is to be effective or if real change is to take place. Clinicians must assume a scientific posture before invoking the therapeutic stance. Therapists must be scientists initially because their primary task is to collect data, specific information, and knowledge from the clients about their problems and the context of their problems. The scientific or discovery process must not be hampered by predetermined explanations and the predefined nature of the modalities regarding clients' problems. The practice of psychotherapists during the intake interview, and even beyond, is to make their clients fit into their approaches or predetermined systems. The struggle with the clients and the information they produce is to force them into seeing their problems from the perspective defined by the approaches.

A video is in circulation that shows Carl Rogers (person-centered), Fritz Perls (gestalt), and Albert Ellis (rational-emotive therapy) conducting individual sessions with the same client at different times. This video clearly demonstrates the attempts by three therapists, with three different approaches and philosophical assumptions, to fit the client into their approaches. Success was accepted or acknowledged only when the client began to see things from the perspective of the therapist and the particular approach dictating the session.

This is not to suggest that clients do not have multiple problems, or that clients may not have problems in the areas of each of the modalities of the various mentioned approaches. However, it is not true to the scientific process of discovery for data to be skewed by therapists and their therapeutic approaches that have predetermined explanations of clients' presenting problems. The scientific process of discovery allows for the emergence of the real problems and their contents.

The video also demonstrates that if the problem is not in the embraced modality, the clients cannot be helped unless the data they present are forced into the philosophical and therapeutic scheme of the therapist's modality. The outcome is tragic because the real problems will not be discovered, nor will the context of the problem be determined.

A therapeutic approach should have the potential to allow for any value, attitude, perspective, disposition, ideology, or cultural trait to emerge in the process of encounter, disclosure, and discovery. It should allow for the emergence of specific information and commonsense knowledge unique to the social situation of the client. The modality must make a dynamic approach that provides a creative interplay between theory, research, education, and practice, which produces knowledge and grounded explanations for the purpose of intervention and application at both the macro and micro levels of human social problems. How problems are discovered, identified, understood, explained, and treated are crucial to the outcome.

It is accurate to conclude that traditional psychotherapists see what they look for, and what they look for they see. What they see is what their therapeutic modalities allow them to see, and what their therapeutic modalities allow them to see is what they treat. Grounded encounter therapy (GET) corrects this flaw for discovery and application.

### **Counseling by Christians and Christian Counseling**

The need is great for Black SDA professionals in counseling and therapy, both on an individual basis and for the collective body of consumers. For a variety of reasons the proper, appropriate, and comprehensive role of these professionals in the work of the collective church has not been determined. To some degree people are skeptical of the field and of professionals who claim to know sociology, psychology, and social-psychology. This has caused a synthesis of the spiritual and the psychosociotherapeutic. However, the kinds of problems emerging in the "hospital" and "mental institution" we call the church suggest that a greater number of church members ought to be trained and skilled in the area of counseling.

Many pastors have seen the need to take pastoral counseling courses, while others have acquired and obtained degrees in fields in which they have learned a bit about the psychotherapeutic modalities available. Other leaders, however, have embraced the view that all one needs to do is to be converted and pray, and all of his/her issues and social and emotional problems will disappear. A careful review of Scripture and a thoughtful study of the Spirit of Prophecy would quickly correct that intellectual posture.

Sometime ago a pastor who wrote a provocative article in which he asserted professional counseling to be a waste of time found himself frustrated by a lack of success in counseling, which he attributed to people simply not following through on his pastoral advice. He did admit, however, that his failure might have resulted from his own ineffective counseling skills. As he was not referring to content, but to skills and appropriate training, we must not suggest that pastors stick to preaching and avoid counseling, although some should.

There is a need, however, for pastors to find effective ways to minister to people and deal with their issues within the context of the church as a collective support system. From a biblical perspective, helping people is not an option; it is a requirement and a responsibility of every believer. Counseling and therapy are a biblically established part of any progressive ministry. The need is great, the task is awesome, and the responsibility is enormous. We cannot be divided on what we must do with this sacred task nor about how the task should be accomplished.

Too many Christians believe that counseling should be left up to professionals. But every Christian has the responsibility to counsel others. Counseling is part of being Christian. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 the Holy Spirit, through Paul, gave important commands to the people of the church in general, not only to the leaders or pastors. Counseling is the general ministry of the church (Heb. 12:15; Eph. 4:12; 1 Peter 4:10).

There is a great need for Christian lay counselors today in every aspect of the life of the church. The lay counselor is the person who has found help in the past and can now use both the Word of God and his/her personal experience to help others. God is "the God of comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Cor. 1:3, 4, NIV).

The more mature we become in Christ, the more responsible we are for carrying out the ministry of lay counseling (see Heb. 5:12, 13). Christian maturity means encouraging others.

### Principles of Biblical Counseling

Lay counseling should always begin with listening—the kind that demonstrates a genuine interest in the person who has come for help. The lay counselor has to discover precisely what the person needs in order to help. Showing love, caring, and help to another person is not possible without first fully understanding the person's problem and its context. We cannot be quick to read a verse or offer a solution, because the selection may not meet the need of this individual, leaving him/her more frustrated than ever. Understanding and discovery are not possible without genuine communication, and to have that communication we must listen to the person who is bound and in need.

If the person seems to be reluctant in expressing the problem, we can show our interest by asking a brief question, such as "Could you tell me more about your feelings?" or "I really want to be of assistance; will you tell me more about the problem?" Genuine discovery always embodies the content of the problem and what can be done to resolve it.

God has a plan and a purpose for every individual. Many among the body of believers fail to understand the meaning

of existence. Thus insecurity, resulting in various spiritual, emotional, and mental problems, is present among Christians who have been given new life. Sometimes an individual needs only a gentle reminder to put him/her back in touch with the meaning of life. Another person may need complete instructions in the basic facts of the meaning of life.

A lay counselor needs to be well grounded in the Bible and be able to recall passages that have helped him/her. We must convey to members of the church the understanding that our ultimate meaning and security are met in God through Christ.

Usually people are unaware of their feelings until they are directed to think specifically about them. For example: Am I angry? Do I feel afraid? Was I disappointed? What makes me feel good about myself? People need to be in touch with their feelings and know how they truly feel.

Counseling in the setting of the church is fellowshipping and disciplining. Lay counseling is establishing a caring relationship with another person. It is a part of the ministry to one another in the church. It is not preaching or merely giving out information; it is concern, love in action, patience, and kindness. It is not self-seeking, touchy, resentful, or rude. It protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres (see 1 Cor. 13:7).

Lay counseling does not negate the need for professional counselors, clinical psychologists, and clinical sociologists any more than witnessing for Christ eliminates the need for evangelists. It is important for the church to utilize the abilities, skills, and gifts of professional counselors and therapists in mobilizing for its counseling ministry.

### The Program for the Church as a Collective Support System

In addition to seminars, workshops, conferences, and retreats, which tend to serve some members, we have to define the church as a collective support system and establish support programs and support groups specific to the issues, needs, and challenges facing the membership. Professional counselors, therapists, and church leaders must be organized to assist in discovery and treatment of the various social and emotional problems in the church. Lay counselors should be utilized as facilitators of support groups after being trained and while being supported by certified and/or licensed professionals.

Effective support groups will be made up of individuals sharing a common bond involving painful experiences who meet regularly to discuss issues and feelings that accompany those experiences. The numbers and kinds of support groups are determined by the needs of a particular congregation.

As a collective support system, with support programs and support groups developed and supervised by professional counselors and therapists, facilitated by trained lay counselors, the church will more adequately meet its divine

responsibility to do what it is commissioned to do—set captives free.

Accepting this commission means that a number of changes must take place, allowing the organization of the church to be enhanced. First, the church facility must be open seven days a week and for most of the day. The local church cannot meet its responsibility as a collective support system with an “11:00 Sabbath morning” mentality. This new conceptualization of the church has no chance of being successful until pastors are made to be accountable.

Second, the present membership must also be resocialized, revived, and reformed. Most members get to church between 10:45 and 11:20 a.m. on Sabbaths, then are not seen again until the same time the next Sabbath. As new members join the church from first-day churches, the Sunday mentality influences their Sabbath involvement. New members are not being socialized into the religious culture of the church as they once were. Called business meetings attract only the pastor’s supporters and a few loyal members. Therefore, the concept of the collective support system cannot be launched successfully during a called business meeting.

This effort must be initiated during the 11:00 hour and the idea of a collective support system discussed with the various support groups. If members understand the role of the collective body and that its needs and interests will be addressed, many will be eager to participate. Training sessions can then be scheduled, along with times for the meetings of the various groups.

Many members have the capacity to pretend that they are doing just fine when their lives are in total chaos. People work hard to present an image of togetherness and wholeness among their families and peers, in the workplace, and in the church. This collective support system is an invitation to true freedom in Christ. People are experiencing feelings of shame, guilt, anger, and loss because of failure, limitations, and unfulfilled human needs. Many refuse the help they need by continuing to insist that they can handle it. When we try to fix our problems by ourselves, we dig deeper holes of despair and depression.

Members must understand that Jesus loves us in our incompleteness, and when He gives us new life, He also gives the church the responsibility to assist each member of His body to live life abundantly. Jesus gently but clearly confronts our denial and pretense and our need for change. He desires us to know the truth about us, for only then can we get the help we need from Him and from those around us in our healing and wholeness. He invites us to be compassionate with ourselves and with others. It will free us to accept and give the healing we need.

The support system to be established is designed to provide assistance that emphasizes recovery, rebirth of inner

freedom, acceptance of self and others “as is,” and discovery of the full life God intends for us to lead.

Services will be provided by a professional Christian group comprised of therapists/counselors, ministers, and trained lay counselors. The professionals will be academically prepared and licensed or certified to practice therapy and counseling.

There must be individual as well as group counseling and therapy. These support groups must provide an atmosphere for healing and recovery in the church through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17, NIV).

Lay counselors must be members in good standing of the local congregation whose responsibility it is to promote mutual help and support. They should be utilized as facilitators of the groups providing structure, process, continuity, and encounter through interactions. Lay counselors must themselves be supported by professional counselors and therapists.

### Conclusion

The ideology of White supremacy has remained firmly embedded in both secular and religious forms of media communication and education. While we as African-Americans have won a measure of freedom for our bodies, too many of our minds remain enslaved by the more subtle restraints of an ideology of White racial preference, which produces a subservient posture. The structures of racism and the posture of superiority are attempting a comeback in overt forms, and African-Americans, in large measure, do not seem to have the spirit to respond appropriately and adequately. If the evils of racism, especially in the church, had been confronted appropriately, it would have been difficult for it to grow and flourish again today.

Great injury has been and is being done to African-Americans. Ellen G. White makes this point: “The American nation owes a debt of love to the colored race, and God has ordained that they should make restitution for the wrong they have done them in the past. Those who have taken no active part in enforcing slavery upon the colored people are not relieved from the responsibility of making special efforts to remove, as far as possible, the sure result of their enslavement.”<sup>3</sup>

Galatians 6:10 says: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” This text makes it clear that Christ has given the church the duty of caring for the needy, not just in society, but also to those who are among the body of the church. In the church, God allows the poor and needy to be a permanent part of the membership, and He has placed a personal responsibility on the church to care for them. The church body, as a family caring for one another, is to minister to the sick physically, emotionally, and spiri-

tually; support the weak; teach the ignorant; train the inexperienced; and protect the helpless. The church has the task of carefully and judiciously structuring, arranging, and planning the care of those among its membership.

Too many churches today are doing little or nothing in this regard. This neglect on the part of the followers of Christ is not pleasing to Him. God is watching us, from a distance and up close, to see how we are treating one an-

other and how we are dealing with the needy as He gives us the opportunity to be of real service.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1977), vol. 1, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> ———, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), p. 382.

<sup>3</sup> ———, *The Southern Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), p. 54.

Next >>>

---

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND CHURCH MUSIC

by Alma Montgomery Blackmon, Mus.D.

## Introduction

Black Seventh-day Adventists are fragmented in their perceptions of music that is appropriate for the worship of God. Cultural differences within families, dissimilar opportunities for musical training and exposure, varying musical traditions within local churches, and wide diversity in the degree to which our clergy, musicians, and members have dedicated themselves to the study of church music all contribute to the fragmentation that we are now experiencing.

## African Musical Heritage

During the civil rights struggle, when Black Americans rediscovered an interest in reaching back to Africa, the history and grandeur of that land, once obscured from us, became apparent to us. The establishment of Black studies in the curricula of schools, colleges, and universities across the country inspired many to embrace almost everything that was Black.

In Seventh-day Adventist churches the Negro spiritual has always had a place, but when Black Adventists began to look for something new that reflected Black heritage, many looked to the rhythmic gospel music that disc jockeys were beginning to play on the radio. This in many churches was viewed as performing the music of the Pentecostal Church, but Black Adventists were determined to reflect in their music the culture of their people.

The 1941 *Church Hymnal* contained music of various nations of the world, and even hymns sourced from other denominations,<sup>1</sup> but there was no inclusion of the Negro spiritual. In fact, at certain Adventist institutions of higher learning White elitist professors of music were commenting on the inferiority of the Negro spiritual as a musical form. In this setting Black gospel music, which was very new to most Adventists, seemed a fulfillment of the African nature. In this chapter I will discuss this direction in Black music and outline problems inherent in the gospel rock scene.

## Biblical Instruction

In our church music we are worshiping God, no matter what color we are, and we have definite instruction about the music that is to be rendered in this exercise. Ellen White, in commenting upon music in worship, states:

“Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer.”<sup>2</sup> Just as we pray to Him, we sing to Him. In both of these activities God is the primary audience. Therefore, our attitude in singing should be as reverent as it is in prayer. Alas, that is not always so.

In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 God imparts to us the kinds of music we should render to Him: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Psalms are passages of Scripture, especially from the book of Psalms, that are set to simple melodies. Examples are “God So Loved the World,” “I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes Unto the Hills,” “The Lord Is My Light,” etc.

Hymns are praises to God in which we extol His character, love, greatness, majesty, might, power, and glory. They are definitely God-centered. Consider as examples “Holy, Holy, Holy,” “Come, Thou Almighty King,” and “Jesus Shall Reign.”

Spiritual songs are musical testimonies of the interaction of the Deity upon the heart and life of the believer. “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour,” “In the Garden,” and “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” are examples. Because these songs describe a relationship between a person and Christ, they are correctly referred to as gospel songs. However, we Blacks do not tend to regard them as gospel songs, because rhythm is not their chief characteristic. Here we err, because it is the poem, the message of the song, and not the music that qualifies a song as “experience music.” And for us there is certainly no greater body of experience music than the heritage we have received from our slave forebears, the Negro spiritual.

For years Black Adventists worshiped this way. There was no obvious attempt to make the church service Black except for the inclusion of Negro spirituals.

## Eurocentrism—A Point of Controversy

Perhaps as a backlash to the prejudice we have experienced in this country and in this church, and perhaps also because of the pride we feel in our reconnection with Africa, there has arisen a great resentment of Eurocentric music and a desire to experience Black gospel music only. We willingly sing hymns and spiritual songs, but an increasing number of us refuse to perform anthems because of

their Eurocentric roots. Hence much of the historical singing of the Word of God is eliminated from our services.

In defense of Eurocentrism in music and worship, it should be remembered that the history of Protestantism—the Seventh-day Adventist Church is, of course, a Protestant denomination—must begin with the Reformation. We cite the work of Martin Luther in Germany, John Wycliffe in England, John Huss in Bohemia, John Calvin in Switzerland and France, John Knox in Scotland, and others in developing the bedrock on which we worship today. And since these persons were Europeans, Protestantism has within itself Eurocentric roots.

Martin Luther not only differed with the Catholic Church on his 95 theses; he was the first Protestant hymn writer. Prior to the German Reformation, the priests and choirs sang all of the music. Luther, who felt that the congregation should participate and not be mere listeners, gave the people the first hymnbook in their own language. In his lifetime he wrote 37 fine hymns, but the most famous and enduring of all, composed in 1529, was “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” The hymn, therefore, as a musical form, is Eurocentric.

Just as Martin Luther developed the hymn for the people, it was necessary to develop independent anthems for the choirs to sing as the newly established Protestant denominations forsook the Mass as celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church and began to develop their own worship forms. Since Protestant Christianity experienced a splintering into numerous denominations with varying subtleties in dogma, composers chose to select biblical texts to write great anthems. Surely there could be no disagreement between denominations if the words of an anthem came directly from the Scriptures! Thus the anthem is indeed Eurocentric and should be held in esteem by Black congregations and clergy. It is the Word of God being sung, so how can we say that it is not relevant to us as a people?

In the current Black Adventist renaissance I do not hear Black clergy reading from Black Bibles written in dialect, nor do I hear their sermons preached in Black “ghettoese.” The King James Version of the Scriptures remains in wide use among us, and it is Eurocentric as well. Although there is an increasing trend among our Black pastors to preach in the mold of the most popular Black preachers in non-SDA circles, music seems to be the main determinant that defines a worship service as Black, and that is unfortunate.

### The African Connection

Many consider the Black gospel music that has arisen to prominence within the Black Seventh-day Adventist Church today to be based upon our reconnection with Africa. Does the style of this music and the nontraditional use of musical instruments bear this out?

Jeffrey K. Lauritzen, director of choirs at Collegedale

Academy, Collegedale, Tennessee, has said: “Drum sets, electric guitars, synthesizers, and elaborate amplification systems, which greatly intensify the rhythmic effect and loudness of the music, are making dramatic inroads into Christian worship, as are commercially produced accompaniment tapes, many of which are in the rock idiom.”

These are not instruments used traditionally by church musicians for the worship of God. Rather they are part of the trappings of rock and roll performers, and while we do not endorse rock and roll, we risk, by our use of these instruments, the danger of following their example instead of moving in the pathway of musicians whose sole purpose has always been to honor God with their talents.

Angi Cooper, of Memphis, Tennessee, took issue with Tipper Gore’s efforts to clean up the rock music scene, which is bombarding our youth today with questionable lyrics, in a letter to the editor of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, dated January 12, 1986: “From the very beginning rock and roll was meant to be a form of rebellion—rebellion against society, government, and parents, who were shocked at Elvis Presley’s rocking pelvis. Rock and roll is more than just a concert or a pop song on the Top 40 countdown. It is sexual, spiritual, and controversial.”

Michael Ventura, a music researcher, conducted studies based on the hypothesis that all American music (that is to say, the music of Black and White classical and pop composers) has its roots in Africa. To do so, he traced the development of African music as it came from the land of our ancestors during slavery to Haiti and then to New Orleans, where many Black pop forms originated.

To cite some examples, “funk” comes from the African word *lu-fuki*, of the Kikongo language. It means “positive sweat,” something that has been done well and is, therefore, good, or funky. “Soul” has a reference in the Kikongo language as well, in the word *mojo*, which means to be invested with a spirit power that has the ability to control. It is a voodoo practice to carry a mojo stone. “Boogie” comes from the Kikongo word *mbugi*, which means “devilishly good.” *Juke* is the Mande word for “bad,” and in the juke joints of New Orleans the word meant “bad music played by bad people in bad places,” according to Michael Ventura.<sup>3</sup>

The September 1982 issue of *Ebony* magazine, in a feature on the career of gospel singer Andrae Crouch, stated: “Crouch certainly didn’t stick to the traditional format of presenting religious music. He has carved for himself a niche in the music world that is usually reserved for nonreligious artists, because he has cleverly combined elements of disco, progressive jazz, rhythm and blues, pop, and even rock, while at the same time walking a fine line between his traditional grassroots gospel background and cut-right Top 40 funk.”

Certainly, despite the African connection, it is clear that

these musical styles have no part in Christian music. In her book *Readings in Black American Music*, music historian Eileen Southern describes primitive African worship as imbued with voodoo practices in which the spirits of gods whom the participants invoke with their drumming “ride” the bodies of the worshipers in such a manner that the onlookers can look at the movements of the dancers and identify precisely which god has come into their midst.<sup>4</sup>

How can we take the purity of Jesus Christ and the story of salvation and present them in such a format? If there is an African connection between rock, jazz, soul, and our gospel music, it is a connection that we should not make.

Even though we are African-Americans and proud of that fact, we are also Seventh-day Adventist Christians, and it is incumbent upon us to select those parts of our heritage that we can safely incorporate into our faith and lifestyle. We cannot accept the whole thing, because our ethnicity is not going to save us in God’s kingdom. It is, rather, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that has made salvation possible for us, and we must not offend Him.

In a conversation with Calvin B. Rock, General Conference vice president, concerning the current musical trend in Black Adventist churches, I explained that we were making attempts to reach back to Africa and to bring that African rhythmic heritage into our music. Rock’s response was that he has been all over Africa and has never seen or heard anything like the music that is going on in our churches today. Of course he has not seen or heard its like; what we are doing is not African. The musical phenomenon that is going on in our churches is an American Pentecostal hybrid!

Because we do not know the culture of consecrated Seventh-day Adventist Africans, we grope in the dark, blindly assessing to them characteristics that we think they possess and that we would like to emulate. Yet African Seventh-day Adventists do not perform the music that we espouse. From time to time I receive requests for music from African conductors whom I have met in my work for the church. They always ask for specific choral anthems and Negro spirituals. We should be careful not to emulate music in our worship that reaches back to pagan practices. We have ample reason to value our Negro spirituals and our great anthems, and to value our heritage as African-American Seventh-day Adventists.

### **The Pentecostal Connection**

As was suggested before, Pentecostalism seems to be a major influence in Black Christian gospel music. According to *Grove’s Dictionary of Music*, “gospel music is a religious type of folk or popular music. It is principally American and is performed by both Blacks and Whites. Among Blacks, gospel music has largely replaced spirituals. Black gospel is related to the development of the Pentecostal and Holiness

churches. Since the 1940s gospel music has been assimilated into the church services of many denominations. It has also become closely associated with certain styles of popular music: Black gospel with soul and White gospel with country music” (p. 554). Over several pages the article explains how the rise of gospel music coincided with the rise of blues and jazz, and how they all got together in the early part of the twentieth century.

At this point it should be acknowledged that gospel music is a legitimate and necessary type of church music. Gospel songs testify of the goodness of God to the individual believer and the believer’s response to Him. Where would we be without songs like “He Touched Me,” “Give Me a Clean Heart,” and “His Eye Is on the Sparrow”? The gospel song is a wonderful form of musical expression.

The danger is in the way we style the gospel song and the instruments we use. As mentioned before, synthesizers, guitars, and drums are used extensively in the field of rock music. Powerful amplification systems guarantee that the music will be loud, causing the singers to force their tone quality from their throats. Furthermore, an undue emphasis on rhythm is highlighted not only in the drumming but also in the bodies of the singers as whole choirs rock back and forth to the music. The organ of preference is the Hammond organ, which can achieve strident sound effects. If we would take the time to visit a Pentecostal church, this is exactly what we would find, proving that we are not imitating Africa. We are embracing Pentecostalism!

### **A Last-Day Prophecy Fulfilled**

In 1900 at a camp meeting in Muncie, Indiana, S. N. Haskell, who had spoken at the Sabbath morning service, was distressed by the music that was rendered there that day by a fanatical “holy flesh” group. Using musical instruments, they had sung sacred words to dance tunes, and the people had danced, shouted, and jerked themselves about until they had become hysterical. And these were White Adventists!

Six months earlier our prophet, Ellen White, had seen the situation in vision, and when letters of concern began to reach her, she replied with these words: “The things you have described as taking place in Indiana, the Lord has shown me would take place just before the close of probation. Every uncouth thing will be demonstrated. There will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit.”

She continued: “The Holy Spirit never reveals Himself in such methods, in such a bedlam of noise. This is an invention of Satan to cover up his ingenious methods for making of none effect the pure, sincere, elevating, ennobling, sanctifying truth for this time. Better never to have the wor-

ship of God blended with music than to use musical instruments to do the work which last January was represented to me would be brought into our camp meetings. The truth for this time needs nothing of this kind in its work of converting souls. . . . The powers of satanic agencies blend with the din and noise, to have a carnival, and this is termed the Holy Spirit's working. . . . Satan works amid the din and confusion of such music, which, if properly conducted, would be a praise and glory to God. He makes its effect like the poison sting of the serpent."<sup>5</sup>

The close of probation is upon us. The prophecy has come true. The music is here in Black Seventh-day Adventist churches, and according to His prophet, God is not pleased. When today's music is performed, it affects the decorum of the congregations, which, together with the music, contributes to the din and noise about which Ellen White wrote. We must be aware that Satan is the author of confusion. Recognition of this fact and the stern warning of Ellen White encourage us to be cautious in our choice of worship music.

Charles D. Brooks, director/speaker of the *Breath of Life* telecast, recently said: "I go all over, as you know, and I hear what is happening to the music of our church. One can see how we are shaping up for the final crisis. I fear that it is music that is going to divide our church. There will be a remnant who will remain steadfast, and those are the ones who will be persecuted, not only by the world, but by their former brethren."

Eric C. Ward, former pastor of the Oakwood College church, shared two approaches Satan has used to divide God's church. First was an effort to cast seeds of doubt on the veracity of the Spirit of Prophecy, which seems not to have worked with Black Seventh-day Adventists. The second approach involved music of questionable style and content tied supposedly to our African heritage. Certainly we would want to take steps to ensure that this plan won't work either.

Eugene F. Durand, in an article published in the *Adventist Review* (Dec. 6, 1990) entitled "Contemporary Christian Music," expressed his concerns about current music in the Adventist Church: "When I was growing up, Adventists were taught that popular music was unfit for Christian ears, not only because of the lovesick, sentimental words, but because of the sensual music. Imagine our discomfort, then, when Adventists moved from rejecting dance music to performing it (with sacred words) in church on Sabbath! That which we conscientiously abstain from during the week . . . we are now forced to listen to during sacred services on God's holy day! . . ."

"Isn't it strange that we Adventists know how to distinguish between the holy and the unholy when it comes to the day of worship, between the clean and the unclean in our

eating, and between the right and wrong in tithing, dress, and recreation, yet seem not to have the foggiest notion of how to tell the sacred from the profane in our music?"

The prophet Ezekiel speaks against mixing the sacred and the profane, for to do so is to create a musical Babylon. In Ezekiel 22:26 he warns: "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and the profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean."

The future status of devotional music in Black Adventism is cause for concern. In our search for "the lost chord," our African connection, we must not lose sight of our spiritual heritage as Protestant Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Our slave forebears brought with them elements of their music that were authentic in terms of African culture, embracing the juxtaposition of one rhythm upon another and modal scales in which the melodies were interwoven. These modes are not American, but African. We as their children should not abandon that authentic heritage.

### The Sacrifice of Praise

God is saying to us, "Worship Me in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." He is looking for expressions of worship in music that extol Him just because of who He is, that acknowledge His power, His love, and the many wonderful attributes that constitute His great character. Would He not be delighted to hear choirs raise their voices in anthems whose words come from the Scriptures themselves? The goal of worship is not to see how Black we can be; it is rather to show reverence and love to our God.

The second coming of Jesus looms upon us. Our worship through music must conform with God's will. In our prayers and in our music, God is the audience. He has never asked us to entertain Him—He has asked us to worship Him. Let us prayerfully consider the direction of our music, giving heed to the instructions and warnings of God, and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that Black devotional music in the Seventh-day Adventist Church will continue to be a vehicle for the highest blessings of God!

<sup>1</sup> For example: "Sometimes a Light Surprises," No. 254; "Sun of My Soul," No. 321; "My God, How Endless Is Thy Love!" No. 414; "O Golden Day," No. 434; and "The God of Abraham Praise," No. 76, from *The Church Hymnal* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Ventura, *Shadow Dancing in the U.S.A.* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1985), pp. 104, 106, 107.

<sup>4</sup> Eileen Southern, *Readings in Black American Music* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), pp. 36, 37.

# BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND WORSHIP

by Mervyn A. Warren, Ph.D.

## Introduction

Persistent points of debate exist on whether or not there is proven significant continuity between religious practices on the African continent and the Black church in America. However, more recent correlations between worship on the two continents demonstrate that meaningful residuals did survive the mid-nineteenth century and continue today (as do imported cultural worship influences in the experience of Indians, Chinese, Europeans, and others who have come to these shores).

The questions for this study are “How much of the contemporary Black worship experience is a genuine reflection of this heritage?” and “What are the principles that provide the worshiper today with tools for proper structuring of the public worship experience?”

Any inquiry into the worship of African-Americans in the Adventist Church, like that of other Black Protestant groups, must take initial cues from the “invisible institution”—the religion of Black slaves in America—born in the seventeenth century, but more identifiable in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By invisible institution we mean the unstructured, ungoverned, unsystematized, uninstitutionalized, and sometimes undetected Black Christian religion as practiced under slavery.<sup>1</sup>

What was it like to worship on the plantation? First of all, contrary to traditional thought, the God of the Bible, or the God of Judeo-Christian faith, was probably already familiar to many, if not most, slaves centuries before their Jamestown landing in 1619. (This point was made most recently by Albert Raboteau in his book *Slave Religion*.) Raboteau’s point is illumined by Ellen G. White, who comments: “The history of the churches of Ethiopia and Abyssinia is especially significant. Amid the gloom of the Dark Ages, the Christians of Central Africa were lost sight of and forgotten by the world, and for many centuries they enjoyed freedom in the exercise of their faith. . . . Within their solitary realm they were content to remain, unknown to the rest of Christendom. The churches of Africa held the Sabbath as it was held by the papal church before her complete apostasy. . . . Upon obtaining supreme power, Rome had trampled upon the Sabbath of God to exalt her own; but the churches of Africa, hidden for nearly a thousand years, did not share in this apostasy.”<sup>2</sup>

While a student at the SDA Theological Seminary I made a presentation on the religious basis for human rights and racial unity. I remember the rebuttal of one of my White classmates: “[To be a] slave in America wasn’t all that bad. After all, we did introduce you to God and Jesus Christ.” To this remark our teacher replied, “Er—mm, I don’t know that we can really claim that.”

Admittedly no one religion or culture from Africa remained the same as it existed there. Rather with time the African religious expressions yielded to a blending on alien soil toward new religious societies structured partly from their diverse African backgrounds and partly from their enslavement experience in a new environment.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact that Christianity for African-Americans antedates that provided by White slavemasters breaks the psychological spell that credits Euro-American missionaries with introducing the Christian God to the African slaves, thus ascribing to Eurocentric thought absolute authority in determining the shape of Black liturgy and ritual. So worshiping on the plantation, for more slaves than traditionally published, was a matter of focusing on a God who was curiously familiar. Worship elements included praying, singing, preaching the Word, shouting, and communal fellowship.<sup>4</sup>

## Earliest Direct Influences

More specifically, worship by Black Seventh-day Adventists traces itself like a silver ribbon through the interdenominational Millerite movement of the early 1840s, highlighting such participants as William Still, a Black abolitionist who spent his life working with antislavery organizations and the Underground Railroad; William Ellis Foy, a Black minister who experienced visions relating to the early Advent movement and whose authenticity was confirmed by Ellen White;<sup>5</sup> Charles Bowles, a Black Millerite minister; Sojourner Truth, a legendary antislavery activist who converted to Adventism; and John Lewis, a Black Advent minister.

During the period leading from the Millerite period to the great disappointment of 1844 to the founding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there was as yet no formal Black Adventist congregation. Thus there is a lack of descriptive accounts of Black Adventist worship services of the time.

Consequently, the worship style of the church in general likely characterized all Adventists, Black as well as White.

It may be assumed that when the first Black Seventh-day Adventist church came into being, in 1886 (Edgefield Junction, Tennessee), its approach to worship bore the stamp of its initial minister, Harry Lowe, who formerly pastored a Baptist church. Undoubtedly, Lowe himself was influenced by his Baptist background as well as what he understood or was taught to be normative worship by his new denomination. In the dominant culture of the Adventist Church, especially during the late 1840s and 1850s, fervent enthusiasm characterized worship until a more tempered style ensued by the 1870s.<sup>6</sup>

Reasons for this transition from more to less ecstatic worship forms have been given as: (1) a natural process caused by church members becoming increasingly educated and sophisticated, (2) cultural change in general on the American scene, and (3) evidence of abuses by extremists who fell into fanaticism, religiously and theologically, typified by the Mauston group in Wisconsin (1861) and the "holy flesh" movement in Indiana (1901).<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, to varying degrees from the 1840s to the turn of the century, Adventist worship included such verbal expletives as "Hallelujah!" "Praise God!" "Glory!" "Blessed Jesus!" and "Amen!" Additional spirited expressions included shouting, singing, laughing, speaking in tongues, and prostration, although tongues-speaking and laughing were evidenced much less often, and their infrequency might disqualify them as actual practices.<sup>8</sup>

Describing a service, Ellen G. White wrote: "Sunday the power of God came upon us like a mighty rushing wind. All arose upon their feet and praised God with a loud voice. It was something as it was when the foundation of the house of God was laid. The voice of weeping could not be told from the voice of shouting. It was a triumphant time. All were strengthened and refreshed. I never witnessed such a powerful time before."<sup>9</sup> On a different occasion she observed that "religion is made to dwell too much in an iron case. . . . The outpouring of the Spirit of God will lead to a grateful acknowledgment of the same; and . . . we shall not hold our peace, we shall sacrifice to God with the voice of thanksgiving and make melody to Him with our hearts and voices."<sup>10</sup>

Reflecting on a meeting he had attended, James White reported: "Last night I felt more of the power of God than I have at any one time for three years. Brethren Ingraham, Sanborn, and I were praying in another room. While a brother was anointing his wife, the room was filled with the power of God. I was standing, but with difficulty. I fell upon my face, and cried and groaned under the power of God. Brethren Sanborn and Ingraham felt about the same. We all lay on the floor under the power of God. We are perfectly free."<sup>11</sup>

When negative criticism was leveled at a certain enthu-

siastic worship meeting, James White defended the exuberance in the *Review and Herald*, dubbing the critics "lukewarm, deceived," and "hardened."<sup>12</sup> Ellen White herself once declared: "I saw singing to the glory of God often drove the enemy, and shouting would beat him back and give us the victory. I saw there was too little glorifying God in Israel and too little childlike simplicity."<sup>13</sup>

However, cautioning against extremes, Ellen White admonished that "there was great danger of leaving the Word of God and resting down and trusting in exercises."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, one particular brother with the habit of shouting was depicted as not knowing "half of the time . . . what he is shouting at."<sup>15</sup> At any rate, sincere Black Adventist worshipers faced a challenge in discerning the difference between appropriate and inappropriate worship.

As general Adventist fellowship evolved into a more structured order, Black Adventist congregations, although familiar with the earlier enthusiastic modes of worship, generally reflected what its pastors and leaders asserted to be the standard denominational worship norm. In 1895 Ellen White warned against extreme emotionalism in Black assemblies: "Among most of the colored people we find unseemly practices in their worship of God. They become much excited, and put forth physical exertions that are uncalled for in the solemn worship of God. . . . Let not the colored people be excluded from the religious assemblies of the white people. They have no chance to exchange their superstitious exercises for a worship that is more sacred and elevating if they are shut out from association with intelligent white people who should give them an example of what they should be and do. . . . They conduct their worship according to the instruction they have received, and they think that a religion which has no excitement, no noise, no bodily exercises, is not worth the name of religion. These ignorant worshipers need instruction and guidance."<sup>16</sup>

No doubt recently freed slaves were reaching out to God in the best manner they knew how. On the one hand, such worship forms would seem little different from the frontier revival worship genre of early Adventism as practiced by James White, Ellen White, and their fellow believers. On the other hand, we must suppose that what Ellen White addresses here among Blacks is the embodiment of an extravagance not unlike the Mauston group of Wisconsin and the Indiana holy flesh episodes. That she appeals for balance is clear when we recall her warning against the opposite extreme: "The evil of formal worship cannot be too strongly depicted."<sup>17</sup>

Worship practices in their previous churches notwithstanding, Black Adventists apparently came to equate worship procedure and practice with the enlightening doctrinal teachings they had received and therefore came to terms with the majority denominational worship culture. The result was a gradual or not-so-gradual transition: hymns and

anthems generally superseded spirituals and religious folk songs, preaching tended to become more doctrinal than inspirational, and worship ritual and liturgy became more formal than informal.

### **“Separate but Equal”: Black SDA Worship During the First Half of the Twentieth Century**

When in 1896 the Supreme Court of the United States, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, supported the constitutionality of “separate but equal” facilities for Whites and Blacks, the era of de jure racial segregation began dictating policy in American public schools, transportation, recreation, lodging, and eating facilities. The church, reflecting the society in which it abides, found it convenient to continue segregationist practices among members of the household of faith.

Although the Black SDA Church in the U.S. was structurally separate from White believers, it nevertheless followed the typical worship style of its White counterparts. During these formative days the Black SDA membership, which numbered 50 in 1894, increased to about 900 by 1909 and 3,500 by 1918.<sup>18</sup> Black SDA believers were separate, but decidedly unequal, in church facilities and control of their programs and finances.

Emphasis placed on separateness by the church at large (with all the inherent injustices in the package), together with arguments by Blacks that their gospel work would enjoy greater progress if under more direct control by Blacks, sparked increased cravings by Black SDAs for self-governance. The mood became an organized movement when in 1929 a group under the leadership of J. K. Humphrey rebelled against church subordination. The movement organized as the United Sabbath Day Adventists.<sup>19</sup> Seeds sown by this bold though extreme initiative sprouted thoughts of self-governance within existing church structures. Evidence of the advantages of such a move led to the first Black (regional) conferences less than 20 years later, in 1944.

This brief review of structural change of the Black church within Adventism suggests that the gradation was not about organizational configuration alone, but also about identifying norms within Blacks themselves for all church matters, including patterns of worship. These patterns were set for challenges ahead.

### **Choices: Factors Influencing Black Worship in the Latter Half of the Twentieth Century**

Four special events converged to affect Black Adventist worship beginning in the 1950s: 1. Oakwood College, the principal center for training Black ministers, became an accredited senior college offering four full years of ministerial study. 2. The Autumn Council of 1983 called for ministerial students to take at least one additional year of study at the SDA Theological Seminary after graduating from college. 3.

Successes in the civil rights movement, among which was the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision ruling racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, opened doors to education and employment for African-American laypersons. 4. The increase of education among African-Americans created demands for a broader and more varied menu of worship styles. Each of these four historic developments had profound influence upon African-American Adventist preaching, music, and overall worship style.

How can we define worship so as to denote the ideal experience of God’s people in assembly? True worship begins to take place when people born of the divine Spirit, with purified and renewed minds, come together to know, love, and willingly obey God. Activities and procedures within a church service are mere forms to assist that reality. Is this not the underlying message of the psalmist—“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart” (Ps. 95:6-8)?

The worship of African-American Adventists can probably best be described as a tug of choices between the traditional and the contemporary: “traditional preaching” focuses on doctrines and “keeping the faith,” and in some cases keeping the pulpit male; “contemporary preaching” stresses renewal, relating, and making the faith relevant to personal and professional demands of the so-called real world, with more of an openness to female ministers.

“Traditional church music” pivots on hymns, anthems, spirituals, and classics accompanied mostly by piano and organ and at times the violin; “contemporary church music” freely embraces gospel songs and modern styles that might even mirror popular secular sounds accompanied by a variety of instruments, including drums. While traditional worship bears clear linkage to a general consensus of what most consider distinctively Adventist—preaching and music in a context faithful to the *Church Manual*—contemporary worship is more flexible and tends to award spontaneity and involvement. During the 1980s a buzzword for contemporary worship became a part of our church family vocabulary—“celebration”—at once a positive or negative term depending on the person using it.

One thing for sure, by the 1990s deciding which particular Black Adventist church to attend has become increasingly a matter of choosing between the traditional and the contemporary worship styles.

### **Worship Hermeneutic for Now and the Twenty-first Century**

Contrary to the age-old adage, all roads do not lead to Rome! As road maps and reliable directions prove invaluable to serious travelers, so serious worshipers find guide-

lines helpful in their corporate quest to experience and honor the divine. These guidelines are termed *hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics describes our search for meaning when we read the Bible and engage in the process of interpreting its message for our attitudes and actions. Are there reliable guidelines to be interpreted and understood for meaningful worship? Is there a worship paradigm for now and beyond?

While the Word of God is replete with worship principles from Genesis to Revelation, I would like to focus on an example found in John 4, where Jesus engages in conversation with a woman alongside a well on a Samaritan road. Four statements from their interchange formulate four prototypical principles of worship: perception, place, procedure, and person.

*Perception.* After Christ pointed the Samaritan woman to the divine grace of “better water,” she responded with deep reverence: “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet” (verse 19). Perception, the God-given capacity to sense the presence of a power above yourself, is a prime requisite to purposeful encounter with Deity. Is God present? Am I experiencing His nearness? “The hour and place of prayer and the services of public worship” become “sacred because God is there.”<sup>20</sup>

Like a thermometer controlling room temperature, an awareness of God’s presence can impress our taste for reverence rather than revelry, holiness rather than hollering, dignity rather than decadence, and true joy rather than thin joviality. “As a shield from temptation and an inspiration to purity and truth, no other influence can equal the *sense of God’s presence*.”<sup>21</sup> Perceiving that the Divine is near is the first step in the process by which the worshiper is remade.

*Place.* Immediately following her perceptive observation that Jesus was a prophet, the Samaritan woman broached a religious controversy: “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain [Mount Gerizim]; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (verse 20). Jesus’ reply lifted her thoughts above matters of form and ceremony: “Woman, . . . the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father” (verse 21). External forms may assist, but must take second place to actual communion with God. Christ neither condemned the Samaritans’ Mount Gerizim nor condoned the Jews’ Jerusalem, both places clearly linked to racial heritage.

Can there be a lesson here for us about cultural conditioning in the context of the history of the Christian church? One writer observes: “This inevitable and legitimate process of cultural entrance and adaptation was continued when Christianity was carried to Northern Europe. . . . The problem is simply that when Christianity was carried to other continents this same cultural adaptability ceased. Thus European holidays, attire, language, and

customs were declared to be the definitive Christianity.”<sup>22</sup>

In the United States, where the church enjoys in its fellowship a variety of racial groups, the body of Christ must allow or adapt itself to appropriate characteristics for the many ethnic worshipers who desire maintenance of their authentic heritage. “A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (verse 21, NIV). In other words, ethnic culture is vital, real, and necessary, but transitory in the long view of eternity. Cultural conditioning can lubricate the machinery that conducts the worshiper near to the heart of God.

*Procedure.* Jesus continued with the words: “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks” (verse 23, NIV). These words of our Lord, in addition to pointing to the internal condition of the heart made new by the Spirit, suggest also that we give attention to worship methodology, liturgy, and ritual—or in a word, procedure. As Paul would later exhort in 1 Corinthians 14:40, that “all things be done decently and in order” (or “in a fitting and orderly way” [NIV]), so also Jesus Christ, at this moment of His conversation, was pinpointing the “how” of worship.

The “how” or procedure of worship is defined as the whole range of programming and activities within the service that enables it to experience movement from a given point to another. Jesus offers His imperative that worship be conducted “in spirit and in truth” or, in all sincerity, with the highest faculties of emotions and mind. A number of African-American Adventist pastors, teachers, and administrators have expressed themselves formally on worship procedure. I quote them below along with one White Adventist and one Black non-Adventist.

Discussing Adventist worship from the viewpoint of left-brain and right-brain functions, the former controlling intellect and the latter emotions, Saustin S. Mfuné concludes that “activities that allow people to respond emotionally and physically as well as intellectually during the service make worship more meaningful and effective.”<sup>23</sup>

Relating intellect and emotion directly to African-American SDA worship, James R. Doggette says that a “striking difference” exists between “evangelistic and regular church preaching,” probably to the disadvantage of the less celebrative and spontaneous and highly predictable regular church service; then he makes a case for preaching that is “both emotionally charged and intellectually engaging,” and for approaching worshipers “both on the cognitive and emotive pathways.”<sup>24</sup>

Commenting on a videotape he made of a large congregation at worship, Louis Venden saw reflected in the faces of those worshipers—“boredom!”<sup>25</sup> Their attitude “contrasted painfully” with the following statements by Ellen

White: "Shall we not keep holy festivals unto God? Shall we not show that we have some enthusiasm in His service? . . . Let the school and the church henceforth have festivals of rejoicing unto the Lord."<sup>26</sup> "Our meetings should be made intensely interesting. They should be pervaded with the very atmosphere of heaven."<sup>27</sup>

That Black Adventist worship functions in a broader context of Afrocentrism is affirmed by Harold Lee: "African-American congregations in general, and Black Seventh-day Adventist congregations in particular, are in their best and most authentic expressions informed by an Afrocentric perspective. While the term *Afrocentric* is relatively new, the historical reality of Black Christians, corporately and individually, whose perspective of the gospel message has been oriented within the context of the issues and needs of an African-centered worldview, is well documented."<sup>28</sup>

Applying the relevance of cultural considerations to all ethnic groups regardless of national origin, Pedrito Maynard-Reid declares: "When people worship in an environment which reflects their daily life and recognize that the images and symbols of daily living have a religious and spiritual side to them, religion and worship will lose their abstraction. As the liturgy is couched in the common tongue, choreographed in local idioms, painted on a culturally relevant canvas, worship will be meaningful and comprehensible."<sup>29</sup>

Benjamin Reaves appeals persuasively for worship to be "informed with theological integrity" lest "it become a source of corruption," and he further challenges that "decisions . . . be made as to what is superfluous and what is of intrinsic value, what is legitimate and what is illegitimate."<sup>30</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of two types of Black church worship services at extreme opposite ends of the pole: "One burns with emotionalism, and the other freezes with classism. The former, reducing worship to entertainment, places more emphasis on volume than on content and confuses spirituality with muscularity. The danger in such a church is that the members may have more religion in their hands and feet than in their hearts and souls. . . . The other type of Negro church . . . has developed a class system and boasts of its dignity, its membership of professional people, and its exclusiveness. In such a church the worship service is cold and meaningless, the music dull and uninspiring, and the sermon little more than a homily on current events. If the pastor says too much about Jesus Christ, the members feel that he is robbing the pulpit of dignity. If the choir sings a Negro spiritual, the members claim an affront to their class status. This type of church tragically fails to recognize that worship at its best is a social experience in which people from all levels of life come together to affirm their oneness and unity under God."<sup>31</sup>

Of course, all worshipers cannot be expected to be clones or cookie-cutter participants in matters of respon-

siveness to a certain liturgical or ritual style. Calvin B. Rock is right on target when he observes that "with academic and economic advances usually comes the loss of primitive fervor and religiosity. But to be fair, we must also acknowledge that it also alters the response patterns of those who do remain dedicated. Many of the devoted do not say amen, but they do shed tears and quietly rejoice as they hear the gospel. We must not be trapped into assuming either extreme: the fervency of the vocal or the disinterest of the silent. Many of those who don't say amen are the most faithful supporters of the church."<sup>32</sup>

*Person.* The fourth and final principle of worship is derived from the final portion of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman: "'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.' Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he'" (verses 25, 26, NIV).

There we have it—the person, Christ, the center, the cross, the atonement to which all authentic worship will lead and around which perception, place, and procedure in worship revolve. As these words of Jesus Christ, which reveal His identity, climax His dialogue with the woman at the well, His revelation of Himself to us becomes the high-water mark of our worship. For He in turn affirms our personhood, our praise, our prayers, and our preaching.

These four observations from the encounter between Christ and the Samaritan woman—perception, place, procedure, and person—are foundational toward a worship hermeneutic that will endure for now and forever.

<sup>1</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), pp. 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), pp. 577, 578.

<sup>3</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 8. Raboteau's well-documented and insightful book grows out of his 1975 Ph.D. dissertation, "The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South," at the School of Religious Studies, Yale University.

<sup>4</sup> Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), pp. 36-49.

<sup>5</sup> Walter L. Pearson, "Bound for Glory," *Adventist Review*, December 1994, p. 10. See also Delbert W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: Adventist African-Americans," *Adventist Review*, Feb. 4, 1993, p. 12; *The Unknown Prophet* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Ronald D. Graybill, "Enthusiasm in Early Adventist Worship," *Ministry*, October 1991, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White to the Church in Brother Hastings' House, Nov. 7, 1850 (letter 28, 1850). In Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White; The Early Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), vol. 1, p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Loveland, Jan. 24, 1856 (letter 2a, 1856). In Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), p. 351.

<sup>11</sup> James White to Ellen White, Nov. 6, 1860. In Graybill, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> James White, "The Immediate Coming of Christ," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 20, 1853, p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White to Arbella Hastings, Aug. 4, 1850 (letter 8, 1850). In Arthur L. White, p. 181.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White manuscript 11, 1850. In Arthur L. White, p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen G. White to Brethren and Sisters at Bedford, c. 1861 (letter 14, 1861). In *Ellen G. White Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, Md.: E. G. White Estate, 1993), vol. 21, p. 364.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen G. White, "An Appeal for the South," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 3, 1895.

<sup>17</sup> ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn. 1948), vol. 9, p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> "Office of Human Relations," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1996), pp. 719-726.

<sup>19</sup> Joe Mesar and Tom Dybdahl, "The Utopia Park Affair and the Rise of Northern Black Adventists," *Adventist Heritage*, January 1974.

<sup>20</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), pp. 242, 243.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255. (Italics supplied.)

<sup>22</sup> This statement is found in the following work as a quotation, though with an inadvertent inaccuracy of its original source. Benjamin Franklin Reaves, "A Study of Black Seventh-day Adventist Worship" (Doctor of Ministry position and professional paper, Chicago Theological Seminary, 1974), p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Saustin Sampson Mfune, "More Than Half a Brain," *Ministry*, October 1991, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> James Richard Doggette, Sr., "Emotion and Rationality in African-American Seventh-day Adventist Worship" (Doctor of Ministry project, Claremont School of Theology, 1992), pp. 90-92.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Venden, "Adventists and Worship: Where Do We Go From Here?" (presented to the Andrews Society for Religious Studies, Kansas City, Missouri, November 1991).

<sup>26</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents and Teachers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1913), p. 371.

<sup>27</sup> ———, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 609.

<sup>28</sup> Harold Lee, devotional (presented to the National Black Caucus of Regional Conference Presidents meeting at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, Calif., Aug. 15, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Pedrito V. Maynard-Reid, "What Liturgy Shall I Borrow: A Caribbean Response to Western Traditions" (presidential address presented to the Andrews Society for Religious Studies, Kansas City, Missouri, November 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Reaves, pp. 21, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 47, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin B. Rock, in *Adventist Review*, Nov. 26, 1992, p. 11.