

January 2008

Exploring the Factors That Shaped the Early Adventist Mission to Jamaica

Trevor O'Reggio

Andrews University, toreggio@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/church-history-pubs>



Part of the [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Reggio, Trevor, "Exploring the Factors That Shaped the Early Adventist Mission to Jamaica" (2008). *Faculty Publications*. Paper 17. <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/church-history-pubs/17>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Church History at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

Exploring the Factors That Shaped the Early Adventist Mission to Jamaica

Trevor O'Reggio

Andrews University Theological Seminary

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the strongest religious organizations in the tropical paradise of Jamaica. With a population of 2.6 million, there are over 220,000 church members,¹ making Jamaica one of the highest per capita areas in the world for Adventist membership.

There are three conferences, two missions, and one university with a student body of over 5,000, which makes it the largest Adventist University in the English-speaking world. The country also boasts eight secondary schools, scores of elementary schools, 597 churches, over 112 pastors, and hundreds of other workers employed in various other capacities.²

By any measurement, Adventism has been tremendously successful in this small country. Such a success story calls for an explanation and an analysis, especially of the formative years, to discover some of the factors that might have contributed to this success. Not much has been published on this topic except for a small book entitled *Thy Light Is Come: A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica*, by Linette Mitchell,³ and a few unpublished term papers by seminarians at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Mitchell's book is a chronological narrative of the development of the Adventist work in Jamaica, focusing on significant people and events

¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book*, 2007, 159-161.

² *Ibid.*, 159-160.

³ Linette Mitchell, *Thy Light Has Come: A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica*, Mandeville: NCUP, 2003.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

that shaped the work over much of the twentieth century. This is a useful book that provides basic facts about the work in Jamaica, but there is no serious analysis of those early factors that may have shaped the success of Adventism in Jamaica.

The purpose of this brief study is to discover and analyze those early factors that laid the ground work for such a successful launching and establishment of Adventism in Jamaica. Perhaps the Jamaican experience may provide a model for successful Adventist missions to other parts of the world.

Adventism and Mission

The early Adventists had no concept of missions and were in fact anti-mission. George Knight has identified four stages in the historical development of Adventist mission. The first stage, dated from 1844-1850, would be considered anti-mission. These early Sabbatarian Adventists had recently come out of the Great Disappointment of the Millerite movement and were trying to understand the reason for their disappointment. Because of their famous "Shut Door" philosophy, they believed probation was closed for most humans, and therefore mission outreach was not part of their agenda.⁴

The second phase lasted from 1850 to 1874, during which time they believed the door was partially open, especially to those sinners who had no prior knowledge of the Great Advent truth. Before the end of this period however, many Adventist members and leaders were convinced about the need for missions, but they still lacked a methodology and a global view of missions.

From 1874 to 1889, they fully embraced missions, but their outreach was limited primarily to Protestant European countries and their new colonies. They sent their first official missionary, J. N. Andrews, to Switzerland in 1874 to what George Knight calls the "heartland of Christian Europe."⁵

By the 1890s, Seventh-day Adventists had moved into the fourth stage, with a mission focus that now encompassed the entire globe. The decade of the nineties would be one of the most expansive eras in missions not only for the Adventists, but for many other Protestant groups in

⁴ J. H. Waggoner et al., "Conference Address: Organization," *Review and Herald*, (June 11, 1861): 21; quoted in George R. Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1995), 59.

⁵ Knight, 68.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

America.⁶ It was during this decade that the mission work was launched in Jamaica, and like so many other mission enterprises in the Seventh-day Adventist church, it began as a result of the publishing work and the subsequent request from the readers of Adventist literature for more understanding about the Adventist message.

An important issue to address at this point is: What was the nature of Adventist mission, and how was it launched in Jamaica? Did it follow the same pattern in Jamaica as in other places? George Knight has identified the Adventist missiological program as a “missiological quadrilateral,”⁷ which means that Adventist mission consists of four dimensions: publishing, health reform, education, and church organization. Knight argues that the fourfold program did not come by conscious design, but may have arisen out of the Adventist view on the holistic nature of human beings. Adventists have historically repudiated the Greek dualistic view of humans and have affirmed the holistic view of human nature. They also affirmed the Protestant view of the sacredness of life and that nothing is secular in the sense of being separated from God. Adventist mission, then, focused not only on the spiritual dimension of the human experience, but also on the physical and the mental.⁸

The genesis of the quadrilateral view did not happen overnight. It had its beginning in the ministry of the Adventist church’s most influential leader, Ellen G. White. In 1848, after coming out of vision, Ellen said to her husband:

I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world.⁹

James White listened to his wife’s counsel and started a periodical called *Present Truth* that had a missionary focus. In the summer of 1850 he started a second periodical, *The Advent Review*, whose purpose was to reach out to the scattered Millerites. In November 1850, the periodicals were combined, and the name was changed to *The Second Advent Review*

⁶ Ibid, 81.

⁷ Ibid, 81.

⁸ Ibid, 82.

⁹ Ibid, 82.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

and *Sabbath Herald*, currently known as *The Adventist Review*, which is today the most important periodical of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The publishing work would be the first stage of the development of the Adventist missiological quadrilateral.¹⁰

The growth of a strong publishing work led to the development of the second stage in Adventism's missiological quadrilateral: church organization. The publishing work created a sense of unity in the organization and led to property acquisition, which necessitated a name and legal corporation under the state. Therefore, "the first concrete step in the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a legal denomination took place with the incorporation of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association on May 3, 1861."¹¹

The early steps of organization would lead to the organization of conferences, with Michigan leading out in October of 1861, followed by seven other conferences in the following year. The final step in the organization process led to the formation of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, with John Byington as its first president.¹²

The third phase in the quadrilateral followed on the heels of the second. On June 6, 1863, Ellen White had her first major health reform vision, in which she wrote:

I saw that it was a sacred duty to attend to our health, and arouse others to their duty. . . . We have a duty to speak, to come out against intemperance of every kind,—intemperance in working, in eating, in drinking, and in drugging—and then point them to God's great medicine[:] water, pure soft water, for diseases, for health for cleanliness, and for . . . luxury I saw that we should not be silent upon the subject of health but should wake up minds to the subject.¹³

Ellen White would link health reform to missions. In a second vision, she was told to establish a health reform institution having the double missiological foci of preparing Adventists for translation and reaching out to unbelievers. Concerning the unbelievers she wrote:

¹⁰ Ibid, 83.

¹¹ Ibid, 83.

¹² *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1976 ed.), s.v. "Organization, Development of, in Seventh-day Adventist Church"; quoted in Knight, 84.

¹³ Ellen G. White, "Testimony Regarding James and Ellen White, unpublished manuscript, Ms 1, 1863; quoted in Knight, 84, 85.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

As unbelievers shall resort to an institution devoted to the successful treatment of disease and conducted by Sabbath-keeping physicians, they will be brought directly under the influence of the truth. By becoming acquainted with our people and our real faith, their prejudice will be overcome and they will be favorably impressed. By thus being placed under the influence of truth, some will not only obtain relief from bodily infirmities, but will find a healing balm for their sin-sick souls. . . . One such precious soul saved will be worth more than all the means needed to establish such an institution.¹⁴

The fourth and final dimension of the Adventist missiological quadrilateral took shape from 1872 thru 1874 with the establishment of a college in Battle Creek Michigan. This college, called Battle Creek College, was established primarily to train young people for mission. When the college was moved out of Battle Creek in 1901, its name was changed to Emmanuel Missionary College. In 1960 it became Andrews University, named for John Nevins, the first official Adventist foreign missionary.¹⁵

Thus, by 1874 the Seventh-day Adventist Church had all four pieces of the quadrilateral in place, “its publishing arm to spread the message, its medical branch to prepare the lives and hearts of people, and its educational work to train workers and nourish young believers,” and a conference system to coordinate all of these activities.¹⁶

Exporting the Quadrilateral to Jamaica

This quadrilateral model would be exported to Jamaica and would replicate some of the ways in which these four aspects of the work developed in the United States. The work began with and would be sustained by the publishing ministry. The work of colporteurs¹⁷ would be critical in establishing and sustaining the work. It would be the first and most important factor in laying the foundation for Jamaican Adventism. The focus of the work in Jamaica, however, would not be on establishing publishing institutions, but primarily on the work of book canvassers distributing Adventist literature all across the island.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:493 (emphasis supplied); quoted in Knight, 85.

¹⁵ Knight, 87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁷ Colporteurs were book salesmen who made their living by selling Adventist literature.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

The second leg of the quadrilateral focused on conference organization. As the work developed and more churches were established, there was a need for a more central organization. During the first decade of Adventism in Jamaica (1893-1903), church growth was outstanding. From the humble beginnings of six members, growth reached 1200 members.¹⁸ Ten years after the first official missionary landed in Jamaica, the Jamaican conference was organized, in March 1903, and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists voted to receive the Jamaica conference into fellowship. Jamaica's rise from mission status to conference was rapid, taking only seven years. In a general meeting in Kingston in 1903, a consensus was agreed on as follows:

Our workers were all united in the idea that the time had come in the progress of the cause in Jamaica when a conference organization, assisted though it must be for the present from Mission Board funds, would prove of educational value to the field, and would help to lay responsibilities upon the churches¹⁹

W. A. Spicer justified his call for a Jamaican conference because of the rapid way in which the church had progressed. He said, "In Jamaica I found nearly 1200 Sabbath-keepers, with about seventeen organized churches. All heartily favored the idea of bonding together as a conference."²⁰ Spicer further commented that Jamaicans were able to understand the nature of the work, the organization, and the responsibility of the individual member and church in relation to the conference. He advocated that more of the burden should be placed on local believers. These words were supported by real action when four ministerial licenses were voted for Jamaicans. He saw this as setting a positive precedent in developing workers for all the tropical fields. He even called for volunteers from Jamaica. Spicer went on to say that "as the work grows in Jamaica, I believe it will be able to furnish disciplined workers for all fields."²¹ Little did Spicer realize that his words would be prophetic, for Jamaica would become the center for the work in the Caribbean and Central America. Much of the work in these regions would be established by workers from Jamaica.

¹⁸ Haysmer, "Jamaica, West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 20 August 1895: 539.

¹⁹ Spicer, "The Jamaica Conference," *Review and Herald*, 17 March 1903: 16.

²⁰ W. A. Spicer, "Jamaica," *General Conference Bulletin*, 1903: 2.

²¹ W. A. Spicer, "The Jamaican Conference," *Review and Herald*, 17 March 1903: 16, 17.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The third major development of Jamaican Adventism was education, the fourth leg of Knight's Quadrilateral of mission.²² From the very beginning of the work in Jamaica, it became clear that schools were needed. In 1896, A. J. Haysmer reported that plans were being made to purchase property in Kingston for a church and a school.²³ As converts were added to the young church, many children came with their families, so the need to educate these youngsters was very important. In 1898, Allan Moon raised the question of whether there should be a school in Jamaica and proceeded to provide a strong and defensible argument for such a school.

In America we feel that our children were not safe from moral contamination in the school of the land and so we provide schools of our own where our children can be under the best influence. . . . If it is necessary that we should have such schools here in the United States, and it is, how much more is this necessary in Jamaica?²⁴

Once the Jamaican mission conference was established in 1903, the idea of a school for the training of workers became paramount. This idea will be developed later. The establishment of this training institute would be one of the most important factors in the consolidation of Adventism in Jamaica.

The third leg of the Quadrilateral, the health message, followed the educational. But as its tardy appearance might indicate, this aspect of the quadrilateral would be in Jamaica the weakest link. The health message, which has been described by Ellen White as the "Right Arm" of the message, never reached the same level of achievement as the other three legs. Although the health needs of Jamaica were great, it appears as if the church never invested the same level of resources and personnel to advance this aspect of the work. It did, however, establish a hospital in the capital city of Kingston in the year 1945 that continues to serve many in that metropolitan area. It is very likely that if this aspect of the work had been more developed, the appeal to the Jamaican middle and elite class would have been greater. However, much of the literature sold by the colporteurs dealt with the subject of health, and many of the converts to

²² Knight, 88.

²³ A. J. Haysmer, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 29 September 1896: 624.

²⁴ Allen Moon, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 11 January 1898: 315.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

Adventism eagerly embraced the healthy lifestyle of Adventism, so in that respect the “Right Arm” of the message was successful.

The Adventist mission work began in Jamaica at the beginning of the 1890s, a few years before Ellen White’s son, Edson White, began his pioneering work among African-Americans in Mississippi, USA. The work began in earnest in Jamaica in 1890 through correspondence from Mrs. Strong of the International Tract Society to Mr. William H. Palmer and subsequently Mrs. Margaret Harrison and others. In a letter to Mr. W. Palmer dated January 12, 1890, Mrs. Strong commented, ““It gives us pleasure to place your name upon our regular mailing list for present truth, a semi-monthly published in London, and the Good Health—a monthly issued in our little city of Battle Creek. These will be sent to you gratuitously for a season and are for your own personal reading”²⁵.

There are various versions about how Adventism really began in Jamaica, but there are some basic elements of agreement. Three individuals are prominent in all the versions: they are Henry Palmer, who sent an Adventist book to his son William Palmer in Jamaica, and Margaret Harrison, the English woman who read some Adventist literature and wrote to the International Tract Society, located at Battle Creek, Michigan, the headquarters of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The previously named William James Palmer had read a tract before receiving the book *The Coming King*, written by Edson White, son of Ellen White, that his father had sent him, and noticed that the same publishers had printed both the tract and the book. After reading the book, he was convinced of the Sabbath and wrote to the publishers, the International Tract Society, for further information concerning the Sabbath. In response to the queries, he received a batch of tracts that he distributed in the city of Kingston. He gave one tract to Dr. Ross at the Kingston Public Hospital, who, not being particularly interested, passed it on to a social worker named Margaret Harrison, a white Jamaican of English descent of the upper class. She was a dedicated worker, spending much time with the sick and the poor.²⁶

Mrs. Harrison was convinced through reading the tract that the seventh day was the Sabbath, but she decided to put the Sabbath literature

²⁵ Mrs. L. S. Strong’s letter to Mr. W. H. Palmer, secretary of the International Tract Society, 12 January 1890; copy found at the Ellen G. White & Seventh-day Adventist Research Center at Northern Caribbean University.

²⁶ Editor, Nigel Coke, “Remembering Our Pioneers,” *West Indian Union Visitor*, Special Centennial Edition, December 2006: 5.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

out of her sight and not let the question of what day she should keep disturb her. One Sunday, in church, the minister read the law, and the members responded after the reading of each commandment with, "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." Conviction seized her heart. She went home, and alone with God and His Holy Word, she promised to obey His law.²⁷ In 1893 she made a trip to Battle Creek, Michigan, at that time the headquarters for the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church, where she received treatment at the Battle Creek Sanitarium and was given other Adventist literature on health reform, a subject in which she had great interest. While at Battle Creek, she attended the 1893 General Conference Session and appealed for a minister to be sent to Jamaica. She returned to Jamaica in May 1893, bringing with her the first resident pastor, A. J. Haysmer, and his family.²⁸

On her return to Jamaica, Mrs. Harrison joined forces with William Palmer, and, together with a number of others, began worshipping at the Palmer home. They then moved to Mrs. Harrison's house, but soon their numbers exceeded the available space, and they moved into a rental hall. This is the traditional story. It must be noted, however, that when L. C. Chadwick came to Jamaica in January 1892, which was almost a year and a half before Mrs. Harrison's return from Battle Creek, he found a small congregation already worshipping at the home of William Palmer²⁹

When A. J. Haysmer arrived, in May 1893, he was accompanied by Mrs. Harrison from Battle Creek, where she had been attending the General Conference session. Haysmer became the one in charge. It was probably Haysmer who considered the Palmers' residence too small and therefore moved the worship services to Mrs. Harrison's residence.³⁰

Pastor Hubert Fletcher, one of the earliest native workers, used colorful and poetic language to describe the beginnings of the Adventist mission in Jamaica. He writes,

In the waters of the Caribbean and nestled in her arms are the romantic aisles of the West Indies. No grander sight can greet the eye than the rays of the rising sun reflected in the water of the sea. As it scatters, it fills everywhere with light and glory.

²⁷ Mrs. Andross, "The Early Days in Inter-America," *Review and Herald*, 3 October 1929: 20.

²⁸ O. A. Olsen, "The President's Address," *General Conference Bulletin*. December 1893, 281.

²⁹ L. Chadwick, "British West Indies" *Review and Herald*, 1 March 1892, 134-135.

³⁰ A J Hasymer, "The West Indies" *Review and Herald*, 5 Dec. 1893, 766.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

So it was early in the nineties, when the rays of the third angel's message penetrated beyond the shores of America and glorious was the dawning of that morn in the fair island of Jamaica.³¹

Pastor Fletcher's description of the rise of Adventism in Jamaica was prophetic, for the march of Adventism on that island has been like the shining rays of the noonday sun, illuminating every nook and cranny of the island with the precious and unique truths of Adventism.

In the following paragraphs I will innumerate the significant factors that shaped the work of the Adventist mission to Jamaica.

Role of the Colporteurs

Perhaps the single most important factor in establishing the work in Jamaica was the role of the printed page. From the very inception and throughout the history of the work, the role of Adventist literature and the work of both canvasser and colporteur were pivotal.

The colporteur work began in 1892 and was spearheaded by stalwart pioneers like L. C. Chadwick, who was the president of the International Tract Society and who was sent to survey the potential of the entire West Indies and Central America region. He spent seventeen days in Jamaica, January–February 1892, and recommended that a colporteur be sent to Jamaica³². In response, James Patterson, the first black American missionary, was sent to Jamaica in 1892. Patterson subsequently suggested that “A white brother would do well in this city, while a colored one would do well in the country, white people in the country not being as prejudiced as their brothers in the city”³³. In response, B. B. Newman was sent from the International Tract Society. Seven months later, the General Conference sent out Elder James Haysmer, the first official missionary to Jamaica, and Adventism began its dynamic, life-changing impact upon the island of Jamaica.³⁴

Many years before the literature work began in Jamaica, Ellen White described the passion for that work in words that would find fulfillment in a very special way in Jamaica.

³¹ Hubert Fletcher, “Synopsis of Message in Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 2 March 1905: 12.

³² L. C. Chadwick, “British West Indies”: 134.

³³ Extracts from letters, from a letter written by brother James Patterson dated at Kingston, September 7, 1892, *The Home Missionary*, November 1892: 262.

³⁴ Nigel Coke, “100 Years of Growth and Development,” *West Indian Union Visitor*, Special Centennial Edition, December 2006: 5.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The chastisement of God is upon the world, to call all who know the truth to hide in the cleft of the Rock, and view the glory of God. The truth must not be muffled now. Plain statements must be made. Unvarnished truth must be spoken, in leaflets and pamphlets, and these must be scattered like the leaves of autumn.³⁵

The work of those intrepid colporteurs would spread the Adventist truth like leaves of autumn all across Jamaica. Pastor Fletcher, writing in 1905, described the canvassing work being pioneered by a Brett Patterson of California, who placed books and literature in the homes of the people. As people read the truth-filled literature, a few of them began to keep the Sabbath. Hundreds of tracts and missionary papers were addressed and distributed which were blessed by God and brought in good results.³⁶

The scale of this widespread distribution of Adventist material was given by Elder Haysmer during one of his reports on the progress of the work in Jamaica.

As the result of the efforts put forth in this island to scatter the truth among the people for the last four and one-half years, there have been over 18,000 *Signs of the Times* and other periodicals and 510,450 pages of pamphlets and tracts distributed. The books sold are as follows: "*Patriarchs and Prophets*" 2,670, "*Prophecies of Jesus*" 450, "*Helps to Bible Study*" 530, "*Christ our Saviour*" 1,720, "*Mount of Blessing*" 950, "*Gospel Primer*" 3,450, "*His Glorious Appearing*" 5,650, "*From Eden to Eden*" 5,285, "*Steps to Christ*" 8,862, trade and miscellaneous books 2,088, besides hundreds of health books, total number of religious books 32,480. As the result of this and other work, there is an interest to learn more of the truth in nearly every district in the island. The work on the whole looks more encouraging than at any previous time.³⁷

W. W. Eastman, one of the early pioneers of the work in Jamaica, attributed the advancement of the work to this large amount of literature distributed.

³⁵ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:231.

³⁶ Hubert Fletcher, "Synopsis of Message in Jamaica", *Review and Herald*, 2 March 1905: 12.

³⁷ A. J. Haysmer, "Distribution of Literature in Jamaica," *The Home Missionary*, September 1897: 187.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

The rapid advancement of the truth in this field is largely due to the fact that a large amount of our literature has been sold in the island; further, the canvassers who have scattered the printed page have not been afraid of their colors. One instance will serve to illustrate this. A few weeks ago one of our canvassers came to a shop-keeper in the country parts to sell him a book. The man remarked that he had bought a book [*Prophecies of Jesus*"] which taught that the seventh day was the Sabbath and that he believed it. The canvasser then and there unfolded to him the Sabbath truth more fully, and told him of the work that was being carried on in the island by Seventh-day Adventists. As a result the man, his wife and father, and all the household began at once to keep the Sabbath. Being a man of influence in the district, this in turn created an interest among his neighbors to learn about the truth. The canvasser returned and held a few Bible readings with an increasing interest.³⁸

G. A. King, colporteur from the United States, writing in 1894, described hundreds of books sold in Kingston which resulted in many accepting the truth, attending meetings, and keeping the Sabbath.³⁹

Even those who opposed Adventism recognized the critical role of Adventist literature and the work of the colporteurs in winning converts. We see this in a complaint written by a Greek Catholic priest when he described Seventh-day Adventist literature as having a kind of hypnotic effect.

The Seventh-day Adventists carry on a very clever propaganda to win converts to their faith. The most powerful lever in winning people is the kind of literature they produce. It is written in a subtle way creating in part of the people a strong desire to read more of the literature until they are fully persuaded and undermining the belief of our church members. We don't mind their preaching so much, but it is their literature that gives us trouble. We find it everywhere. These people have sold \$6000 worth of their literature in this district and the worst part of it is our members of this (Greek Catholic) church have purchased this literature whereas they have hardly purchased a dollars worth of Catholic literature.⁴⁰

³⁸ W. W. Eastman, "A Year's Labor in Jamaica," *The Missionary Magazine*, September 1898: 22.

³⁹ G. A. King, "Jamaica West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 17 April, 1894: 249.

⁴⁰ Herbert J. Edmund, "Complaint of a Roman Catholic Priest," *Jamaican Visitor* 3/4 (January 1929): 4.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The colporteurs themselves recognized the importance of their work and described it in powerful metaphors as the fight against evil. O. Perceival Reid, a colporteur, described the student colporteurs as on the firing line, storming the enemies with big cannons and machine guns directed by Christ, the mighty captain who is giving victory to his soldiers.⁴¹

C. A. Hall described Jamaica as a profitable field for the canvassing work. Books were sold from one end of the island to the other, resulting in believers springing up all over.⁴²

A. J. Haysmer testified to the conversion of several families based on Adventist literature.⁴³

Pastor Richardson pointed out in 1899 that the majority of the people who accepted the truth did so because of the direct work of the canvasser or from the publications that they sold.⁴⁴ He also spoke of the significant number of the members involved in the canvassing work, selling everything from *Signs of the Times* magazine to the largest books, and many of them were quite successful.⁴⁵

G. A. King, an American colporteur, reported selling hundreds of books in Kingston, the capital city.⁴⁶

These testimonies were corroborated by F. M. Wilcox in 1894, who described that much of the progress of the work could be attributed to the canvassers who actually engaged in distribution of Adventist literature throughout the island.⁴⁷

C. A. Hall also testified of the work of colporteurs who sold books in every part of the island, causing the work to spring up everywhere.⁴⁸

⁴¹ O. Perceival Reid, "Colporteur Experience," *Jamaican Visitor* 11 (July 1927): 11. O. P. Reid was the eldest son of Clarence Reid of Cornwall Mountain district in Westmoreland. Clarence Reid was baptized in 1924 by Methuselah Jones, and I believe that his three sons, O. P. Reid, D. P. Reid and E. C. H. Reid (all of whom became pastors) were subsequently baptized (Garnet Weir testimonial).

⁴² C. A. Hall, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 1 September 1896: 559.

⁴³ A. J. Haysmer, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 5 October 1897: 635.

⁴⁴ F. I. Richardson, "Jamaica" *Review and Herald*, 26 May 1896: 332.

⁴⁶ G. A. King, "Jamaica West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 17 April 1894: 249.

⁴⁷ F. M. Wilcox, "Our Work in the West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 29 September 1896: 622.

⁴⁸ C. A. Hall, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 1 September 1896: 559.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

Focus on Lay Leadership

A second major factor that contributed to the success of Adventism in Jamaica was the early focus on lay leadership and the enthusiasm and passion with which these local lay leaders embraced the work. Scores of reports testified of active laymen and women preaching, teaching, giving Bible studies, engaging in house to house work, doing public evangelism, and accepting the work as their own. They did not wait on clerical or conference leadership to launch out in new territory. Without pastoral leadership or conference resources, many faithful laymen and women advanced the work of God using their own time, efforts, and resources. Much of the success of Adventism in Jamaica can be attributed to this lay ownership of the work. They saw the work as their work, and they engaged in it with all their energies. As a boy growing up in Jamaica, I rarely saw a pastor at our local church, but the work went on. My own family exemplified the spirit of lay involvement; we established a new church without pastoral leadership or conference resources.

Describing the role of the laymen in conversion, J. B. Beckner wrote that, "Six of these [new converts] were the result of the work of the Church at Grove Town without a minister; one by reading, and other six under the labor of Brother W. J. Tanner."⁴⁹ The place of baptism was twenty miles from Providence at Mild-river Spring Plain. "Yet the people did not complain about the walk. Two sisters walked forty-two miles to be baptized. Surely the argument of 'inconvenience' had no weight with them."⁵⁰

In 1913, as Elder Hubert Fletcher enumerated the success of the work in Jamaica, he pointed out that much of it was due to church members who took an active part in missionary work, house to house, district to district, proclaiming the message to their friends, neighbors, and relatives.⁵¹

When making a report to the General Conference concerning the work of the laity in the Caribbean region, E. E. Andross had very high praises for the laity in Jamaica. He described their work in the following way: "Many of the lay brethren go out to the adjoining villages walking fourteen or fifteen miles to visit a town or village, every Sunday; and they raise up believers so rapidly that Elder C. E. Wood, president of the

⁴⁹ J. B. Beckner, "Balaclava, Jamaica," *The Missionary Magazine*, January 1902: 46.

⁵⁰ W. J. Tanner, "Jamaica, West Indies," *Review and Herald*, 3 December 1901: 786.

⁵¹ Hubert Fletcher, "Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 28 September 1913: 23.

conference, had been unable to visit them all and prepare them for organization”⁵²

Spirituality of the Jamaican People

A third important factor was the deep spirituality of the Jamaican people. Jamaicans were and still are a deeply spiritual people who believe in the power of prayer and hard work. They engaged in the work as if their success depended on their efforts and prayed as if it depended upon God. The early reports of these new believers described them as deeply fervent. C. E. Wood, writing in the *Inter-American Messenger*, June 1924, described some Jamaican Adventists as aggressive laymen, raising up churches, pitching tents in many of the major cities of Jamaica, and increasing membership even during a time of drought.⁵³ Mr. Woods, writing in another place, described a week of prayer in which the majority of the church members were at the church at 4:00 a.m. for prayer. One lady even got there at 1:00 am so as not to be late. He described them as earnest, full of fervor, spirit filled. He cited the case of a Jamaican immigrant who recently returned from California filled with the message and who raised up a company of twelve believers.⁵⁴

W. A. Spicer, Seventh-day Adventist General Conference president, speaking of the work in Jamaica, described the strong fervency of the members, the beauty of the land, and the faithfulness of the workers, in spite of trials and struggles.⁵⁵

During a successful week of prayer conducted by Elder H. Fletcher in the latter part of the year 1898, Fletcher recorded that, “although some had to come from three to six miles, their voices could be heard early in the morning rising in praises and thanksgiving to God. The Spirit of God was manifested throughout the meetings . . . [and] as the people considered what they had heard, reviewed their past lives, and submitted themselves anew to God, eyes were bathed with tears.”⁵⁶

In another place, C. A. Hall reported that “thirty believers began to build a house of worship; one of the brethren gave the lot on which to

⁵² E. E. Andross, “God’s Leading in Mexico, Central America and the West Indies,” *Review and Herald* 17 Oct. 1924: 9.

⁵³ C. E. Wood, “Spreading the Word in Jamaica,” *Inter American Messenger*, June 1924: 4.

⁵⁴ C. E. Wood, “Week of Prayer in Jamaica,” *Inter American Messenger*, March 1925: 34.

⁵⁵ W. A. Spicer, “In Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 3 March 1902: 150.

⁵⁶ Hubert Fletcher, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 20 December 1898: 819.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

build the chapel, and another gave ninety feet of hewn stones for the foundation.”⁵⁷ H. F. Humphrey ascribed the success of the work to careful labor, house to house visits, Bible readings, and open air meetings.⁵⁸

In another place, President Spicer extolled the pioneering spirit of the Jamaican worker and the tremendous benefit of the canvassing work. He described their courage and zeal and the deep appreciation the believers had for the Advent message. Spicer identified something that would carve a special place in the history of Adventist missions for Jamaican workers. He saw Jamaica as an ideal place for developing workers for all tropical fields, Africa in particular. He writes, “As the work grows in Jamaica I believe it will furnish us faithful and disciplined workers for other fields.”⁵⁹ This was proven correct, as pointed out earlier.

J. B. Beckner described the Jamaican believers as having great zeal for the message and eagerness to take it to others. They were willing to build the Lord’s house, make sacrifices, carry stones on their heads, saw lumber, and do whatever was necessary for success of the work.⁶⁰

J. A. Strickland, former American missionary to Jamaica, who had ample opportunity to observe Jamaican Adventists, had these kind words to say about their devotion and spirituality: “I wish our American brethren would have the same love, faith, zeal and intelligence manifested by our native brethren in the deliberation and devotions of the conference. In spite of the devastation caused by the hurricane that swept Jamaica last year, progress was reported in every station.” The number of baptized Sabbath-keepers as of January 1, 1903, was 1188. During 1903 there were 174 baptisms, tithes of \$1,462.76, weekly offerings of \$420.24, and annual offerings of \$128, for a total of \$2,011.⁶¹

Organization of Conference

No one could have imagined that these simple words written in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* on March 27, 1894, would mark the genesis of one of the most successful Adventist mission enterprises in the world: “Word has just come from Jamaica, West Indies that a Seventh-day Adventist church was organized at Kingston in that island March 21

⁵⁷ C. A. Hall, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 2 April 1901: 221.

⁵⁸ H. F. Humphrey, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 12 October 1897: 650.

⁵⁹ W. A. Spicer, “The Jamaican Conference,” *Review and Herald*, 17 March 1903: 16, 17.

⁶⁰ J. B. Beckner, “Balaclava, Jamaica,” *The Missionary Magazine*, January 1902: 46.

⁶¹ J. A. Strickland, “The Jamaican Conference,” *Review and Herald*, 11 Feb 1904: 17.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

consisting of thirty-seven members, of those thirty were baptized and six joined by letter.”⁶²

This humble launching marked the establishment of the first Adventist church in Jamaica and laid the foundation for one of the strongest and most successful stories in Adventist missions in the world. The organization of the church and the subsequent organization of the conference was another vital factor for the Adventist success in Jamaica. Effective organization under capable leadership is capable of doing great things, and it appears that Jamaica was blessed with both.

The first church growth records of Adventism in Jamaica between 1893 and 1903 set the pattern and laid the foundation for future success. When A. J. Haysmer arrived in Jamaica, there were only six believers, according to him. He expressed disappointment. Twenty had been reported, but it seemed some had apostatized, while others had migrated.⁶³ By 1895 the number had increased to 105, and the following chart shows the steady increase in subsequent years.

Church Membership Growth in Jamaica	
Date	Members
1895	102
1896	300
1898	400
1900	713
1903	1200

In 1893, when A. J. Haysmer landed in Jamaica, it had been only 30 years since the Seventh-day Adventists organized themselves formally, so the church itself was still evolving in its understanding of what it meant to be an organization. The Foreign Mission Board, which launched the mission to Jamaica, was an autonomous organization under the umbrella of the church. As the work progressed in Jamaica, it became necessary to organize a more central form of leadership, so from November 5 to 15, 1897, representatives from Guyana, Trinidad, Barbados,

⁶² A. J. Haysmer, “First SDA Church in Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 27 March 1894: 208.

⁶³ A. J. Haysmer, “Jamaica, West Indies,” *Review and Herald*, 3 December 1893: 539.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

British Honduras, Bonacca, and Jamaica along with Elder Allen Moon, representative from the Foreign Mission Board of the General Conference, met in Jamaica with the goal of organizing the work on a more solid footing.⁶⁴

During this 1897 meeting, the West Indian Mission was organized, with headquarters in Kingston, Jamaica, and A. J. Haysmer was appointed as Superintendent.⁶⁵

In actual fact, Allen Moon, during his report to the Foreign Mission Board, December 5, 1897, recommended the establishment of the West Indies Union Mission. The recommendation was, of course accepted. The minutes of that meeting:

Allen Moon presented a detailed account of his visit to Jamaica, and the proceedings of the general council held, November 5-15, 1897, which revealed that there were about one thousand persons in and around the Caribbean sea who are keeping the Sabbath, and stated that in his judgment and in the judgment of those who attended the Jamaica meeting, it is desirable unite the work in that field under one general management, with headquarters, in Kingston, Jamaica. In harmony with this report the following actions were taken—ORGANIZATION—Voted that our work in Central America, Bay Islands, the West Indies, and northern South America, including Guiana, be united under the head of The West Indian Mission Field. HAYSMER-MANAGER—Voted that A.J. Haysmer be invited to act as Superintendent of the West Indies Mission field. . . . Voted, that Kingston, Jamaica, be headquarters for the work in the West Indian Mission Field.⁶⁶

The mission territory was divided into seven districts and included the West Indian Islands, Central America, and South America, extending to the southern boundary of French Guiana, covering an area of 3,520 square miles with a population of 15,511,000.⁶⁷

Seven years later, in 1903, a consensus was reached that Jamaica should be organized as a full-fledged conference. W. A. Spicer, General

⁶⁴ Wesley Amundson, *The Advent Message in Inter-America*, (Washington: Review and Herald, 1947), 99.

⁶⁵ A. J. Haysmer, "Biennial Report of the West Indian Mission Field," *The General Conference Bulletin*, 4, 16 April 1897: 275.

⁶⁶ Foreign Mission Board Committee Minutes of December 5, 1897 meeting. Foreign Mission Board minutes vol.3 March 18, 1897-Jan 6, 1899, 40, 49.

⁶⁷ Amundson, 99.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Conference Secretary at the time, expressed his sentiments in these words:

Our workers were all united in the idea that the time had come in the progress for the cause in Jamaica when a Conference organization, assisted though it must be for the present from Mission Board funds, would prove of educational value to the field, and would help to lay responsibilities upon the churches.⁶⁸

Establishment of a Training School

Education has been a vital part of the Adventist mission outreach, as mentioned earlier, and it would play a critical role in the success of the work in Jamaica. The need for educating Adventist young people and the establishing of a college for the training of workers was evident very early in the Adventist work in Jamaica. The early Adventist missionaries recognized that education was necessary for the stability and consolidation of the work. As early as 1898, only five years after the landing of Haysmer, the first Adventist missionary to Jamaica, Allen Moon raised the question, "Shall we have a school in Jamaica?" and set forth a compelling argument for such a venture.⁶⁹ Other church leaders suggested that the moral climate in the Jamaican schools, and the fear of indoctrination by the Sunday-keeping denominations which controlled the Jamaican public schools, made the establishing of Adventist schools for Adventist young people a necessity.⁷⁰

The great concern of the Adventists for their young people in these Jamaican public schools was the influence of the Protestant church groups on these schools. Jamaica did not follow strict separation of church and state, especially regarding the curriculum of the Jamaican public schools. The Anglican Church, which was the official state religion (because of British rule), along with other traditional Protestant denominations, essentially ran the "public schools," so the students who attended these schools were exposed to a good portion of their teachings. Adventists felt that such an exposure as this was dangerous to Adventist young people attending these schools.

⁶⁸ W. A. Spicer, "The Jamaica Conference," *Review and Herald*, 17 March 1903: 16.

⁶⁹ Allan Moon, "Shall We Have School in Jamaica?" *Review and Herald*, 11 January 1898: 32.

⁷⁰ W. A. Spicer, "In Western Jamaica," *Review and Herald*, 10 March 1903: 15.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

The greatest need, however, for Jamaican Adventists was the need for a training college to train workers to establish the work on a firmer footing in Jamaica. Nothing could boost the work more than the establishment of such a school.

There is much uncertainty about the genesis of the Adventist College in Jamaica, so I have relied on the testimony of the family who were foremost in getting the church to establish a college in Jamaica, as the story was reported to Garnet Weir, former Alumni Director of Northern Caribbean University.

I spoke with Maude Peart-Goulbourne in January 1972. She told me then that she had written to the General Conference, about establishing a school in Jamaica, after learning about the Oakwood manual training Center, from a friend of hers who had migrated to the USA, and was in attendance there. She also told me of getting a response from Mr. Briggs. My impression, though was that this was sometime in 1906. She told me that her father, Mr. Daniel Peart was one of the six men selected by the Jamaica Conference to search for land for the school, and that they identified such land in Bog Walk. On May 10, 1906, this land for the school was purchased from Elias Levy Stannigar of Linstead, and, comprising 66 acres, was registered under transfer no. 2081 (Certificate of Title, Vol. 49, No. 34) at the Registrar of Titles, in the names of Judson Barkley Beckner, Jannus Addison Strickland and Wellington Frederick Buckley – “Elders of the Seventh Day Adventist Society”- as joint tenants. The land by the writer’s observation and assessment borders and partly encompasses part of an area in Bog Walk now known as Old Church Road.⁷¹

The purchase of the land is supported by J. B. Beckner in an article he wrote in the *Advent Review & Herald* of July 19, 1906, page 15. In this he states,

We have secured subscription pledges to the amount of fourteen hundred and fifty dollars to our industrial school, to be paid within the year. On the strength of this we bought sixty-five acres in a valley, about twenty-five miles from Kingston, and one and a half miles from Bog Walk railroad station . . . The purchase price is fourteen hundred and sixty-one dollars. We also took a lease and sale on forty-one acres adjoining this

⁷¹ Testimonial of Maude Peart-Goulbourne as told to Garnet Weir in January, 1972.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

property. The purchase price of this will be eleven hundred and seventy dollars.”⁷²

Floyd Greenleaf, in his book, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean*, commented,

The school that George Enoch described in such glowing terms in 1906 fell far short of expectations. During the second half of 1906, J. B. Beckner moved to the school site, a plantation known as Willowdene, with ten boys and four girls, to clear the land. By the time the earthquake struck they had about five acres in cultivation, but when C. B. Hughes assumed charge of the school in March, 1907, West Indian Union workers discovered the land was unsuitable for a successful farm. Immediately, they began searching for another location.⁷³

The minutes of a meeting of the General Conference executive committee held on July 24, 1906, indicates that the petition from the West Indian Union Conference for assistance with the school was presented by Elder I. H. Evans, and the committee voted:

To permit G. F. Enoch (president of the West Indies Union) to visit as many camp-meetings as possible in the States, with the object of raising means for the Jamaican school, and after these visits to go to such conferences as he chooses and as can be arranged with the Presidents, to raise further funds . . . That the General Conference donate 2,000 ‘Christ Object Lessons’ to the West Indian field, to aid in securing this school.⁷⁴

At a subsequent meeting on October 10, 1906, the committee voted:

- a) That we request the Keene Academy Board to release C. B. Hughes to take charge of the training school in Jamaica the next year.
- b) That we increase the appropriation of Christ Object Lessons to the West Indies, to 3000 copies, provided they are sold by

⁷² J. B. Beckner, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald* 19 July 1906: 15.

⁷³ Floyd Greenleaf, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 143.

⁷⁴ General Conference Executive Committee Minutes of July 24, 1906, meeting, 210, 211.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

July 1, 1907, and all the proceeds turned into the industrial school enterprise.⁷⁵

When the second school year began in March 1908, Hughes had moved his teachers and students to another estate, Riverdale, which he and Bender purchased after scouring the Kingston area. Enrollment for that year reached about twenty-five or thirty, a near capacity figure. Long before the second year ended, the school board had to face the realities of trying to operate with virtually no cash revenues.

The training college for Jamaican workers, after having been moved from two previous locations and being discontinued for awhile, was finally established close to the town of Mandeville. In 1918, under the leadership of Elder G. A. Roberts, the 181-acre Coolsworthy property was purchased, and in January 1919, school was reopened with Professor Hughes as head. The buildings at Riverdale (last site of the school) were dismantled and sent to Coolsworthy, where they were rebuilt. Several industries were established, such as baking, farming, dairying, printing, and sheet metal work, which provided employment for the students. The first class of three graduated in June 1923 from the 12th grade. The following year, the school was upgraded from an academy to a Junior College, and the name changed to West Indian Training College. Three years later, in 1926, seven students graduated from the two year college course.⁷⁶ The school initially served as a missionary base in supplying workers for the region and beyond. West Indies Training College would become the leading Junior College in the Inter-American Division. The college sought to implement many of the principles of Ellen White, one of major founders of Adventism. Education focused on the total development of an individual—heart, hand, and mind—so that the early curriculum emphasized not only intellectual development, but also the development of the physical and spiritual powers.

The school has progressed tremendously over the years. When the school was opened in 1906, there were only eight students and four teachers. In 1919, when the school was reopened in Mandeville, there were twenty students. By 1935 it had risen to 200, and by 1963 there were six hundred students and forty faculty.⁷⁷ The college has continued

⁷⁵ General Conference Executive Committee Minutes of October 10, 1906, meeting, 159.

⁷⁶ Linette Mitchell, *Thy Light Has Come: A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica* (Mandeville: NCUP, 2003), 48.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

to flourish, and since 1999 it has achieved university status and now has an enrollment of over 5,000 students.

The role that the college has played in the success and consolidation of the work in Jamaica is incalculable. The college provided a cadre of well-trained, qualified workers that helped to advance the work not only in Jamaica, but in the surrounding region. It was a source of continual inspiration to the young people, giving them hope of advancing themselves not only spiritually but also materially in the secular world. It was a magnet for youth all around the region who came in their numbers, bringing with them their unique cultures and languages to the college and thus enriching the educational experiences of their Jamaican colleagues.

The college provided Jamaicans with a global vision of the work, for it attracted many foreign workers who came to share their gifts and talents. The college provided continuing education to workers already in the field, thus sharpening and refining their skills for ministry. It gave the Adventist message a respectable profile within Jamaican society, for the college came to be seen as a valuable asset in nation building. Adventism would gain immeasurable respect and credibility through its graduates, spread far and wide in Jamaican society. Few Jamaican Adventist leaders would question the enormous role West Indies College (now Northern Caribbean University) played in the success and prosperity of Adventism in Jamaica. This noble institution sitting upon a hill commanding an impressive view of the surrounding countryside continues to train thousands for the work of God all over the world and continues still to inspire thousands more.

Aggressive Public Evangelism

Another critical factor in the advancement of the work in Jamaica was the early use of tent meetings for public evangelism. This method may have accounted for the largest number of accessions to the Adventist church in Jamaica. Elder F. I. Richardson, an American missionary, was the first to pitch a tent for public evangelism. In August 1894, he pitched a tent in the southwest corner of the Kingston Race Course. Pastor Fletcher, reflecting on the meetings, described them as “crowded, the singing inspiring and sung with devotion and fervency.” He continued describing how as the sublime truths of prophecy and other subjects were presented, the peoples’ hearts burned within them. Little groups were seen studying and discussing the subjects, while others were pricked in their hearts and were inquiring what they needed to do in order to be saved. As a result of the tent effort, the numbers of believers was greatly

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

increased, and the original meeting house was no longer adequate to house the new members. This led the group to purchase an old Baptist church at 32 Text Lane, Kingston, and this would become the first organized Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica.

This first tent meeting by F. I. Richardson would mark the beginning of an evangelistic explosion that is now part of the storied legacy of Adventist evangelism in Jamaica. All across the island, for the next 100 years, laymen and pastors alike would engage in this method of evangelism on an aggressive scale that brought to pass the words of Jesus, “on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

J. A. Strickland described a tent meeting in Christiana that stirred up quite a bit of opposition among the local clergy and local officials who went from house to house to prejudice peoples' mind against the truth. They also disturbed the meeting, stoned the tent and attempted to eject the evangelist.⁷⁸

A. J. Haysmer, the first American missionary and first president of the Jamaica mission, also engaged in many tent meetings.

Geographical, Historical, and Cultural Factors

There were a number of other factors that may not be considered direct causes for the success of the Adventist mission in Jamaica, but were necessary precursors and provided the necessary context that aided in the success. The accident of geography placed Jamaica in close proximity to the United States, the birthplace of Adventism. The travel time for American Adventist missionaries was relatively short. They could travel to Jamaica and return home frequently for rejuvenation and rest if needed. However, it was the proximity in culture, language, religion, and customs that made the transition and adaptation that much easier for both the missionary and the new believer.

Jamaica was the largest English-speaking country in the Caribbean and also the center of British colonial rule in the region, so Jamaicans shared a common cultural and linguistic heritage with the Americans. English was the major language spoken, so there was no need for the missionaries to learn a new language. Furthermore, since the vast majority of Adventist literature and books was written in English, these materials were readily available to the new believers in large quantity to speed

⁷⁸ J. A. Strickland, “Jamaica,” *Review and Herald*, 9 February 1905: 17.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

up the process of indoctrination. The short travel time also accelerated this process. The missionaries themselves, once they arrived in Jamaica, could immediately begin preaching, traveling, and instructing the native workers and new believers.

The similarity in religious heritage was also significant, because of the British influence. Jamaica was a mainly Protestant nation and accessible to all kinds of Protestant missionary groups, such as the Moravians, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists. Although the Sabbath and other distinct Adventist doctrines would make Adventism unique, they still had many religious similarities, due to their common Reformation roots. Although Adventism experienced sporadic opposition from the religious groups all across the island, opposition never coalesced into a major national/state hostility that hindered Adventist mission work. So there was a religious receptivity that was already present that the Americans could never receive in any of the other surrounding Catholic nations of Central and South America and the Caribbean.

Another important factor was customs, especially as it related to race. The British abolished slavery in 1838, but the newly freed Blacks remained at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Many of these newly freed Blacks refused to return to the plantation, so the British imported Indian and Chinese workers to fill the need for laborers. However, another distinct group of people, the Mulattoes, would be the key players between the ruling English and the vast Black majority. This group, the offspring of the British planters and their slaves, would emerge in the Jamaican society and form an alliance with the remaining Whites to rule Jamaican society. As the White American missionaries landed in Jamaica, they seemed to gravitate to the Mulattoes, and it is from this group that the earliest group of native leaders would emerge. It seemed that those American missionaries, all of whom were White, found it easiest to establish friendships with these people and to train them for leadership. When we visually observe the very first group of ordained Jamaican ministers, we notice that all belong to this Mulatto/White group. Another reason for this was probably that they were already the educated group and were therefore much more easily trained. However, the success of this situation would become obvious over time, because as the darker elements of society flooded the church in large numbers, they would remain conspicuously absent from the leading positions of church leadership, as these positions were reserved for either the White missionaries or the White/Mulatto native workers. Why did I call this a success factor? It was obviously not a good thing, but we must understand that

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

the vast Black population was accustomed to seeing these people in leadership positions in the wider society. Although a few dissident Adventist voices rejected this practice, most Black Adventist Jamaicans accepted it, as this is all they ever knew. This should not come as a surprise to any one, since these White American missionaries were coming from a racist culture that denigrated Blacks, although they themselves would vehemently deny their own racist attitudes and practices. What is remarkable, however, is that in spite of these challenges, the work still flourished, and the message was enthusiastically embraced by thousands of Black Jamaicans. It appeared that Divine providence overruled whatever racial prejudice these White missionaries may have had and greatly blessed their work.

The leaders of early Adventism in Jamaica would primarily be White Americans or White/Mulatto Jamaicans. So the church in some way was reflecting the social reality of Jamaican secular society, which was dominated by the White/Mulatto class that composed the ruling elite. Most of these White American Adventist leaders brought to Jamaica their views about race that essentially relegated Blacks to an inferior status. The Adventist Church in America at this time was practicing racism in all of its institutions, so it should not be surprising that these Adventist leaders would reflect this attitude. They admitted Margaret Harrison, a White Jamaican Adventist, into Battle Creek Sanitarium while excluding their fellow African-American Adventist patients from the same institution.

As early as 1908, Black Jamaicans began to agitate for equality, especially as it relates to salary. According to Weir, a Jamaican worker (Methuselah Jones) was making \$1.00 per week while his American counterpart was making \$6.00 per week.⁷⁹ Such blatant disparity would not go unchallenged, and so Jamaican workers would agitate for some level of equality.

The skin color of the early interests from Jamaica about Adventism may have been a factor that influenced the response of the Adventists to them and so in a strange sort of way benefited the advancement of the early work. Margaret Harrison, who was White, although a Jamaican native of English ancestry, was received warmly by White American Adventists, who responded quicker to her needs than they did to the millions of African-Americans living within their borders. It was one year after the Adventist leadership sent A. J. Haysmer to Jamaica before any

⁷⁹ Weir, personal interview with author in 2008.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

systematic effort was launched to minister to African-Americans, and this was done by Edson White without the General Conference blessing and support.

Another important factor was the climate of Jamaica. Time and time again, the American missionaries wrote of the “salubrious” climate of Jamaica. Anyone who has ever visited or lived in Jamaica can testify of the majestic natural beauty of the place and the beautiful climate, with a yearly temperature in the range of 80 degree Fahrenheit and the cool ocean breezes with little humidity. Jamaica is still one of the most beautiful places in the world to live.

The Truth and Prophetic Factor

In trying to understand the early factors that contributed to the rise of the Adventist work in Jamaica, I have discovered three types of factors. The first factors focused primarily on organization and methodology. The second group of factors included those of geography, history, and culture, and I have dealt with those extensively. There is a third group of factors that focuses on the nature and content of the Adventist message itself. The fact that Adventism as a new faith born out of a great disappointment with an unpopular message would have such a great success all over the world has puzzled scholars. A number of them have suggested some answers by their analysis of Millerism and by extension Adventism as an outgrowth of that movement.

The first reason is a view of truth. George Knight describes Adventism, like Millerism, as an apocalyptic movement that attracted both rationalists and emotional types. Adventism, however, has appealed primarily to the rational element. “Thus in Adventism there is much emphasis on conversion to the truth.”⁸⁰ The content of this truth has contributed to the evangelistic success of Adventism because of many of its unique doctrines that are presented with a special sense of divine mission.

Hewitt, in explaining Seventh-day Adventist growth in contrast to lack of growth in his own Christian community, notes “that the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, while causing it to be viewed with suspicion by many traditional believers, have seemingly given its faithful members a resoluteness of individual and group character that goes far to explain its success.” Dean Kelly suggests that people want to join a movement that provides an alternative to the larger culture. Knight, although agreeing with these, also points

⁸⁰ Knight, 134, 135.

O'REGGIO: THE EARLY ADVENTIST MISSION TO JAMAICA

out that "Adventism is not so far removed from Protestant orthodoxy that people are hostile to it."⁸¹

A third element of evangelistic success was the organizational structure. I have dealt with that before. But it does appear that this centralized authority provided cohesion and direction, although Knight warns that this organization, which originally contributed to the success of the church, could also prove the undoing of the church.⁸²

The fourth and most important element in the rapid success of Millerism and, by extension, Adventism, was a sense of prophetic mission and urgency that was guided by that prophetic understanding. Knight argues that Sabbatarian Adventists never saw themselves as just another denomination. They understood their movement and mission as a fulfillment of prophecy. They saw themselves as a prophetic people.⁸³

The Sabbatarian Adventists, unlike the other groups that came out of Millerism, continued Miller's prophetic scheme of interpretation and explained their disappointment by re-interpreting the event of 1844. They affirmed Miller's prophetic timetable, but substituted a new event that occurred at the end of this period.

Summary and Conclusion

The Adventist mission experience in Jamaica, following the missiological quadrilateral, as proposed by George Knight, has proven to be an incredible success. Adventism has been enthusiastically embraced by many Jamaicans and is today the largest denomination in the country. Recently, the leader of Adventism in Jamaica and the surrounding region was appointed as the Governor General of Jamaica by the Prime Minister, perhaps a fitting tribute to the impact that Adventism has made on the island.⁸⁴

I have identified three categories of factors that may have contributed to the success of Adventism in Jamaica. The first group of factors dealt with organization and methodology, and these were probably the most critical. The second group of factors included geography, culture, customs, and language, and although these factors were more indirect,

⁸¹ Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), quoted in Knight, 85.

⁸² Knight, 136.

⁸³ George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 295-325; George R. Knight, *Anticipating the Advent*, quoted in George R. Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom*, 137.

⁸⁴ Mark A. Kellner, "From Adventist Pastor to Chief of State", *Adventist Review*, 19 March 2009: 9

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

they provided a receptive context that facilitated the advancement of the work. The final factor was the nature and content of the Adventist message. This apocalyptic message, with its unique focus, presented with a sense of urgency appealing to the rational mind, struck a very responsive chord among Jamaicans, who by nature are a very spiritual people.

Trevor O'Reggio teaches in the Department of Church History at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. He earned his Ph.D. and M.A. in History from the University of Chicago and an M.Div. in Theology from Andrews University. Dr. O'Reggio is an active preacher, guest lecturer, and presenter at ministerial conferences and for various congregations. toreggio@andrews.edu