Chapter 4

The Black Experience in Adventism, 1840–1930

From the start of the Millerite Movement around 1840 to the time James K. Humphrey left the Seventh-day Adventist church in 1930, the African American experience in Seventh-day Adventism was a saga of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence. Born in the midst of the Second Awakening, the Adventist movement and later the Seventh-day Adventist denomination both demonstrated uncertainty, if not confusion, in dealing with the Blacks who filtered into their ranks in myriad ways. Adventists lacked a coherent, strategic plan to evangelize Blacks, hedged on declaring their position on the race issue shortly after their official organization at the height of the American Civil War, and only moved to intentionally minister to people of African descent in America after they were reprimanded by Adventist pioneer, Ellen Gould White, in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Their noble pronouncements to the contrary notwithstanding, Adventist resonance with the color issue during this period was one of pragmatism over principle and expediency over legality.

Adventist treatment of Blacks has led supporters and detractors among members and nonmembers alike to question the organization's sincerity, sensitivity, and commitment to inaugurating an age of racial healing and reconciliation. At the start of the new millennium, race, as in the broader society, was one of the most important challenges confronting the denomination, defining and contextualizing not a few of its policies, practices, and priorities. In the United States, the Seventh-day Adventist church is structured unambiguously along racial lines, a reality that eloquently tells that in the Seventh-day Adventist church race matters.

Historically, Seventh-day Adventists have viewed human history and the events of the world from a distinct perspective, ascribing meaning to world events in keeping with principles that rise above the earthly sphere and viewing the earth as the theater in which human history is played out. Adventists conceive of history as being purposeful, with events and personalities proceeding inexorably toward a meaningful, climactic end. As such, human beings should order their lives with an eye on the end, fully aware that their actions do have an impact on their future destiny.[1]

The distinctiveness of the denomination's cosmology began to emerge during the time the group existed as part of the Millerite Movement, evolving more between the Great Disappointment of 1844 and the formal organization of the denomination in 1863. Yet Seventh-day Adventism did not evolve in a cultural and historical vacuum, uninfluenced by larger political and economic forces and factors. Consequently, while Adventists conceived of historical forces in ways that caused them to be branded a cult, they tended to view people of African descent in very much the same ways that the broader American society did. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the denomination did so unquestioningly, accepting the theological and sociological framework and underpinnings for society's diminution and depreciation of the African American's nature, culture, and ability.[2]

James K. Humphrey joined the Seventh-day Adventist church shortly after the start of the twentieth century, when Africans from the South and the West Indies were beginning to stream into the urban centers of the North. Rising quickly through the denomination's leadership ranks, Humphrey, a proud Jamaican who was troubled by the racism he encountered in American society, early experienced severe pangs of conscience over the ways the Adventist church handled matters of race. Ultimately, Humphrey, unable to accept the marginalized status of African Americans in the Adventist church anymore, broke with the group.

The Millerite Movement

Between 1800 and 1850, the land mass of the United States increased by approximately 50 percent and the population jumped 400 percent from approximately five to more than twenty million people. The young nation became home to millions of immigrants, many of whom were from Ireland and Germany. This

influx of people to America was the first genuine mass immigration the nation experienced. Even though America welcomed new peoples to its shores, immigration created tension and antagonism among its population. This was particularly true with respect to religious orientation and allegiances, and, more important, the nascent spirit of nativism in the nation at the time. Americans viewed the growing Roman Catholic population with suspicion, labeling Catholics as anti-American for the premium they placed on promoting their own educational system. Early to mid-nineteenth century America saw religious uniformity come to an end and, concomitantly, a rise in the number of sects and religious groups that operated outside the margins of American society. So pervasive was the increase and spread of religious groups and activity during the period that it has been referred to as the time of religious ferment.[3] Yet, the rise of activity in the religious sector of the nation did not occur without other influences but mirrored tendencies that were occurring in the political and social spheres of the nation as well.

The two individuals who represented the strains and changes that took place in the social and political lives of the nation were Charles Finney and Andrew Jackson. To be sure, Finney was not Jacksonian in his political ideology. Yet Finney was vintage Jackson in his presuppositions and world view, siding with the little and marginalized peoples of the American society whose discontent he exploited. The activity of both men resulted in the elevation of ambition and initiative over wealth and ancestry, and for the first time the American dream was considered within the reach of all. Optimism and egalitarianism were the watchwords in both the popular religion and popular democracy of the day.[4]

It was in this context of hospitality to unconventionality in both politics and religion that Adventism was born and fostered. Its parent was millennialism, a Christian theology that includes the ultimate victory of Christ over the forces of evil and the deliverance and exoneration of his followers. Millennialism is best taught and understood in the context of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, an event some Christians believe is synonymous with the end of human history. Millennialism in general, and apocalyptic millennialism in particular, invaded America from England in the first half of the nineteenth century, although William Miller, their chief American proponent, was not extensively versed in their British version.[5]

The Seventh-day Adventist church had its origins in the Millerite Movement that swept the American northeast from the early 1800s to the mid-nineteenth century. Millerism was inaugurated by William Miller, a farmer from Low

Hampton, New York, who began to seriously study the prophetic portions of Scripture around 1818.[6] A self-taught, self-styled Bible expositor and theologian, Miller concluded, based on his personal exegesis of Daniel 8:14, that Jesus Christ would return in 1844 to purify the earth. Miller initially was loathe to divulge his findings to the public, opting instead to talk and preach with small groups of people wherever and whenever the opportunity arose. He would have continued to do so but for the involvement in the movement of Joshua V. Himes, a Boston publisher who on hearing Miller's views embraced them and decided to publicize them.

From 1840 onward, Joshua V. Himes functioned as the chief organizer and promoter of Miller's beliefs, giving the Advent Movement shape and focus.[7] Were it not for Himes, Miller may never have had a place in American history. Later, Himes's skills were augmented by those of Charles Fitch, whose unique interpretation of Revelation 18:4 provided the movement with one of its defining moments. Together, these two men promulgated Miller's beliefs through the printed page and by organizing several general conferences in the northeastern United States to study the issue of the Second Coming.[8] Their efforts were not without success. As many as fifty thousand Adventists were spread across the northeastern United States by the mid-1840s, all eagerly expecting something of cataclysmic dimensions to occur. Nor were these people oddballs or fanatics woefully out of touch with mainstream America.[9]

Miller was modest in his ambitions and goals. For starters, he did not want to launch a new denomination or organization, believing that his convictions transcended sectarianism and division and that Christian unity was both a prerequisite and prelude to the second coming of Christ. Miller, at least up to 1844, was not a separatist and was so against separatism that he even rejected the second angel's message of Rev. 14 as preached by Charles Fitch and others, viewing the message as disruptive to the goals and mandate of the Second Advent movement.[10] Moreover, Miller believed that because his message was Bible-based, it had the special blessing of God. Miller remained a Baptist until late 1844 when the Low Hampton congregation in which he had held membership expelled him. Thereafter, his teaching on church membership oscillated between espousing separation and remaining loyal to one's congregation. One factor that contributed to Miller's calls for separation was the persecution that Adventists, as those who embraced Miller's teaching that Christ would return to the earth in 1844 were then being called, were receiving in their respective churches.

People of African descent were involved in the Millerite Movement. Among the first Blacks to embrace Miller's beliefs were John W. Lewis of Providence, Rhode Island, and Charles (Father) Bowles of Boston.[11] Before becoming a Millerite, Bowles was a Freewill Baptist who had organized many White congregations. Yet among the Blacks of the Millerite Movement no one stands out as much as William Foy, a light-skinned Black from Maine who received visions earlier than Ellen Gould White did. Until recently left out of or miscast in Adventist history books, Foy lived and preached at the peak of the Advent Awakening. He received a total of four visions, at least one of which occurred in a mixed congregation. It was originally believed that fearing prejudice and perhaps physical danger, Foy refused to publicize what had been revealed to him in vision. Yet his biographer has shown that after a three-month hiatus Foy resumed preaching, continuing to do so until close to his death on November 9, 1893. Although it is unclear how Foy felt about the Sabbath or whether he ever kept it, Foy was a genuine spokesperson for the Millerite cause, serving as a pre-Disappointment prophet who in no way competed or contradicted the post-Disappointment prophecies and ministry of Ellen Gould White.[12]

Lewis, Bowles, and Foy were but three of the Blacks who figured prominently in the Millerite cause. To be sure, only a sprinkling of Blacks ever encountered the phenomenon, and there are no figures indicating how many ever joined the movement. Still, these three individuals show that Blacks were involved in the cause. According to Seventh-day Adventist historian George Knight, Millerite leadership was strategic and intentional, if not aggressive, in their efforts to work among Blacks, demonstrating their commitment by investing not just time but money in their efforts.[13]

Were Millerites abolitionists? Did they aggressively work to eliminate slavery? Did they stand in solidarity with the slaves? Ron Graybill believes that the foremost abolitionist leader of the day, William Lloyd Garrison, was ambivalent toward Miller and his cohorts, viewing them as deranged individuals victimized by outlandish theories concerning the second coming of Jesus Christ that made them of no use to the abolitionist cause. Graybill says there is no record that Miller himself was actively involved in the antislavery cause and that Millerite publications are almost completely bereft of any articles designed to promote the elimination of slavery. Millerism, to be sure, had something in common with the abolitionist cause, including a similar concern with biblical predictions about the millennium, a mutual opposition to organized religion, and a shared quest for personal piety, perfection, and purity. Yet Millerism was

a movement with a single focus that adherents refused to allow to be blurred by other tangential concerns. Concluding that Millerism did little to foster reform causes, Graybill alleges that it actually pulled many people away from active participation in the movement.[14]

Graybill seems to have an ally in George Knight, who says that by 1843 Miller "was at loggerheads with the reform movements, as well as with the church, in terms of a strategy for bringing in the kingdom." For Miller, "the second coming would be the reform of all reforms. It was the ultimate cause."[15]

George Knight contends that even though Garrison was "a bit discouraged" with Joshua V. Himes's "apostasy to Millerism" and "frustrated beyond measure when talented leaders converted to Millerism," Garrison's abolitionism was focused and intense, with the eradication of slavery "the central element in bringing about the millennium" in Garrison's thinking. For Garrison, talk of a millennial reign of peace that was not linked to the end of slavery was an absurdity. Knight also disagrees that Miller was not involved in the abolitionist cause, citing evidence that in 1840 Miller was touted as being an abolitionist in the *Liberator,* a Garrison periodical, and Knight asserts that Miller's involvement in the abolitionist movement must have been sustained, because two weeks after the October 1844, disappointment, Miller was identified as a "trusted participant" in the Underground Railroad.[16]

Some of the significant figures in the Millerite Movement did display signs of a social conscience. For example, Joshua V. Himes sponsored several reform causes before becoming Miller's chief promoter, and Charles Fitch wrote at least one article questioning slavery. In addition, Joseph Bates organized an antislavery group during the 1830s and a temperance society in the 1820s. Himes's involvement in the abolitionist movement was anything but peripheral. "A perpetual activist" who "did not sit on the sidelines in the struggles of the day," Himes plunged into the abolitionist cause when to do so was to endanger one's career, if not life, even in the North. His fervor and intensity so unnerved the members of the First Christian Church that Himes was forced to resign his leadership role in that congregation. He moved on to become the pastor of the Second Christian Church, which was formed by a core of those who left First Christian in the wake of Himes's departure. Charles Fitch was a "zealous abolitionist" whose discourses condemning slavery were thought to supercede Garrison's in terms of eloquence and vigor, and even though Fitch ultimately broke with Garrison, it was not because Fitch's antislavery sentiments had waned.[17]

Joseph Bates was among the foremost in terms of Sabbatarian Adventists who stood in solidarity with the slaves. Bates's passion for the Temperance and Abolitionist causes did not wane with his involvement in the Sabbatarian Adventist movement, even though he was reprimanded by some detractors for such. Bates refused to drive a wedge between social reform and expectations of the Second Coming of Jesus, arguing that, in a sense, they stood together or would fall if bifurcated. Indeed, Bates believed that anybody who did not believe in the second coming of Jesus would and could not serve the moral reform movement well.[18]

Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart argue that Adventist pioneers were involved in abolitionist activities before they became Adventist or before the group became an organized entity but that once they joined the group Adventist pioneers generally reflected the broader society's attitudes and practices with regard to the issue of race. The authors contend that Adventists early perceived the issues of slavery and racism in America less as matters that required social reform than as issues that underscored American hypocrisy and identified and situated the nation in the scheme of Bible prophecy. Not only did attitudes of prejudice inform and dictate early Adventist approaches to race, with church leaders adopting the policy that good race relations between Blacks and Whites are best fostered and facilitated by the separate-but-equal doctrine, but the authors believe that Jim Crow segregation found a prototype in Adventism.[19]

Not surprising, after the Great Disappointment of 1844, Adventists experienced a decline in their numbers. In 1846, a remnant of the disappointed merged with a group who believed in the sanctity of the Bible Sabbath, which they held was the seventh day of the week, becoming known as Sabbatarian Adventists. By the end of that year Ellen White, who had started receiving visions in December 1844, was generally viewed by the new group as heaven's special messenger to the remnant.[20] From that time on to the organization of the denomination in 1863, Sabbatarian Adventists worked at concretizing and systematizing their doctrinal tenets and beliefs, ultimately hammering out a theology that included an attempt to address the race issue.[21]

Sabbatarian Adventists held that slavery was antithetical to the biblical ideal of love and brotherhood and was a stain on the nation's moral fabric. They were particularly troubled by the Fugitive Act of 1850, viewing it as an intrusion by the federal government into the lives of citizens, whose freedom of choice Sabbatarian Adventists held was a biblical principle. Sabbatarian Adventists prized

the notion of freedom of choice, rightly arguing that its denial or compromise in one sphere would spread to others, including themselves, a small, fledgling group operating outside the parameters of mainstream American religion. Yet, for all their lip service to the tenets of abolitionism, Sabbatarian Adventists stopped short of radical involvement in the abolitionist cause. Confronting the principalities and powers were not what they were about.

Douglas Morgan, while admitting that Sabbatarian Adventists "thundered against governmental actions favorable to slavery" and "sought to keep their own community free from the sin of slavery," claims that they did not aggressively or intentionally work to alter the American system. Their poignant, penetrating words in support of abolitionism notwithstanding, Sabbatarian Adventists "would not fight their war with bullets or . . . with ballots." As far as they were concerned, conditions in American society would only be remedied at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and even though it was incumbent on those preparing for the event to point out injustices in society, it was more critical that people ready themselves for the event.[22]

At best, then, Sabbatarian Adventists were moderate abolitionists whose preferred course of action was quiet diplomacy, not physical confrontation or even collective agitation. They believed that their target should be the moral and spiritual health of the American nation, not its political life. Sabbatarian Adventists were convinced that were the moral and spiritual fibers of the nation righted, an inevitable corollary would be an upswing in America's political life and institutions for the oppressed and marginalized. Among those who embraced and sought to advance the causes of both Sabbatarian Adventism and Abolitionism was Sojourner Truth, though she is more known and celebrated for her espousal of the feminist movement.[23]

Early Seventh-day Adventist Contact with Blacks

Organized during a time when the United States was locked in a conflict centering around the destiny of Black people, the Seventh-day Adventist church was sluggish in mounting an intentional, aggressive campaign to proselytize Blacks, who heard the Adventist brand of the gospel in as early as 1875 from a lay preacher named Silas Osborne.[24] A native of Kentucky who had migrated to Iowa in 1851, Osborne had accepted Adventist teachings there before moving back to Kentucky in 1871. His brother pressed him to share his newfound

beliefs publicly, and after much cajoling, Osborne obliged.[25] Among Osborne's first Black converts to Adventism in Kentucky was a preacher named Edmund Killen, who went on to preach to African American audiences, although not much is known about the degree of success he experienced in winning Blacks to his new denomination.[26]

When Adventist pioneers began preaching to Whites in some parts of the South, they found a sprinkling of Blacks worshiping with the Whites. For example, C. O. Taylor, the first Seventh-day Adventist minister to preach the Third Angel's[27] message in Georgia, reported that he saw some Blacks present with the Whites in the Baptist church he used to attend, and D. M. Canright asserted that there were three African American Sabbath keepers among the White congregation to which he preached in Kentucky.[28] It is far from surprising that Blacks were found worshiping with Whites at this time, since before the Civil War slaves had generally worshiped in the churches of their masters.

Adventist pioneers to the South were not oblivious to the challenges inherent in witnessing to African Americans. For example, D. M. Canright, from Little Rock, Arkansas, related that they encountered no problems trying to preach to Blacks as long as they restricted their efforts to the Black community.[29] Years later, J. M. Rees stated that in Tennessee Black and White membership in Adventist churches presented no problem but that a minister who tried to preach to an integrated public audience would invariably see the Whites leave.[30] Two Adventist preachers in Georgia saw both Blacks and Whites leave their meetings when the two groups realized they would have to sit together for the meetings. Yet some time afterward African American evangelists reported successful attempts at preaching to White and Black congregations in the South.[31]

At the conclusion of a Tennessee camp meeting in 1889, a group of ministers and delegates spent time pondering "important issues," the race issue being the "most serious and perplexing." Reporting on the deliberations from back home in Louisville, Kentucky, R. M. Kilgore stated that for northern Whites to attempt to dismantle "the distinction between the races" would be "simply fanatical and unwise" and that those who had never worked in the South could not resonate with the situation there. He argued that Whites who labored "indiscriminately" among both races would "have no influence whatever among the Whites in any part of the South" and that only those Whites who restricted their efforts to Blacks could expect success to attend their work. Kilgore stated that Whites would have to accept that to labor exclusively for Blacks would make them of "no reputation among the Whites."[32]

The first Black Seventh-day Adventist church was established at Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, in 1886 by Harry Lowe, a former Baptist minister. It had been organized as a company in 1883.[33] In that year, J. O. Corliss reported that there were 267 White and 20 Black Adventists in the South. In 1890, R. M. Kilgore, the northerner heading up the Adventist work in the South, who would later urge the separation of Black and White churches, organized the second Black Adventist congregation in Louisville, Kentucky. Kilgore built upon the labors of A. Barry, who had started having meetings in Louisville after accepting Adventism as the result of reading an issue of the denomination's official paper, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald.* The following year, another Black congregation was organized in Kentucky, this time in Bowling Green, by Charles Kinney, a former slave from Richmond, Virginia, who had moved west after the Civil War.[34]

Known as the "Father of Black Adventism," Charles Kinney joined the Adventist church in 1878 through the preaching of two distinguished Adventist pioneers—John N. Loughborough and Ellen G. White. On July 30, 1878, Kinney heard Ellen White preach to a crowd of four hundred in Reno, Nevada. He was moved by the sermon, which was based on 1 John 3:1, "Behold, what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." By the end of September, Kinney was keeping the Sabbath and experiencing belonging and fellowship among the individuals who would become the nucleus of the Reno church. Recognizing Kinney's competencies, church members elected him church clerk, and conference officials appointed him secretary of the Nevada Tract and Missionary Society. Kinney was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1889, in a ceremony that he never forgot and that changed the course of his service to the Adventist church. On the day of his ordination, church officials tried to segregate Kinney and his members at the camp meeting where the solemn service was to be held, only backing down when Kinney and his congregation threatened to bolt.[35]

Admitting that his ideas were radical and that his suggestions were ones he wished he neither had to make nor would ever be implemented, Kinney in 1889 began to call for separate services for Whites and Blacks in the Adventist church. He believed that inherent in the gospel was the power to break down all walls of prejudice resident in believers. Yet prejudice existed in society, creating barriers to the promulgation of the gospel. Kinney stated that the color question was an embarrassment to all Blacks, whose presence in meetings hindered Whites from joining the church. In an effort to ameliorate the situation,

he offered twelve propositions, among them a call for a "frank understanding" between Blacks and Whites on all issues having to do with race. Kinney also advised that separation be pursued as a viable strategy wherever integration limited or negated church growth and that Christian community be fostered so that separation may be viewed for what it is—a strategic way to reach all people and not a monument to prejudice and alienation.[36]

A couple of years before Kinney began counseling General Conference leaders on the race issue, Adventist leaders had started wrestling with it. Vigorous debate about the race question had dominated the 1887 General Conference session, with the issue dividing the delegates. On the one hand were those who, citing the moral underpinnings and biblical principles attending the issue, found segregation offensive and unacceptable. They argued that Whites who refused to worship with Blacks were better left alone, their Christianity suspect anyway. On the other hand were the pragmatists who did not want to disturb the status quo or create controversy. They wanted the gospel to be preached without discrimination to anyone who wanted to hear but reasoned that elimination of prejudice in the hearts of Whites was a matter better left to the Spirit of God.[37] Still, a resolution recognizing no color line was introduced, with E. J. Waggoner amending it to say that Blacks who accepted the Third Angel's Message should be received into the Adventist church on an equality with White members and that no distinctions whatsoever be made between the two races in church relations.[38]

Between 1889 and 1895, Kinney, who had been ordained and commissioned with the expressed mandate to evangelize African Americans in the South, offered to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists strategies for the successful promulgation of his assignment. Stressing the egalitarianism inherent in Scripture, he appealed for White missionaries to penetrate the South with the gospel even as he admitted that structural racism would continue to frustrate those efforts. Kinney addressed the delegates at the General Conference session of 1891, speaking of the necessity of establishing a distinctly separate work for Blacks, especially in the South. Citing racial issues, he said that such a structure would lead to more effective soul winning efforts among Blacks. More than anything else, Kinney did not want to see the dignity and worth of his people trampled upon. At the same time, he did not want to see Whites refuse to accept the gospel because of the presence of Blacks in their churches.[39]

Seventh-day Adventist work among Blacks in North Carolina started in Greensboro in 1891 and in Texas at Catchings in 1893. Black congregations

continued to be spawned in the South throughout the 1890s—in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1894; Birmingham, Alabama, in 1895; Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Charleston, South Carolina, in 1898; and in Orlando, Florida, Montgomery, Alabama, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1899. The proliferation continued in the first decade of the twentieth century, with Black congregations beginning in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1900; St. Louis, Missouri, in 1901; Kansas City, Missouri, in 1903; and in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1906.[40]

African Americans were not a drain or a financial burden on the Seventh-day Adventist church during this time. When Blacks first assembled for worship at Edgefield Junction in 1883, they contributed ten cents in offering. Ten years later they returned fifty dollars in tithe,[41] and five thousand dollars at the turn of the century. In Mississippi, where in 1903 Black Seventh-day Adventists numbered nearly as many as White ones, financial records reveal that Blacks returned approximately half of all tithe the previous year.[42] At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, African Americans were returning $25,000 annually in tithe.[43]

Adventist efforts to educate Blacks during Reconstruction were as slow as those to expose them to the gospel. More than ten years after the end of the Civil War, a school for African Americans ranging in age from six to twenty-four, who were "more obedient than the White pupils in the surrounding schools," was finally operating in Ray County, Missouri. Not much is heard about the school after 1877.[44] From March through May of that year, however, reports were received at General Conference headquarters about a school for Blacks in Texas that had been started by a lay couple in a tent. Joseph Clarke and his wife were pleased when Blacks replaced the tent with a building they built themselves.[45] Yet Adventists launched their most ambitious project to educate Africans Americans in the mid-1890s when the Oakwood Industrial School was established in Huntsville, Alabama. Named Oakwood because of the preponderance of oak trees in the vicinity, the school aimed to develop the moral, mental, and physical faculties of Blacks so as to prepare them for the "practical duties of life." Students were expected to work as well as to study and to conform to the religious and ethical ideals of the denomination and institution, with expulsion from school the penalty for the infraction of any of its rules. In 1904 Ellen White, whose counsel was key in the establishment of the institution, visited the campus, later dispatching an inspirational letter informing students that they were acquiring an education to better prepare themselves for service to God and reminding

them that God, as their great teacher, was ever willing to bestow wisdom upon them.[46]

In 1903, General Conference president George I. Butler called for "greater and better facilities" to be provided at the Oakwood Industrial School. Noting that Oakwood was the only institution in the world established for training people to work among Blacks in the context of the Third Angel's message, he admitted that the undertaking called for more resources than the Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists could supply. Butler believed that only a collaboration between southern and northern forces could help Oakwood meet its objectives. Yet what stands out in his address to the delegates assembled for the Thirty-Fifth Session of the General Conference was his admonition that the Session not adjourn without voting policies that would place the educational institution at a level that would match its needs and the demands of God at that time.[47]

In 1901, with Oakwood's enrollment hovering around fifty, Black Adventist church membership approximating three hundred, and church leaders still caught up in the throes of debating the race issue, the Seventh-day Adventist Mission Board dispatched Anna Knight to India, where she labored as a missionary for six years. A Mississippi Black whose love of reading had exposed her to Seventh-day Adventist literature, Knight became convinced of the Bible Sabbath after an intense study of the issue and was baptized in Graysville, Tennessee. She later attended the Adventist College in Battle Creek, Michigan, graduating from the school's nursing program. In 1896, as the Oakwood Industrial School was opening its doors for the first time, Knight returned to Mississippi, where she launched a mission school for impoverished Whites in her hometown of Gitano. When Blacks heard of her school, they requested that she start a Sunday School among them. Knight obliged, operating two Sunday Schools concurrently, one for Blacks and the other for Whites.[48]

In New York City and Los Angeles, Seventh-day Adventist contact with African Americans followed divergent paths, with an ordained Adventist pastor and church leader establishing the Adventist presence in New York City and a layperson doing the same in Los Angeles.[49] Stephen N. Haskell pioneered the Adventist work among Blacks in New York City in 1902. Working out of a room on West 59th Street in the Borough of Manhattan, Haskell began canvassing Blacks in the neighborhood. Toward the end of that year the fledgling group he had started rented a hall for twenty-five dollars. When the year ended, a church with a charter membership of eleven had been organized. H. W. Cottrell and

E. E. Franke, who organized the congregation, left J. H. Carroll, a layperson, in charge. Carroll plunged into his work with such enthusiasm that by early 1903 the membership of the church had increased by 300 percent and a night school providing instruction in reading, writing, Bible, history, grammar, and other subjects was in operation. Among Carroll's first converts was James K. Humphrey. Yet no action was taken at the first annual session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, held October 7 to 12, 1902, in New York City, to target the African American population.[50]

Four years after Adventist work among Blacks started in New York City, an African American then holding membership in the White Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Los Angeles started giving Bible studies to interested Blacks in the burgeoning population. As a result, two years later the first Black church in the West was established.[51]

What attracted African Americans to the Seventh-day Adventist church during this era? To be sure, Blacks did not flock to the church in significant numbers. Still, more than a handful saw in the unorthodoxy of the church's teaching a body of truth uniquely suited to bring them the mental, spiritual, and physical uplift they needed. Victimized by slavery and segregation, they found in the teaching of the imminent return of Christ the hope of rescue from oppression and injustice. The doctrine of the Sabbath offered a much-needed respite from the daily, unrelenting grind of labor in the fields of the South and urban centers of the North. And the denomination's still-evolving health emphasis held out an antidote for their physical needs. In sum, Adventism offered a system of Bible teaching and truth that powerfully appealed to the desire of African Americans for a better life in this world, not to mention in the one to come.[52]

Ellen G. White and the Race Issue

A survey of the African American experience in Adventism would be incomplete, if not problematic, without an investigation of the thought and writings of Ellen G. White, whose work continues to be a formative and guiding influence in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Ellen White had much to say about slavery, people of African descent, and how Christians should have related to the newly emancipated slaves.

Slavery was a volatile, divisive issue that fractured many denominations and polarized the membership of others. The Methodist church split over the issue

in 1844, the year of the Great Disappointment for Millerites and Adventists, and the Baptists followed suit the following year. As the Civil War raged in 1861, three denominations with huge memberships split over the issue—the Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Old Side Presbyterians. Because Sabbatarian Adventists during the period from 1844 to 1861 drew heavily from the Baptists and Methodists, it is not surprising that Adventist theology and practice reflected the struggle of these two denominations to reconcile the issue.[53] Of course, Adventism's unique interpretation of prophecy made for a radical connection between slavery and prophecy.[54]

Among the myriad of thorny issues with which the infant Seventh-day Adventist church wrestled was church race relations. Still experiencing the pangs of birth, the denomination could not rationalize, on biblical grounds, the nonacceptance of the essential humanity and equality of people of African descent, though it relegated them to the fringes socially. One year after the church nearly splintered over the theological issue of righteousness by faith,[55] it was forced to confront the race issue in 1889 at its annual Fall Council meeting of world church leaders.[56] Ellen White, conciliatory and pragmatic, would then begin to issue a series of thoughts and admonitions on the race issue that speaks to its complexity, ubiquity, and irrepressibility. The first of White's messages, entitled "Our Duty to the Colored People," was delivered to world church leaders on March 21, 1891.[57]

Ellen White asserted the intrinsic equality of Blacks, saying that in heaven's recordings the names of Whites are juxtaposed with those of Blacks, an axiomatic truth she believed shows that in God's reckoning no difference is found between Whites and Blacks. Arguing that God's love for his creation knows no division and shows no preference based on race, nationality, or gender, she said that the soul of the African is as precious in God's sight as that of any of his covenant people of ancient biblical Israel and that those who speak ill or harshly of Blacks are guilty of misappropriating the blood of Jesus Christ, which makes of all people one nation. White reminded Seventh-day Adventists that, contrary to popular belief, there would be no segregated neighborhoods in heaven.[58]

White bemoaned the 1889 General Conference resolutions on the color issue, claiming that they were not only unwarranted but precluded the miraculous intervention of God, and she cautioned church leaders against cementing prejudices that should have expired with Christ on the cross. She believed that sin was marring the church because it had made only lackluster efforts at winning Blacks to Christ and warned that the church had received no permission from

God to bar Blacks from their assemblies. Encouraging White church members to exploit every means possible to make amends for the injustices meted out to Blacks, Ellen White asserted that Blacks, like Whites, had souls to be saved and were the property of Christ, too. Yet White's most telling admonition at this time was that Blacks hold membership in White churches.[59]

Ellen White was all for the development of American-born Black leadership, holding that many Blacks were intelligent, competent individuals whose abilities could be honed and sharpened should Blacks only be given the same opportunities as Whites. She believed that even though slavery had degraded and corrupted the Black race, many African Americans possessed "decided ability" and "more intelligence than do many of their more favored brethren among the White people."[60] She perceived Blacks as an "ignorant and downtrodden class" with emotions and customs so hardened by years of degradation that arresting and reversing them posed no small problem. Yet she claimed that a corresponding situation existed among Whites and that success could still be realized if efforts were made to salvage African Americans. Even so, White did not condone the penchant among some Blacks of aspiring to preach to White audiences. Believing that such a move was a mistake, she encouraged Black preachers to focus on their own race, saying that such an emphasis would have as a corollary contact with White gatherings.[61]

White continued admonishing the Adventist church on the race issue throughout the 1890s, her appeals being pointed and passionate. For example, she indicated that the church needed to "repent before God" because it had failed to perform missionary work in the "most abandoned part of God's moral vineyard" and stated that a concern for people of African descent should be central and foundational to the church's missionary endeavors. Indeed, to continue to neglect African Americans in favor of others overseas betrayed a tragic misunderstanding of the priorities and purposes of God. Yet White's most poignant statement during this period was that the darkness of the skin of African Americans was not a measure of their sinfulness or wretchedness and that much of what African Americans were then experiencing was the direct result of how they had been treated by Whites.[62] The church's neglect of the African American had left it unprepared for the coming of the Lord, Ellen White stated.[63]

The United States did not escape the indictment of White, who claimed that the entire system of slavery had been originated by Satan, a tyrant who fiendishly delights in pitting people against each other.[64] She informed the nation that it owed a "debt of love" to the African American, telling it that God had ordained

that the nation make restitution for past wrongs and that accountability rested as squarely upon the shoulders of those who had not enforced slavery as upon those who had.[65] To Ellen White, the Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves ranked in significance with the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. In both cases God had miraculously intervened to bring deliverance to an enslaved people. Yet God did not leave freed slaves to fend for themselves but placed on the American people the responsibility of empowering African Americans. To the detractors who claimed that Blacks were hopelessly mired in a downward spiral of wickedness and depravity, Ellen White said that Whites were to be blamed for spoiling the morals of Black people.[66]

Ellen White criticized her church for not moving quicker to bring relief to the plight of the freedman, saying that conditions in the South would have been markedly different if strategies had been initiated immediately after the proclamation of freedom. Alleging that only about 1 percent of what could have been done there had been done, she said that angels in heaven were then stifling their music in displeasure. She argued that God had bestowed upon many people of African descent "rare and precious talents" that were only waiting to be tapped and unleashed, a reality aggravated by years of resistance to educating Blacks. Calling the South a "sin-darkened" field, she claimed the church had no excuse for not working it.[67]

Ellen White's counsels on the race issue during the 1890s were consistent with her earlier expressed views. She had opposed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 that demanded the return of runaway slaves, encouraging church members to disobey it and suffer the consequences. As the nation was becoming embroiled in its Civil War, White received what may only be termed a watershed vision about slavery. She called slavery a horrible curse and "high crime," asserting that through the Civil War God would punish the South for perpetuating slavery and the North for allowing it.[68]

Delbert Baker deftly summarizes Ellen G. White's comments on the race issue by saying that they revolve around seven principles: (1) the biblical, which calls for Christians to preach Christ worldwide; (2) the moral, which requires that Christians do what is right; (3) the humanitarian, which calls on people to be compassionate; (4) the empathetic, which challenges Christians to try to understand what others are experiencing; (5) the restitutionary, which calls for a restitution of things to the exploited; (6) the societal, which argues that reciprocity is what has made society strong and vibrant; and (7) the eschatological, which asserts that judgment will be meted out to the oppressors of

society, especially to those who have done nothing to correct wrongs done to the poor.[69]

Notwithstanding her pointed statements condemning slavery and racism, Ellen White was a product of her times, whose social theories and practices conspired to produce in her a pragmatism that continues to confuse Blacks to this day, and that begs for explanation and understanding. To the uninformed Ellen White comes across as contradictory and confusing, and detractors have not relented in questioning and castigating her for comments she made that seem to compromise the biblical principles she espoused. For example, while encouraging Whites to work for the rights of Blacks, Ellen White still cautioned against "fanaticism," specifically saying that interracial marriage should neither be taught nor practiced.[70] More specifically, White seemed to give tacit sanction to "separate but equal" facilities and operations for Blacks, her reasons ostensibly driven by both social realities and private concerns for the growth of the "Black work."[71]

Saying that efforts put forth on behalf of Blacks in the South should be done in such a way as not to trigger the prejudice of Whites, Ellen White cautioned workers there to pay close attention to what they said about Black-White relations. Workers were especially admonished not to criticize Whites about their treatment of Blacks. Still, White appealed for manpower and resources to be poured into the region, taking the time at one General Conference session to point out to the delegates that when previously she had talked about the "Southern work," some had mistakenly assumed she meant the White work when in reality she had been using the terms "South" and "Black" synonymously.[72] Her appeals for workers notwithstanding, White admitted that she had once counseled her son Edson, who pioneered Adventist work among Blacks in the South, to move on to another field of labor, though admittedly for health reasons.[73]

In 1908, Ellen White stated that separate churches were one way of effectively promulgating the evangelization of Whites. Integrated churches, she believed, presented serious obstacles. Specifically, White stated that "in regard to white and colored people worshiping in the same building, this cannot be followed as a general custom with profit to either party." She argued that "the best thing will be to provide the colored people who accept the truth, with places of worship of their own, in which they can carry on their services by themselves." These places of worship were to be "neat, tasteful houses of worship." Separation of the races was particularly necessary in the South, "in order that the work for the

white people may be carried on without serious hindrance," and the practice was to be continued "until the Lord shows us a better way."[74]

Even though a careful reading of her statements shows that they were conditional—that is, that Ellen White did not consider segregation to be the ideal but a pragmatic way for the church to deal with a nettlesome issue—many believe that they are a reflection of the church's true position on the issue and that White's statements helped determine Adventist policy throughout the twentieth century. Bull and Lockhart, for example, believe that the Adventist church is a White body with a mission to White America, and that, its liberal statements to the contrary notwithstanding, the church did not want this fundamental objective imperiled by forays into the African American community.[75]

Yet Roy Branson vigorously defends Ellen White, arguing that, in an era when "many fine Christians" defended slavery as an economic or political issue, Ellen White viewed it as a moral matter. Pointing out that Ellen White felt so strongly about the issue she even recommended that public defenders of slavery be removed from the fellowship of the church, he states that White anchored her beliefs of race on not only eschatological grounds but on the doctrines of creation and redemption as well.[76] Bronson admits that the doctrine of redemption, with its emphasis on Christ's atoning work, which links all people together into one community of faith, appeals more to Christian believers but says that even nonbelievers should see in the doctrine of creation more than hints of the commonality and equality of human nature.[77]

Addressing Ellen White's statements that seem to promote segregation, Branson explains that it was not her theology that prompted them but the "crisis of the nineties," which Jim Crow legislations and severe economic conditions in the South had conspired to produce. He argues that White's remarks were a concession to what she hoped to be a temporary situation and that when White cautioned Blacks not to seek equality with Whites she was referring to some particular social arrangements and not to the fundamental nature of human beings. Moreover, her counsels reflected a concern for those Whites working in the South who throughout the 1890s had borne the brunt of aggression provoked by their humanitarian work. Branson concludes that Ellen White was no "gradualist, no moderate" but a "zealous reformer, vivid and full-blown."[78]

Branson finds an ally in Ron Graybill, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination's first and foremost expert on Ellen White and church race relations. Stressing that Ellen White "held no latent doctrine of inherent inferiority for

the Negro,"[79] Graybill says that she never supported the popular notion of a contented slave or the southern White man as the best friend of Blacks, two widespread beliefs of her time. Furthermore, White firmly believed Blacks and Whites were inherently fully and totally equal people headed to and preparing for the same heaven. He concludes that Ellen White's counsels regarding separate religious services and facilities were a "temporary expedient" based on "conditions in a country mired in the depths of its deepest pit of racism."[80] Furthermore, the expedience "was necessitated by the force of law and the threat of violence, loss of life among Negroes, and the abrogation of the opportunity to work among all classes of mankind."[81]

Edson White and the Mission to Black America

The individual credited with spearheading Seventh-day Adventist work among African Americans in the South is Edson White, the second son of Adventist pioneers and leaders James and Ellen White. Inspired to do so at the conclusion of a Bible training conference held at the denomination's headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1893, Edson White immediately began to strategize as to how he could bring spiritual and social enlightenment to rural poor Blacks in the South. His plans gained momentum when he stumbled upon the counsel his mother had given to the church's leadership in 1891 that the organization should evangelize Southern Blacks. At a loss to explain church leaders' neglect of his mother's plain counsel, Edson forged ahead, preparing himself for his mission by attending a three-week seminar in Atlanta, Georgia, in January 1894.

Returning home from the Atlanta Conference, Edson settled upon an educational and vocational program as the best way to address the social, spiritual, and educational problems of Blacks in the South. This program would be modeled after that of famous Tuskegee Institute educator Booker T. Washington. Yet the denomination preempted White when it established Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1896. Edson did finally see his dream of evangelizing Blacks come true; he helped finance the project by printing and marketing a small instructional manual he called *The Gospel Primer* and procured and outfitted a boat he called *The Morning Star*[82] for his expedition into the South.[83]

Six months after launching, Edson White and his crew arrived in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in early January 1895, receiving hospitality from the Mount

Zion Baptist church, a Black Baptist congregation in Vicksburg. A year before their arrival, a Black minister from Arkansas had come to town preaching a combination of fire and brimstone that provoked the ire of civic leaders. The preacher, Alonzo Parker, was martyred by an incensed mob, though not before predicting that the city would receive another opportunity to mend its wicked ways before receiving the judgments of God. When *The Morning Star* steamed into port, many of Vicksburg's Black population were convinced that the boat represented the fulfillment of Parker's prophecy.[84]

White and his company promptly started to instruct interested Blacks in the rudiments of the three R's—Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. Their progress was slow and difficult and was made more so when White learned that the denominational publishing house had decided to suspend publication of *The Gospel Primer,* a move that threatened to bankrupt the project and bring it to a halt. Yet White encountered his stiffest challenge from local authorities, who twice threatened to run him out of town. Once, White was denied permission to erect a church in Vicksburg. On another occasion he was asked to cease teaching Blacks. Permission was ultimately given for the erection of the church, which was dedicated on August 10, 1895, with General Conference president O. A. Olsen preaching the dedicatory sermon.[85]

Not only did Edson encounter passive and active resistance to his efforts from Southern Whites, but he did so from the Blacks as well. Southern Whites, still seething from their defeat and humiliation in the Civil War, viewed Northern Whites as outsiders intruding on their sovereignty and economic well-being. The Blacks, experiencing a measure of freedom and self-determination for the first time in their existence in America, tended to look askance at White and his strange religion, which, among other oddities, proclaimed that Saturday was the Bible Sabbath and the day God wanted Christians to keep holy. In addition, Edson encountered Blacks who seemed bent on preserving whatever vestiges of their ancestral past still remained among them.[86]

The Morning Star tooled up and down the Mississippi River from late 1894 into the twentieth century, docking along its banks to bring enlightenment and empowerment to interested African Americans. Yet White was stung by charges that his project was being financed by the poor—the very people it was designed to liberate and empower. Meeting those charges head on, Edson informed a session of the General Conference that *The Morning Star* was his own property and had been financed with his own money and that all operating expenses had been met by him. He asserted that at the start his personal

income had been used to pay the salaries of the ten to eighteen individuals who had been deployed in various capacities upon the steamer and that only when the operation had expanded had donations been used to help meet payroll. Yet Edson did not want *The Morning Star* to be looked upon as his personal endeavor but as God's plan and work. In responding to a query about where he had gotten the money to sustain his operation, Edson stated that the Lord had given it to him.[87]

One year after docking in Vicksburg, Mississippi, *The Morning Star* began serving as the headquarters of the Southern Missionary Society, a semi-independent arm of the organization that Edson White had established to bring focus, contour, and direction to the work among Blacks in the South. The Southern Missionary Society would later become an arm of the Southern Union Conference, which was organized in 1901. Relocated to Nashville, Tennessee, shortly before the establishment of the Southern Union Conference, the Southern Missionary Society functioned as the vehicle for the promulgation of the evangelistic, educational, and health programs of the church for Blacks. Its functions were assumed by the Negro Department of the General Conference, which was established in 1909.

The Morning Star thus represents the first sustained attempt by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination to evangelize Blacks. Yet it was the brainchild of a creative maverick whose ideas and plans created friction along the way. White's program was successful only because of his dogged determination and the encouragement of his mother.

Six years after arriving in the South, Edson rejoiced to see a permanent church building erected in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The speaker for the dedicatory service was his mother, whose sermon was "Trust in God." Ellen White, whose visit to the South was made while she was very ill, was impressed with the building, in the basement of which was a school and to which was annexed a two-story mission house and another four-room house. Yet what struck Ellen White was the congregation, which was made up almost entirely of Black people whom she characterized as "bright and sharp of intellect." Ellen White "never felt more pleased to break the bread of life" than at that moment.[88]

It was no accident that the Vicksburg congregation was almost all Black. Edson White disagreed with Adventists who believed that Blacks and Whites in the South should worship together no matter what dangers attended such an arrangement. For him segregated services was a matter of expedience, with experience showing that mixed congregations had adverse effects on both

Black and White church attendance. Edson had scoured his mother's writings for instruction that even remotely suggested it was "obligatory upon us to force the two elements together." Coming up with nothing, he sought direct counsel from her, intoning, "If I am wrong in this, I want to be right." As far as he was concerned, "no masterly effort" to dismantle Southern prejudice was required of him. Furthermore, any compulsion to bring Whites and Blacks together in the South would leave him without a viable strategy of motivation to work there. As far as Edson was concerned, only a miracle of God could change the situation in the South.[89]

Painfully aware that working among Blacks posed barriers to working among Whites, Edson proposed a separate camp meeting for Blacks in Tennessee in 1900. He counseled that Black ministers should be brought in to run the meeting but that control of it should rest in the hands of Whites. Edson was particularly distressed by the forwardness of Chicago Blacks, whom he claimed were "absolutely and aggressively persistent in pushing what they claim to be their rights in spite of all reason." He could not fathom why Chicago Blacks failed to see the damage they were doing to the advancement of Adventism by their presence and behavior in the church there. According to White, their behavior had been so "outrageously offensive" that many interested Whites had left vowing never to return.[90]

Edson White's position was in keeping with the denomination's history of subordinating sensitive issues to the greater good of the church and of prizing expediency more than disturbing the status quo. To church leaders, maintaining popularity was more critical than being pushed to the margins, or worse, being viewed as irrelevant. Ample evidence of this may be seen in the way one of White's associates responded to an editorial in a Yazoo City, Mississippi, newspaper criticizing the mission activities of the White group. F. R. Rogers, the associate, responded to the editorial by saying that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in, teach, or practice social equality. Accused of adopting two Black girls who dined at his table with the rest of his family, Rogers denied the charges, informing readers that he had had servants who had been treated as such and that his group had exercised every care to follow the customs of the city and state because they were peaceful, law-abiding citizens. Yet Rogers left Yazoo City for Vicksburg soon after denying the charges, prompting the rapturous applause of both Yazoo City newspapers.[91]

Edson and his associates did not view their duty in the South as that of contending with insolvable problems or irremediable difficulties. Instead, they

were to preach "Present Truth," leaving all social and political conundrums to God, who in his own time and way would resolve all wrongs and bring deliverance to the oppressed and exploited.[92] White decried attempts by northern Blacks and southern Blacks who had received educational training in the North to bring about social changes in the South. It was impossible to reform the social customs of the South, Edson believed, saying that an individual might as well try to alter the course of the Mississippi River. He asked potential workers who did not have the simple objective of working for the salvation of souls in mind and who were unable to accept conditions in the South as they found them to stay away, intoning that his operation did not want "reformers" on social equality to enter the field.[93] Edson's thoughts and comments resonated with those of his mother, who cautioned Blacks not to press for social equality with Whites, ostensibly because of unregenerate Whites who were the real cause of the race problem.[94]

As pioneering and as groundbreaking as was Edson White's southern project, it may not be classified or viewed as a strategic, focused plan of the Adventist denomination to evangelize African Americans. The fact is that initially White met with fierce resistance from Adventist leaders, who even diverted funds for its upkeep, and the denomination did not craft any coherent plan to evangelize Blacks in the South until White had experienced a measure of success doing so. Edson White's experience with Adventist church leaders amply illustrates the ambiguity, if not confusion, that permeated and characterized the denomination's attitudes toward reaching Blacks in the South toward the end of the nineteenth century. To be sure, it may be that control was the issue at stake. Edson White was somewhat of a maverick whose vision and resolve may have disquieted church leaders.

The seeming contradictions and ambivalence that Ellen G. White, Edson White, and other Seventh-day Adventists displayed on the issue of race were not unlike the feelings harbored by other nineteenth-century Christians. This was especially true of Christians in the South, where slavery had been the backbone of the economy. Even some abolitionists who vigorously fought for the termination of slavery were not free of racial prejudice, and many were conspicuously contemptuous in their treatment of Blacks, even refusing to associate with them. Some Whites in the abolitionist movement held that people of African descent should be represented and their causes championed while at the same time they believed that Blacks were intellectually, socially, and morally inherently inferior to Whites.[95]

The North American Division Negro Department

In 1890, Black membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church was approximately fifty, with not more than twenty Black Seventh-day Adventists living below the Mason-Dixon. As the twentieth century dawned, there were more than three hundred Black Seventh-day Adventists in seven organized churches in the South, and Oakwood's enrollment hovered around fifty. By 1908, Black church membership was more than a thousand, and there were thirteen canvassers[96] spread out over the South promoting church literature uniquely geared to the African American community. Coordination to reach African Americans was provided by the Southern Missionary Society, and church leader Ellen G. White continued to agitate on behalf of the Black work. In 1909, Seventh-day Adventist church leaders recognized the need to create a centralized entity to direct the Black work with intentionality and purpose.[97]

The creation in 1909 of the Negro Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists illustrates the move in America at that time to address issues of self-determination among Blacks in substantive, meaningful ways. In 1905 the Niagara Movement had committed itself to the abolition of all distinctions centered around race. A few years earlier a Black Adventist minister named Louis C. Sheafe had issued a call for Black representation in the leadership of the church, claiming that as he traveled around the country he was inundated with questions and concerns about the treatment of Blacks in the church. Sheafe believed the work among Blacks would be accelerated if spearheaded by Blacks themselves.[98]

In spite of the call for Black leadership, a White person was appointed the first director of the Negro Department, with three more White individuals succeeding him until 1918, when the first African American was appointed director. William H. Green, a brilliant attorney who had argued cases before the highest courts of the land, led the department from 1918 until his death on October 31, 1928. Throughout the 1920s the General Conference continued to tinker with the structure it had set up to facilitate work among Blacks, finally voting at its Fall Council meeting in 1929 an action that even today is considered a watershed—in Union Conferences with at least five hundred members, a Black would be elected as union secretary.[99]

The General Conference was on record as saying that the office of the director of the Negro Department would be at its headquarters. It was that way until 1918 when Green was elected head of the department. Prejudice precluded the

continuation of that policy so that Green's was a roving office away from the world headquarters of the denomination. In 1930, the year Humphrey and his congregation were officially severed from the Seventh-day Adventist church, the General Conference again reaffirmed its wish that the head of the Negro Department be situated at its world headquarters building in Washington, D.C. Even so, prejudice again derailed the implementation of the action.[100]

The evidence shows that the Negro Department did realize its major objectives of facilitating and fostering work among African Americans and of helping to develop indigenous Black leadership. Among the Black Adventist ministers nurtured and developed during the early twentieth century was Sydney Scott, who in 1913 baptized more than one hundred people in Wilmington, North Carolina. Known and remembered for his masterly use of graphics that visibly illustrated the prophecies of the Bible books of Daniel and Revelation, Scott conducted several evangelistic campaigns during this period in North and South Carolina. Another successful Black Adventist minister was Matthew C. Strachan, who, before assuming in 1924 the pastorate of Harlem Number Two in New York City, was a notable minister in Florida. J. S. Green, Floyd Stevens, and John Manns were three other successful ministers. Manns, who baptized about 150 in Savannah, Georgia, ultimately left the organized Seventh-day Adventist church over the race issue, taking much of the membership and church property with him. The remnant of the Savannah, Georgia, congregation was organized under the leadership of W. S. Willis, who in 1916 went to Washington, D.C., to stabilize the remainder of the Sheafe apostasy there.[101] Yet the standout among Black Seventh-day Adventist ministers in the early twentieth century was James K. Humphrey.

African Americans and the SDA Church

African Americans have struggled for full participation and self-determination within the Adventist church from at least the early twentieth century. Calvin Rock submits that their protest movements fall under three broad categories: (1) the struggle for participation, 1909–1929; (2) the push for structural accommodation, 1929–1944; and (3) the battle for modified autonomy, 1969–present.[102] The goals of Black protest during the first period were "job opportunities, equal pay within the system, and adequate representation on committees and boards," showing that what Black Seventh-day Adventists wanted was

essentially "complete acceptance within the church as a whole." The goal of Black protest during the second period was the development of Black churches and institutions along the lines of White ones.[103]

For Rock, it is far from surprising that Seventh-day Adventist church leadership opposed Humphrey's drive for self-determination. Rock, a retired denominational Black leader, asserts that the Seventh-day Adventist church has a tradition of resisting every type of integrationist model that Blacks have ever proposed. Rock argues that both when Blacks sought access to power under the "separate but equal" policies of the first half of the twentieth century and when they later pursued the power of self-determination, White Seventh-day Adventist church leadership opposed them.[104] Yet, the fact that Seventh-day Adventists have, at least theoretically, embraced the notion of egalitarianism is beyond dispute. Adventists accept that it is the goal for which all Christians should strive. Still, Adventists have historically struggled to translate their mental assent to equality into credible policies and practices, and when it comes to their practices, the value of expediency has often trumped the principle of equality.[105]

Rock takes this assertion further, contending that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has experienced little, if any, dissonance or trauma complying with laws antagonistic to racial equality but has demonstrated a stubborn reticence in endorsing and complying with laws seeking to bring about racial tolerance and acceptance. He allows that this is not how it was at least up to the early 1890s. Before that decade, Ellen White generally espoused a position of race relations that challenged the status quo, and early Adventists did have somewhat of a social conscience.[106]

In seeking the reasons that Blacks have had the experience of second-class citizenship in the Seventh-day Adventist church, Calvin B. Rock submits five: (1) Adventists tend to be conservative politically and socially; (2) Adventists, theologically, are fundamentalists; (3) Adventists have given up any hope of effecting any substantive, meaningful change in the world, in part because of the complexity and difficulty of the issues involved; (4) the denomination's mission and church growth initiatives have been aimed at "upper-lower and lower-middle class" Whites, groups that are especially unnerved by the upward social movement of Blacks; and (5) "political expediency."[107]

Rock later refined and nuanced his reasons that African Americans have had to struggle for full acceptance in the Seventh-day Adventist church, submitting that there are theological as well as socioreligious and sociopolitical constraints. The theological constraints are: (1) an apocalyptic eschatology,

(2) a sectarian ecclesiology, (3) a radically deterministic doctrine of God, and (4) the free-will image of man. Adventism's apocalyptic eschatology sees the end of the world as imminent and as an event that will be catastrophic and cataclysmic. More important, according to Rock, is the impact of the denomination's apocalyptic eschatology on its social understandings and ministry, which has been conservative. As such, attention to societal ills is not given the priority it deserves, not with the end of the world and the Second Coming of Jesus so imminent.[108]

Adventism's sectarian ecclesiology has led to the denomination isolating itself from the rest of Christianity, which Adventism views as nominal. Initially, Seventh-day Adventists resolutely resisted the idea of concretizing themselves into an organized religious body, their reasoning against such a move driven by, among other things, their experience of persecution in their former churches and the imminence of Christ's return to earth. Yet most significant in this regard was their view that church organization smacked of Babylon, in Adventist theology signified to mean confusion about religious and spiritual things as well as a system opposed to truth and aligned with error.[109] In time, Adventists did formally organize themselves, quickly adopting a stance of isolation from the rest of Christianity and calling on all people who are opposed to doctrinal error to leave apostate religion and embrace fully God's truth.[110]

Calling the Seventh-day Adventist denomination's attitude and practices toward Blacks "the dirty linen of discrimination within Adventism," Rock in 1970 called on both White and Black Adventists to alter their thoughts, attitudes, and actions based on race, reminding all that Blacks never elected to pursue an independent route to the kingdom of God. Rock claimed that Blacks were forced to pursue such a course because of the "long, discouragingly weak record of race relations" within the SDA denomination, which "clearly negates any optimism" that things will be much better anytime soon. Yet Rock understood that the "Better Way" was at once possible and probable, in part because of the power of God to impact and transform lives "by whatever circumstance necessary." [111]

As compelling and as desirable a goal as full integration is, it is not enough for Frank W. Hale Jr., like Rock a former president of Oakwood College, who suggests that integration without a full sharing of power, resources, and opportunities is vacuous and palpably unfulfilling. Hale believes that it was to register their discontent with just such an integration that Richard Allen left the Methodist church and James K. Humphrey could remain no longer in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. For Hale, when Whites retain all power

in their hands, integration is of a "false kind," especially when African Americans are made to experience its "indignities."[112]

That more Black Seventh-day Adventists did not splinter from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination because of its history on race relations is "remarkable" to Calvin B. Rock, who cites as reasons the following: "a) an apocalyptic emphasis which minimizes hope or need for social change; b) a system of 'belief transmission' or socialization through church schools and youth societies which incorporates succeeding generations and maximizes loyalties to the larger religious body; c) a combination of 'plausibility structures' both *theoretical and structural*, which legitimates one's religious world in ways that provide binding intellectual and psychic security; d) the stellar efforts of a long line of eminent black preachers, . . . who, with pen and voice, have proclaimed a gospel filled with exhortations of fidelity to the church which they hold to be God's chosen people."[113]

African American Adventists conceive of the Adventist church as a unique group of Christians called into being by God to proclaim and embody a heretofore unheralded, perhaps even neglected, gospel. The embodiment and proclamation of this gospel message is embedded in the prophecies of the books of Daniel and Revelation and will result in people, who will not number many, leaving apostate churches and joining the Adventist church. Yet Black Adventists have not been oblivious to the conditions and practices of the Adventist church that have militated against their inherent right to equal treatment and have a history of pointing out the dissonance in what the denomination says and what it does in the area of race relations.

Can African Americans in predominantly White denominations be both committed to their church and true to their racial heritage simultaneously? Although a quick look at the history of independent Black religious movements would seem to suggest that Blacks are more at home in their own churches, at least as far as worship is concerned, Rock contends that Blacks in predominantly White denominations "can be at once racially formidable and denominationally loyal."[114]

Summary

The Black experience in the Seventh-day Adventist Church began when a few Blacks joined Millerites in expecting the advent of Christ in 1844. Blacks

who embraced Millerism, associated with Sabbatarian Adventists, and joined the Seventh-day Adventist church did so on their own, in part because the three groups lacked a coherent, intentional plan of attracting African Americans, whose status as slaves and then as freedmen posed problems for them. Seventh-day Adventist pioneers were involved in some antislavery causes, to be sure, though the reasons for their involvement are debatable. One reason that issue continues to be made over whether Adventists endorsed segregation in the nineteenth century is the absence of any official record of the denomination's position on the issue.

Not until 1887 does the issue of segregation appear in official church records. At an official meeting of Seventh-day Adventist church leaders that year, delegates passionately exchanged views on a resolution calling on the church to erase all lines of distinction between Whites and Blacks. A three-member committee was empaneled and empowered to study how the resolution may be implemented, reporting one week later that it did not sense a need for the church to enact laws or guidelines on so delicate an issue. As with other sensitive issues, the denomination left the matter up to the dictates of individual consciences.[115]

Seventh-day Adventists began their attempts at attracting Blacks in the South after the Civil War, when the region was undergoing reconstruction. Not all Southern Blacks resonated with the politics of Reconstruction, tainted as it was with Jim Crow legislation and de jure segregation that made a mockery of the Thirteenth Amendment. Neither did all Southern Blacks flock wholesale to the Northern Whites then canvassing the South, the altruistic pronouncements of these Whites notwithstanding. Southern Blacks viewed Northern Whites with deep-seated feelings of suspicion, and in their attempts to redefine themselves spiritually and socially, most Southern Blacks opted to remain with their churches, "The Invisible Institution" that had functioned as a balm for them during the Antebellum period.[116] Yet some Blacks did exploit the educational and vocational opportunities offered to them by Northern Whites.

Adventist ministry to and among Blacks in the South received a boost when Ellen G. White's son chanced upon counsel she had given to church leaders years earlier. Pointed and passionate, Ellen White had called upon the church to not neglect the freedmen in the South, claiming that Whites and Blacks were equal in the sight of God. Edson sailed into Mississippi in January 1885, plying the Mississippi River for almost a decade thereafter evangelizing the African American community. Yet both Edson's and his mother's writings on

matters of segregation call for sober, in-depth, and reasoned analysis because of their seeming contradictions.

As the twentieth century dawned, James K. Humphrey, passing through New York City on his way to Africa, accepted the teachings of Adventism from a layman. A former Baptist minister, Humphrey embarked upon a career of service to the Seventh-day Adventist church that was marked with distinction. In time, he pastored the largest Black Seventh-day Adventist church in North America, ending his service only when his congregation and he were expelled.

Delbert Baker sees five themes running through the Black experience in Adventism. First, he believes that the development of the Black work was in keeping with, and an integral part of, God's plan for Seventh-day Adventists to evangelize the entire world. Second, he posits that God designed that the Seventh-day Adventist church be multicultural and all-inclusive. Third, he identifies Ellen G. White as the single most important Adventist leader for championing Adventist ministry to Blacks. Fourth, he submits that the relationship between the Seventh-day Adventist church and Blacks was a mutually beneficial one, in that African Americans helped the church to "mature in its outlook on multiculturalism." In this regard, he cites Ellen White, who pointed out the incongruity of the church sending missionaries overseas when a mission field in the South lay right before it. Finally, Baker calls for a celebration of the strides made in winning Blacks as a result of the collaborative efforts of the entire church.[117]