

The Utopia Park Affai and the Rise of *Northern* BLACK ADVENTISTS

Joe Mesar and Tom Dybdahl

"United Sabbath Day Adventists. An offshoot led by J. K. Humphrey, pastor of a large Negro SDA congregation in the Harlem section of New York City."

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia



EVEN before Seventh-day Adventists existed as a group, there were blacks in the Advent movement. Early Adventists were strongly anti-slavery, and some of them had actively worked for abolition. But following the end of the Civil War, the church was slow in starting work among black people. By 1894 there were only about fifty black Seventh-day Adventists in the United States, with five organized churches, all in the south.

The first Adventist work among blacks in the east began in New York City in 1902. A black layman named J. H. Carroll, a recent convert from Catholicism, began to hold meetings in a home. He made contacts among Methodist and Baptist churches, and several baptisms resulted.

One of his first converts was James K. Humphrey, an ordained Baptist minister. A native of Jamaica, Humphrey was a natural leader with considerable charisma. He was both a musician and a scholar, with a special talent for organizing people and getting things done. When Carroll's group was formed into a church, Humphrey was chosen to be the pastor.

Under his direction, the work spread rapidly. Humphrey worked in both Manhattan and Brooklyn and founded the First Harlem SDA Church. By 1920 its membership was about 600, and he had also started three other congregations.

Because of his prominence, Humphrey was invited to speak at the 1922 General Conference in San Francisco. He spoke on suffering the evening of May 23. Said Humphrey: "Every man who has ever made up his mind to please God has to suffer. This is God's program."

He went on to tell the story of a man who had encouraged him to break loose from the denomination in 1905. In telling the story, he did not explain the arguments this brother had used. But he did state his answer unequivocally: "I flatly refused to do it . . . I refused then to do it, and I refuse now to do it." Those words would return to haunt him.

Humphrey continued his ministry in New York, baptizing about fifty persons each year. In December, 1924, the Second Harlem Church was officially formed. The future looked bright.

But things were not as ideal as they seemed. Humphrey had become somewhat unhappy working in New York City, and at both the 1918 and 1922 General Conference sessions he had asked to be transferred. Both times he was turned down. Because of his success, the conference wanted him to stay where he was.

At the same time, a change had begun in Humphrey's mind. He had always been concerned about the situation of blacks within the church; his sermon on suffering had made that plain. But thus far he had solidly affirmed his loyalty to the organized church, and made up his mind to accept whatever came. But as time passed and things did not change, his frustration began to build.

The only Seventh-day Adventist institution for blacks in the United States at this time was the Oakwood school, which had become a junior college in April,

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J. K. Humphrey is white haired man in center of picture.



1917. There were no other schools where blacks were normally admitted. They were not allowed in any Adventist sanatoriums or treatment rooms — even as laborers. Blacks had given their tithes and offerings to support these institutions, yet they could not take advantage of the benefits.

In early 1929 the Spring Council met in Washington, D. C. One major item on the agenda was the question of how the work among blacks should be organized. Elder W. H. Green, the Secretary of the Negro Department, had died suddenly the previous October, and his position had remained unfilled.

Humphrey attended the council, along with other black leaders. A majority told the brethren they believed that the best way to work among blacks would be to organize black conferences. In these conferences, they could handle their own money, employ workers, develop institutions, and generally promote the work along their own cultural lines. These conferences would have the same relationship to the General Conference as the white conferences.

The General Conference Committee did not accept the proposal, but neither did they reject it outright. Instead, they appointed a Negro Commission to make a survey of the black constituency and to study the subject of black conferences, and then make a recommendation to the Fall Council. Of the sixteen members on the commission, eleven were white and five were black. Humphrey was appointed as a member.

Fall Council was scheduled for October in Columbus, Ohio. A meeting of the Negro Commission was called just prior to the Council. During the interim, Humphrey had not been asked to confer about the situation, although some of the other commissioners met with the presidents of the various conferences that would be affected. When announcements of the commission meeting were sent out, Humphrey sent word that he was sick and would not attend. Speaking later of the incident, Elder Louis K. Dickson, President of the Greater New York Conference, remarked: "So far as could be found out, his sickness consisted of promoting his own scheme."

That "scheme" was what became known as the Utopia Health Benevolent Association. It was to become the concrete cause of the split and was to bring to the surface the tensions that had long been hidden.

Humphrey had returned from Spring Council with the feeling that the General Conference had "absolutely refused" to accept the recommendation of the black ministers. (He was substantially correct; the Fall Council decided to continue the previous system.) He felt that the only way the needs of the blacks could be met was to start their own program. He began to do precisely that.

His idea was to establish a place owned and operated by blacks, where they could develop their own institutions. He wanted to include an orphanage, a home for



James K. Humphrey protested the subordination of blacks in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Courtesy Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

the aged, a training school, an industrial area, plus private residences with recreation and health-care facilities. It would be called Utopia Park.

The first plan proposed that Utopia Park would be in Wappingers Falls, N. Y., a resort area south of Poughkeepsie. But when that property was unavailable, they decided to buy the Hosford Estate at Atlantic Highlands, N. J., a small town on the Jersey shore about forty-five miles south of New York City by road.

Humphrey felt certain that if he told the conference what he planned, they would not allow him to do it. He believed that the attitude and the decision of the church at Spring Council had closed the door on separate institutions for blacks, and that if this idea were to become a reality, he would have to do it alone.

So he began to actively promote Utopia Park — without conference knowledge or support. He issued a promotional brochure, calling Utopia Park "The Fortune Spot of America for Colored People." It was to be "absolutely non-sectarian," but would be exclusively for blacks.

The aim, according to the brochure, was to "provide healthful recreation for thousands of colored people who are interested in the care of their bodies and the betterment of their minds." Among the sports advertised were boating, tennis, handball, archery, ice boating, skating, and baseball. Swimming was to be a major attraction, using any of Utopia Park's three lakes — "three beauti-

ful sheets of water that shine like silver cloths in the summer sun. In the large lake there is room for bathing for five thousand people, if necessary."

To finance the project, the estate would be subdivided, and lots sold. To be eligible, a person was required to be "of good moral standing." Lots were 25 by 100 feet, and there would be electricity, gas, and septic tanks. Residence lots were priced at \$600, with corners going for \$650.

The primary need was money, so Humphrey and his congregation began to work. They solicited in the streets, signed up interested people, and sponsored fund-raising events. On October 21, they had a benefit dinner and an "intellectual review," and sold tickets for \$12.50 each. By November, they had raised \$8000, which was deposited in Humphrey's name in the Harlem Branch of the Chelsea Exchange Bank.

But prior to this, the conference president, Elder Dickson, had heard rumors that questionable activities were going on at First Harlem. He was uneasy, because it was not the first problem he had had with the church. Some months earlier, five leaders — not including Elder Humphrey — had come to talk with him about the feelings of the members at First Harlem. They told him that the reason for their decline in financial support was not Humphrey's doing, but an increasing unwillingness on the part of blacks to support institutions that discriminated against them. Dickson, however, still blamed Humphrey, and in anticipation of trouble, a new pastor, Matthew C. Strachan, was brought in to build up the Second Harlem Church.

To find out what was happening, Dickson wrote to Humphrey on August 13.

The report has come that you and the officers of your church are promoting this project among your members, with the object of finally establishing a colored colony, sanitarium, and old people's home. Of course, these are merely reports and I must come to you for facts. . . I am totally in the dark regarding the facts. I would be glad to have you drop me a line, setting me straight on this matter, and giving me any other information which you think will be helpful in explaining what may be going on.

Humphrey replied one week later.

It is true that some of us are interested in this effort to help the colored people realize these institutions which we so sorely need.

It is not a denominational effort, inasmuch as our people are unable to maintain one. I thank you very much for your expressions of kindly interest and your desire to cooperate in this good work, but it is absolutely a problem for the colored people.

Dickson was very much upset by this answer, and he responded immediately.

I cannot think that you are ignorant or unmindful of your obligations as an employee of the conference to counsel upon such important projects as planning for institutions for our people before such plans are launched in the church of which you are appointed pastor.

I think it is obvious to you from the foregoing that your answer to my letter was entirely unsatisfactory and disappointing. I am, therefore, now repeating my request to you for an explanation of this project which you are launching, as you say, in behalf of the colored people.

Humphrey did not reply. Consequently, Dickson decided to bring the matter up at the conference committee meeting on September 5. Humphrey was present, and according to Dickson, was "given the privilege of asking counsel of his associates in the ministry, but no such request came. A few statements regarding the

The dream of Utopia Park never materialized. Courtesy Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.





New Boulevard and
High School
Leonardo, N. J.

Aims and Purposes

UTOPIA PARK is being designed to provide healthful recreation for thousands of colored people who are interested in the care of their bodies and the betterment of their minds.

To provide a social intercourse that will bring out the best in their natures, thereby creating happiness and contentment.

To allow the creating of an ideal rustic community - by the provision made for the selling of lots for bungalow and cottage sites. A real country home.

Climatic Conditions

DUE to the elevation of this property and its close proximity to the Ocean, it is continually fanned by breezes during the entire summer.

The health giving Ocean breezes act as a clarifying tonic to those jaded in body and spirit.

It is a well known fact that homes bordering or near the Ocean have a climate 5 to 10 degrees warmer in winter.

When this Estate was originally laid out by the Hosfords everything was taken into consideration that might tend to ideal living conditions.

THE ridge upon which Utopia Park is situated is the high point in healthful locations of Monmouth County.

project were made, but such a meager statement it was that we were as much in the dark as to the real status of the situation as we were before." After some discussion, they decided to refer the matter to the Atlantic Union Conference Committee, of which Humphrey was also a member. The meeting was to be held on October 27.

Some time before then, the situation became even more troublesome in the eyes of the Greater New York Conference. In order to carry on its regular street solicitation during the Christmas holidays, the conference was required to obtain a permit from the Commissioner of Public Welfare. When one of the employees went down to get the permit, the Commissioner called him

in and asked if he knew James K. Humphrey, and whether or not Humphrey was a Seventh-day Adventist minister. When the man answered yes to both questions, the Commissioner asked him for more information about Humphrey. Reluctant to answer, the man instead made an appointment for Elder Dickson to meet with the Commissioner the next day.

At the meeting, the Commissioner showed Dickson twenty-seven typewritten pages of material that he had collected in a hearing on the Utopia Health Benevolent Association. He said he was surprised that the denomination had not taken any action about one of its representatives being involved in a scheme such as this one. The conference president was embarrassed and felt compromised in the eyes of the Commissioner.

Humphrey did not attend the Union committee meeting on the 27th, but he was the main subject under discussion. After talking over the situation, the committee decided "that we hereby acquaint Elder Humphrey of our disapproval of his course of action in connection with this enterprise, and further that we counsel the Greater New York Conference Committee to revoke his credentials until such time as he shall straighten out this situation in a way that will remove the reproach that his course has brought upon the cause. The vote was unanimous. The action also stated that "we hereby place our unqualified disapproval upon this whole enterprise and solemnly warn our church members to beware of this and all other such projects."

Four days later, on Thursday afternoon, the Greater New York Conference Committee met again, with Elder Humphrey present. They discussed the matter further, and appealed to Humphrey to reconsider, but his mind was made up. So they announced their decision. He was informed that he was no longer a Seventh-day Adventist pastor or a member of the Union and Conference Committees.

The next major step was to explain the decision to the members of the First Harlem Church. At Humphrey's request, a meeting was set for the following Saturday evening, November 2. Elder Dickson was the main speaker, but he brought along plenty of support. The General Conference President, Elder W. A. Spicer, was called up from Washington to attend, along with Elder C. K. Meyers, the Secretary of the General Conference. Elder E. K. Slade, President of the Atlantic Union Conference, was also present.

In his address to the church, Dickson recounted the events leading up to their action regarding Elder Humphrey. He placed the emphasis, not on any specific wrongdoing associated with Utopia Park, but on the attitude of Humphrey and where it was leading. Said he: "We wish to emphasize to you that we are not arguing the merits or demerits of any real estate enterprise, but must insist that the conference cannot allow any of its representatives to commit it to an enterprise which has never been considered by the conference . . ." He contended that Humphrey had used his position and the church's name to promote his own project.

Dickson's strongest appeal was on the subject of church unity.

Throughout all the history of the church, the cause has prospered in direct proportion to the perfection of the organization, and the loyalty of God's people to the same . . . To disregard the most fundamental principles of the organization is to open the gate wide to the assaults of Satan. To trample under foot the body of Christ is to crucify Him afresh and put Him to open shame. This we cannot do and be blessed of heaven.

In his speech, Dickson also sought to refute Humphrey's contention that he had acted because the denomination had not cared for blacks. He pointed out that Humphrey had not waited for the Fall Council to take action on the various recommendations, and rather than joining "in the study of this problem, he has chosen rather to launch an enterprise independent of conference and General Conference counsel." He urged the church members "not to be moved from the truth, and from the relationship which acceptance of the third angel's message involved."

The five-hour meeting was an extremely stormy one. Church officials reported that "conference representatives were constantly interrupted," "strong and loud denunciations of the entire denomination were made," and "a majority of the audience present kept up the wild confusion and uproar in disrespect of the presence, counsel and advice of the leaders of the denomination."

From any viewpoint it was a wild scene. The New York *News* reported that "the meeting soon became uncontrollable and bid fair to develop into a riot, which was prevented by the quick action of the pastor himself."

One thing, however, was perfectly clear. The church was solidly behind Humphrey. Even the conference men agreed. "It was made very clear by the apparently unanimous vote of the people that the entire church was opposed to the conference . . . The former pastor was upheld and sustained in all his activities and attitude by the membership of the First Harlem Church."

After this meeting, the conference officials decided that they would have to take action on the whole church. On January 14, 1930, there was an Executive Committee meeting of the Greater New York Conference. A resolution was adopted unanimously that they drop "the First Harlem Church from its sisterhood of churches, and that the former First Harlem Church no longer be recognized as a Seventh-day Adventist Church." They also voted that any members who made "public profession of their loyalty to the denomination and of their desire to continue therein" would be organized into a new church.

The committee also voted to send a copy of the resolution to the members of the First Harlem Church. They invited representatives from the church to come to the Biennial Conference starting on January 27 "to present such facts in its defense as it may desire or think

proper." No delegates from First Harlem came to the conference.

Meanwhile, the legal difficulties of the Utopia Park enterprise were being resolved. After completing its investigation, the Welfare Department asked the District Attorney's office to investigate the matter further. On November 16, 1929, the New York *World* reported on the situation. "Assistant District Attorney Lehman began yesterday an investigation for possible graft in the operation of the Utopia Health Benevolent Association which has been planning a Negro health resort at Wappingers Falls, N. Y."

The investigation continued for about two weeks, and ended on December 3. The reason Lehman closed the investigation, said the New York *Times*, was because "no complaints of alleged wrongdoings had been brought to him." The *World* added that "no charges were pending against the promoters or anyone else connected with the association."

UTOPIA

(Tune—"MY MARYLAND")

*Utopia, Utopia
Sweet land of Ethiopia
I look away across the sea,
A mansion there now waits for me.*

CHORUS

*View that golden, sunny shore,
My dream, my home, that I adore.
Utopia, Utopia,
Sweet land of Ethiopia.*

II

*Utopia, Utopia,
Sweet land of Ethiopia,
I'm waiting for thy great command
To go to the promised land.*

CHORUS

*View that golden sunny shore
My dream, my home, that I adore.
Utopia, Utopia,
Sweet land of Ethiopia.*

Humphrey felt that this was a vindication of his efforts and tried to get the Utopia Park project going again. But there were other difficulties, and the adverse publicity proved to be too much. The remaining money was returned to the investors, and the project was dropped.

Shortly after the incident, both parties issued defenses for their actions. The General Conference was first, publishing a pamphlet entitled "Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey." It was signed by J. L. McElhaney, Vice-president of the General Conference for North America.

The pamphlet opened with a lengthy quote from Humphrey's sermon at the 1922 General Conference, in which he had stated that he had "never seen in the Word of God a precedent for any man, under any circumstances whatever — of hardships and trials and troubles, of wrong treatment by his brethren — to turn aside from God's organized plan of work, and succeed." It then went on to recount the SDA view of the events from August, 1929, through January, 1930, that had led to Humphrey's dismissal and the separation of the First Harlem Church.

The statement alleged that one of the reasons that Humphrey had broken away was because he had personal ambitions for himself. He was said to have desired the position of secretary of the General Conference Negro Department, and was "greatly" disappointed when this seemed unlikely. They added that Humphrey "likened himself to Moses, who would lead the colored people of the denomination out of the slavery of white domination into a 'land of promise.'"

In response, Humphrey's supporters issued a pamphlet called "Attitude of the Church." In it, they stated their belief that church leaders felt "that Negroes are incapable of leading and governing themselves in any respect." They claimed that conference officials had gone about trying to ruin Humphrey's reputation because of his attitude. They justified his actions on the grounds that it was the only way anything would be done for blacks within the church.

They strongly denied that Humphrey had any ambitions to be the secretary of the Negro Department. It could not be true, they argued, because he had opposed the idea of continuing the department and had voted instead for black conferences.

Because one of the major issues was the use of funds, the Humphreyites cited conference reports showing how much their church had contributed in tithes and offerings to the work of the church. They felt they had been treated unfairly.

It is very evident that during all these years in which the colored people have been associated in conference relationship with the white people, their funds have been drained and depleted without disposition on the part of the white presidents to give them an equal chance in developing talent along all cultural lines in this denomination. These funds should have been used to develop the work among colored people.

The General Conference had anticipated this charge, since it had been one of the sore points all along. And shortly after he had lost his credentials, Humphrey had declared in a newspaper article that the Seventh-day Adventists were doing nothing for colored people. It was a charge that needed to be answered.

To refute this accusation, the General Conference statement contained an article by Elder R. A. Ogden, president of the Antillian Union Conference. Ogden spoke at length of the support and help the church had given to the work for black people outside the United States, but made no reference at all to the contributions for blacks in North America. He, too, emphasized the unity theme: "We cannot think that you will allow yourselves to be deceived and led to follow any man who leads out on the pathway of rebellion and opposition to this great movement."

In closing, the statement included a listing of the actions taken at the 1929 Autumn Council affecting the North American Negro Department. There were a large number of recommendations, but the basic structure remained unchanged. There would be no black conferences, and black officials would continue to be under the control of white conference leadership.

Some of the other recommendations of the Autumn Council were particularly interesting. One provided for study to be given to establish a school for training colored youth. The stated purpose was so that they could "receive a Christian education without embarrassment to anyone." With regard to medical training, it was asked that "where possible" our sanitariums accept colored young people into the nurses training course. There was no mention of medical school.

No doubt Humphrey would have been amused by this last recommendation. The last part of his defense contained two letters that blacks had received refusing them admission to Adventist institutions.

One was written by Martha Borg, director of the School of Nursing at the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University). In the letter, dated January 8, 1929, she informed Mrs. Beryl Holness, a black, that

we do not see our way clear to accept you to the nurses course because of your nationality. We have had some difficulty in training students of your nationality before. While they may have done very excellent work in many ways, yet many complications have arisen in connection with their training which, we feel, would not have arisen in institutions and schools of nursing further north.

The other letter was from Harvey A. Morrison, president of Union College. Writing to a Mr. J. E. Jervis, on August 22, 1919, he stated: "It is not our policy generally to receive colored students outside our own territory unless there is some very special reason why this should be done." Then he further clarified their position: "Ordinarily we do not have colored students in our school, even from our own territory."

The letters alone were eloquent arguments, but by

this time most of the controversy had been played out. After the church was dropped from the conference, they formed a new organization. The First Harlem Church became the United Sabbath Day Adventist Church, with J. K. Humphrey as bishop. For a time there was strong support for Humphrey among black Adventists, but much of it gradually died out. George E. Peters, who had been chosen as the new secretary of the Negro Department, was sent to Harlem to help stabilize the situation. Under his direction, the Second Harlem Church became the Ephesus Church and grew rapidly.

The last act of the drama centered around the former First Harlem Church building at 141 West 131st Street. The church went to court, trying to get the deed to the property, since they had paid for most of it. A lower court ruled in their favor, but the State Supreme Court overruled the decision. They were told that the only way they could keep the building would be to return to the conference. Forced to choose once again between the church and their pastor, they opted for the latter.

Shortly afterwards, the conference sold the church to a Baptist congregation. Meanwhile, the Sabbath Day Adventists were looking for a place to meet. Ironically, their first regular place of meeting after the split was their old home church. They rented it on Sabbaths from the Baptists.

With the conclusion of the law suit over the church property, Humphrey's formal dealings with the church came to an end. The effect of his actions, however, had a wide-ranging influence on the main Adventist body in its efforts to minister to America's blacks.

For one thing, the Utopia Park controversy dramatically underlined the point that the problem of church race relations was national in scope. No one solution could apply to every local situation.

Humphrey's departure drew attention to the difficulties facing blacks in the North. In turn, the dispute surrounding his church was a clear indication that the "Negro work" could no longer be regarded largely in Southern terms.

This view, forged during the 1880's and '90's, was an understandable one. At that time most blacks lived in the Southern states. The church naturally concentrated its missionary efforts for black people in the area below the Mason-Dixon line.

The Southern Missionary Society, formed by James Edson White in 1895, was the first organization set up by the church to promote the gospel among the nation's blacks. The Society's journal, the *Gospel Herald*, graphically described the economic and spiritual needs of blacks in the Mississippi Delta. Edson White recruited Northerners to move South to help operate mission schools throughout the Black Belt. So completely were efforts for the black man identified with the Southern setting that Ellen White's thin volume on the subject was entitled *The Southern Work*.

The beginning of the Adventist work in the South virtually coincided with the passage of the famous Jim Crow laws. These laws sharply reduced the black man's social and political rights and enforced a system of rigid race segregation. The fact that the church's first sustained ministry for black people began in the South in the 1890's meant that the pattern of Adventist race relations was set in an area and at a time of great hostility and conflict.

This conflict severely hindered the work of the fledgling Southern Missionary Society. Its leaders tried to avoid confrontation on the race issue to preserve the fragile beginnings they had made among the black population. Gradually a system of separate churches developed in the South.

The Society faced other problems. Most serious among them was a lack of general support among white Adventists in the North. A number of white leaders, notably Ellen White, urged that the work for blacks be given greater attention, but this was not done.

In 1891, she wrote: "Sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made greater effort for the salvation of souls among the colored people." Over a decade later, she noted that the money spent for this purpose was still inadequate.

The work to be done for the colored race is a large work, and calls for a large outlay of means. My heart aches as I look over the matter that has already been printed on this subject, but which upon many minds has no more weight than a straw. Like the priest and the Levite, men have looked indifferently on the most pitiful picture, and have passed by on the other side.

In 1915, at the time of Ellen White's death, the work among blacks in the South was still meeting opposition in many quarters. Throughout the early 1900's, the "Southern field" always existed on a tenuous basis, never quite moving to the center of the church's missionary concern.

The organization of the Negro Department in 1909 was an attempt to remedy this situation. It was to oversee the opening of new territory, publish reports on the progresss of the Negro work, and in general represent the needs of black Adventists at the General Conference level. A white man, John W. Christian, was chosen as the department's first secretary. An executive committee, including J. K. Humphrey, was formed, and an initial appropriation of \$40,000 was granted.

Until 1918, when W. H. Green was appointed secretary, the Negro Department was administered by white men. This same pattern held true on the local conference level as well. In the South a bi-racial Negro committee handled the affairs of the black membership. In practice, however, this group merely ratified decisions reached previously by the all-white conference committee.

In the North, a few black ministers like Humphrey sat on conference and union committees. These men

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Dear Brother March 12th 1828

Dear Brother

Since you were here we have experienced a variety of the blessings of God. The most striking among them was the donation of our Deacons over conference meeting was held in a private house in our vicinity neighborhood at the evening of the 30th & night of March we gathered 200. (the house where we were being visited) with but total sum observations were made by the brethren in the light when it appeared that the whole probably were officially in tract, an laboring under solemn conviction for sin one young woman that had a few years since obtained a hope and had let this light come forward and publicly acknowledged her failure a complete her failings 2 or 3 young men and a number of young women were struck with conviction; and some of them have since obtained hope some are yet groaning by reason of the burden of sin - since which time we have had meetings 2 or 3 times in the week - our meetings are full, and every meeting we hear of new cases of conviction - one young man came to my house last night after I used to regard him as had been & good and conviction more or less as to his own religion he had tried to make him a Christian but of course was he appears to be almost in despair, for fear the Lord would leave him before he became a Christian. I thought I could say to him, said "My dear son to bid always the Lord to be found, & to bid him to forsake the sin of the world" taken on 14th 1828 and requested prayers last Sunday evening - it is now the week of God. ~~and~~ ^{especially} ~~and~~ ^{and} it is given the world have received them well - however I find in a confirmation so general, so solemn, and so little time

Dear my Dear. First we have reason to rejoice and be glad the Lord has remembered the love & trust of his people and hath come down to deliver two of my children Ned & Willam & have a good degree of hope and confidence of grace - very few indeed in our way of thinking are willing this was confirmed by fact. we should have something

of ever returning again had not God visited us by his grace - and likewise given the heart of our hundred & christian friends also and your hundred Dollars has been subscribed from the adjoining town, there is more done prospect that we shall be self sufficient. we are really so in your favor we are much in number, we are really so in excess we shall not be able to pay the money down of my subscription at the present time I expect however to gain the above mentioned object we shall have great reason to commend your generous & with gratitude and hope I shall be grateful for your visit do visit to me if you will ever writing will permit it except in the mean time the warmest wishes of myself and family for your prosperity -

Yours affectionately

John Miller

had a somewhat greater opportunity to influence actions taken concerning their churches. Humphrey's pamphlet leaves little doubt that in his mind, at least, this arrangement did not satisfactorily meet the needs of black congregations.

This, then, was the organizational background against which the events of 1929 occurred. Despite the dedicated service of many whites, the black work in the Adventist church was generally regarded as an area of secondary importance. Its main focus was in the South. Its organizational structure was based on the Southern experience. Beyond the local church level, it was rarely administered by blacks themselves.

Humphrey wanted to reverse these trends. As early as 1909, he had appealed for funds for Harlem in the pages of the *Review and Herald*. He also had repeatedly urged that blacks be provided with a greater share of the church's funding and personnel. His proposal for the formation of black conferences was designed to bring about these changes. In addition, the black conferences would insure indigenous leadership for black institutions.

It is likely that Humphrey's desire for greater autonomy for black churches was reinforced by the trends within the black community at large. The 1920's brought a resurgence of black nationalist feeling in Harlem, most vividly seen in Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement. In his pamphlet Humphrey concluded with a passage from a Claude McKay poem, calling his people to stand "like a strong tree against a thousand storms." McKay was one of the leading figures in the black literary revival known as the Harlem Renaissance.

In turn, the actions of the First Harlem Church received considerable publicity in the black community. In the black press the church's split from the Greater New York Conference was pictured as part of the black man's larger crusade against white injustice.

Within the church, the influence of Humphrey's ideas continued long after the First Harlem Church was disfellowshipped. Because of Humphrey's successful ministerial career and his prominence in the denomination, his arguments could not be dismissed out of hand. The leadership, as we have seen, took great care in preparing its response to questions concerning the affair.

The impact of the schism was even more powerful for black Adventists. The charges of discrimination raised by Humphrey could not be ignored. His plan for black conferences, once it was separated from the Utopia Park incident, gained support among black clergy and laymen.

F. L. Bland, E. E. Cleveland, and W. W. Fordham, black ministers currently associated with the General Conference, have stated that Humphrey's break with

the church was the catalyst that sparked demands for the regional conference system. Humphrey's struggle left blacks with a single concrete goal around which to organize.

Despite their efforts, the change did not come until 1944. It was precipitated by a concrete instance of discrimination. In the previous year, a black woman was refused admission to the Washington Sanitarium and Hospital. Spurred by this incident, a group of black laymen, led by Joseph Dodson and Addison Pinkney, issued a pamphlet containing a list of grievances. This *ad hoc* committee proposed sweeping changes in church policy.

Their recommendations included many of Humphrey's earlier concerns. For example, the black laymen urged fairness in church hiring practices, and in the admission policies of Adventist schools and hospitals. They pressed the question of black conferences with arguments reminiscent of 1929. Going even further, they requested an end to segregated facilities at the General Conference Headquarters.

Because of the pressure exerted for these changes, the General Conference scheduled a special series of meetings to discuss the whole issue. These sessions were held in conjunction with the Spring Council of 1944.

At that time, the black conference idea was thoroughly debated. Some whites opposed the plan, desiring to retain the status quo. A number of blacks agreed with them. Some of these men favored integration at all levels and suggested that separate conferences would defeat that goal.

In the end, the influence of the General Conference President, J. L. McElhany, proved decisive. McElhany, who had compiled the church's defense against Humphrey, now became the most effective white spokesman for the plan. He argued forcefully that blacks who pastored large churches supervised a bigger membership than some white conferences. With McElhany's support, the black conference resolution passed. Later in that year, after local approval was obtained, the first black conferences were organized.

The blacks in the Atlantic Union, Humphrey's old territory, were united into the Northeastern Conference. In the mid-fifties, some of the officers of the conference made an attempt to bring the Sabbath Day Adventist Church back into the main organization. William Samuels, Humphrey's successor as bishop, invited the conference president to present the idea to his congregation. The appeal was made in a Sabbath sermon that emphasized the need to forget old differences. Nevertheless the church voted overwhelmingly against the merger.

In part, this rejection stemmed from a feeling that the black conferences were not nearly so independent as Humphrey envisioned. In particular, the limits placed on local conference financial policy by the General Conference were unacceptable to the Sabbath

Day group. An even bigger obstacle was the fact that in the intervening years Humphrey's followers had rejected Ellen White as a divinely inspired messenger.

Despite the acceptance of many of their ideas by the larger church, the Sabbath Day Adventists have not been concerned with influencing the church from outside. Instead they have been consistently occupied with the survival and growth of their own church.

They encountered problems almost immediately after the split. One faction within the church soon broke off over personal difficulties with Bishop Humphrey. A small remnant of this group with nearly identical beliefs still meets on 138th Street in Harlem.

After renting from the Baptists at their old location for some time, the Sabbath Day Adventists acquired a home of their own on 135th Street. This building allowed the members a greater range of services and activities. They remained there until after Humphrey's death in 1952. When the City of New York bought the building for \$135,000, the group was forced to move again.

At this point there was much disagreement about the proper course of action for the church. Most of the members, led by Samuels, favored buying property with the money from the recent sale and building a new church from the ground up. A sizable minority opposed this plan and also Samuels' proposal to use tithe money for the construction of the church. Rather, they wanted to purchase an apartment building and remodel it into a small worship hall. Failing to persuade the rest of the membership, this smaller group split off and relocated in the Bronx. This group still exists, although they have had to borrow money from Samuels' church in order to survive.

Bishop Samuels and the main congregation bought land on 110th Street and built on it their present church for \$144,000. It was completed in 1955. A low stone structure facing Central Park, it is the only black Adventist church in New York constructed and financed by its own membership.

In 1956 this congregation united with another small Adventist company to form the Unification Association of Christian Sabbath-keepers. The Association now has members in Trinidad, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Antigua, and Nigeria.

Bishop Samuels, a native of Antigua himself, is still a vigorous pastor at 81 years of age. It was our privilege to hear him preach on the 17th anniversary of the founding of the Unification Association. It was a powerful sermon full of Christian hope, faith in the Scriptures, and an urgent sense of mission. It was a sermon that any Seventh-day Adventist preacher would have been proud to deliver.

In this way and many others the services at 110th Street are similar to those one might attend a few blocks farther north at the Ephesus Church. There are, of

course, differences. Sabbath School classes, for example, are conducted with the aid of the Unification Tutor. This small pamphlet is a kind of stripped-down Sabbath School Quarterly, done in question and answer style, without the Ellen White quotations.

On one of the Sabbaths that we visited, a young man walked into the church off the street. After being greeted by the deacons, he left briefly and returned with his wife and small child. At the end of the service a deacon appealed to the congregation for money to help the young man and his small family through difficult times. The deacon prayed for the couple and then handed them the special offering just collected. The young man could barely express his thanks when he was surrounded by members wishing him well and asking him to return. Whether he did or not, the spontaneous gift was a moving moment that is hard to forget.

This incident reveals a good deal about the Sabbath Day Adventists today. Most of the members are not really concerned about the church's tumultuous past. Few of them, in fact, are aware of the events of 1929. Rather they seem determined to improve the church's quality of life in 1973. □

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