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# Resistance and Accommodation to Racism Among Early Seventh-day Adventist Missionaries in the American South: a Case Study on Relating to Oppressive Cultural Practices in Missions

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ABSTRACT

# RESISTANCE AND ACCOMMODATION TO RACISM AMONG EARLY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MISSIONARIES IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH: A CASE STUDY ON RELATING TO OPPRESSIVE CULTURAL PRACTICES IN MISSIONS

by

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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## Topic and Method

A basic task of the missionary is to negotiate the complex social codes of the foreign territory; for early Seventh-day Adventist missionaries in the American South this meant negotiating a culture of racism which oppressed the Black population. The present study investigated how early Adventist missionaries to the South related to the racism they encountered. Using data drawn from books, periodical literature, personal letters, and denominational minutes, the expressions and recorded actions of the missionaries were analyzed to determine how the missionaries' attitudes and behaviors were related to the cultural racism. Three categories of

relationship were utilized for analysis: resistance, accommodation, and institutionalization.

## Conclusions

This analysis provided a picture of the race relations of the missionaries as it changed over time. Early Adventist missionaries first resisted the racist beliefs and practices of the South. Then, pressured by custom and escalating violence, they began to accommodate the racism by racially segregating, yet continuing to resist the oppression of Blacks. Over time, however, the segregation which began as accommodation was normalized and institutionalized. In effect, it became part of the Adventist culture in America.

This history has been instructive for understanding how to relate to oppressive cultural practices in missions, and two recommendations are made for preventing the adoption of the oppression in the larger culture when some accommodation is necessary. First, the accommodation must be accompanied with regular internal communication of right principles. Second, the accommodation must be regularly and intentionally re-examined. These strategies are designed to resist the internalization of the wrong principles which underlie the oppressive practices which are being accommodated.

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A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Divinity

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

There was a strange silence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church after the Civil War. The Adventist voices which had protested the enslavement of Blacks had mostly fallen quiet, with few rallying cries for the welfare of the southern freedperson. For years no Adventist missionary ventured into the American South wherein lived millions of Blacks newly freed from slavery, and it would be decades before Adventist missionaries were sent specifically to minister to Blacks.

When they finally arrived as missionaries to the southern Black population, Adventists encountered a White supremacist culture that often enforced its racist social codes with violence. A fundamental task of any missionary is to negotiate the complex social codes of the territory; in the case of these Adventist missionaries, many of those social codes were cultural practices which oppressed Black Americans, those whom the missionaries had come to evangelize. This study seeks to explore how early Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to the American South related to the racism there and then ask what that history can teach about relating to oppressive cultural practices in missions.

## Method

### Data Analysis

The data for analysis were drawn from primary and secondary sources about the missionaries in the South. Books, magazine articles, personal letters, and denominational minutes provided primary information regarding the expressed beliefs and recorded actions of Adventist missionaries. Those expressions and actions which concerned race were categorized under three headings: resistance, accommodation, or institutionalization of the cultural racism of the South.

This method has its limitations. It is an inexact science to categorize actions of historical persons. Not every action or expression was documented, and documentation can be skewed with self-reporting bias. However, while the string of extant historical artifacts provides only an imperfect and partial transcript of people's self-expressions and actions, it does leave a trail that is useful for asking questions and finding answers.

Also, racism has both internal and external aspects; it is a diagnosis of attitudes and actions. It would be presumptuous to study history as though one looking backward could read the minds of those who came before. Our own experience demonstrates that we cannot know the intentions and thoughts of the people of the present with certainty, and sometimes even our own psychology is mysterious to us. Recognizing this limitation, the coding and concluding must be done with humility, though they still can be done. Just as we are able to recognize social justice or injustice today, we may identify it in the historical record.

It must be acknowledged as well that the categories of resistance, accommodation, and institutionalization are somewhat messy; often a single expression or action was coded in two categories. Such untidiness is to be expected in a study of this nature, particularly if an overly simplistic history is to be avoided. Coding the data under these categories also provided an accessible way to understand a complex history, tracing the contours of the missionaries' dynamic relationship with racism and allowing crucial insight into the missionary experience in general and Seventh-day Adventist history in particular.

## Dimensions of Racism

In discussing how Adventist missionaries related to racism, it is helpful to acknowledge that racism is not a monolithic phenomenon, but a multifaceted and many-layered collection of multiple phenomena. One way to conceptualize the dimensions of racism is to distinguish between racist attitudes and racial discrimination. Racist attitudes are held by those that believe that one race is inherently superior to another; racial discrimination is any action or policy which relates to people differently on the basis of their race, that is, it is unfair treatment of one racial group over another. Although racist attitudes and racial discrimination often co-occur, they may also operate with a degree of independence. There are people who hold racist beliefs but who have no power to racially discriminate, and some people who behaviorally discriminate on the basis of race yet do not hold racist beliefs. A policy regarding racial segregation is discriminatory, but is not necessarily a reflection of an individual's attitudes about race. Furthermore, it is clear that the complexity of racism invalidates any attempt to categorize a person or their deeds as

simply "racist" or "not racist." Though they may still discern their errors, careful students of history will understand the characters of the past on their own terms.

## Claims and Significance of Research

### Research Claims

One aim of this project was to read the history of early Adventist missionaries in the South from the perspective of race relations, asking how the missionaries related to the racism there. This project demonstrates that early Adventist missionaries first resisted the racist beliefs and racist practices of the South. Then, pressured by custom and escalating violence, they began to accommodate the racism by racially segregating, yet continuing to resist the oppression of Blacks. Over time, however, the segregation which began as accommodation was normalized and institutionalized. In effect, it became part of the Adventist culture in America.

The Adventism which grew out of these missionary efforts was by no means ideologically pure or flawless in its race relations, but it would be a serious misinterpretation of the facts to portray it as a mere reflection of the South's racial ideology. Racial segregation began as a reluctant concession to the violent and volatile climate of the South, but the temporary expediency hardened into an established pattern in the American Adventist Church: It was institutionalized.

This history has been instructive for understanding how to relate to oppressive cultural practices in missions, and the fourth chapter offers two recommendations for preventing the adoption of the oppression in the larger culture even when some accommodation is necessary. First, the accommodation must be accompanied with

regular, internal communication of right principles. Second, the accommodation must be regularly and intentionally re-examined.

## Significance of the Study

The way that the missionaries related to racism more than a century ago has had a long-lasting impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States, a denomination which is still struggling with the issues of race and racism. However, although a historical understanding of how the institutionalized racism developed would help inform the conversation regarding race relations in the denomination today, this research project aims principally to contribute to a missiological inquiry. This paper is a small contribution to the much larger question of how Christian missionaries in new fields can relate to unbiblical, oppressive beliefs and practices without legitimizing or internalizing that oppression in the churches they are establishing.

The research set forth here provides a framework for understanding missionary accommodation to unbiblical practices, proposing a resistance-accommodation-institutionalization model. This model may help interpret missionary enterprises of the past. Additionally, the recommendations given in application of this study suggest methods for the missionaries of the present and future to adapt to unbiblical practices without adopting them.

## Outline

Chapter 2 provides a historical background and social context in which the early Adventist missionaries were operating. It gives brief exposition of the southern

culture of race relations after the Civil War, a culture characterized by political struggle, a climate of violence, and segregation in both the public sphere and in religious life. In chapter 3 the data are analyzed, and the changes from resistance to accommodation to institutionalization are traced. Finally, in chapter 4 wider missiological applications are made based on the case study in chapter 3.

# CHAPTER 2

## RACE RELATIONS IN THE POSTBELLUM AMERICAN SOUTH

It is crucial to understand the climate of race relations in the postbellum South if we are to properly understand how Seventh-day Adventist missionaries related to it. Though this is only a cursory view of a broad and deep subject, it touches upon those points of southern culture which intersect with the Adventist missionaries' experience and which I think best aid in understanding the way that they related to the race relations of their day: racial etiquette, political struggle, interracial violence, and segregation.

### The Need for a New Paradigm

The Civil War was a bitter and bloody conflict, entangling issues of national unity, state's rights, slavery, and abolition. The war had in the end kept the Confederate states from seceding from the Union, but a multitude of problems remained unsolved. What remained after the war were many scars, many empty chairs in many homes, and many unresolved political and social tensions. What was created, among other things, was the need for a new paradigm in race relations.

In the antebellum South, race relations between Whites and Blacks were governed by the relations of master and slave. The system of slavery had developed a complex and high-functioning etiquette, rules for social interaction which distributed power among the interacting parties and which governed social distance and

intimacy. Race relations under the plantation model involved a strange mixture of social intimacy and distance. Black men and women were involved in the most personal parts of their masters' lives: washing their clothes, preparing their food, raising their children, and often bearing their illegitimate children. This intimacy was reflected in every interaction, including the speech and tone of master to slave and slave to master. Yet this intimacy was allowable only in the context of social hierarchy and distance. Blacks had a place—and in this worldview it was clearly, inarguably, unquestioningly beneath that of the White population. This social distance was maintained even in close physical space by a largely unspoken set of rules: eye contact, gestures, body posture, sidewalk positions, etc.

When the Black man and woman were subjugated under slavery, social relations were predictable, within a paradigm of White enfranchisement and Black disenfranchisement. The Black person had few resources outside his or her own character: no land ownership, no political voice, no social power. This situation, although unspeakably inhumane, was stable. The abolition of slavery and the freeing of slaves were cataclysmic disruptions of the southern way of life, as were the political legitimacy suddenly bestowed upon all Black men and the social power which was growing in their possession. The caste system which had so long been depended on, which gave each person a sense of place within the hierarchy, was shaken at its foundations.[1] Southerners found themselves in a strange and often disconcerting racial world.

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[1]See Vernon Lane Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 5.

> For many whites the breakdown of customary social forms was one of the most visible and upsetting factors of how great a change the Civil War had wrought. "It is hard to have to lay our loved ones in the grave, to have them fall by the thousands on the battlefield, to be stripped of everything," declared a white Savannah woman in February 1865, "but the hardest of all is nigger equality, and I won't submit to it."[2]

## Southern Culture of Race Relations

### Political Struggle

Reconstruction (1865-1877) was a time of active federal interest in the affairs of the South in which the status of the Black person was being redefined.[3] A salient feature of this period is the political enfranchisement of Blacks, but this enfranchisement was not without a long-lasting struggle. The relationship between President Johnson and the congressional majority was strained, and the spirit of reconciliation was severely tried by the conflicts between Democrats and Republicans. The disparity between the promises made to the freedperson and the delivered reality created a despair among Black Americans, and the entirety of this struggle only intensified the distrust between southern Whites and Blacks. Political struggle on every level, charged with racial tensions, characterized this period of southern American history.

Reconstruction was a complex time, and any one picture of it is likely to be at least partially untrue. One favorite picture of Reconstruction is as a golden time in

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[2]"Carleton" to *Boston Journal,* February 13, 1865, reprinted in *National Freedman* 1 (April 1, 1865): 83; quoted in Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, 2006), 28.

[3]John David Smith, *Black Voices from Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (Brookfield, CT: Millbrook, 1996), 14.

race relations, standing between the military battles of the Civil War and the reign of Jim Crow. Here, the myth says, Blacks were enfranchised, educated, uplifted, and empowered. Unfortunately, the Black experience during Reconstruction was more tarnished than golden. Radical Republicanism urged for the full participation of the Black person in social life, but the recently freed slaves found this enfranchisement difficult to actualize because as a group they came into it limited by illiteracy and poverty. Furthermore, though "white southerners reluctantly recognized the blacks' freedom," they "granted them few legal rights or social privileges" and this reluctance was reflected in the passage of the Black Codes of 1865-1866.[4] These state laws restricted the rights of Black Americans so severely as to make the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments nearly ineffective. The White population "acted immediately to inform African Americans that they might be free but they were definitely not equals."[5]

The agricultural-economic system of sharecropping further oppressed the freedpeople and limited their opportunity for economic and social advancement. Worse still, the convict lease laws in place opened the door for a neo-slavery in which Blacks were arrested on flimsy accusations or for petty crimes and forced to labor

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[4]Smith, *Black Voices*, 15.

[5]Ritterhouse, 30.

under cruel terms and in inhumane conditions.[6] In many ways, Black women and men were still struggling against their enslavement.

## A Climate of Violence

Yet however harshly southern Whites treated their Black neighbors under Reconstruction, the treatment worsened as the federal government withdrew its directive hand from the South and Democrats re-asserted themselves. And however tense and uncertain race relations were during the period of Reconstruction, they worsened as the nineteenth century drew to a close and turned into the twentieth. "The period of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is one of the darkest epochs in American race relations."[7] This time period, known as the "nadir" of race relations, was one set against a backdrop of blood and brutality. "By 1900, a dark cloud of racial terror had descended upon the land. . . . In the closing decades of the century, a wave of violence drenched America with blood."[8] In the exodus of Black

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[6]For a chilling historical chronicle of the neo-slavery created by the convict lease laws, see Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008). Regarding the role of the justice system in this neo-slavery, Blackmon demonstrates that "by 1900, the South's judicial system had been wholly reconfigured to make one of its primary purposes the coercion of African Americans to comply with the social customs and labor demands of whites. It was not coincidental that 1901 also marked the final full disenfranchisement of nearly all blacks throughout the South" (7).

[7]Shawn Leigh Alexander, "'We Know Our Rights and Have the Courage to Defend Them': The Spirit of Agitation in the Age of Accommodation, 1883-1909" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 2004), vii.

[8]Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 3.

Americans from the house of bondage, these decades were a Red Sea colored too often with their own blood.

As the racial etiquette was being re-formed in the decades after the war, the inequality of the races was a value that went largely unchallenged in the experience and belief system of the White southerner. The details were being negotiated, but the core of the racism—the deference of Black to White—remained, and adherence to this etiquette was coerced through violence. Any breach of this postbellum racial etiquette—the touch of an elbow to a White stranger, a prolonged look in the direction of a White woman, slowness to step off the sidewalk to let a White person pass—meant "discipline" at the hands of the law or the mob. "The only way free blacks could avoid such abuse, whether at the hands of private citizens or public officials or both, was to perform much the same show of humility required of slaves."[9] As a form of social control, this violence was largely successful.

> Like the discipline of slavery, the murders and assaults of the postemancipation South convinced most African Americans to follow racial etiquette most of the time. They accommodated whites' expectations at least enough to stay alive in a hair-trigger environment, an environment in which black life remained cheap and unprotected.[10]

To a large degree, Blacks in the presence of Whites had as their main concern survival. Just as in slavery, under this updated social code "only scrupulous adherence to the etiquette could prevent conflict and make survival possible."[11]

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[9]Ritterhouse, 34.

[10]Ibid., 47.

[11]Arthur Sheps, new introduction to *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control,* by Bertram Wilbur Doyle (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), xi.

Naive or reluctant White people were also coerced into obeying this etiquette of race relations. Southern sympathizer and historian Henry Lee Swint wrote in 1941 of the northern teachers who came to the South and were "abolitionist in sentiment and equalitarian in practice." Such people "became the object of social ostracism, persecution, and physical assualt." The resistance to the cultural racism of the South in idea and practice elicited a proactive and coercive response from local Whites.[12]

White social scientist John Dollard visited Indianola, Mississippi, for a cultural anthropology study in the 1930s. In his book *Caste and Classs in a Southern Town,* Dollard spotlighted "the extent to which white southerners tried to teach racial etiquette to *him,*"[13] the awkwardness and tension he experienced interacting with Blacks under the ever-watchful eyes of the small town.[14] The resistant White person in the South would receive persuasive lessons in racial inequality, by subtle pressure and, if necessary, brutal force.

Racial antagonisms were hostile and the climate of the South was, as Graybill noted, one "of violence in race relations."[15] In fact, violence was a principal means of keeping Blacks "in their place," a place under Whites. Williams notes "the

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[12]Henry Lee Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1941), v.

[13]Ritterhouse, 54.

[14]John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, 3rd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957).

[15]Ronald D. Graybill, *E.G. White and Church Race Relations* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1970), 25.

centrality of violence as a foil to freepeople's educational efforts."[16] Lynchings in particular hang as a haunted memory in the American past, reminding us of our brutality against one another. These lynchings were not merely executions, but acts of terror against the offending population. Usually incorporating horrific forms of torture (e.g., amputation, burning over an open fire), lynchings often were spectacles of public humiliation that brought a "death that was the result of extraordinary, sadistic cruelty."[17] Lynchings were perpetrated against both Whites and Blacks, but more often than not it was a Black body that had been dealt this "justice."[18]

As an act of terror, lynching was more than a way of punishing the accused; it was a communication tool and a powerful form of social control. Beyond lynchings, other forms of violence committed by individuals, mobs, or officers of the law communicated the same message to Blacks (and to sympathizing Whites): Obey the

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[16]Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2005), 5.

[17]Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 31.

[18]Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations,* 23.

racial code of White supremacy. Racial equality was an innovation which would not be tolerated.[19]

## Segregation

### Segregation in the Public Sphere

One of the principal issues in race relations that were being negotiated in the years just following the Civil War was the place of the freedperson in the public sphere. As noted above, the institution of slavery had written a strict contract governing race relations, a contract abrogated by the freeing of Black Americans. With race relations already confused, the place of freedpersons in the public sphere became an even more urgent question as thousands of Blacks moved away from the country estates of their former masters and into the cities and towns.[20] Now Black persons and White persons were in frequent public contact with one another; such a situation required the establishment of a new social code to ameliorate the anxiety caused by uncertainty.

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[19]This "climate of violence" extended well into the twentieth century. The first decade was characterized by race riots and racially motivated massacres in cities across the South such as Nashville, Atlanta, Houston, and Dallas. "In the United States after 1900, lynchings continued as weekly phenomena, and mob assaults, comparable to European pogroms, against black communities became commonplace occurrences in both the North and the South" (Shapiro, 93). The climate of violence extended to genocidal language in local newspapers (Shapiro, 97) and forcible racial cleansing of southern towns. See Guy Lancaster, "'Leave Town and Never Return': Case Studies of Racial Cleansing in Rural Arkansas, 1887-1937" (PhD diss., Arkansas State University, 2010).

[20]Richard Wade, Introduction to *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890,* by Howard N. Rabinowitz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), ix.

In searching for a solution to the increased racial stress, there was experimentation with a variety of approaches, but all of them were based on social separation.[21] In his signal book on segregation in the American South, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, C. Vann Woodward examined the segregation phenomenon and posited that there had been, in his phrasing, "forgotten alternatives" to segregation.[22] He contends that segregation was not the inevitable outcome of history, that in fact the postbellum South had had "a period of variety and experimentation in southern race relations from the end of the Civil War to the early 1890s in which segregation was not always the rule."[23] However, an integrated society in which race relations were founded upon social equality was probably never a truly viable option.

The alternative to segregation was not integration, but rather exclusion from the public sphere.[24] In the antebellum South, exclusion of Blacks from public life had been the convention: Blacks were basically prohibited from participation in the political process, in public education, in independent travel; they were not admitted

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[21]Rabinowitz's study examines "how urban leaders handled the question of race relations under the changed circumstances occasioned by emancipation. As they approached each problem, they sought solutions based on racial separation." Wade, Introduction, x.

[22]C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

[23]Ritterhouse, 7.

[24]Ibid, 8. Social historian Howard Rabinowitz also discusses "forgotten alternatives," saying, "The debate [over the Woodward thesis] has been fruitful, shedding needed light on race relations in the postbellum South. But the emphasis on the alternatives of segregation or integration has obscured the obvious 'forgotten alternative' which was not integration, but exclusion." Rabinowitz, 331.

to "hospitals, asylums, and places of public accommodation."[25] Segregation was utilized in those areas in which exclusion was not possible, such as was the case with freedmen and freedwomen before the Civil War.

Looking back from our modern vantage point, segregation is seen as a criminally unjust and cheap substitute for integration and equality. The myth of separate-but-equal has been exposed as a sham. In the years of Reconstruction and Redemption, however, it seems that the Reconstructionists' "loftiest hope was a separate-but-equal system. Hence, when the old forces regained control they inherited *de facto* and *de jure* segregation. They simply tightened it and made it more unequal."[26]

Segregation, then, began in the public sphere very early, before the Civil War. It continued during Reconstruction[27] as the favorable alternative to exclusion, and it was tightened and made more strict during Redemption, and especially so in the years after 1890 ("the time commonly accepted as the beginning of a rigid system of segregation").[28] Racial segregation was a crucial component in maintaining the

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[25]Rabinowitz, 332.

[26]Wade, Introduction, x-xi.

[27]"First, at no time, even at the height of the Radical Reconstruction, were blacks accorded the same rights and privileges as whites. Second, in seeking to discipline blacks, whites very early resorted to various means of piecemeal disenfranchisement in the political sphere and to *de facto* and *de jure* segregation in the social. Third, although Reconstruction witnessed the commonly acknowledged enfranchisement of blacks, it was not characterized by integration. Instead, Republicans championed the replacement of an earlier policy of exclusion with one of separate but equal treatment." Rabinowitz, xv.

[28]Ibid., xiv.

social distance and asymmetrical relationships[29] between White and Black people, and in extending the oppression of Blacks past the years of their enslavement.[30] Even before the time of its legislation, segregation was deeply woven in the fabric of southern society.[31] It was a core value of southern culture; it was a pillar of the new code of racial etiquette; it was a lesson begun in infancy[32] which continued its instruction until death by natural or violent means.

**Segregation in Religious Life**

In religious life, public and private spheres overlapped, and segregation in Christian churches created its own distinct pattern. Before the Civil War, segregation in Christian worship had begun as distinction and separation, first as a matter of seating, but it came to touch also the issues of preaching, partaking in the Lord's

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[29]Erving Goffman, "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor," in *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 52-55; quoted in Ritterhouse, 4.

[30]Grace Elizabeth Banks makes an important distinction between racial segregation and racial inferiority. "Separation, after all, did not necessarily mean racial inferiority. It could also signify the creation of relatively autonomous black spaces, even autonomous black bodies. In fact, . . . many black southerners sought to separate themselves as fully as possible from the white southerners who had been their former masters." *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 199.

[31]Wharton argues that this revised racial etiquette (which he calls a new code) permeated the lives of African Americans and "was stronger than the law, stronger than the Slave Code of 1857 or the Black Code of 1865" (274). Writing as a scholar in Mississippi history of this time, Wharton observes that this stronger-than-law code was in place by 1890 (233).

[32]Ritterhouse, 3.

supper, camp meetings, altar calls, and worship expressions.[33] That separation would grow wider as the distinct seating turned into distinct services, distinct organizations within the same denomination, and distinct denominations.[34] Katherine Dvorak notes the contrast of the eras before and after the Civil War:

> Joint worship was the predominant pattern for Christians in the American South before the Civil War. While slaves and free Negroes generally sat in designated areas and often partook of the Lord's Supper after whites, antebellum Christians shared the same ritual meal and the same denominational structures. Then, suddenly, this pattern of joint worship changed to one of virtually total racial separation in less than ten years after the Civil War.[35]

By 1871, a huge majority of southern Blacks were worshipping in denominations distinct from their White brethren,[36] a pattern that persisted into the twentieth century.[37]

During the decades in which the early Seventh-day Adventist missionaries

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[33]Bertram Wilbur Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1937), 37-42.

[34]Doyle characterized the separation as going in "three directions: Negro preachers were being licensed or ordained to preach to Negroes; separate services for slaves within the churches were changing to separate churches for them, with white ministers; and there was a 'church within a church' where the Negro members had organizations of their own, within the white church, and subordinated to it" (45).

[35]Katherine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of Southern Churches* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1991), 1.

[36]Ibid., 2.

[37]Ibid., 4-5. Though the segregated seating within shared services was apparently not an invention of Black worshippers but rather their White owners, the religious segregation which grew out of that appears to be generally the result of self-segregation on the part of Blacks. This desire for religious separation was at least partly due to a desire to escape denigrating behaviors, and at least partly due to a desire to worship in their native cultural way. Dvorak's thesis is that "the driving force in the segregation of the southern churches was the black Christians' surge toward self-separation acting on their own distinctive appropriation of Christianity" (2).

labored in the South (1870-1910) the culture there was largely shaped by race relations. When Seventh-day Adventists began their evangelistic efforts there they encountered a strong and deeply rooted culture of racial oppression, and the culture of the South put intense pressure on people of both races to adhere to its code of racial conduct. In addition to preaching, Bible studies, and prayer, such issues as segregation, racial etiquette, and economic and political activism were at the forefront of their daily work as missionaries. Primary to our understanding of their work, then, is an understanding of race relations in the South. It was a dynamic characterized by interracial stress, tense political struggle, a climate of violence, and deeply embedded segregation in secular and religious life.

# CHAPTER 3

# RESISTANCE, ACCOMMODATION, AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

This chapter examines how Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to the American South related to race. It also surveys how race relations progressed in the Black work[1] and in the larger North American Division. Therefore, a large amount of history is herein considered (about 100 years) but with an intense focus on 1891-1903, years in which the most active pioneering mission work was being done for Blacks in the South.

This study aims to illuminate the different aspects of how Adventist missionaries related to the racism of the South and to demonstrate that from a big-picture perspective their approach changed over time: First they primarily resisted, then they increasingly accommodated, and finally there was an institutionalization of racial prejudice. There are not, however, any clear lines of demarcation, and I have not set dates to each stage. The shifts were general and organic and messy, and there were many shades of gray as race relations were negotiated internally and externally. Specific approaches were greatly influenced by personality and particular circumstances. As will be argued later in this chapter, accommodation was especially experimental and under negotiation.

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[1]"The Black work" is a Seventh-day Adventist term used to describe denominational work among Black Americans, particularly evangelism.

Where materials regarding other Adventist missionaries were discovered and shed light on the topic in question, these were incorporated; however, there is a heavy emphasis on the work of James Edson White ("Edson") and the developments associated with him. The reason for this is threefold. First, Edson initiated the first systematized work for southern Blacks and his influence was wide and deep. Second, Edson was an author, publisher, preacher, and denominational worker, and he left many written records of his thoughts and actions. As the son of Ellen G. White, denominational co-founder and influential thought leader, much of the correspondence between him and his mother has been preserved as well. Third, for the reasons stated above, there is a healthy amount of secondary literature on Edson and the work he did. This literature has helped place Edson, his work, and his colleagues into their wider context and strengthened the conclusions of the research presented here.

## Historical Overview

Though the denomination officially organized in 1863, missionary labor for Blacks was not organized until the 1890s. There had been a General Conference resolution in 1865 stating "that a field is now opened in the South for labor among the colored people and should be entered upon according to our ability."[2] Apparently the ability to extend the work southward was rather weak, because for decades even the missionary endeavors to the general southern population were sporadic and originated in individual initiative. In the 1870s a small number of Adventist ministers

[2]General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Transcription of Minutes of GC Sessions, 1863-1888" (17 May 1865), 14.

and laypeople entered the South,[3] and a few independently operated schools for Blacks were opened.

The first Black Seventh-day Adventist congregation was formed in 1886 (Edgefield Junction, Tennessee),[4] and the first Black Seventh-day Adventist minister, Charles Kinney, was ordained in 1889, but these steps of progress into the Black work were rather happenstance, not the result of an intentional and coordinated enterprise to reach Blacks with the Adventist message. At the General Conference level, there were animated discussions regarding racial segregation (1887),[5] and in 1889 the South was designated "District No. 2" with R. M. Kilgore given oversight of the work there.[6] Adventist historian Delbert W. Baker rightly calls the period of 1844 through 1890 the "Inactive Period" of early Black Adventist history.[7]

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[3]According to Arthur Whitefield Spalding, during this inactive period the "principal Adventist pioneers in the South were these six men: [E. B.] Lane, [S.] Osborne, [O.] Soule, [J. O.] Corliss, [C. O.] Taylor, and [R. M.] Kilgore." *Captains of the Host: First Volume of a History of Seventh-day Adventists Covering the Years 1845-1900* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1949), 490.

[4]*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia,* Commentary Reference Series, vol. 11 (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1996), s.v. "South Central Conference," 644.

[5]Delbert W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: The Turning Point," *Adventist Review* 170, no. 6 (11 February 1993): 10.

[6]Spalding, *Captains of the Host*, 502.

[7]Delbert W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: The Turning Point," 9. The church did make one additional step toward a coordinated mission for Blacks during this time. In 1892 the General Conference appointed Henry S. Shaw as a superintendent for the Black work. His work was effective, but limited in scope. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "South Central Conference," 644.

That changed in 1891, the beginning of what Baker calls the "Active Period."[8] In that year, Ellen White addressed church leaders at the General Conference session in Battle Creek, Michigan. Her appeal was titled "Our Duty to the Colored People," and in it she urgently called for dedicated missionaries to reach Blacks with the gospel message. She recognized that the southern field posed particular challenges in race relations that intensified the difficulty of evangelizing Black people: "It will always be a difficult matter to deal with the prejudices of the white people in the South and do missionary work for the colored race."[9] Despite the hardship, however, doing this work was not optional. "Sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made greater effort for the salvation of souls among the colored people."[10]

Ellen White also addressed the confusion that the workers in the South were experiencing regarding segregation (the "color line"). At the start of her address she said, "It has been a question to some how far to concede to the prevailing prejudice against the colored people."[11] She responded to this perplexity by developing a theology of the equality of all people, referencing Christ's poverty and outward lowliness, His teachings regarding compassion, the efficacy of His sacrifice for all people, New Testament passages exhorting the tenderest love between believers, the liberation of the oppressed Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, and even her own

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[8]Delbert W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: The Turning Point," 9.

[9]Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1966), 15.

[10]Ibid. This appeal included not only exhortations to undertake missionary work to Blacks, but also a powerful theology of equality and strong statements against those who sought to exclude Blacks from White worship gatherings.

[11]Ibid., 9.

experience in receiving a message from God regarding the brotherhood of all believers.

This message was the "decisive turning point in the history of the church's Black work."[12] It was distributed in manuscript form to church leadership and prominent workers in the South, and later was published as a leaflet.[13] Despite its distribution, the counsel was basically ignored until 1893 when Ellen White's oldest surviving son, Edson, went hunting for it and found it scattered among papers in an office under renovation.[14] Edson had recently experienced a reconversion and desired to serve God in denominational service, and he had already been investigating the possibility of working among the Black population; it was this discarded pamphlet that actuated Edson's breakthrough missionary enterprise.

With business partner Will O. Palmer, Edson built a river steamboat that would serve as living quarters, printing press,[15] and chapel for the small missionary band. The boat *Morning Star* set out in 1894, and after a long trip it arrived with its crew in Vicksburg, Mississippi, on January 10, 1895.[16] Edson and Palmer were given a small weekly salary of eight dollars, and had been given credentials by the General

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[12]Delbert W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: The Turning Point," 8.

[13]Compiler's note in Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work*, 9.

[14]Benjamin Baker, *Crucial Moments: Twelve Defining Events in Black Adventist History* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2004), 48-57.

[15]Edson White published a periodical, *The Gospel Herald*, from aboard the boat, as well as flyers, books, and other materials.

[16]A helpful volume about this enterprise is Ronald D. Graybill's *Mission to Black America: The True Story of Edson White and the Riverboat* Morning Star (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1971).

Conference to serve as missionaries to the Black population of the South.[17] They began by meeting with the people in a home prayer circle, then moved to the Mount Zion Baptist Church to hold Bible studies, and soon after began night classes which gave reading lessons and religious instruction. Interest swelled and soon persecution came as the northern missionaries became too popular and word got out about their peculiar seventh-day Sabbath-keeping.[18] The local churches were then closed to them, but in time the Adventists built their own chapels[19] and the work spread into surrounding Mississippi locations such as Yazoo City, Lintonia, Calmar, and Bliss's Landing.

Other missionaries came to join the work in Mississippi and expanded the educational ministry.[20] In 1896, the General Conference opened the doors to Oakwood Industrial School in Huntsville, Alabama, as a training school for Black youth; that school is Oakwood University today. By 1910 Edson White and other missionary companies had established dozens of schools across the South. The medical missionary work was expanding as well, providing home health care,

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[17]Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists with an African Heritage* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1984), 63.

[18]Lydia E. Kynett, "Mississippi," *Review and Herald* 73, no. 20 (19 May 1896): 317.

[19]Ibid. Lydia Kynett reports that they opened a chapel in July 1895, and were operating a second night school and afternoon classes in February 1896. By May 1896 a day school was running in the chapel. They had also built a new church building and added a library to the chapel.

[20]Fred Rogers and his wife arrived in Lintonia in 1898; in 1900 Franklin G. Warnick moved to Yazoo City. See R. Steven Norman III, "Edson White's Southern Work Remembered," *Southern Tidings* 89, no. 10 (October 1995): 2-3.

cooking schools, and hygiene training to the local population.[21] This health ministry worked well with the mercy ministries that began operation, including a regularly operating Dorcas society[22] and even disaster relief.[23] Meanwhile, the Black work was gathering momentum throughout the South. As Calvin B. Rock aptly summarized,

> But the most obviously portentous event in the 1890s was the mushrooming of Colored congregations—especially in the South: Lexington and Memphis in 1894; Birmingham in 1895; Coriscana in 1896; Chattanooga and Charleston in 1898; and Orlando, Montgomery, and Winston Salem in 1899. And, as the twentieth century began, the phenomenon continued—Atlanta, Georgia, in 1900; Washington, D.C., and St. Louis in 1901; New York City and Kansas City, Kansas in 1901; Kansas City, Missouri, in 1903; Mobile in 1904; Jacksonville, Florida . . . in 1906.[24]

Within about fifteen years the number of Black Seventh-day Adventists went from about fifty in 1894, to nine hundred by 1909.[25] As the work grew and the membership increased, more structured organization was required. The Southern Missionary Society (SMS) was created by the *Morning Star* laborers in 1895 as "a

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[21]Dr. W. H. Kynett opened the medical missionary work with his daughter Lydia, a nurse. Lydia E. Kynett, "Mississippi," 317.

[22]Ibid.

[23]J. E. White, "Work for the Colored People in Mississippi," *Review and Herald* 74, no. 37 (14 September 1897): 587. In 1897 a devastating flood ran along the Mississippi River and through the delta, including the Yazoo River Valley, where missionaries had just begun work, their first effort in the country ("plantation work"). Edson White reports on this flood and the impediment it was to their labors there. Graybill (*Mission to Black America,* 87-91) tells how the riverboat turned into a rescue vehicle and the Adventist chapel became a refugee station. The missionaries also solicited donations of money and food to assist those who lost their living or their loved ones from an outbreak of yellow fever (ibid*.,* 109).

[24]Calvin B. Rock, *Go On! Vital Messages for Today's Christian* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1994), 101-102.

[25]*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia,* 1976 ed., s.v. "Regional Affairs, Office of, and Regional Conferences."

loose association of workers," and in 1898 they incorporated. This organization was to become the channel of donation for the southern work,[26] and it "conducted schools, carried on evangelistic work, taught principles of health, provided charities, and did publishing work."[27] As the General Conference established union conferences in 1901, the Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was organized in Nashville; soon thereafter the SMS became a branch of the new Southern Union,[28] and Edson White's publishing work was also adopted into the denominational structure as the Southern Publishing Association.[29]

In 1908 the Southern Union Conference became two entities, one bearing the original name and the other called the Southeastern Union Conference. Accordingly, in 1909, the SMS was renamed the Southern Union Mission in the new, smaller Southern Union Conference; the correlating department in the new Southeastern Union Conference was named the Union Negro Mission Department (see figure 1).[30] This change was part of a larger movement within the denomination to "make a more noticeable impact on the growing Negro population," which not only effected change in the organization at the union and conference levels, but at the General Conference level as well with the formation of the North American Negro

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[26]Mervyn A. Warren, *Oakwood! A Vision Splendid: 1896-1996* (Collegedale, TN: The College Press, 1996), 23.

[27]Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herlad, 1962), 2:348.

[28]*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Southern Missionary Society."

[29]Ibid., s.v. "Southern Publishing Association," 677-678.

[30]Ibid., s.v. "Southern Missionary Society," 674.

Department. This department was designed to oversee the evangelization of Blacks, including all matters relating to educational institutions connected with this work and the publishing ministry in this line.[31]

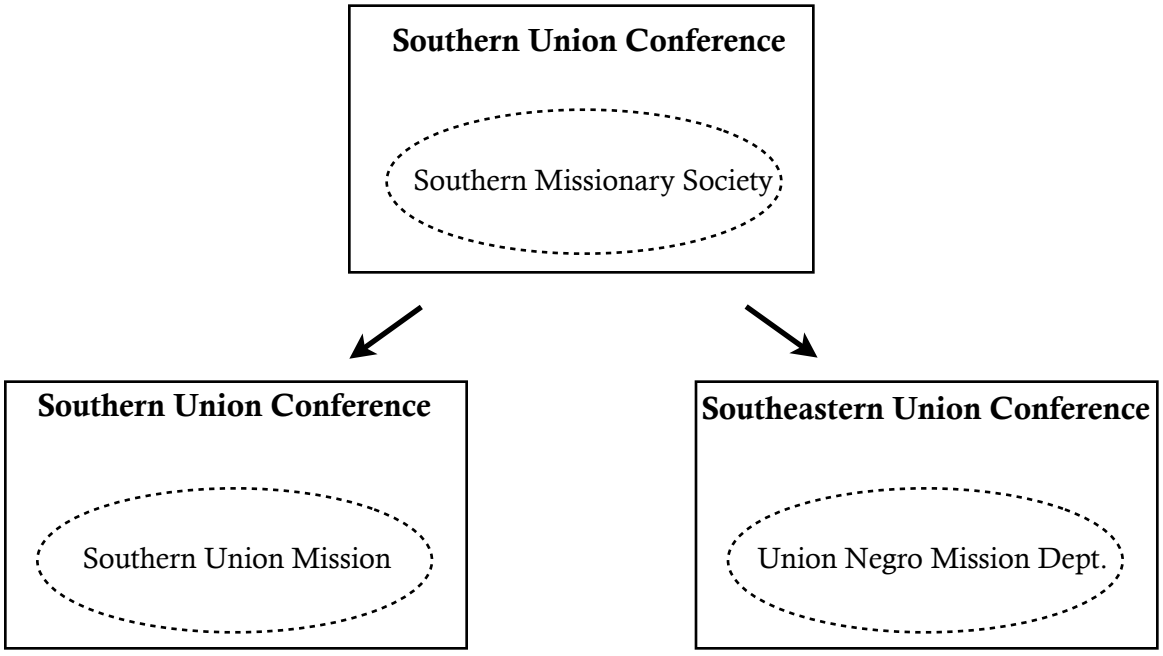


Figure 1.

The Negro department was relabeled the "Colored Department" in 1942[32] because it seemed somehow "less harsh, less divisive," but it would not be long

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[31]A.G. Daniells, "Twenty-Sixth Meeting," *Review and Herald* 86, no. 23 (10 June 1909): 13. Daniells, then-denominational president, gives an optimistic rationale for this new department. "I believe that under this direct effort, we shall see the work in behalf of the Colored people of this country go forward with greater success than we have ever seen it before. Now, how will this be changed? . . . They will take into consideration all branches of this work." Ibid.

[32]*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1976), s.v. "Regional Affairs, Office of, and Regional Conferences."

before the constituency of the church would demand more than a name change. In 1944 a vote was taken at the Spring Council to establish regional conferences, and between 1945 and 1947 seven such conferences were created in six of the nine unions; there are nine operating today.[33] The formation of regional conferences was the last major formal organizational development in the Black work, although since that time some have promoted the idea of Black unions.[34]

## Resistance

### Pre-disposing Factors

With their religious ideology and experience as a foundation, Seventh-day Adventist missionaries went to the South with values contrary to the cultural racism they encountered there. These countercultural values manifested themselves in some countercultural behaviors. Through the expression of these non-conformist attitudes and acts, the missionaries resisted racism.

#### Adventist Ideology

The Seventh-day Adventist faith traces its lineage back to the Millerite movement of the 1830s and 1840s which preached the imminent return of Jesus Christ. The most influential of the Millerites (William Miller, Joshua V. Himes,

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[33]Delbert W. Baker, "Regional Conferences: Fifty Years of Progress," *Adventist Review* 172, no. 49 (November 1995): 12-14.

[34]For example, see Calvin B. Rock, "Cultural Pluralism and Black Unions," *Spectrum* 9, no. 3 (July 1978): 4-12; Benjamin Reeves, "The Call for Black Unions," *Spectrum* 9, no. 3 (July 1978): 2-3. See also Charles E. Dudley, *"Thou Who Hath Brought Us…"* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Services, 1997), 166.

Charles Fitch) were outspoken in their opposition to slavery.[35] Millerism was an intense apocalyptic movement awaiting the end of the world that largely discouraged social activism.[36] However, as a child of this movement, Seventh-day Adventism held on to the spirit of abolitionism, a spirit which can be seen in the activities and writings of the foremost among the denomination's founders.

Joseph Bates (church co-founder) was a social reformer in the 1830s and participated in anti-slavery activities. John Byington (first denominational president) and John P. Kellogg (father of renowned Seventh-day Adventist John Harvey Kellogg) may have even assisted in the Underground Railroad.[37] Ellen G. White was not only a co-founder of the denomination, but she was an especially influential thought leader, and considered a prophet by the Seventh-day Adventist community. She was staunchly anti-slavery, and "had clearly become a radical abolitionist by the time she married"[38] in 1846.[39] Prominent Seventh-day Adventist leaders James White (husband to Ellen) and J. N. Andrews condemned slavery in writing and

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[35]Ronald D. Graybill, "The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[36]Ibid.

[37]Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 193-194.

[38]Ciro Sepulveda, *Ellen White on the Color Line: The Idea of Race in a Christian Community* (Leominster, MA: Biblos Press, 1997), 15.

[39]Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 52. See also Roy Branson, "Adventism's Rainbow Coalition," in *Make Us One*, ed. Delbert W. Baker (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 69.

considered it to be a sign of the moral corruption of the United States.[40] In 1859, another important Seventh-day Adventist leader, Uriah Smith, wrote: "Slavery is a sin we have never ceased to abhor."[41]

This ideological opposition to slavery was not strong enough medicine to prevent racial tensions among Adventists, but it did shape the understanding of race of those who entered the South as missionaries, and it set them in opposition to a southern population which had spilled its own blood to protect its right to slave ownership.

**Adventist Experience**

The interracial experience (or inexperience) of Adventists also contributed to their countercultural attitudes and behaviors. There had been Blacks in the Millerite movement, there were a few Blacks in Seventh-day Adventism prior to the Civil War as well, and history gives us "no indication of anything other than complete acceptance and racial harmony."[42] The Adventists who went to evangelize in the South would probably have had little personal knowledge of interracial relationships,

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[40]Bull and Lockhart (1989), 194.

[41]Uriah Smith, "Letters and Responses," *Review and Herald* 13, no. 16 (10 March 1859): 124.

[42]Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White, Co-Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (New York: P. Lang, 1985), 228.

particularly of the hostile nature that characterized race relations in their missionary field of labor.[43]

Furthermore, Seventh-day Adventism was born in the northeastern United States and as it expanded it did so westwardly. Adventists were basically unacquainted with the South, and considered it "a closed field, where violent men defended their prejudices with guns and whips."[44] This probably explains in part why the church was so late to begin laboring in that region, and it certainly helps explain the reactions of mild astonishment when Adventist missionaries encountered southern racial customs.

Thus the anti-slavery spirit of Seventh-day Adventism was fostered in a northern environment and cultivated a certain naivete regarding race relations in the South. There was a certain level of surprise and wonder as the first Adventists entered the South and wrote home their descriptions.[45]

In 1871 Elbert B. Lane was the first to go south, and the subsequent article he wrote for the denominational paper *The Review and Herald* (the "*Review"*) contains a brief report on his labors there and a lengthy description of southern culture. He describes the Civil War cemetery in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, as "a silent city of the

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[43]As Edson White recounted several years into his missionary labors, "And yet when we went to the South we knew practically nothing in regard to the situation of the South." "Missionary Service," *General Conference Bulletin* 3, extra no. 11 (15 April 1901): 248.

[44]Spalding, *Captains of the Host*, 488.

[45]Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart comment on these earliest Adventist visitors to the South, saying, "There is no indication at this stage that Adventists endorsed these practices, although they did accept them as part of life in the region." Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 279.

dead," a place still bearing the marks of bloody conflict. He reports on the hatred of southerners for the North, and on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan to keep Blacks out of government and to keep northerners from putting Blacks in political office. He describes also the condition of Blacks, liberated from slavery for six years but now suffering under "hatred from the whites, and consequently a different form of oppression," languishing in poverty, and politically and educationally thwarted by vigilantes.[46]

In May 1876, D. M. Canright described his experience holding a religious meeting in Texas, writing, "Here they came from every direction, afoot, on horseback, and with wagons, men, women and children, both white and black, to the number of a hundred or more. . . . Here I saw something new,—the whites all seated inside the house and the colored people all outside,—an invariable custom through the South."[47]

C. O. Taylor, the first to enter the Deep South, commented on the racial segregation he observed there. "The colored people have places of worship by themselves, occupying the same house with the whites, only sitting by themselves. Last Sunday one-third of the congregation were colored persons."[48] Clearly this segregation and culture of race relations was foreign to the visiting Adventists, and their own adaptive race relations would have to be developed in the field.

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[46]Elbert B. Lane, "The South," *Review and Herald* 38, no. 15 (26 September 1871): 118-119.

[47]D. M. Canright, "Texas," *Review and Herald* 47, no. 21 (25 May 1876): 116.

[48]C. O. Taylor, "Georgia," *Review and Herald* 49, no. 01 (04 January 1877): 7.

## Countercultural Attitudes and Behaviors

In the following section the words and actions of the missionaries will be examined for elements of resistance. First, those apparent attitudes, values, and beliefs which run counter to the culture of racism will be surveyed. Then those missionary behaviors which demonstrate a countercultural resistance to racism will be surveyed. Let it be understood from the beginning, however, that at a basic level the entire missionary endeavor was countercultural. This can be clearly understood by the fact that the northern outsiders were the ones initiating it, and that those who had the most cultural power (that is, Whites) resisted the missionary influence because its goal was to uplift a population oppressed and neglected by their native culture.

### Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs

#### Expressed ideology

At the beginning of the Mississippi life Edson made acquaintance with the pastor of the Mount Zion Baptist Church in Vicksburg, and in doing so made acquaintance with the personal history of slavery. A couple of months later he wrote to his mother about the man: "The pastor is an old man who had been a slave, and who at one time got 500 lashes for having a hymnbook, which, by the way, he could not read. . . . This man is, I believe, a good Christian man."[49] The tone of his report suggests a feeling of injustice and sadness at the act of brutality imposed by slavery upon this Black pastor, and confirms that Edson's attitude was still hostile to slavery.

[49]Graybill, *Mission to Black America,* 41.

The language used to refer to Black people in the publications and personal letters of the missionaries is respectful, if dated. Most often Blacks are referred to with the straightforward label "the people." This is in contrast with monikers like "the old Southern darkey," used in a pro-segregation article of one of the local papers, the *Yazoo City Herald.*[50] That same article employs a common argument in favor of segregation, saying that segregation preserves interracial harmony.[51] The early Adventist missionaries, however, believed that the barrier to true racial harmony was not integration, but prejudice, which explains why they viewed segregation as a concession to prejudice.

An article by another local paper, the *Yazoo Sentinel*, defended racism as the order of the natural world and obedience to God's will.

> This rule of color and law of race has always been preserved in the South. We have treated the negro always kindly and considerately, but always with a firmness that could not be misunderstood. We have built him a home, but have not permitted him the liberties of our own; we have built him a church, but have not allowed him to mingle with us in worship; we have built him a schoolhouse, and taxed ourselves to support it, but we have seen to it that his children have not mingled with our children in the study hall, on the play ground, or elsewhere. We have treated him justly; but in doing so, we have also been just to ourselves. In doing this we have simply enforced nature's laws, and obeyed the will of that Being who created a superior and inferior race.[52]

This argument is here quoted as a contrast to the missionary rationale for segregation. In their papers there is a noticeable absence of such natural-order

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[50]"A Word to the Colored People: Danger in Following the Seventh-day Adventists," *Yazoo City Herald*, 01 June 1900, quoted in J. E. White, "The Southern Field Closing to the Message," *The Gospel Herald* 2, no. 10 (October 1900): 88.

[51]Ibid.

[52]"Seventh-day Adventists," *Yazoo Sentinel* (07 June 1900), quoted in J. E. White, "The Southern Field Closing to the Message," 86.

arguments. Segregation is referred to in terms of concession, not in terms of racial superiority and inferiority.

While doing work at a location called Bliss's Landing (discussed in more detail below), the missionaries were holding segregated religious services with Blacks and Whites side by side but separated by a curtain. Edson expressed his dislike for the curtain. (According to Graybill, Edson "would rather preach to the black people alone . . . so that he could talk to them more directly.")[53] According to his own expression, it was Edson's positive valuation of racial harmony in interpersonal contact that explained his concession to the separating curtain. He wrote,

> I am unwilling, until I try it further, to let go one particle of the hold I have in bringing the two races as near together as we are now doing. Of course I cannot see yet what it will grow to, but when we come to build a church I may want just the vantage ground which these services on the boat may give me. They are becoming familiar now with having both races attending the same service, and when we move into our church, when the time comes to have one, it will not seem so strange.[54]

In another insight into the ideology of the Adventist missionaries, Edson discusses his views of the southern farming system. Edson sees the plight of the poor Black farmer as externally influenced, owing in large part to an interplay of social factors which he outlines.[55]

> The question is often asked, "Why is the Negro farmer in the South so poor? Why cannot he succeed as well as white farmers?" And then the answer is wisely given: "It is because he has no ambition. He is *so* shiftless!" . . . Now, where does the fault lie? Is it all in the rapacity of the merchants? Is it all in the indolence and incapacity of the tenant-farmer? Doubtless some of the responsibility lies with

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[53]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 84.

[54]Ibid., 84-85.

[55]J. E. White, "Who Can Do It?" *The Gospel Herald* 1, no. 8 (March 1899): 63.

each; but the real trouble is to be found in the *system of operation* all the way through, which makes such a condition of things almost unavoidable.

Ellen White's influence on the mission work among southern Black Americans was powerful. As mentioned above, Ellen White was not only a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and respected spiritual authority, but was also Edson White's mother. Thus her writings had significant religious authority, and for Edson had personal influence as well. Delbert W. Baker's doctoral dissertation studied the influence of Ellen White's communication on the progress of the Seventh-day Adventist work among African-Americans, and concluded that her impact was "significant."[56] Along with Edson and Charles Kinney, Baker considers Ellen White to be one of the three "major architects of the Black work" who "wielded primary influence on its initial development."[57] Therefore, Ellen White's expressed ideology of race is insightful for understanding the ideology of race held by the missionaries.

The corpus of Ellen White's writings regarding race and the southern work[58] is too voluminous to look at in detail here, and other authors have done that job. Although the issue of accommodationism will be examined below, at this point it is

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[56]Delbert W. Baker, "The Dynamics of Communication and African-American Progress in the Seventh-day Adventist Organization" (PhD diss., Howard University, 1993). See also chap. 7, "Ellen G. White's Influence on SDA Approaches to Race Relations," in Graham, 223-296.

[57]Delbert W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: The Ministry Begins," *Adventist Review* 170, no. 07 (18 February 1993): 17.

[58]One critical book for understanding Ellen White's views on this issue is the small volume *The Southern Work,* which is a selected compilation of her writings in article, letter, and speech form. As another indication of how influential her views were to the Adventist missionaries, the book was originally published by J. Edson White aboard the *Morning Star* (see E.G. White, *The Southern Work*, 6).

important to understand that Ellen White fundamentally believed in the equality of the races. She wrote that Blacks and Whites were equal on the basis of their equal redemption in Jesus Christ,[59] because of their shared human brotherhood,[60] because of their shared heavenly reward,[61] and because of God's loving view of people.[62] She

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[59]"The Lord Jesus came to our world to save men and women of all nationalities. He died just as much for the colored people as for the white race." E. G. White, *The Southern Work*, 9. This quality is established, then, by the fact of the equal price of salvation paid for all people, but Ellen White also argues that the equality is reinforced among those who accept God's gift of salvation. "When the sinner is converted he receives the Holy Spirit, that makes him a child of God, and fits him for the society of the redeemed and the angelic host. He is made a joint heir with Christ. . . . The black man's name is written in the book of life beside the white man's. All are one in Christ. Birth, station, nationality, or color cannot elevate or degrade men." Ibid., 12.

[60]"While at St. Louis a year ago, as I knelt in prayer, these words were presented to me as if written with a pen of fire: 'All ye are brethren.'" Ibid., 11.

[61]"There is to be no special heaven for the white man and another heaven for the black man. We are all to be saved through the same grace, all to enter the same heaven at last. Then why not act like rational beings, and overcome our unlikeness to Christ? The same God that blesses us as His sons and daughters blesses the colored race. . . . Many of those who have had every advantage, who have regarded themselves as superior to the colored people because their skin was white, will find that many of the colored race will go into heaven before them." Ibid., 55.

[62]"'Who,' says Paul, 'maketh thee to differ?' The God of the white man is the God of the black man, and the Lord declares that His love for the least of His children exceeds that of a mother for her beloved child. . . . O what impartial love the Lord Jesus gives to those who love Him! The Lord's eye is upon all His creatures; He loves them all, and makes no difference between white and black, except that He has a special, tender pity for those who are called to bear a greater burden than others." Ibid., 11-12.

advocated treating colored people with respect[63] and consistently characterized the apparent weaknesses of the Black population as the result of oppression, not an inherent inferiority.[64] As Roy E. Graham summarized, Ellen White made known "in no uncertain terms that there could be no such thing as racial-superiority thinking within the church. The whole body must recognize this foundational principle."[65]

Positive appraisals

In their personal correspondence the missionaries gave positive appraisals of the Black people to whom they were ministering. Edson White wrote to his mother regarding a local young Black woman who he hoped might teach at one of the schools they had opened. "She is a fine girl, of good character, and is a graduate of the public high school of Vicksburg. She is a natural teacher and can do good

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[63]In a very clear statement she wrote, "Those who slight a brother because of his color are slighting Christ." E. G. White, *The Southern Work*, 13. She declared that this respect ought to be manifested with courage. "No matter what the gain or the loss, we must act nobly and courageously in the sight of God and our Saviour. Let us as Christians who accept the principle that all men, white and black, are free and equal, adhere to this principle, and not be cowards in the face of the world, and in the face of the heavenly intelligences. We should treat the colored man just as respectfully as we would treat the white man. And we can now, by precept and example, win others to the true course." Idem, Manuscript 7, "The Colored People" (1896), quoted in Ronald D. Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1970), 111.

[64]As an example, she addressed Seventh-day Adventist believers gathered at the General Conference of 1903 with these words: "You say that the colored people are depraved and wicked, that their standard of morality is very low. Who made them wicked? Who spoiled their morals? I want you to think of this, and of the burden that rests upon the white people to help the colored people." E. G. White, "The Southern Work," *General Conference Bulletin* 5, no. 13 (14 April 1903): 203.

[65]Graham, 247.

work."[66] In his address to the General Conference in 1903, Edson also noted that among the Black Americans who were employed as principals and teachers in the missionary schools, there were "teachers of special ability and sterling worth."[67]

In a letter to Leroy Nicola regarding the building of their first church in Mississippi, Edson praises the sincerity of the faith of the Black converts, and their admirable spirit of giving. "They are willing, but every dollar they give means to go without shoes or clothing or proper food. That is sacrifice, and yet all have bravely come up and are doing their level best. . . . And right here I want to say that I never saw a firmer body of Seventh-day Adventists than the little colored company in Vicksburg."[68]

E. A. Sutherland, who later joined the Mississippi enterprise, gives a positive appraisal of their spiritual interest. "I never met a company of people which seemed to appreciate the truth any more than this company of colored people," he wrote.[69] Though he notes that "their reasoning faculties are not very well developed"[70] (which relates to the underdevelopment of their natural capacities), he gives also a favorable

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[66]J. E. White to Ellen G. White, 15 August 1895, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

[67]J. E. White, "Report of Southern Missionary Society," *General Conference Bulletin* 5, no. 13 (14 April 1903): 200.

[68]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 58-59.

[69]E. A. Sutherland to Ellen G. White, 25 April 1899, 2; quoted in *Telling the Story: An Anthology on the Development of the Black Work,* comp. Delbert W. Baker, (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Printing Services, 1996), 5/32-5/34.

[70]Ibid., 6.

assessment of their innate abilities, writing, "I found that they are as bright as the average white children who are surrounded by the same circumstances."[71]

Comments such as these reveal that the attitudes of the missionaries viewed Blacks positively and perceived that their natural abilities were not inferior to Whites. Blacks were not less spiritual, not less able to appreciate spiritual things, not less naturally intelligent, not of lower innate morality. The attitudes they expressed were attitudes of equality, not racism.

**Behaviors**

Personal sacrifice

The behaviors of the missionaries also demonstrated that they were resisting the cultural racism. Such behaviors included the great amount of personal effort put forth by the missionaries for the well-being of the Black people to whom they were ministering and the self-sacrifices that were made. For instance, Will Palmer and Edson shared some of their meager salary with a Black minister who had converted from another faith.[72] Before the work was financially connected with the denomination, the missionaries struggled for funding, but that did not prevent them

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[71]Ibid., 5.

[72]J. E. White to Ellen G. White, 06 February 1895.

from loaning money to the needy,[73] giving food to the impoverished,[74] or providing free medical care.[75]

In 1894 the *Morning Star* crew worked to persuade the officials in St. Louis, Missouri, to provide a pilot's license for the young Finis Parker, despite the prohibition against Black river pilots. The efforts ultimately failed, but it demonstrates an early activism (and probably naivete) in the missionary band. Edson also personally labored for the freedom of one Brother Olvin who, in a spate of persecutions against the Adventists, was accused of murder. Through publication, fundraising, personal donations and care, Edson did his best to provide for Olvin, who eventually was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to ten years in prison.[76]

Interracial cooperation

Early on, Edson used Black musicians in the evangelistic services. This demonstrates an interracial cooperation and a partnership mentality, and it definitely

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[73]For instance, Edson once made a loan in the sum of $1.50 (half of all the money Edson had) to a local man named More. Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 53.

[74]In a personal letter, Edson recounts the financial faithfulness of the converts, even in the midst of hardship: "Others I have helped to get food to eat when I knew their cupboards were empty—and yet all want an interest in their church." Ibid., 59.

[75]This medical care was at least sometimes combined with personal self-sacrifice. Graybill tells a story of Dr. W. H. Kynett, Adventist missionary in Mississippi: "Late in January he visited a black woman who was very sick. . . . When Dr. Kynett arrived, he discovered that there was no fire in the little house. . . . He went to his own home to get some coal for a fire. Then he treated the woman." Ibid., 69.

[76]Ibid., 138-141.

necessitated mingling with the Black musicians in their common work.[77] In Montgomery, Alabama, a White Adventist named W. G. Buckner labored with a Black Adventist convert named Taswell B. Buckner to establish an Adventist school and later a congregation in the same locale.[78] Both of these occurrences of interracial cooperation were in opposition to prevailing racist sentiments of social separation between Black people and White people.

Countercultural behaviors

Other examples of countercultural behaviors are found in the basic approach of the missionary endeavor. While "white people refused to let black people into their halls,"[79] the White Adventist missionaries were intentionally inviting Black people into their halls, churches, and schools, and spent considerable expense to construct these buildings for such a purpose. The missionaries built quality buildings for the Black work without sub-standard construction.[80] Beyond the careful construction of buildings, however, the missionaries also cultivated loving personal relationships with the Black people. Establishing positive, caring interpersonal

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[77]Ibid., 68, 72.

[78]Reynolds, 122.

[79]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 99.

[80]For a description of one construction project in Vicksburg, see Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 75-76.

connections demonstrates again the resistance to the racial prejudice that was so highly suspicious of such relationships.[81]

While White Southerners may not have been visiting the Black churches in their communities, that was among the first activities of the Adventist missionaries aboard the *Morning Star*. In December 1894, while they were detained in Memphis on their way to Mississippi, the crew began to canvass the town and visit local Black churches.[82] They did so as well when they arrived in Vicksburg, visiting Mount Zion Baptist Church.[83] They also personally visited the homes of the Black residents.

The mission work was unwelcome among the racist Whites of the South and Edson uses this as a reason for building the *Morning Star.* "The work must go into the interior. But just as soon as you leave the cities, no white man can go and rely on the people for the place of his living."[84] It was their disapproval of the entire missionary endeavor that kept Whites from housing the Adventist missionaries laboring for Blacks.

The phenomenon of segregation played an important and controversial role, and this complex issue was troublesome for the missionaries as they struggled to know how to relate to it. There are many examples of the missionaries

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[81]Graybill retells a story of Adventist historian A. W. Spalding visiting Yazoo City and meeting some who still remembered Edson and his wife, Emma White. One woman remembered Emma encouraging her when her studies were difficult. Her husband, Joe Miller, recalled going to the train station in the chance he might see Edson before he left; there they engaged in conversation together until the last moment, whereupon Miller confessed, "'Well, I do love him.'" Ibid., 96.

[82]Ibid., 37.

[83]Kynett, 317.

[84]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 65.

accommodating the segregationist practices of the South, some of which will be examined below, but one early example in the work of the Vicksburg missionaries is instructive. In 1896 a White woman came to visit the Adventist church that was being dedicated, but was taken aback by the Black congregation. Edson later reported happily, however, that though he initially feared that she would not return, he observed that "she had overcome her 'difficulty' about black people, and even engaged in friendly chatting with some of the black church members after the meeting."[85] She later joined that church. The White woman's initial discomfort was normal, while her later change of heart was countercultural.

Wholistic ministry

One of the defining features of the missionary work under Edson's direction was its wholistic nature. It was ministry to the whole person. In the first issue of the *Gospel Herald*, Edson made the wholistic aims of the paper and the wider ministry clear.

> Our Savior, "went about doing good." He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and preached the gospel to the poor. This was a whole gospel. If this paper can bring education to the ignorant, aid and comfort and healing to the sick, and the truths of the gospel to the needy, its mission will be fully met.[86]

Indeed, this wholistic vision was carried out as the missionaries began ministries of education, health, relief, and reform. This wholistic ministry was also the approach taken by other Adventist missionary groups, which explains the establishment of the important institutions of Oakwood Industrial School (operated

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[85]Ibid., 70.

[86]"The Gospel Herald," *The Gospel Herald* 1, no. 1 (May 1898): 6.

by the General Conference) and Riverside Sanitarium (operated by an Adventist lay person), and the countless smaller schools, Dorcas societies, and medical missionaries who served the South. These efforts to minister to the whole person were to uplift the downtrodden population, efforts that ran counter to the culture which had for decades been working to keep the Black person "in his place." Thus in every area of the wholistic ministry, the missionaries were resisting the cultural values in the South that degraded and neglected Blacks.

Primary among the missionaries' activities were educational ministries. They established night schools, day schools, and even afternoon schools that taught reading and writing and religion. This educational ministry taught young and old the basics of literacy and the Christian faith, but it had also as its aim the preparation of the students for leadership and expanded usefulness in the world at large, but specifically in the continued evangelization and uplifting of the Black people of the South. As stated by Baker, "The aim of Edson White's educational program was to train and staff African-American schools with African-American teachers, but the demand so outgrew the supply that in a number of cases white teachers from the North were employed."[87] On multiple occasions before the opening of Oakwood, Edson pleaded for some school to which he could send talented Blacks for education, missionary instruction, and practical training beyond what they could offer at the local level.[88] Further underlining the educational emphasis, the Southern Missionary Society sponsored Black young people in their medical school education at Meharry

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[87]Baker, "The Dynamics of Communication," 62.

[88]For an example, see J. E. White to Ellen G. White, 11 June 1895, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

Medical College in Nashville.[89] In 1901, an Adventist sanitarium was established in Nashville for the medical training of Black young people.

The establishment in 1901 of an Adventist sanitarium for Blacks to be educated and treated confirms not only the importance of the educational ministry, but also the high value placed on medical ministry. Dr. J. E. Caldwell worked for many years in the South doing medical work in Tennessee, Florida, and Alabama.[90]

From the early stages of Edson's work in Mississippi, the missionaries had aimed to give health care and education. Mrs. F. R. Rogers (wife of missionary Fred Rogers) and Mrs. Halladay (wife of missionary Fred Halladay) were nurses,[91] as was Ida Wenkel. The medical team was later expanded with the arrival of Dr. W. H. Kynett and his daughter, Lydia Kynett, a nurse.[92] In 1897 L. A. Hansen and his wife arrived in Vicksburg, a very capable couple.[93] These medical workers were badly needed in a place whose hospitals "had very meager means of caring for the sick,"[94]

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[89]J. E. White, "Report of Southern Missionary Society," 200.

[90]*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1976), s.v. "Caldwell, Joseph Edmond."

[91]Jacob Justiss, "Origin and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Health Message Among Negroes" (Master's thesis, Andrews University, 1945), 11.

[92]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 69.

[93]L. A. Hansen would go on to be one of the most influential Adventist missionaries in the medical work of the South, expanding or establishing the health ministry in Mississippi, Tennessee, Florida, and Washington, D.C. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1976), s.v. "Hansen, Louis A."

[94]L. A. Hansen, "Pioneer Providences," *Youth's Instructor*, 13 July 1943, 5; quoted in Justiss, "Origin and Development," 9.

and even more so for the impoverished Black population.[95] The Adventist health and hygiene ministry was offered to even the poorest in the community without discrimination.

Also among the goals of the Southern Missionary Society was "assisting the people in economic need" and it "started businesses which would provide employment to them."[96] Mercy ministries such as provision of clothing and food, and direct relief work such as was carried out during the floods, provided aid to those who desperately needed it. Fred Rogers and his family took in two homeless Black girls, which got them in trouble with the local papers, but which demonstrates the extent of their compassionate care.

In addition to providing financial relief in emergencies, the missionaries sought also to remedy the broken economic system that bankrupted many farmers. Both Edson White and E. A. Sutherland sought to teach local farmers about crop variety and other tools to help them get the most out of their land and then, hopefully, out of debt to the owner of the land.[97] Again it is seen that this wholistic

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[95]Justiss notes that "sometimes colored were taken into white hospitals but were neglected. L. A. Hansen tells of seeing a colored woman lying on a pallet on the basement floor of a Vicksburg hospital. When he asked concerning her she was spoken of as the 'thing.'" Justiss, "Origin and Development," 9n14.

[96]Graybill, *Mission to Black America,* 73.

[97]Sutherland called sharecropping "another form of slavery which bound to keep the colored people in bondage as long as the white man wishes to be dishonest with him." E. A. Sutherland to Ellen G. White, 25 April 1899, 3.

ministry was part of a countercultural mission, seeking not just to save the souls of the Black folk, but to better their lives.[98]

### Conclusion

It would be an unfair reading of history to say that these Adventist missionaries had a perfect or pure resistance to the racial oppression they encountered in the South. They did not treat Black people ideally. If they had, we would expect to see some things play out differently, including much more pushback from the host culture and much more rapid advancement of racial equality within the faith community. What the record does show, however, is that the missionaries were thinking and acting counterculturally. In their beliefs and their behaviors they were opposing the social system that existed at the time.

## Accommodation

As the missionaries had more experience and faced more persecution in the South, their resistance to the cultural racism softened. They began to more actively accommodate. No dates can be given for a clean transition from a resistance approach to an accommodation approach because this accommodation was a complex adaptation to the host culture which took place over time and varied in detail depending on the location and personalities involved. In every place in the

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[98]The matter of a seventh-day Sabbath seems to have been especially odious to the Whites of the South. Not only did this practice go against their well-established custom of Sunday observance, it also prevented the Black converts from working on Saturdays. It may have been that this challenged the view that Whites had of Blacks as economic resources, and such a challenge was clearly unwelcome.

South, however, the accommodation of the missionaries was basically in relation to segregation. In almost every case cited below the issue was "the color line."

Several observations can be made regarding the accommodation, which will then be set forth with explanations below. The accommodation to the racism of the American South by Adventist missionaries was a missionary phenomenon; catalyzed by violence; cautionary; negotiated and experiential; and naively political.

## A Missionary Phenomenon

From the very beginnings of the missionary work in the South, segregation had been an issue, but it took several decades for a policy to develop. Before 1890 or so, "where the church was established, the degree of integration depended on whether the initiating evangelists were of Northern or Southern origin, and on the degree of local prejudice and pressure,"[99] though the question had been raised many times.

> During the General Conferences of 1877 and 1885, the question of whether or not to bow to Southern prejudices by establishing separate work and separate church for blacks was debated. Most speakers believed that to do so would be a denial of true Christianity since God was no respecter of persons. In 1890, however, R. M. Kilgore, the Adventist leader with the most experience relative to the South, argued for separate churches. D. M. Canright had urged this policy as early as 1876 during a brief period of labor in Texas.[100]

Also, in the 1887 General Conference there was a discussion on the question of segregation in the southern labors, and the recommendation was made that there should be no distinction made between the races. The resolution was referred to a

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[99]Graham, 231.

[100]Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979), 234.

committee, and "a week later the committee reported that they saw 'no occasion for this conference to legislate upon the subject, and would, therefore, recommend that no action be taken.' This left the question to the discretion of individual ministers and teachers."[101]

It was those who had experienced the racial hostilities of the South during their personal missionary labors there—Canright and Kilgore—who advocated for the use of segregation in the Adventist work. This was true also of Edson, who clashed with J. H. Kellogg over this very issue.[102] Even when a separate work for Blacks had begun with Will Palmer and Edson's missionary trip to the Blacks of Mississippi, O. A. Olsen, a denominational leader, wrote a letter in 1895 expressing his disapproval of the racially separated work, believing that "the gospel should overcome prejudice."[103] It was not the anthropology or theology which caused the missionaries to consider implementing segregation, it was their actual experience in the field. For this reason I consider the accommodation to be a missionary phenomenon.

Furthermore, it can be considered a missionary phenomenon because one reason that it developed was a concern for the viability of the missionary endeavor. As will be shown below, a primary reason for accommodationism was the physical safety of the Adventist missionaries and their congregants and students. In addition to that, however, the missionaries reasoned that to inflame the prejudices of the local

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[101]Delbert W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: The Turning Point," 10.

[102]See Bull and Lockhart (1989), 195. See also Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations*, 62-63.

[103]Schwarz, *Light Bearers,* 240.

people would be to erect an unnecessary barrier against the Adventist message[104] (which was odious to many people anyway because of its distinctive doctrines). As Ellen White said, "As this work is continued, we will find prejudice arise, and this will be manifested in various ways; but we must have wisdom to labor in such a way that we shall not lose the interest of either party, the white or the colored."[105] Again, the accommodation may rightly be called a missionary phenomenon.

Bull and Lockhart claim that segregation was adopted only to appease the Whites, not for the sake of Black people. In a stinging criticism they write, "It was still a white movement, with a mission to a white America, and blacks were not allowed to jeopardize the evangelistic objective of the denomination."[106] However, in explaining the move of the SMS headquarters to Nashville, Ellen White comments rather extensively on the better racial climate there and its advantages for working for Blacks. For example, she says, "There is not in Nashville the bitter opposition to the work for the uplifting of the downtrodden colored race that exists in many other cities in the South."[107] According to Ellen White, the work for Blacks must go forward, and Nashville was a better center for operation because a healthier climate of race relations meant there would be less interference of prejudiced Whites with

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[104]This sentiment had been expressed by D. M. Canright in 1876, saying. "A man cannot labor for them [Blacks] and for the whites too, as the whites would not associate with him if he did." Canright, "Texas," 166.

[105]Ellen G. White, "A Holy Calling," Manuscript 17 (1909), quoted in Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations*, 85.

[106]Bull and Lockhart (1989), 197.

[107]Ellen G. White, "The Southern Work," *General Conference Bulletin* 5, no. 13 (14 April 1903): 202.

the mission for Blacks. The missionary accommodation to racism was meant to keep the prejudice of Whites from jeopardizing the work for Blacks.

## Catalyzed by Violence

Although Edson and his company of workers had gone into the South aware that race relations was a troublesome issue there, it was the knowledge of race-motivated violence that began to push them away from resistance and toward accommodation. This knowledge came by way of story and, later, first-hand experience. As early as 1895, Edson felt the shadow of threatened violence for those who violated the racial etiquette. He wrote, "Here we do not dare accept any entertainment from the colored people, even if they were able to give it. A missionary a little ways from here was taken out by a masked band and shot because he made common with the colored people."[108]

The work as a missionary in the South was a difficult work on many fronts, but perhaps the most troublesome aspect was the matter of race relations. As these race relations worsened in the South in the 1890s, the troubles became more pronounced for those resisting the culture of racism. Practices began to shift to active accommodation among the Adventist missionaries in Mississippi in the last years of the nineteenth century as they experienced a crisis of violence. George I. Butler, then president of the Southern Union Conference, gave the General Conference attendees a snapshot of the troubles faced by the *Morning Star* missionaries.

> Around in that country I suppose there is as little favor shown to the colored people as anywhere in the South. . . . Brethren W. O. Palmer, Fred Rogers, and others . . . labored there at the risk of their lives. The white men around said their

[108]J. Edson White to O. A. Olsen, 14 July 1895, quoted in Graham, 242.

> meetings must stop, and they took one of the workers and put him on the cars and told him to leave; and I think there were two or three colored people killed. Sometimes, Brother Rogers tells me, men going by would fire a rifle ball right through his house; and when he went up to Yazoo City, he had to go in the night, and come back in the night. Sometimes when the vessel was anchored, and while they were having meetings on it, there would be plans concocted to destroy and burn it. . . . Many things of this kind might be mentioned, but this is sufficient to show that the brethren labored there at the risk of their lives.[109]

This explains why people who were ideologically committed to racial equality began increasingly implementing segregation in their work.

Edson acknowledged the role that life-threatening social coercion had played in their decision to segregate. "We have done this because it is the only way we *can* work. We tried working for both races together and our lives were threatened. We preferred to live and work in *such lines as we could* than to force the issue *and be cut off from the work.*"[110]

One case provides a clear view of this progression: the accommodation made after the turbulent winter of 1898-1899 in removing F. R. Rogers, a White missionary, from teaching in classrooms of Black students. First they resisted local cultural custom by having White teachers in Black classrooms. Then, late in 1898, Rogers received an in-person threat at Yazoo City regarding the destruction of the boat *Morning Star* and was told that the missionary work there must stop. Half a year later, a mob in Calmar looted the Adventist facilities there, burned their materials, forced at least one Adventist onto an outbound train, and physically attacked a Black

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[109]George I. Butler, "Southern Union Conference," *General Conference Bulletin* 5, no. 9 (09 April 1903): 132.

[110]J. E. White, "Labor for the Two Races," *The Gospel Herald* 3, no. 1 (January 1901): 4, emphasis his.

Adventist with a whip and shot his wife in the leg.[111] The troubles for Rogers were not of a general nature only. "When Rogers walked down the main street of Yazoo City, a chorus of boys would hang onto his coattails, shouting: 'Nigger lover! Nigger lover!' His hat was once shot off, and he was pelted with brickbats."[112] And in 1900 the opposition flared up again "on the ground that our white teachers were teaching in our colored schools."[113] It was clear that their peculiar Christianity and countercultural race relations had stirred the violent ire of the local population.

In response to this, Edson brought in two Black teachers from Battle Creek to work in Yazoo City. "Then he gave Rogers the title of 'Superintendent of Education' to thwart those who claimed to be offended by a white teacher in a black school."[114] The change in their practice to accommodate the segregationist ideas of the Whites in Mississippi was catalyzed by their experience with violence.[115]

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[111]J. E. White to Ellen G. White, 25 May 1899, quoted in Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations,* 56-57.

[112]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 136. Edson White also described Rogers' troubles in his connection with his work in Lintonia, a Yazoo City suburb. It convinced Edson that "there is one line of work in some parts of the South that it seems cannot be tolerated, and that is the teaching and educating of the colored people by white teachers." "The Southern Field Closing to the Message," 85.

[113]J. E. White, "The Southern Field Closing to the Message," 85.

[114]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 134.

[115]These incidents of violence also precipitated a move of the Southern Missionary Society headquarters out of Mississippi to Nashville. The reasons for this are clearly spelled out by Ellen G. White in *Testimonies*, vol. 7 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 232-234. The principal reason is "our workers will find it easier to labor in this city for the colored race than in many other cities of the South" (232).

## Cautionary

Because the backdrop of their adaptation was the threatening shadow of violence, the missionaries' accommodation can also be characterized as cautionary. It was an attempt at carefulness in the volatile southern field. This is an important point because it sits in contrast with an accommodation born out of a changed attitude of race relations. Let it be clear, however, that the accommodation was seen as just that: an accommodation. Thus the language of caution and carefulness serves as an important reminder that at this point the missionaries still perceived the racial prejudice of the South as a hardship.

A few selected quotations will serve to establish this claim. In 1899, Edson wrote to his mother regarding the opposition in Battle Creek to their segregation practices. He explained that their adaptations were to protect the lives of people of both races who were connected with their work.

> The fact is, the people of the North do not know anything of the true situation in this awful field. It is "Ku Klux" days right over and we are in the midst of it. . . . The North MUST realize that the workers coming here will have to be the most careful that it is possible for them to be. If not they will not only imperil their own lives, but will also imperil the lives and bring distress upon the colored people themselves.[116]

In describing the change in their policy which removed White teachers out of the Black classrooms, Edson uses wording which clearly portrays their reluctance: "But the time came when it became imperative that colored teachers should teach the colored schools in Mississippi."[117] At that same meeting, Ellen White spoke also

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[116]J. E. White to Ellen G. White, 14 May 1899, quoted in Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations*, 61-62.

[117]J. E. White, "Report of Southern Missionary Society," 199.

regarding the methods used in the southern field: "I wish to say that it is necessary to use the greatest caution in working for the colored people. . . . Those who go to the South must be very careful of what they say. Let them not criticize the white people in regard to the way in which the colored people have been treated."[118] Adventist sentiment was such that special cautions were needed to keep new workers from speaking out against the racial injustices in the South and endangering themselves and others.

## Negotiated and Experimental

In early 1897 the *Morning Star* was detoured into a more interior Mississippi location called Bliss's Landing. While there Edson contacted Mr. Bliss, the plantation owner, and with his approval made plans to hold a religious meeting aboard the boat. As Graybill tells the story, "Edson and Bliss had intended the meeting to be for the white people nearby. However, Albert Green, cook on the *Morning Star*, who had heard a meeting was scheduled, set out to invite all the black people he could find as well."[119] When Blacks and Whites arrived to the same service, no one was denied entrance to the meeting, and everyone found themselves attending "one of the first 'integrated' church services in that area since the Civil War, but not without [Edson]

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[118]Ellen G. White, "The Southern Work," 202-203. It is clear that Ellen White's statements encouraging missionary accommodation are made against the backdrop of racial violence and a deep concern for the success of the Black work. Her fundamental belief in the equality of the races and the Christian duty to treat all people with respect had not changed. For a treatment of this topic, see Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations*; Roy L. Branson, "Ellen G. White—Racist or Champion of Equality?—3: The Crisis of the Nineties," *Review* 147, no. 17 (17 April 1973): 4-6.

[119]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 83.

conceding to custom enough to ask the black members of his congregation to sit in the back."[120]

The meetings continued at Bliss's Landing, and seating the Blacks in the back was just the first of a few different attempts to accommodate. Edson moved the Black congregants up to sit side-by-side with the White attendees, dividing the assembly down the middle with a curtain. This may have been an attempt to create a more dignified situation for the Black people, but Edson disliked even the curtain. His words are important enough that they are worth reading again.

> But, he asserted, "I am unwilling, until I try it further, to let go one particle of the hold I have in bringing the two races as near together as we are now doing. Of course I cannot see yet what it will grow to, but when we come to build a church I may want just the vantage ground which these services on the boat may give me. They are becoming familiar now with having both races attending the same service, and when we move into our church, when the time comes to have one, it will not seem so strange."[121]

Eventually, the services were fully segregated and a school for the large Black population was opened nearby, but that school brought the missionary team into danger and social disgrace. A local official found Edson and told him that he was to cease his educational and religious work among the Blacks; "he was threatened with ostracism and possible lynching if he continued."[122] Edson later found out that the

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[120]Ibid.

[121]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 84-85.

[122]Schwarz, *Light Bearers*, 240.

local Black plantation workers had been instructed by their White bosses not to attend any services on the *Morning Star.* The work at Bliss's Landing was effectively halted.[123]

A progression in the accommodation can be traced: (1) Biracial religious meeting with Blacks seated in the back; (2) biracial religious meetings with Blacks and Whites side by side, yet separated with a curtain; (3) separate religious meetings, with a school for Blacks; and (4) the work in that location abandoned. This negotiation with the culture was one reason that there was no official segregational policy in the church for many years: The missionaries were adapting to their particular locales, at least some of them, like Edson, with the hope of "bringing the two races as near together" as possible.

## Naively Political

In a special number of *The Gospel Herald* in October 1900, Edson discussed at length the social troubles that the missionary team had experienced in recent months. After reporting on the accusations made by their enemies and the resulting trouble, Edson then seeks to defend the missionaries from the accusations and clear their names. In so doing, he reveals the naive philosophy under which they were operating. He repeatedly states that they do not aim to act politically, but only to work for the Black people within the customs of the South. (However, the custom of the South was *not* to work for Black people.)

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[123]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 85-86.

Edson claimed that "in all this work politics have been ignored. Our workers in the South have no politics. Our kingdom is 'not of this world.'"[124] Later, he again protests, "To the political side of this question we shall make but little comment, for with this we as a people have nothing to do." While it may have been true that the missionaries did not bother themselves with elections and the like, they certainly did have politics, no matter how fervent Edson's objections.

Tied together with this belief in apoliticism is a sense of futility to change the racist conventions of the South, though they were reprehensible. "Although some of the customs are wrong, oppressive, and wicked, they were there before we came, they are very positive and aggressive, and nothing any reformers may do can change them; and instead of their growing better, every thinking man can see that they are growing more pronounced and positive."[125] The eschatological image of the just God as solving the unsolvable political problems also played a role in their approach. "Our duty is not to attempt to battle with problems we cannot solve, and difficulties we cannot remedy. Our duty is to carry Present Truth to those who know it not, and leave these social and political problems with Him who will finally right all wrongs, and bring relief to all who are oppressed."[126]

Time and time again Edson claims that their work is not political; however, their very presence was political, as was their work and their religion. The thinking that resistance and accommodation were apolitical acts contributed to the later

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[124]J. E. White, "The Southern Field Closing to the Message," 86.

[125]Ibid., 85.

[126]Ibid.

institutionalization of racism in the denomination because it allowed Adventists to believe that their race relations were distinct from their theology and yet also distinct from political implications. In this thinking, to challenge the customs of the wider culture would be a political act, and since God's "kingdom is not of this world" political involvement is to be avoided. Bull and Lockhart agree that this tendency of the Adventists to avoid political questions weakened their defenses against the prejudiced attitudes and behaviors of the larger culture. "It is quite likely that the desire to remain aloof from social problems may have made the church rather insensitive to the issue of race. The policy on church and state also made white Adventists reluctant to speak out on racial injustice."[127]

## Conclusion

The accommodation to racism was imperfectly executed by imperfect people in unfortunate times, and yet it allowed the Black work to carry on and progress. Without such accommodation, it is clear, either the work would have ended or the lives of the people would have. Indeed, the accommodation approach in the Adventist work was catalyzed by violence and was taken up as a cautionary measure to protect life and limb. The accommodation was also experimental and negotiated, with the missionaries at one time trying this method, at another time trying that. Unfortunately, the missionaries were unaware of the political significance of their presence and their work, and this ignorance kept them from working more wisely.

It is critical to understand that the shift toward segregation did not signal that a change had occurred in the belief of racial equality. It was at its heart an

[127]Bull and Lockhart (1989), 201.

accommodation, an adaptation to the target culture in order to evangelize, an uncomfortable and reluctant adjustment to customs deemed "wrong, oppressive, and wicked."[128] Consider the words of Edson's personal letter in 1899 after five years of labor in the South:

> God forbid that we should build up color lines where they do not now exist. . . . God has made [of] one blood all nations of the earth and He so regards them. If we are true children of God we will regard them in the same way. We are not to regard the prejudice of men in matters of this kind only as we are compelled to do so in order that we may be allowed to work for them.[129]

**Institutionalization**

As the work expanded and grew older, the experimental and negotiated adaptation was replaced with policy. Racism, particularly in the form of segregation, infiltrated the policy and unconscious culture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in America. This racism was manifested in hiring discrimination, under-representation in leadership, unfair financial practices, and persistent segregational policies. What began as an expediency designed to benefit Blacks with the Gospel was left unexamined and eventually became the institutionalized racism that caused the denomination much grief and cost it some of the brightest personalities within its membership.

The first decades of the twentieth century saw wonderful growth among Black American Adventists: from about fifty believers in 1890 to about one thousand in two decades' time, operating "fifty-five primary schools in ten southern states, in

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[128]J. E. White, "The Southern Field Closing to the Message," 85.

[129]J. E. White to M. A. Cornwall, 10 October 1899, quoted in Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations*, 64-65.

which over eighteen hundred pupils were enrolled."[130] The efforts of the pioneer missionaries had produced much fruit and blossomed into a well-organized and prospering work. As mentioned in the historical overview above, in 1909 the North American Negro Department was organized to further systematize and grow the Black work. But all was not well.

In 1907 Black Adventist layman John Ragland left the church because of his experience of racism and discrimination. In about 1915 Lewis Sheafe—called by some the most gifted Adventist preacher of either race—left the church after struggling for many years with the issue of race in the church. Also around 1915 a successful Black evangelist, John Manns, left the denomination because of racial discrimination, crying foul all the way out. In 1929-1930 there was yet another bright and effective minister lost to the church when J. K. Humphrey, embroiled in a controversy of self-determination with the denomination, had his ministerial credentials revoked and his entire congregation disfellowshipped.[131]

These and many other, unnamed Black persons left the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of what they perceived to be irremediable racial discrimination. This discrimination was manifested in White leadership over the Black work, long after the work itself had produced competent Black leaders.[132] Although the equivalent

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[130]Richard W. Schwarz, "The Perils of Growth: 1886-1905," in *Adventism in America*, ed. Gary Land (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 115.

[131]See Romauld Clifford Jones, *Utopia Park, Utopian Church: James K. Humphrey and the Emergence of the Sabbath-day Adventists* (PhD diss., Western Michigan University, 2001).

[132]"The fact is that the SDA work in Southern States continued, but was still largely white-led." Graham, 251.

departments for Germans and Scandinavians ("home mission departments") were led by people of the targeted ethnicity, for nine years (1909-1918) the North American Negro Department was led by a White man. As Dudley writes, "positions of leadership representing these [nonwhite] ethnic groups were sought in 1909, 1919, and 1929 to strengthen the growing work"[133] and those requests were effectively denied. The editor of *Message*, the denomination's magazine for Black readership, had a White man as its editor for thirteen years (1932-1945). Until 1932 Oakwood's top administrator was White.[134] These influential and important leadership positions in the Black work were held by Whites, revealing that the denomination did not trust that Blacks could lead the work, or that they should lead it. Hiring discrimination, however, was not limited to the key leadership positions. Doctors, nurses, and office secretaries were all under-represented on the church payroll. Yet being hired did not guarantee equal treatment. W. H. Green was the first Black man to lead the Negro Department, and in his words,

> it was very uncomfortable from the very first. . . . I could not eat in the General Conference cafeteria with everyone else. Some whites would not even greet you when they saw you in the morning. When they saw you coming, they would look at you, look by you—there would be no greeting at all. This was largely on the part of the womenfolk, but once in a while the men would do it too.[135]

One of the most visible features of racial inequality in the North American church was the segregation of Adventist facilities. Black students were denied

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[133]Dudley, 165.

[134]Warren, 135.

[135]Bull and Lockhart (1989), 201.

entrance to Adventists schools on the basis of their race,[136] and Black patients were denied care at Adventist hospitals.[137] The director of the Negro Department was not admitted to the Review and Herald Publishing House cafeteria on the basis of race. In 1944, a group of Black Adventist laity sent a written document to the General Conference with demands for change. A summary of that eight-page letter is helpful for understanding the discrimination in the church at that time.

> The statement contrasted the integration of colleges and hospitals outside the church to denominational institutions to which Black members contributed tithes and offerings. Three principal demands were made: integration of Adventist institutions, greater Black representation at all levels of all denominational administration, and greater accountability from denominational leadership of Black members' financial contributions to the Adventist Church.[138]

The segregation which began as an expediency had clearly outlived its usefulness by the time that integrated public facilities could be contrasted with segregated Adventist institutions. But this was not the last time a call for racial integration would be heard. In 1950 the president of the world church, W. H. Branson, sent a letter to denominational leadership (including every union president and every local conference president), urging integration. He, too, pointed to the progress of the world passing by the church in this area. "Perhaps no religious group

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[136]Jones, 185-186.

[137]Bull and Lockhart (1989), 198.

[138]Branson, "Adventism's Rainbow Coalition," 77. Regarding financial accountability, before his withdrawal from the denomination John Manns had asked for such accountability at the turn of the century. It was not granted and he was chastised for bringing it up. Dudley, 135.

in the United States or the world, claims so loudly that it is international in its attitudes and services as do the Seventh-day Adventists and yet, in this matter of Negro segregation, we are trailing behind the procession." Twelve years later, at the 1962 General Conference session in San Francisco, it took physical demonstrations, written demands, and front-page news stories for the announcement to come that indeed the church would desegregate.[139]

Why was the church so slow to reform in this area? Why was there such a struggle to practically embrace the philosophy of racial equality held by the founders of the denomination and the pioneers of the Black work itself? "There are those in the SDA church, who, looking back, consider that EGW's 1909 statements were followed to the exclusion of other counsel she gave."[140]

The statements on racial equality published in volume 9 of Ellen White's *Testimonies for the Church* have proven the most troublesome, with lines such as these: "The colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people. The relation of the two races has been a matter hard to deal with, and I fear that it will ever remain a most perplexing problem. So far as possible, everything that would stir up the race prejudice of the white people should be avoided."[141] The context and intention of these words will not be explored in detail here; other

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[139]Branson, "Adventism's Rainbow Coalition," 78-80.

[140]Graham, 251.

[141]Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 214.

scholars have done this.[142] It is clear, however, that her counsel was an accommodation to the racial hatred in the South, meant as a temporary measure "until the Lord shows us a better way."[143]

Regional conferences were voted in the Spring Council of 1944, long after they had been proposed by Kinney (1891?), Sheafe (1905?), and Humphrey (1929).[144] This was not full integration and empowerment, but it did mean much more self-determination for Black Adventists while remaining in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Regional conferences are not segregationist in the sense of the Jim Crow laws of the past era; they are not attempts to keep Whites and Blacks socially separated because of racial superiority-inferiority. The formation of regional conferences as a parallel structure within the church did, however, testify to the failure of North American Adventism to offer full legitimacy to its Black American members.

## Conclusion

It is the thesis of this chapter that the Adventist relationship to the cultural racism of the South had three distinguishable postures: resistance, accommodation, and institutionalization. Surveying the history, those contours do appear. Imperfectly,

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[142]See Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations*; Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White, Co-Founder,* 247-248; Ciro Sepulveda, *Ellen White on the Color Line*. Another helpful volume is *People of Providence: Selected Quotations on Black People from the Writings of Ellen G. White*, ed. Delbert Baker, Susan Baker, and Benjamin Baker (Huntsville, AL: Oakwood University Publishing, 2010).

[143]E. G. White, *Testimonies*, 9:217.

[144]Jones, 188-189.

slowly, experimentally the Adventists' relationship to racism shifted from resistance to accommodation (catalyzed by violence), and then to a *de facto* and *de jure* institutionalization of racism. The lessons offered by this history came at a high price: Let us make the most of them.

# CHAPTER 4

# MISSIOLOGICAL APPLICATION

The Adventist missionary enterprise in the South slowly adapted to the cultural racism as it faced the hostility there. Unfortunately the gospel principle of racial equality was not preserved, and the cultural racism of the South was adopted by the American Adventist church. I have used as a case study the experience of early Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to the American South in order to address a larger missiological issue. How can missionaries relate to oppressive or non-biblical cultural practices in ways to allow a hearing for the gospel, yet without distorting the gospel? How can missionaries adapt to oppressive cultural practices without adopting them?

Two recommendations are proposed in this chapter. First, the adaptation must be accompanied with regular internal communication of right principles. Second, the adaptation must be consciously and regularly re-examined.

## Missiological Assumptions

This study is based on a certain understanding of Christian missions and certain missiological assumptions. Missions is an intentional effort to communicate the gospel and persuade others to receive it and commit to it. Missions is a cross-cultural effort (even when it is not an international effort), and therefore missions necessarily requires some adaptation to the target culture on the part of the

missionary. Furthermore, every culture is corrupt and includes ideas and behaviors that oppress groups of people. The oppression may be based on ethnicity, race, gender, wealth, political or religious affiliation, sexual orientation, ability or disability. These forms of oppression and dehumanization are contrary to the gospel. However, missions may require some adaptation to the social customs that are un-Christian in order to gain a hearing for the gospel or to survive in dangerous situations. Ultimately one objective of missions is to alter the culture by establishing an alternative community.

## Lesson Learned

Race relations in the postbellum American South were characterized by political struggle, a climate of violence, and segregation. This required that the early Adventist missionaries accommodate the cultural racism (primarily in the form of segregation), but the institutionalization of this racism was a failure of the church. This failure is instructive: Unexamined accommodation of oppressive cultural practices can become part of the culture of the new church community, perhaps even unwittingly institutionalizing the oppressive elements that were originally resisted. (This danger may be intensified when the missionaries' culture of origin also participates in a similar type of oppression, because it would be more difficult for the missionaries to identify the evil in the practices of their new culture.)

## Recommendations

These recommendations seek to provide a solution to an external-internal confusion taking place within the faith community in which external adaptation

behaviors confuse the internal understanding of reality. Since the problem is an external-internal one, so are the solutions. This divide between the outward behavior of the faith group and the inward ideology is reflected in the case study presented in chapter 3.

### Regular Internal Communication of Right Principles

Regular internal communication of right principles sets up tension against the practiced accommodation to the culture. In this way constant referral to the biblical norm can act as a reminder that the behavior of accommodation is a concession, a necessary expediency, but is not to be perceived as a reflection of gospel reality. Externally, the new Christian community behaves in an adaptive way, but internally they remind one another of the true gospel teachings.

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the Adventist missionaries in the South regularly communicated the gospel principle of racial equality. Most of the preserved materials are not communication statements made by the missionaries to the converts, but words written or spoken by the missionaries to people of their home culture. It is probably safe to assume, however, that they did not prioritize this task or intentionally address this issue as they formed new Adventist communities in the South.

There is at least one example of this principle being practiced, however, though not by a missionary to the South, but by an important counselor to missionaries in the South. In her speeches, letters, and articles recommending accommodation, Ellen White repeatedly couples her exhortations for cautious adaptation with a message of Christian equality. For instance, in 1903 she addressed

the General Conference attendees and said, "Those who go to the South must be very careful of what they say. Let them not criticize the white people in regard to the way in which the colored people have been treated."[1] Then she immediately reminds the hearers of their responsibility before God to uplift Black people through personal efforts, and she scolds those who judge Blacks as morally depraved.

This same pattern is in her tract (later published in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9), "Proclaiming the Truth Where There Is Race Antagonism." She writes about the difficulties created by racial prejudice and racial hatred motivated by greed, and recommends that in these circumstances segregation ought to be followed and Black Adventists should work as missionaries among other Black people. These are recommendations to accommodate, but in the same tract she identifies prejudice and racial hatred as originated in the evil plans of Satan, and looks forward to when "there will be triumph of humanity over prejudice in seeking the salvation of the souls of human beings. God will control minds. Human hearts will love as Christ loved."[2] Statements like these communicate clearly that ideas of racial inequality are anti-gospel. Other examples could be cited, but the point has been established: Even as she felt compelled to exhort accommodation to wrong principles, Ellen White practiced regular internal communication of right principles.

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[1]E. G. White, "The Southern Work," *General Conference Bulletin* 5, no. 13 (14 April 1903): 203.

[2]E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:209.

Regular, Intentional Re-examination of Accommodation

Although initially Adventists resisted it, once the precedent of segregation had been established, it was much easier to continue segregationist practices without examination. Unfortunately, some of Ellen White's strongest statements (unbalanced by her many affirmations of equality and Christian unity) were used in support of such unexamined policies.[3] Graham notes that "the majority in the SDA church tended to hide behind the EGW statement of 1909, especially as the racial climate in the U.S.A. did not improve and segregationism became the way of life."[4]

This later application of Ellen White's writings is not surprising considering that much greater effort would have been required to continually re-examine the issue of race relations than to settle into the status quo. It does not seem to have been a justifiable course, however, considering her clear statements on the need for future re-examination, saying, "This plan is to be followed until the Lord shows us a better way."[5] In the same discourse she says, "We are not to be in haste to define the exact course to be pursued in the future regarding the relation to be maintained between white and colored people."[6] Again, "We cannot lay down a definite line to be

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[3]Graham, 251. Graham suggests that this may have been due in part to the fact that while *Testimonies* volume 9 received wide distribution, *The Southern Work* (containing a much broader collection of her statements regarding race relations) was published privately by Edson, and for decades was out of print.

[4]Ibid.

[5]E. G. White, *Testimonies,* 9:207.

[6]Ibid., 9:209-210.

followed in dealing with this subject. In different places and under varying circumstances, the subject will need to be handled differently."[7]

It appears that while the subject never fell completely out of view, it clearly was not prioritized. This is probably due in part to the people-blindness of those in power; their whiteness insulated them from the sting of racial inequality. However, at Oakwood—the church's historically Black college—the issue of race relations was at home. Consequently, Oakwood energized much of the progress made by the church in race relations. Oakwood produced many of the denomination's leading Black ministers, medical workers, teachers, and administrators who encouraged change through their personal influence. Additionally, on an institutional level, the history of Oakwood demonstrates that re-examining the cultural adaptation is a valuable contribution in moving beyond an accommodationist practice that has lost its usefulness.

From the school's beginnings race relations was a prominent concern internally and externally. O. R. Staines, a business manager at Oakwood, reported several instances when locals advised the Oakwood staff on appropriate southern race relations, discouraging interracial foot washing[8] and encouraging the White

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[7]Ibid., 9:213.

[8]Sometimes called the Ordinance of Humility, Seventh-day Adventists pair off and wash one another's feet before participating in the Lord's Supper (in imitation of John 13). Interracial foot washing was short-lived once "Ruffin, the colored farm foreman . . . said if some of the white neighbors there knew of it they would mob us," remembers Staines. O. R. Staines, "Memories of Early Days," D-File-3, 1912; quoted in Mervyn A. Warren, *Oakwood! A Vision Splendid: 1896-1996* (Collegedale, TN: College Press, 1996), 31.

manager to let "a colored boy" help him with freight-loading in public.[9] As noted by Oakwood historian Mervyn A. Warren, "Advice about black and white relations on and off campus was never lacking and remained an ever-present matter to consider in determining the *modus operandi* of the school, with operations sometimes adjusting to a *modus vivendi*."[10]

While these pressures encouraged accommodation, the Black-orientation of the school meant that this accommodation would continue to be challenged. As Reynolds describes, "Each change of [Oakwood's] administration re-posed the question of how far the school should go in its departure from racial customs of the South."[11] The strongest challenges to the racist accommodations, however, did not come from Oakwood's administrators, but from its students. In the 1920s students protested the academic situation at the school, likening it to a plantation because of the long work hours and de-emphasized intellectual life. A student strike in 1931 raised the ire of the school leadership and got five students expelled, but the next school year Oakwood's first Black president took office. In the 1960s, undeterred by the denomination's strong apolitical and anti-activism stance, individual students participated in the civil rights movement in Huntsville, effecting change in their local community.[12]

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[9]Warren, 31.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Reynolds, 200.

[12]For an analysis of all three of these challenges see Holly Fisher, "Oakwood College Students' Quest for Social Justice Before and During the Civil Rights Era," *Journal of African American History* 88, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 110-125.

These challenges pushed the school (and thereby the American Adventist Church) to move beyond the decades-old accommodation. The nature of these challenges, however, meant that they came as crises and cultivated conflict. This could have been minimized if the denomination had thoughtfully and intentionally questioned the appropriateness of segregation and White leadership through the years.

**Critical Contextualization**

Paul Hiebert's critical contextualization model[13] provides an established missiological paradigm for orienting the recommendations in this chapter. Hiebert developed the model of critical contextualization as an alternative to under-contextualized colonialism on the one hand and over-contextualized syncretism on the other hand, and proposed this model as a middle way for relating to local cultures. In brief, the four steps in the critical contextualization process are (1) non-judgmentally exegeting the culture to understand the meaning and function of local customs, (2) studying the Bible to understand the transcultural Christian principles relating to the issue of concern, (3) engaging the local people to corporately evaluate their local customs in light of biblical truth to decide how to apply that truth, and (4) establishing new, indigenous customs as a Christian community.

Applied to Adventist missions in the South, critical contextualization would have provided a gospel-oriented way to adapt to racial oppression, but newly constructed indigenous alternatives to the established racial etiquette, segregation,

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[13]A succinct introduction to critical contextualization is Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (July 1987): 104-112.

and social constructs would probably have been too dangerous to be feasible at least through the 1930s. Even if new ways had not been implemented earlier, however, internal communication regarding race relations as in steps one through three would have been revolutionary and may have prevented the oppression later demonstrated within the church. Furthermore, Hiebert argues that "contextualization itself is an ongoing process,"[14] which underscores the need for regular re-examination of the contextualization as the larger culture changes. Ongoing contextualization would have enabled American Adventists to be advancing at least *with* the culture instead of very far behind it.[15]

**Sunday Observance**

The two recommendations for adapting without adopting, which have been set forth in this chapter, may be understood better by examining how early Adventist missionaries in the South related to another countercultural aspect of their religion: Sabbath-keeping. The American South had a strong culture of Christian Sunday observance, and accompanying legislation forbidding work on this day.[16] Seventh-day

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[14]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 110.

[15]Two other principles in Hiebert's missiology relate to the problem of race relations faced by Adventist missionaries. First, Hiebert argues that as part of their discipleship process both the missionary and the convert need to undergo deep identity re-formation in order to see themselves fundamentally and foremost as humans and Christians and to eliminate racism and ethnocentrism (Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009], 192-193). Second, one of the roles of the gospel is to transform culture (Ibid., 31) and accordingly missions has a place in standing against the corporate sin of social systems (idem, "Critical Contextualization," 109).

[16]Linton Weeks, "Blue Laws," *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1313.

Adventists, however, consider Sunday to be a common day and Saturday to be holy. They observe the sacredness of the Sabbath by worship at church and by abstaining from non-essential labor.[17]

Seventh-day Adventist missionaries adapted to Sunday observance without ever adopting it and losing their seventh-day uniqueness. How? Although they held public religious meetings on Sundays, even in Sunday-keeping churches,[18] and also avoided doing work on that day,[19] they privately maintained their own worship gatherings on Saturdays. They slowly and carefully introduced interested people to their belief in seventh-day sacredness (except in those cases in which they were "discovered").[20]

As people were in the process of becoming insiders, they were introduced to the Adventist doctrine of the seventh-day Sabbath even though Saturday observance was countercultural. This is because seventh-day Sabbath-keeping was considered an essential part of what it meant to be a Seventh-day Adventist; it was effectively internalized into all believers. Its primary importance meant that even during times when the missionaries were concealing their observance of Saturday, the sanctity of the seventh-day was regularly communicated among insiders. This communication

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[17]General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 267.

[18]Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, 41.

[19]Ellen White's counsel on this was that new Black believers should not excite the prejudice of non-Adventists by working on Sunday. *The Southern Work*, 73.

[20]Kynett, 317. In describing the first months in Vicksburg, Kynett tells that the missionaries did not present the Sabbath issue but some local people overheard their singing on the boat *Morning Star* one Saturday morning and inquired about their worship.

was especially powerful because it went beyond verbal messages: Every seven days as they gathered together for church Adventist believers were re-affirming their religious convictions and had opportunity to re-examine their accommodations to the local custom of Sunday observance.

Racial integration and Black civil rights were not on the same level of importance as the seventh-day Sabbath. This meant that integration and civil rights could be compromised while Sabbath-keeping could not. Given the highly dangerous situation in the South during the time of the early missionary ministry there, an uncompromising stance on race relations would have probably meant death and certainly meant the end of the missionary work; accommodation, therefore, was necessary. But while integration, civil rights, and other racial issues regarding social systems were not essential to Adventist identity, it remains to be explained why equal respect for the human dignity of all persons was not.

It appears that the missionaries were skilled in navigating the treacheries of resistance and accommodation in at least this one issue that was deemed important enough to be prioritized with regular communication and re-examination, Sabbath-keeping. Early Adventist missionaries could have emphasized racial equality even while it was necessary to concede to the customary behaviors of the South. However, they seem to have largely settled the issue by deciding on racial segregation, skipping over any opportunity for critical contextualization and for the most part bypassing intentional, regular internal communication of right principles and re-examination of accommodations. The result was an over-identification of the American Adventist

church with the unjust social systems of its surroundings, the institutionalization of racism, and a legacy of troubled race relations that reaches to the present time.

## Conclusion

For the missionary, adaptation to the target culture is a primary task. This already complex task is made especially difficult when circumstances demand adaptation to social customs which are contrary to the gospel. Therefore the question must be asked: How can missionaries adapt without adopting? The recommendations of this study are that the adaptation be accompanied with regular internal communication of right principles, and that the adaptation be regularly and intentionally re-examined. The adaptation must be seen always as a concession for the sake of the gospel, but never confused with the gospel itself.

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