

## 60. THE AMERICAN NEGRO WORK

By the close of the fifteenth century a struggle was in progress that has extended over three centuries. The contact of European civilizations with Africa and the consequent partitioning of the great continent, have had a profound effect on the Negro race. The migration of slaves to America, with no consent of their own, introduced problems during colonial times which have not been easy of solution.

For centuries the Negro of Central Africa had been separated by geographical barriers from the rest of the world. The Sahara Desert to the north, the rugged coast with few suitable harbors, and malaria-infested coastal regions, made the country unsuitable for colonization. Thus the natives were prevented from entering into prolonged relation with any life-giving civilization. The lack of a system of writing prevented the diffusion of any discoveries that might tend to enrich the life. The nature of the climate and the soil enabled the people to obtain the necessities of life without the stimulus of exacting labor or study.

Most serious of all handicaps to progress was the almost universal belief in witchcraft. If a man dared to know more than his fellows, to accumulate property, or to prosper above his neighbors, he was in danger of being accused by envious persons of sorcery, and perhaps to pay with his life for the "crime" of improving his condition and that of those around him.

From such a background came the slave chattels of the early American colonists. Whatever characteristic native cultures they had possessed in their environment—and they had not been altogether without such—largely disappeared in their new environment of enforced servitude. Through increase in population and new migrations, the Negro element in America grew, till by the time of the Declaration of Independence, a large part of the Old South was economically dependent upon slave labor. At the last census (1940) about one tenth of the population of the United States was of the Negro race.

It is true that the emancipation during the Civil War swept away the legal status of slavery, but, owing to the trying conditions of the reconstruction period following the war, it left, for the most part, perplexities which time has not yet fully solved. The

Negro people were to a large extent thrown on their own resources with no preparation for freedom. They had been left in inferior economic circumstances, and it was but natural that such conditions should tend to keep the race isolated from general social progress. The institution of slavery had frowned upon education. Ideas and forms in religious worship were based somewhat on the Bible, for that was one book most easily accessible to them. The Negroes in colonial times were not in possession of the tools of learning that would have enabled them to express attitudes and viewpoints in a new America. Their cautious masters restricted them in mind as well as in body.

The Negro has made his foremost contribution in the gift of labor, but his service in the field of invention alone has too often been overlooked. His gifts to American life have been substantial and varied. He has enriched music, both in the spirituals and in other folk songs, which are distinctly American. There have been some gifts in literature and art. Withal he has maintained a spirit of loyalty and patriotism.

The World War brought a tremendous shifting of the Negroes to the Northern States when they left rural living for the great-urban centers, with their better wages and increased social contacts. A kindred problem of economic adjustment must be sympathetically met in the conditions aggravated by continued world conflicts. Both white and colored Americans are today faced with new racial problems. Better understandings and appreciations are developing. There is a general impression that the Negroes are a religious people; yet nearly half the entire number in the country are not identified with any church organization. That in itself presents a challenge to evangelical forces.

*The proclamation of the third angel's message* in so vast a mission field within America presents a task of the first magnitude. Respecting the duty of such endeavor, Ellen White wrote (1907): "Thousands of colored people in the South may now be uplifted, and become human agents to help their own race, if they can receive the help God is calling upon us to give them."<sup>2</sup>

During the seventies the Seventh-day Adventists did their pioneer work among the colored people of the South. The work spread from Kentucky to Tennessee, and soon the first church was organized (1883) at Edgefield Junction, Tennessee. The members were won by a colored believer who accepted the message by reading the *Signs of the Times*. This group of believers raised the money to build their place of worship.

*James Edson White*, son of James and Ellen White, had been impressed with calls for work in the South. In fact, a friend had brought to his attention a testimony relating to this very needy field. He conceived the plan of a "floating mission of the South," built on the plan of a typical river steamer, with a stern paddle. Originally the boat was seventy-two feet over all, with a one-cabin deck. When ready for service, the "Morning Star" was piloted by way of a canal to the Illinois River, thence down the Mississippi to Vicksburg.

Funds for the construction of the steamer were procured largely from the sale of the illustrated children's book, the *Gospel Primer*. A number of young men were connected with the mission adventure, and the boat stopped at the principal river points to enable them to carry on their unique colporteur work. In this manner they reached Vicksburg.

The following year Edson White's partner was called to other work. The sole owner then proceeded to enlarge the steamer to make it more commodious and suitable for mission service. One of the rooms contained two steam power presses, and another the chapel, which was indispensable for their work.

*Within a few years* an organization known as the Southern Missionary Society was perfected by the workers. The value of house-to-house labor, where the worker would go to the homes of the people, holding studies and helping them in ways of living, was early recognized as most important. The work at Vicksburg developed to the extent that a missionary chapel was erected. Plans were arranged also to start the work in Yazoo City farther north in the State. It was in this latter place that the *Gospel Herald*, a monthly periodical, was published for a time. This same paper was printed later at Battle Creek, but was finally transferred to Nashville, Tennessee.

The object of the *Gospel Herald* was threefold: educational, industrial, and evangelical; and it served this balanced purpose very well. Through its pages funds were solicited for several mission chapels in the South.

*Opposition* was stirred up against the message while some of the leading brethren were visiting Edson White and his workers. A mob gathered and came down to the river to dynamite the "Morning Star," but God intervened, and no harm came to the vessel. Mrs. White herself had written to her son: "If you knew

how many times the Lord had interposed to save your life, you would never be discouraged again.”<sup>1</sup>

Climatic conditions had been very trying for the workers from the North, and when they had succeeded in establishing the work in a number of Southern cities, they left it in charge of colored preachers and instructors. The activities of the Southern Missionary Society were moved to Nashville, Tennessee (1900). Within a short time the society ceased functioning, for the local conferences were now in a position to assume added responsibilities in caring for the needs of the Negro work. Nashville is the present headquarters of the publishing work in the South.

Half a century has passed since Seventh-day Adventists began advanced education work for the Negroes in the South. The site chosen was near Huntsville, Alabama. From a very humble beginning the Oakwood Junior College keeps adding to its campus and equipment. From its doors have gone forth a large number who have entered ministerial and other lines of work. Oakwood is dedicated to the training of youth for the duties of citizenship and for the preaching of the third angel's message. It was originally established as an industrial school, and throughout its history has endeavored to maintain that early viewpoint, keeping before the students the education of the hand, heart, and head.

One of the most inspiring gatherings ever held for colored youth convened (1934) on the campus of Oakwood Junior College. Over a thousand, from widely scattered areas, attended this helpful Youth's Congress. Academies and intermediate schools, in addition to many church schools, are training colored youth for their part in living and proclaiming the truths of Seventh-day Adventists.

During the session of the General Conference of 1901, Ellen White spoke particularly of the work in the Southern States: "We need schools in the South. They must be established away from the city, in the country. There must be industrial and educational schools where the colored people can teach colored people, and schools where the white people can teach the white people."—*General Conference Bulletin, April 25, 1901, 483*. Oakwood has set a good example, but there must be a greatly expanded work.

As late as 1894 there were only about fifty colored Seventh-day Adventist believers in the United States. During the next fifteen years, as a result of the earnest efforts of the Southern Missionary Society and the Southern Union Conference, there was an

encouraging increase, but the number of adherents was still below a thousand. As the great task of getting the message before the colored people was carefully considered by church leaders, it was the general opinion that it ought to become a part of the regular organized program of the General Conference. Accordingly, at the session held in 1909, the work for the Negroes in North America was organized into a department.

This was the beginning of a strong, systematic effort on behalf of the Negro race. Tent efforts were held in nearly every State in which there were large numbers of Negroes. A fund was raised for the better equipment of the Oakwood College. Bible workers and ministers were trained quickly, and after but four years the secretary was able to report a membership more than double what it was when the department was organized. (*General Conference Bulletin*, 1913, 70.) Corresponding gains have been reported since that time.

Colporteur work has been a most valuable means of promoting the message among the Negroes. Many thousands of both large and small books as well as magazines are being sold by the faithful messengers. The *Message Magazine* has been instrumental in reaching out in numerous ways to introduce the prophetic truths of this time. This periodical is well illustrated and attractively written, and will have much to do with increasing the influence of the church. Special numbers of the *Message Magazine* have appeared for the promotion of the ingathering for missions.

*A growing evangelism* is being carried on in the great cities. Ministerial institutes are conducted to study ways and means of reaching the masses of colored people with the gospel. The task ahead is stupendous. There is wise counsel in the words of Ellen White: "Let us follow the course of wisdom. Let us do . . . nothing that will hinder the proclamation of the gospel message."<sup>2</sup>

#### REFERENCES.

1. M. E. Andross, *Story of the Advent Message*, 180.
2. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, IX, 208, 226.

## 61. THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MINISTRY

*A twofold work.* The gospel ministry has a twofold objective. Its first purpose is to respond to the gospel commission: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. 28:18-20. This work is commonly known as evangelism. It preaches the gospel to the unsaved, and persuades them to prepare for the coming of Jesus.

The second purpose of the gospel ministry is to "feed the flock of God." 1 Peter 5:2. When men and women accept the gospel and join the church, they need instruction in spiritual things, guidance in practical Christian living, and direction in Christian work. To provide this is part of the responsibility of the ministry.

Most ministers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church carry out both objectives in their ministry—they seek the lost, and they feed those who are in the fold. Some ministers are especially gifted as evangelists, and spend the greater part of their time in winning new converts. Others, who are especially gifted as pastors, teachers, or executives, devote the greater part of their time to strengthening the church. Paul wrote, "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers." Eph. 4:11. God has ordained that the different gifts of differing human beings can all be used "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Eph. 4:12.

*Evangelism* has always been an outstanding feature of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the early days of the cause, it was comparatively simple. A large proportion of the people of that day believed in the Bible and in Jesus; and the Seventh-day Adventist preacher merely presented the second advent, the true Sabbath, the state of the dead, and a few other kindred truths. Those who saw that these doctrines were Biblical, simply gave them their rightful place together with the fundamental truths they already held, and became Seventh-day Adventists.