

THE CHURCH AND RACE RELATIONS—Part 2

Common Myths Defending Separate Black & White Conferences in North America

[Article Excerpted from Author's *Must We Be Silent?*]

By

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, PhD

Director, Public Campus Ministries, Michigan Conference

Introduction

In part 1, we looked at some arguments from history often employed to justify the embarrassing situation of currently operating racially separate church structures in the United States. In this second part, we shall take a closer look at two other myths—namely the appeal to the writings of Ellen G. White and the claim to preserve racial harmony. As in the previous section, we shall first state the argument of the proponents and then respond to it.

“Ellen G. White Called for Racially Separate Congregations”

Another argument often employed in defense of the current Black and White conference system is that in 1895 and 1896, Ellen G. White called for the separation of the two races as the most practical way to advance the work among the respective groups of people. Advocates—both Black and White—of the current status quo argue that racially separated churches necessarily require racially separated conferences.

□ **Statements Often Misquoted.** Those who hold the above view often misquote and misinterpret the following statements from Testimonies, volume 9, and The Southern Work:

“In regard to white and colored people worshiping in the same building, this cannot be followed as a general custom with profit to either party--especially in the South. The best thing will be to provide the colored people who accept the truth, with places of worship of their own, in which they can carry on their services by themselves” (*Testimonies for the Church*, 9:206).

“Let colored workers labor for their own people, assisted by white workers as occasion demands. They will often need counsel and advice. Let the colored believers have their place of worship and the white believers their place of worship. Let each company be zealous to do genuine missionary work for its own people and for the colored people wherever and whenever they can” (*ibid.*, 210).

“But for several reasons white men must be chosen as leaders. . . . The mingling of whites and blacks in social equality was by no means to be encouraged (*ibid.*, 202, 206).

In addition to the above 1895 statements from Testimonies, vol. 9, the following 1896 counsel recorded in The Southern Work is also often quoted:

“Common association with the blacks is not a wise course to pursue. To lodge with them in their homes may stir up feelings in the minds of the whites which will imperil the lives of the workers. . . . The breaking down of distinctions between the white and the colored races unfits the blacks to work for their own class, and exerts a wrong influence upon the whites (*The Southern Work*, 95, 96).

The above justification for racially separate churches (and hence conferences) takes the statements of Mrs. White out of context. Advocates fail to recognize that the above counsels were made at a very difficult time in American history of race relations, a period in which White Adventists “who attempted to work for the black race had to suffer persecution, and many were martyrs to the cause” (ibid., 43). Those familiar with the writings of Mrs. White know that given her biblical understanding of the inherent worth of all races, she would not yield to racism in the matter of separate worship services.

Before looking at the often-quoted 1895 statement, let me call attention to one pertinent statement by Mrs. White to refute the assertion that she believed in racially segregated congregations. In 1891, she wrote:

“You have no license from God to exclude the colored people from your places of worship. Treat them as Christ's property, which they are, just as much as yourselves. They should hold membership in the church with the white brethren. Every effort should be made to wipe out the terrible wrong which has been done them” (*The Southern Work*, 15).

Since in 1891 Mrs. White discouraged any attempts at excluding Blacks from worshipping with Whites, why would she later (1895 and 1896) argue for separate work for Blacks and Whites? A brief historical context will show that she was addressing a specific situation in which the life and work of missionaries to the South were being threatened. The oft-misquoted statements were ad hoc and not a timeless policy. They were judicious counsels on how the church at that time was to handle the life threatening racial condition, not a mandate for racially separate congregations or conferences.

A Historical Background. As we pointed out earlier, during its beginnings the SDA church did not seriously have to deal with the problem of racial prejudice and segregation. However, when Adventist missionaries went to the South in the 1890s, they discovered a social system based on the separation of the races. This system was also in place in many of the Christian denominations, from which the Adventist missionaries obtained a bulk of their new members. [15]

Our Adventist missionaries to the South were also caught in the middle of a racial war raging in the country. Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation proclamation on September 22, 1862, freeing all people held as slaves in areas of the Confederacy (the South), effective January 1, 1863. Three legal enactments gave friends of the abolition movement a further cause to celebrate: (1) the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (1865) ended slavery and involuntary servitude; (2) the Fourteenth (1868) recognized the rights of Negroes to citizenship;

and (3) the Fifteenth (1870) gave Negroes the right to vote.

But in the South, there was a counter-reaction to the freedom of Blacks. The Ku Klux Klan emerged and inspired violent raids and acts of terrorism against Blacks and White supporters and sympathizers. There were widespread civil disorders as new laws were enacted that further restricted freedmen. Lynching of Black people increased at an alarming rate. The racial segregation flourished greatly with the promulgation of Jim Crow laws. These laws first banned interracial marriages (1875). They were followed by the construction of segregated schools (in 1885) and by the 1890's, new Jim Crow laws spread rapidly to trains, streetcars, employment, and hospitals. [16]

So, on one hand, we had pro-slavery segregation laws and violence in the South. On the other hand, we had anti-slavery agitations against them by people who believed in the "social equality" of Blacks and Whites. This volatile racial climate created unfavorable conditions to advance the work among Blacks. Though to a lesser extent than in the South, this racial war was also going on in the North. [17]

Adventist missionaries in the South were most vulnerable to attacks from slaveholders in the South. This is because "the entire South's economy strongly depended on the barbaric system of bondage, delicately balanced as it was—always tenuous, ever subject to insurrection by its victims. Slaveholders seemed little disposed to risk indoctrination of their work force by outsiders, especially by invaders from the North who might question the propriety of one man's holding another in a lifetime of unrecompensed servitude. Hard work for slaves was looked upon as a prime necessity, and anyone who advocated a rest day for them, a Sabbath as set forth in the Ten Commandments, or any free time other than Sunday, would do so at the peril of his life." [18]

Perhaps we can use two incidents that occurred in the late 1800s to illustrate what Ellen White was trying to avoid four years earlier in Testimonies volume nine. On December 18, 1898, a week before Christmas, Edson White (the son of Mrs. White and the builder of The Morning Star steamboat) received a letter from J. A. Crisler, a friendly physician in Yazoo City, Mississippi. At that time Edson was at Vicksburg, Mississippi, while F. R. Rogers, his assistant in the mission work in the South, was operating the school for Blacks in Yazoo City, Mississippi. The physician's letter alerted Edson of a plot to attack the Whites who were helping the Blacks. Dr. Crisler's letter said:

Mr. Rogers was ordered to leave here by some kind of a committee, who claim to have been informed by some colored people, that the Negroes were going to rise and slaughter the whites on Christmas eve, or shortly after. These informers (colored) state that these uprising Negroes are being wrought up by white people, and they (the committee), have gone no further into the investigation, but take these informers' words as being correct, and have ordered all whites who are in any way connected with the colored race here to leave. . . . They, of course, do not represent the good people of this section. . . . Please do not connect our name in this matter to anyone as it would destroy our usefulness to you in helping adjust this great and uncalled-for calamity. I will quietly do whatever I can to peaceably settle things. [19]

The next morning, Edson received another letter. This time from F. R. Rogers himself, whose work among the Blacks had earned him a reputation as a “Nigger-lover.” [20] The letter of Rogers read:

Satan is loosed here. We are in trouble. Today at 1:30 p.m. two men rode up to the chapel where we are holding school and called me out and asked my name and told me ‘This business must stop. We went to the river last night to sink the boat *Morning Star*, but could not find it. It will never land here again, SO BEWARE.’ . . . Well, Bro. White, we are resting in the Lord and have left the case to Him. However, I applied to the Mayor for advice as to leaving the organ and other things in the chapel, as burning was threatened. The Mayor said all was safe and he would see me protected. [21]

Commenting on the above two events Edson White wrote: “On receiving these communications we all felt that great caution and much heavenly wisdom was required to enable us to take the proper course in this matter. The testimonies [counsels from the Mrs. White] instruct us that great caution must be exercised so that these evilly disposed persons shall not be aroused and the work closed up as a result.”[22]

James Edson White understood that their lives and their work were in danger because of the racial prejudice and animosity in the South. Five months later, in May of 1899, new trouble arose, this time from a white mob. On May 25, 1899, Edson wrote a letter to his mother, reporting the incident that had taken place:

Two weeks ago tonight, a mob of about 25 white men came to our church at Calmer at about midnight. They brought out brother Stevenson, our worker, and then looted the church, burning books, maps, charts, etc. They hunted for brother Casey, our leading colored brother of that place, but he had escaped in time so they did not reach him. They then went to the house of brother Alvin, called him out, and whipped him with a cowhide. I think they would have killed him if it had not been for a friendly white man who ordered them to stop whipping after they had struck a few blows. They did not pay any attention to him at first, but he drew his revolver and said that the next man who struck a blow would hear from him, and then they stopped. During this time they shot at brother Alvin’s wife and struck her in the leg, but did not hurt her seriously. They took brother Stevenson to the nearest railway station, put him on the cars and sent him out of the country. They posted a notice on our church, forbidding me to return, and forbidding the steamer, *The Morning Star*, to land between Yazoo City and Vicksburg. The whole difficulty arose from our efforts to aid the colored people. We had given them clothing where in need, and food to those who were hungry and taught them some better ideas about farming, introducing different seeds such as peanuts, beans, etc. that bring a high price, . . . and these the whites would not stand.[23]

Edson’s May 25, 1899 letter from Mississippi had a profound impact on his mother. A few days after receiving the letter she wrote on June 5, 1899 to A.F. Ballenger (a one-time Adventist minister and secretary of the National Religious Liberty Association) on the subject of race. “It is the prejudice of the white against the black race that makes this field hard, very hard. The

whites who have oppressed the colored people still have the same spirit. They did not lose it, although they were conquered in war. They are determined to make it appear that the blacks were better off in slavery than since they were set free. Any provocation from the blacks is met with the greatest cruelty. The field is one that needs to be worked with the greatest discretion." Mrs. White continued:

The white people will stir up the blacks by telling them all kinds of stories; and the blacks, who can lie even when it is for their interest to speak the truth, will stir up the whites with falsehoods, and the whites who want an occasion will seize upon any pretext for taking revenge, even upon those of their own color who are presenting the truth. This is the danger. *As far as possible, everything that will stir up the race prejudice of the white people should be avoided. There is danger of closing the door so that our white laborers will not be able to work in some places in the South* " (*The Southern Work*, 83, 84; emphasis mine).

The words in italics are identical to those quoted in Testimonies volume 9, p. 214, suggesting that it is this kind of situation Mrs. White was trying to avoid when she wrote that there should be separate worship services and separate lines of labor for blacks and whites, and that blacks should not agitate for "social equality." [24] It is the same reason that lies behind her strong counsel against inter-racial marriage. [25]

When she urged caution in the South, saying that future missionary labor among Blacks "would have to be carried on along lines different from those followed *in some sections* of the country *in former times*" (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 206), she herself indicated that her counsel must take *place* and *time* in consideration. It is not a universal or timeless admonition. [26]

Therefore, it is incorrect to argue, as some do, that "Mrs. White bowed to the white racism she had earlier tried to resist" or that her counsels inadvertently "helped those within the movement who wanted to keep blacks 'in their place' and who wanted to justify discrimination against them." [27] It is more accurate to say that her calls for "separate churches [were] a concession to necessity." [28]

In fact, those two statements often cited as evidence that today we need racially separate congregations and ministries are contained in a full section within *Testimonies for the Church* ("Among the Colored People," pages 199-226). Ellen White's whole point in that section was that if the customs and prejudices existing in certain areas could not be ignored, those laboring there must exercise great prudence. Failure to do so could jeopardize the work and even the laborers

and those being labored for.

The reason why Mrs. White called for the change of method was the “strengthening opposition” from outside the church, the “danger of closing the door” to the work (*Testimonies*, 9:214); “we shall find our way blocked completely” (ibid.); “do nothing that will unnecessarily arouse opposition” (ibid., 208). She counseled that because of the changed situation, Blacks should have their own places of worship as “the course of wisdom,” “where demanded by custom or where greater efficiency is to be gained” (ibid.). A careful reader will also observe that the course that she outlined was one that was to be followed to the best advantage “*until the Lord shows us a better way*” (ibid., 207).

Ellen White Statements in their Full Context. It is, therefore, incorrect to argue for the continued existence of separate Black and White congregations or conferences on the basis of statements from *Testimonies* volume nine, statements which were clearly addressing a unique problem threatening the life and work of our missionaries in the South. Bearing in mind the historical and contextual background presented above, we may now read the *Testimonies*, vol. 9, quotations in their full context:

In regard to white and colored people worshiping in the same building, *this cannot be followed as a general custom* with profit to either party--*especially in the South*

. The best thing will be to provide the colored people who accept the truth, with places of worship of their own, in which they can carry on their services by themselves.

This is particularly necessary in the South

in order that the work for the white people may be carried on without serious hindrance. Let the colored believers be provided with neat, tasteful houses of worship. Let them be shown that *this is done not to exclude them from worshiping with white people*

, because they are black, but in order that the progress of the truth may be advanced. Let them understand that this plan is to be followed *until the Lord shows us a better way.*

The colored members of ability and experience should be encouraged to lead the services of their own people; and their voices are to be heard in the representative assemblies. The colored ministers should make every effort possible to help their own people to understand the truth for this time. As time advances, and race prejudices increase, it will become almost impossible, in many places, for white workers to labor for the colored people. Sometimes the white people who are not in sympathy with our work will unite with colored people to oppose it, claiming that our teaching is an effort to break up churches and bring in trouble over the Sabbath question. White ministers and colored ministers will make false statements, arousing in the minds of the people such a feeling of antagonism that they will be ready to destroy and to kill. The powers of hell are working with all their ingenuity to prevent the proclamation of the last message of mercy among the colored people. Satan is working to make it most difficult for the gospel minister and

teacher to ignore the prejudice that exists between the white and the colored people (*Testimonies for the Church*, 9:206-208; emphasis mine).

While men are trying to settle the question of the color line, time rolls on, and souls go down into the grave, unwarned and unsaved. Let this condition of things continue no longer. Let men and women go to work, and let them labor as the Spirit of God shall impress their minds. We need the talent of the colored believers, every jot of it, in this work. Let colored workers labor for their own people, assisted by white workers as occasion demands. They will often need counsel and advice. Let the colored believers have their place of worship and the white believers their place of worship. Let each company be zealous to do genuine missionary work for its own people and for the colored people wherever and whenever they can. . . . *But we must not unnecessarily arouse prejudice that would close the way against the proclamation of the third angel's message to the white people* (ibid., 210; emphasis mine).

The time has not come for us to work as if there were no prejudice. Christ said: 'Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.' Matthew 10:16. If you see that by doing certain things which you have a perfect right to do, you hinder the advancement of God's work, refrain from doing those things. Do nothing that will close the minds of others against the truth. There is a world to save, and we shall gain nothing by cutting loose from those we are trying to help. All things may be lawful, but all things are not expedient.

The wise course is the best. As laborers together with God, we are to work in the way that will enable us to accomplish the most for Him. Let none go to extremes. We need wisdom from above; for we have a difficult problem to solve. If rash moves are made now, great mischief will be done. The matter is to be presented in such a way that the truly converted colored people will cling to the truth for Christ's sake, refusing to renounce one principle of sound Bible doctrine because they may think that the very best course is not being pursued toward the Negro race.

We must sit as learners at the feet of Christ, that He may teach us the will of God and that we may know how to work for the white people and the colored people in the Southern field. We are to do as the Spirit of the Lord shall dictate, and agitate the subject of the color line as little as possible. We must use every energy to present the closing gospel message to all classes in the South. As we are led and controlled by the Spirit of God we shall find that this question will adjust itself in the minds of our people" (ibid., 215; emphasis mine).

In giving the above counsels, Mrs. White made it clear that her counsel "cannot be followed as a general custom." To suggest that she encouraged separate churches as a rule is to grossly misunderstand her writings. She also circumscribed the context of her counsels—namely the volatile racial situation in the United States, especially in the South. Her concern was "in order that the work for the White people may be carried on without serious hindrance." In other words, her concern was for the advancement of the work, not for the color of the skin.

□ **Additional Evidence.** Another indication that the above statements cannot be used as a justification for racially exclusive churches and conferences can be found in Edson White's

understanding of his mother's counsel. On October 10, 1899, four months after Edson had sent his letter to his mother, he wrote to a woman in Washington, D.C., who was planning to work for Blacks over there. In this letter, Edson, interpreted the *Testimonies* as he understood them to apply to integrating schools:

Now in regard to the testimonies respecting colored schools unmixed with whites. *I understand that this refers to the South only where mixed schools will not be tolerated. God forbid that we should build up color lines where they do not now exist.*

You say, 'I have been asked by several whether that testimony [from Mrs. White] would apply here and whether they should separate them.' I would not undertake anything of the kind myself.

I should feel that I would sin in so doing.

I think there is a rule that we may safely follow in this color line business. *We must regard it only as it affects the outside element in such a way as to close up our work and injure its usefulness.* If you disregard [White probably meant to use "regard"] the sons and daughters of Christ you cannot make divisions where God regards us all blood relation to the Lord, God Almighty and brethren and sisters of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For us to build up anything of the kind will be as bad as the 'Middle Wall of Partition' built up by the ancient Jews.

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 where a different course would close the field to our work and make it difficult and impossible to reach the people at all. I do not think I have any further advice to give upon this point. [29]

Finally, Mrs. White herself explains to us how we should understand her counsels in *Testimonies*

volume nine. Speaking to Black students at Oakwood College, Hunstville, Alabama, on June 21, 1904, she said:

We need, O so much, colored workers to labor for their own people, in places where it would not be safe for white people to labor. White workers can labor in places where the prejudice is not so strong. This is why we have established our printing office in Nashville. . . . You can labor where we can not, in places where the existing prejudice forbids us to labor. Christ left Jerusalem in order to save His life. It is our duty to take care of our lives for Christ's sake. We are not to place ourselves, unbidden, in danger, because He wants us to live to teach and help others. God wants the colored students before me today to be His helping hand in reaching souls in many places where white workers cannot labor (*Manuscript* 60, 1904 ["The Work of the Huntsville School"]).

It must be pointed out that Oakwood College (until 1943 known as Oakwood Industrial School) was established in 1896 in response to the appeals of Ellen G. White to develop a training center in the South for Black leaders.

The inescapable conclusion from our investigation of the context of Mrs. White's statement in *Testimonies* volume nine is that no one can legitimately use her words as a justification for today's separate Black and White churches (and hence conferences) in the United States. Ellen White was addressing a specific situation during which the lives and work of Adventist missionaries were being threatened by strong racial prejudice and hatred. It is true that racism still exists in America. But the situation today is far more different from what it used to be in Ellen White's day. Even in those difficult days, she said her counsel was valid "until the Lord shows us a better way."

"Racially Separate Conferences Preserve Fellowship, Unity, and Harmony"

One popular myth regarding the creation and existence of the present racial structures in the North American church is that the path of separate Black and White conferences is "a road to fellowship," the only realistic hope of "preserving unity in the Seventh-day Adventist church," and the divine way for the different races "to get on together." [30] Can this argument be sustained today?

It is paradoxical to explain how "separate" conferences preserve "fellowship," "unity" and "getting on together." In the context of our discussion, how is it possible for the word "separate" (which means being apart, at a distance, cleavage, division) lead to "fellowship" "unity" and "getting together"—expressions that imply "brotherhood," "accord," "company," "oneness," "solidarity," etc.?

More importantly, given our discussion in the previous chapter about Christ's prayer for unity, and Ellen White's desire for the Lord to show us "a better way," can we still hold on to the racially segregated structures of church governance as though they are the ideal means to redeem us from our racial quagmire?

□ **An Equivocal Answer.** Seventh-day Adventists don't have to second-guess an answer. Almost a century ago, Ellen White was presented with a similar question. Her unequivocal answer shows that racially separate organizations do not foster unity, but rather discord. She gave her answer when she was asked about the desirability of creating separate German and Scandinavian conferences in America. It is significant that her response is found in a chapter titled "The Spirit of Unity." On September 1, 1905, she wrote from Loma Linda, California:

Dear Brethren: Some of our ministers have written to me, asking if the work among the Germans and Scandinavians should not be carried forward under separate organizations. This matter has been presented to me several times. When I was in College View, the Lord gave me a straight testimony to bear, and since that time the matter has been presented to me again. . . .

According to the light given me of God, *separate organizations, instead of bringing about unity, will create discord. If our brethren will seek the Lord together in humility of mind, those who now think it necessary to organize separate German and Scandinavian conferences will see that the*

Lord desires them to work together as brethren

“Were those who seek to disintegrate the work of God, to carry out their purpose, some would magnify themselves to do a work that should not be done. *Such an arrangement would greatly retard the cause of God.*”

If we are to carry on the work most successfully, the talents to be found among the English and Americans should be united with the talents of those of every other nationality. And each nationality should labor earnestly for every other nationality. There is but one Lord, one faith.

Our effort should be to answer Christ's prayer for His disciples, that they should be one” (Testimonies for the Church, 1:195-196; emphasis mine).

Now, if the path of separate conferences is “a road to fellowship,” the only realistic hope of “preserving unity in the Seventh-day Adventist church,” and the divine way for the different races “to get on together,” and if a race is any group of people distinguishable by easily noticed features (such as color of the skin, eye, hair, or shape of the face or body, or age, gender, etc.), then would we be justified in calling for Hispanic conferences? Korean conferences? African conferences? Haitian conferences? Polish conferences? If Black and White conferences are justifiable, why is it not legitimate to have women’s conferences? youth and teenage conferences? etc.

And why stop at racially exclusive conferences? Why not demand separate Unions?—and even, Divisions and General Conference (i.e., an organization separate from the SDA)?

I may be exaggerating in the above rhetorical questions. But my point is to highlight the utterly unconvincing nature of arguments that racially separate conferences preserve fellowship, unity, and togetherness in the North American church.

Visible Unity, A Divine Mandate. No, the Bible calls for visible unity. “A unity that will convince the world must be visible and readily evident. It cannot be limited to doctrinal unity or some mystical ‘invisible’ unity. The world must see a unity in practice that demonstrates that the gospel of Christ is strong enough to destroy the sectarianism, selfishness, and ethnocentrism that is natural to human nature.”[31]

“Where this oneness exists,” says Ellen White, “it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity” (The Desire of Ages, 678). In other words, the absence of a visible unity in the church is evidence that we are not converted. But where there is true conversion, we are able to transcend the artificial barriers sin has erected. Conversion makes us “one in Christ”—regardless of our color, nationality, or station in life. Writes Mrs. White:

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. Whoever of the human family give themselves to Christ, whoever hear the truth and obey it, become children of one family. The ignorant and the wise, the rich and the poor, the heathen and the slave, white or black--Jesus paid the purchase money for their souls. If they believe on Him, His cleansing blood is applied to them. 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. The character makes the man.

If a red man, a Chinaman, or an African gives his heart to God, in obedience and faith, Jesus loves him none the less for his color. He calls him his well-beloved brother. The day is coming when the kings and the lordly men of the earth would be glad to exchange places with the humblest African who has laid hold on the hope of the gospel. To all who are overcomers through the blood of the Lamb, the invitation will be given, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Arranged on the right and left of the throne of God are the long columns of the heavenly host, who touch the golden harps, and the songs of welcome and of praise to God and the Lamb ring through the heavenly courts. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (*The Southern Work*, 12-13).

Endnotes

[15] It seems that a majority of Christians in the South simply acquiesced to the status quo in American society. Prior to the slave Emancipation and Civil-War days in America, there were no separate Black churches or denominations as we know them today. In the South, Black slave church members belonged to their masters' congregations. Though the churches were interracial, at meetings and church gatherings the Negroes were separated—often relegated to the back seats. For a brief discussion of the reaction of the early SDA missionaries to the South, see *SDA Encyclopedia*, 1192-1193.

[16] It is a matter of record in American history that "in the 1890's, in a period of economic and political unrest, segregation increased sharply, and many legal restrictions date from that time." See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, revised edition (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976), 1193.

[17] A case in point was the situation in the Washington, DC., area churches, where some were unwisely urging the association of Blacks and White on the grounds that they were equal in society. Ellen White acknowledged that, indeed, Blacks and Whites were equal: "Both white and colored people have the same Creator, and are saved by the redeeming grace of the same Saviour. Christ gave His life for all. He says to all, 'Ye are bought with a price.' God has marked out no color line, and men should move very guardedly, lest we offend God. The Lord has not made two heavens, one for white people and one for colored people. There is but one heaven for the saved." (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, 33). But while acknowledging the equality of Blacks and Whites in society, Ellen G. White warned that the unwise agitations and hasty actions by some churches could flare up the already volatile racial feelings in society and, consequently, thereby jeopardize the missionary work among both races. It was for this reason that she encouraged separate lines of work for Blacks and Whites. Mrs. White wrote: "There is a work to be done for both the white and the colored people in Washington, and in the neighboring States. Many obstacles will arise to retard this work. Inconsiderate or premature movements would bring no real satisfaction, and would make it far more difficult to carry forward

any line of work for the colored people. The work in behalf of this people has been sadly neglected, and the powers of darkness are prepared to work with intensity of effort against those who take up this work. From the light given me, I know that every injudicious movement made in or about Washington, or in other parts of the Southern field, to encourage the sentiment that the white and the colored people are to associate together in social equality, will mean more in retarding our work than any human mind can comprehend." She continued: "There is too much at stake for human judgment to be followed in this matter. If the Conference should say that no difference is to be recognized and no separation is to be made in church relationship between the white people and the colored people, our work with both races would be greatly hindered. If it should be recommended and generally practiced in all our Washington churches, that white and black believers assemble in the same house of worship, and be seated promiscuously in the building, many evils would be the result. Many would say that this should not be, and must not be" (ibid., 32). Ellen White did not consider laboring along separate racial lines as jeopardizing her strong stand against racism. "Those white people who appreciate the ministry of Christ in their behalf, cannot cherish prejudice against their colored brethren" (ibid., 33).

[18] Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists With an African Heritage* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1984), 42.

[19] J. A. Crisler, Letter to James Edson White, quoted in letter from James Edson White to "Friend and Fellow-Worker," December 18, 1898.

[20] Some twelve years after the incidents in the late 1890s, A. W. Spalding visited Yazoo City to interview the workers there for his book. It was reported that Rogers was often "accompanied by a string of boys holding his coat-tails, chorusing, "Nigger-lover! Nigger-lover." Spalding also mentioned how on one occasion, Rogers was knocked down, pelted with brickbats, had his hat shot off, and was chased to his home by a bloodthirsty mob. See Arthur W. Spalding, Letter to William C. White, September 26, 1912; cf. his letter to W. C. White, October 6, 1912.

[21] F. R. Rogers to James Edson White, quoted in a letter from James Edson White "Friend and Fellow-Worker," December 18, 1898.

[22] Ibid. In his reply to Rogers the same day, Edson White wrote: "Of course we are willing to trust all these matters to the Lord, and yet He requires us to be very cautious; and the Testimonies [counsels from Mrs. White] point out to us the necessity of such extreme care that prejudice shall not be aroused among this class of people down here, for, if it is, it will shut us off from the work entirely." J. E. White, Letter to F. R. Rogers, December 1898.

[23] See also Ron Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970), 56-57; idem, *Mission to Black America* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1971), 130-131; cf. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow*, 102-104; Charles E. Dudley, Sr.,

"Thou Who Hath Brought Us . . ."
(Brighton, NY: Teach Services Inc., 1997), 179.

[24] Wrote Mrs. White: "We are to avoid entering into contention over the problem of the color line. If this question is much agitated, difficulties will arise that will consume much precious time to adjust. We cannot lay down a definite line to be followed in dealing with this subject. In different places and under varying circumstances, the subject will need to be handled differently. In the South, where race prejudice is so strong, we could do nothing in presenting the truth were we to deal with the color line question as we can deal with it in some places in the North. The white workers in the South will have to move in a way that will enable them to gain access to the white people. . . . Let colored laborers do what they can to keep abreast, working earnestly for their own people. I thank God that among the colored believers there are men of talent who can work efficiently for their own people, presenting the truth in clear lines. There are many colored people of precious talent who will be converted to the truth if our colored ministers are wise in devising ways of training teachers for the schools and other laborers for the field. *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. There is danger of closing the door so that our white laborers will not be able to work in some places in the South" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 9:213-214).

[25] In 1896, Mrs. White wrote: "There is an objection to the marriage of the white race with the black. All should consider that they have no right to entail upon their offspring that which will place them at a disadvantage; they have no right to give them as a birthright a condition which would subject them to a life of humiliation. The children of these mixed marriages have a feeling of bitterness toward the parents who have given them this lifelong inheritance. For this reason, if there were no other, there should be no intermarriage between the white and the colored races" (*Selected Messages*, 2:343-344; cf. 481-488). Again she wrote in 1912: "In reply to inquiries regarding the advisability of intermarriage between Christian young people of the white and black races, I will say that in my earlier experience this question was brought before me, and the light given me of the Lord was that this step should not be taken; *for it is sure to create controversy and confusion*. I have always had the same counsel to give. No encouragement to marriages of this character should be given among our people. Let the colored brother enter into marriage with a colored sister who is worthy, one who loves God, and keeps His commandments. Let the white sister who contemplates uniting in marriage with the colored brother refuse to take this step, for the Lord is not leading in this direction. *Time is too precious to be lost in controversy that will arise over this matter. Let no questions of this kind be permitted to call our ministers from their work. The taking of such a step will create confusion and hindrance. It will not be for the advancement of the work or for the glory of God*" (Letter 36, 1912; emphasis mine).

[26] For an insightful discussion of the relationship between the incidents in Yazoo City, Edson's letter to Mrs. White, Sis. White's letter to Ballenger, and her statement in *Testimonies*

for the Church

, volume nine, see Ronald Graybill's
E. G. White and Church Race Relations
, 57-68.

[27] Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking A Sanctuary*, 195-196, 201. They are, however, correct in suggesting that “what began as an evangelistic expedient eventually became the denomination’s preferred method of dealing with the races, especially as the black membership grew” (ibid., 197).

[28] *SDA Encyclopedia*, 1193.

[29] J. E. White, Letter to M. A. Cornwell, October 10, 1899; emphasis mine. It is true that Edson White cannot be regarded as an inspired interpreter of his mother’s counsels any more than anyone else. But as Graybill correctly noted, Edson “worked more closely with her on this subject of race relations than any other person and was certainly closer to the situation than anyone else. It is significant, then, to notice that he interprets her testimonies concerning separate schools as given in order that the work for Negroes might not be closed by white prejudice, and says that the prejudice is only to be regarded when a different course would make it difficult and impossible to reach the people at all” (Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations*, 65-66).

[30] A chapter describing the creation of Black (Regional) conferences is titled: “Separate Conferences: A Road to Fellowship” (see Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists with An African Heritage* [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1984], 292. Another work mentions that the reason why some influential Blacks urged the then GC president [J. L. McElhany] to organize “separate conferences for Black members [was] in the hope of preserving unity in the Seventh day Adventist church” (see W. W. Fordham, *Righteous Rebel: The Unforgettable Legacy of a Fearless Advocate for Change* [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1990], 76; cf. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow*, 294). A prominent leader of the General Conference (one time president of the Michigan Conference), is also quoted in *Righteous Rebel* as saying, “Racial segregation originated in the Bible as the divine way for nations to get on together” (ibid., 75).

[31] David R. Williams, “The Right Thing to Do,” *Adventist Review*, February 20, 1997, 25.