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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST HEALERS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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Introduction

African Americans have played a critically indispensable role in shaping the American identity. As America's problematic immigrants (those whose American identity has been cast by slavery—what Peter Stamp calls the "peculiar institution"), African Americans have defined what it means to be a problematic immigrant whose citizenry and humanity have been interrogated and challenged because of the foundational emblem stamped on them through the institution of slavery. African Americans have lived, therefore, in the veiled consciousness of responding to a condition created by an economic and social institutional paradigm that has viewed them through a lens influenced by the horrid three-fifths compromise of 1787, a resolution that attempted to strip humanity from those Africans brought to America via the Atlantic slave trade. This attempted mutilation of the human spirit and black body has created human beings whose cognitive reality has called forth a group of people owning a racial sensitivity that has birthed generations of activists committed to creating an institutional paradigm in which equal and civil rights are collectively at its center. Moreover, the African American church has played a central role in creating an institutional civil rights platform. Examples abound of the civil

rights stage from which the African American church has inspired a God-centered revolutionary practice. One such example is the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. Rosa Parks's refusal to relinquish her seat to a white gentleman on Thursday, December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, is legendary. The late Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s role as the leader of the boycott is also one of the famous stories associated with the boycott. However, the story must also include this: The Montgomery Bus Boycott was grounded in Christian ethos. On Monday, December 5, 1955, Christian preacher-servant Dr. King rose from the prophetic pulpit at the Holt Street Baptist Church to breathe into the imaginations of his church folk—people who would walk 382 days to end bus segregation in Montgomery, Alabama. He gave this inspiring message from the Christian point of view. King's *Stride Towards Freedom* affirms this. "In the first days of the protest . . . the phrase most often heard was 'Christian love.' "

Moreover, African American Seventh-day Adventists have also influenced America's religious, spiritual, and social discourse and, more specifically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The presence of the African people who suffered through what is historically known as the Middle Passage, chattel slavery, and Jim Crow segregation has encouraged the implicit formation of a people whose presence calls for the need of a holistically healed community to create what the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. deemed the "beloved society." The presence of enslaved Africans in America, who were deemed three-fifths of a human being, has also called forth the need for an institutional paradigm and conversation in which healing in relation to ethnicity and race must be the motif. One must affirm Delbert Baker's point when he says, "The SDA Church was to model Christ's gospel of love and inclusion—in practice. It was in this context that Ellen White repeatedly told church leaders that they were not fulfilling their mission if they neglected their disadvantaged Black brothers and sisters in their own country."[1]

Although psychologically, socially, and spiritually wounded because of being enslaved and dehumanized, the African American has successfully navigated these American shores and is the American institutional example of healing if one follows the definition of *health* as defined by the World Health Organization: A "state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease." Therefore disease can be, and often is, present in the psychological/social bloodline of an apparently healthy body, such as America and the church. The people who have encouraged the recognition of a discourse and conversation about race in America and, more directly, the Seventh-day Adventist Church are the African Americans. This complex conversation has influenced the church's multicultural paradigm. It has also established the need for an intellectual and communal conversation about the multifaceted contributions of African American Seventh-day Adventists.

The purpose of this collection of essays is to examine, highlight, and share the contributions and questions people of the African diaspora have gifted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, America, and the world.

African American Seventh-day Adventist Healers in a Multicultural Nation is a collection of essays inspired by a celebratory conference sponsored by the School of Religion at Loma Linda University on February 16, 2013. The conference as well as the book project "fills a niche that is virtually untouched in the scholarly world," says Jon Paulien, former dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University. The purpose of this collection of essays is to examine, highlight, and share the contributions and questions people of the African diaspora have gifted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, America, and the world. It also examines how they have,

metaphorically speaking, been the agents of a poetic healing among those navigating the harsh reality of slavery and its aftermath.

The eight essays and sermons in this collection affirm the reality that African Americans have been healed by "something better." In addition to the traditional academic essay, the African American sermonic tradition is represented in the text. Moreover, what is clear about this collection of essays is a continuous need for an affirming dialogue about African Americans' contribution to America.

African American Seventh-day Adventist Healers in a Multicultural Nation includes the following essays:

1. "Faith Hall of Famers: Are We There Yet?" by Dr. Mervyn Warren. This sermon represents the testimonial sermonic tradition. Acknowledging Carter G. Woodson, the brain behind Black History Month, Warren asks a crucial question: "Are we there yet?" Offering the "main course" Hebrews 11:39, 40, Warren recognizes that "these were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for [the African Americans] so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (NIV).

2. "Repairers of the Breach: The Social Role of Black Religion," by Andy Lampkin. The black church emerged during the colonial period in the Southern United States at the intersection of spirituality and systemic oppression to serve the existential and spiritual needs of the black community. It began as clandestine gatherings away from the supervision of the ruling class. It emerged as a sanctuary for people without sanctuary, a place of caring and respite, an incubator for leadership development, and a location of social empowerment and spiritual renewal. Through its emancipatory practices, the church functions as a healing institution that has helped perfect the American republic. Considerable scholarly attention has been given to the significant role of the black church during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. This

essay explores the emancipatory practices of the black church from antebellum times to our contemporary context. By exploring the unique contribution of black Seventh-day Adventists to the nation's healing, this essay fills a gap in the scholarly literature on the black church. Until recently, black Christians who were not a part of the nine traditional black denominations were neglected in the scholarly literature. This essay provides a foundation and context for understanding the unique contributions of black Seventh-day Adventists to healing the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the American republic as it explores how the black faithful live out their faith commitments amid oppression.

3. "We, Too, Sing America: African American Seventh-day Adventist Women Healers," by Andrea Trusty King. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is home to many exceptional African American women healers. This essay provides a survey of prominent African American women in Seventh-day Adventist history such as Sojourner Truth and Eva B. Dykes and others whose stories have gone untold, such as Jennie Allison and Lottie Blake. This essay describes their work and addresses the wounds these healers faced as African Americans and as Seventh-day Adventists. It discusses how race sometimes put these women in conflict with their denomination and how their gender put them in conflict with their race.

4. "Westward Leading: Healing Western Style; The African Diaspora Arrives in Compromised California Healing in a Free State," by Anthony Paschal. Initially, healing is rarely concerned with the morality of those needing healing. The healer is simply driven by a moral imperative to heal. Many a doctor has saved the life of a murderer, sewn him up, and released him to the proper process. Healing involves "having the goods, the evidence, and acting with mercy for the lifting up of the character of God." As the African diaspora spread from the west coast of Africa through an emotional, tumultuous, and successful journey to the West Coast of the United

States of America, this people demonstrated and continues to demonstrate resilience and resolve to "show the Lord's death [and Resurrection] till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26, GNV). This essay explores what evangelizing and healing in a climate of hate and confusion means for Seventh-day Adventists, who see themselves as part of a "movement of destiny" preparing a people to meet God.

5. "To Dream, to Be, to Act: Healing a Sick Society," by James L. Kyle. As we witness the increasing physical and psychological sickness that has afflicted our society, how do African American Adventist physicians approach their calling in order to make a difference? This chapter focuses on the interplay of cherished dreams, self-realization, and spirit-driven action with the potential impact they can have on society. The dream, or calling, of the physician must first be realized in personal growth and character development. We cannot hope to change our society when we have not first experienced the change in our own being.

6. "Healing Shepherds and the Pastoral Care of African American Religioracial Ills," by Maury Jackson. Black theology is a practical theology. When African American clerics attempt to offer a healing word, that word should not begin in a context different from the context of those to whom they seek to minister. Nor should it be one that does not take seriously the lived experience of black people. Before taking up the task of being healers in a multicultural nation, pastors need to recognize that there are social ills in the African American community that must be addressed. The need for religioracial healing among African American people calls for the African American Adventist pastor-healer to (1) resource black theology as the conceptual framework for applying caring techniques, (2) replot the pan-African story to give voice to subversive memories of resistance, and (3) reimagine the Bible as a source for nurturing social solidarity.

7. "Healed by Something Better," by Calvin Rock. Rock's sermon

is testimonial and revelatory. The principle of "something better" is nestled in Hebrews 11:40 and is mentioned no less than eleven times in Hebrews's memorable portrayal of the means whereby Christ reconciles lost humanity. Likewise, history reveals that this principle, nestled in the human heart, is a true and traceable cause of humanity's most noble and productive energies.

8. "Conference Mission, Structure, and Function: An Analysis of Organizational Unity and Mission Particularity in the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," by Leslie Pollard. This paper is an open invitation to conversation. Pollard illustrates both unity and autonomy within Seventh-day Adventist structure. The chapter demonstrates the way in which African American Seventh-day Adventists have woven culture and mission into an organizational arrangement that preserves connection to the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist church while translating the healing power of the SDA message into the cultural idiom of peoples of color. It is intended to provide a thoughtful examination of the organizational structures existing in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (hereafter, NAD) that are officially designated as "regional conferences." Recently, several writers and speakers have urged changes in the NAD that intend to dissolve the regional conference structure. These calls have been forwarded in the stated interest of "unifying" the Adventist Church in North America.

Given the amount of discussion generated in internet chat rooms, periodicals, websites, and in classrooms, it is helpful to initiate an open conversation that moves beyond the heat of assertions to the light of thoughtful consideration of biblical, theological, and missiological perspectives on some of the weightier questions raised by the continued presence of the regional conference structure in North America. Questions related to this discussion of mission and structure include, but are not limited to, the following: Does

the New Testament require or mandate an ideal organizational structure? Do passages such as John 17:21; Ephesians 2:14–18; or Galatians 3:27, 28 demand identicality of structure? What role, if any, does or should gender, race, culture, ethnicity, and nationality play in Christian mission and community building? Are "ethnic" structures de facto violations of Christian unity? Should regional conferences be considered evidence of "race-based organizational segregation" in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Should the creation of "ethnic" evangelism and congregations be discouraged or promoted? What is the biblical relationship between unity and diversity? And does the existence of state and regional conferences symbolize an ongoing divide between white and black Adventists in the United States?

Finally, if there are lessons to be garnered from this collection of essays, it is this: An authentic and celebratory dialogue about African Americans who have been systematically "othered" because of race needs to find its way onto the marquee of the Christian consciousness and into a systematic plan to implicitly improve race relations in the church and society.

Beautifully and intellectually, *African American Seventh-day Adventist Healers in a Multicultural Nation* is a call; it is a linguistic portrait of a people who James Cone says were put on "lynching trees" to die; however, they lived. If there are lessons to be garnered from this collection of brilliant essays, it is this: an authentic and celebratory dialogue about African Americans who have been systematically "othered" because of race needs to find their way onto the marquee of Christian consciousness and into a systematic plan to explicitly improve race relations in the church and society.

Ramona L. Hyman, PhD

Dr. Ramona L. Hyman is a writer, speaker, and professor "whose words are powerful memories for us to walk in the 21st century," says Sonia Sanchez. She is a graduate of Temple University (BA), Andrews University (MA), and earned her doctorate from the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. She is the author of *I Am Black America*. Of her literary work, African American critic, Dr. Joyce Joyce says, "Hyman challenges audiences to explore a poetic imagination grounded in a feel for the southern landscape, African-American literary and political history, Black spirituality, and a creative fusion of Black folk speech with a Euro-American poetic vernacular. Dr. Ramona L. Hyman emerges as a strong Black intellectual poetic voice." At present, Hyman is working on "Montgomery 55 on My Mind: Lessons From the Boycott," and "Jesus in Alabama," a collection of poetry.

1. Delbert W. Baker, "Black Seventh-day Adventists and the Influence of Ellen G. White," *Perspectives*, https://d34387f8-b80b-4319-a5ee-4b34617a2bab.filesusr.com/ugd/dc5cd6_2e21f03038694d25a9b90ca4c08d2326.pdf.