

In the Wake of the State: Seventh-day Adventism and Apartheid in South Africa

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During the Apartheid period in South Africa, the Seventh-day Adventist Church not only failed to critique the discriminatory system, but it formalized the establishment of internal apartheid within the Church, with two (and for some time three) separate race-based organizational structures that had very little contact with one another, and segregated congregations, schools, and welfare organizations. This paper asks why this came about, at what point in the evolution of South African society and political institutions did significant changes in this begin, and to what extent the internal apartheid has been dismantled. It explores the dynamics behind these situations and changes.

THEORY

The operationalization of church-sect theory was clarified by Stark and Bainbridge who, building on the insights of Johnson (1963:542), argued that it is best conceived of as measuring a single summary variable, the "state of tension" between a religious group and "its surrounding sociocultural environment" (1985:23). That is, a sect is likely to have high tension with the state, other churches, and society in general. Conflicts over its peculiar beliefs and behavioral norms are often sources of tension. As a result of such conflicts the sect may receive or, because of its theology at least expect, persecution from the state. It may also, for either of these reasons, condemn the state as evil. That is, there may be mutual hostility.

I will illustrate these dynamics from my own publications on Seventh-day Adventism. Early Adventism was in high tension in many ways with America, the land of its birth. It had emerged in New England as one of the fragments of the Millerite movement after the failure of the prophecy of William Miller, a Baptist laypreacher, that Christ would return in 1844. Adventists continued to believe that the end of the world was imminent, and thus rejected the American Dream; they insisted on observing Saturday as the Sabbath at a time when it was a regular workday, making it difficult for them to secure employment; their observance of the Sabbath, their embrace of vegetarianism, and their rejection of most forms of popular entertainment and of the then current women's fashions separated them from others, making them objects of scorn. Some of their positions resulted in tensions with the state: they announced during the American Civil War that they were conscientious objectors and refused to serve in the military in spite of conscription; and their eschatology led them to expect persecution over their observance of the Sabbath from the US government, which they identified with the lamb-like beast of Revelation 12 that goes on to "speak like a dragon." The expected persecution would be the result of a church-state alliance against Sabbath-keepers instigated by the Catholic Church. The latter interpretation seemed confirmed when Adventists were arrested repeatedly over several decades for violating state blue laws by working their farms on Sundays; its ultimate fulfillment seemed imminent

when bills that would have enforced Sunday sacredness were introduced in Congress in the 1880s (Lawson 1996b).

Once a sect begins to lower its tension with society, and thus moves along the continuum from sect towards denomination, it is likely that it will also seek to lower tension with the state. Because it becomes eager to win the favor of the state but has little leverage with it, it may make dramatic changes as it seeks to accomplish its goal. It may modify its behavioral norms in attempts to reduce areas of tension. It may pledge its loyalty to the state and seek the latter's protection. It may attempt to garner a positive reputation with the state by taking actions designed to win its approval while doing everything it can to avoid negative publicity. Because of its naivete, inexperience and lack of confidence, it may, in its endeavors to change its standing with the government, fawn over it, issuing statements praising it or retreating from positions that had provoked it. In its endeavors to appear cooperative and to present a positive profile, it will avoid critiquing the actions of the state; should those actions present a direct threat to a cherished doctrine or behavioral norm, it may feel obliged to speak out as a matter of self-preservation, but will likely do so mildly while emphasizing its loyalty. If its membership is relatively small, it is unlikely that such actions will make a large impact within a democracy, so that it may at best move from being regarded as a threat or problem to being largely ignored. However, if the regime is authoritarian and in need of bolstering its legitimacy, the toadying of the religious group may place it in a spotlight and it may even establish an exchange relationship under which it receives favors from the state in return for its public support of it.

Over time, tension between Adventism and American society diminished as it established educational, medical, and publishing institutions and, as these gradually became avenues for upward mobility, Adventists began to put down roots in society. They shifted their view of the US government, portraying it as not yet in its "dragon" phase but still lamb-like. When they tried to rally opposition to the legislation that would have enforced Sunday observance but found themselves without the numbers for electoral impact, they embraced separation of church and state and became eager advocates of religious freedom as means of self-protection. They sought, and gained, accreditation for their medical and educational institutions. Over time they transformed their position on military service, first, in order to embrace patriotism, allowing members to serve in non-combat roles, then creating a close relationship with the American military, which staffed a special program training Adventists to be medical orderlies, and finally announcing that a member's stance towards military service was a matter of individual conscience (Lawson 1996a). When they felt that Adventism was threatened by negative publicity from the Branch Davidian crisis, church leaders hired public relations firms in a successful effort to keep the Davidian connection to Adventism out of the press (Lawson 1995).

A denominationalizing sect may find its options limited if its central norms continue to create tension with the state. Resolution may have to wait for society to change so that the tensions disappear or are reduced. In the case of Adventism, Sabbath observance is one such central norm. Tensions associated with this were reduced first as prosecutions under state blue laws ceased about 1900, then by the introduction of the five-day week in the 1930s, and then, in the decades after World War II, as Adventists won a series of protections in the courts granting them first unemployment insurance when

they were fired from positions because of Sabbath observance and then increasing protection of their jobs (Lawson 1997). This pattern has been repeated, with some variation, in most democratic countries.

A religious group may also find it has less room to maneuver if interpretations leading it to expect problems with the state are central to its worldview. This has proved to be so for Adventism in terms of its expectation of persecution over Sabbath observance from an alliance of church and state because of the strong endorsement of that expectation by the Adventist prophet, Ellen White, whose interpretations and predictions are difficult to discard because of her standing. Consequently, although Adventist views on social issues are often similar to those of the American Religious Right, their wariness caused by the endeavors of the latter to form an alliance with the state has to date made collaboration impossible.

Where Adventism has found itself dealing with authoritarian regimes, its political naivete and self-serving attitudes have often led it to establish exchange relationships with governments as diverse as Nazi Germany, the USSR and its Eastern European satellite states, the military regimes that dominated Latin America and Korea in the 1980s, and the Moi regime in Kenya. At the same time, Adventist leaders, whose predecessors had been unknown outside their group, now relished occasional photo opportunities and tet-a-tets with the powerful. In return for helping to provide legitimacy for these regimes, Adventists gained freedom to worship on Saturday, protection and favors for their institutions, etc. (Lawson 1996b). However, they typically abandoned attempts to gain members freedom to avoid military combat from such regimes.

If a group's interpretations are very specific, it may so focus on looking for their fulfillment or guarding against them that it may fail to notice other dangers or to see the broader implications of its actions or inactions. In the Adventist case, their singular focus on their identification of the Catholic Church with the beast of the biblical book of Revelation closed their eyes to the beast-like qualities of regimes with whom they formed relationships, preventing them from raising a prophetic voice against the evils of their times. South Africa provides an excellent case study of these nuances.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research reported here is part of a large study of Seventh-day Adventism, which has included well over 3,000 in-depth interviews in 55 countries in all twelve divisions of the world church. This research has included two extensive trips to South Africa: in 1986, when the Apartheid regime was still strong but was facing increasing pressure; and in the Summer of 1999, shortly after the election of the second democratic government. I completed 129 in-depth interviews with church administrators, pastors, college and school administrators and teachers, and leading laypersons representing all four major racial categories (Black, white, Coloured, and Indian); conducted focus group discussions with groups of students; did participant observation in congregations, colleges, and schools; and collected copies of relevant documents. I added four updating interviews with key leaders when delegates from the world church gathered in Toronto for the General Conference Session in July 2000. Since I am an Adventist,

and can put respondents at ease because of my knowledge of Adventist issues and expressions, those of all races were willing to be very open with me.

1. ADVENTIST BEGINNINGS AND ORIGINS OF SEPARATION

Separation in society dated from colonial times--it was the British way. This was imported into the Adventist Church, where for most of the time the Black work was in separate white-led missions ("fields") administered by the South African Union Conference (SAUC), while the white work was in their own conferences. (Conferences, which are financially self-supporting, elect their own leadership; the leaders of missions, however, are appointed by higher structural levels, because they are partially dependent on outside funds.) The missions used local African languages.

Similarly, the church-owned institutions (colleges and schools) were also separate and racially segregated. (but original college?)

Coloureds and Indians were also separated during the 1930s, with separate churches in 1930 and a separate Cape Field in 1933. The rationale given at the time was that this would allow them to run their own show.

2. THE ADVENTIST RESPONSE TO THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF APARTHEID

Adventists were taught to be apolitical, focusing only on Romans 13 while ignoring other passages which could suggest alternative approaches. --Any opposition to government was defined as being political.

Whites, favored by the laws, and used to separation, accepted them; Blacks, taught well by missionaries, also mostly accepted them. That is, Adventists were more passive than average. That is, as with Adventists in Nazi Germany and in Communist Eastern Europe, South African Adventists, with their focus on evangelism and its Roman "beast," did not recognize the "beast" in their midst.

3. INTERNAL APARTHEID

1951: After Apartheid was institutionalized following the election of the Dr Malan's Nationalist party government in 1948, Adventist Afrikaners urged the church to fall in line with government policy. The SAUC session decided that in future all delegates to its sessions would be white--the non-whites could be represented by whites just as the government was doing.

1953: The Adventist workforce was separated into Group I and Group II, with those working for the Blacks in Group II. This, then, established separate internal administrations with separate executive committees. Although Group II covered the Black work, there were no blacks among its leadership or on its executive committee.

There was a parallel decision at the Trans-Africa Division of the World church (TAD), which was then headquartered in Capetown.

Dynamics of the decision: reached over Black objections.

The new system institutionalized unequal educational opportunities and pay-scales.

1960: The SAUC decided to move its headquarters from Bloemfontein to Johannesburg--but only Group II personnel moved. That is, the headquarters of the two Groups were now separated.

Institutionalizing the structure: separate unions

Black laity began to push for leadership opportunities for Blacks--boycotts. It was suggested that the Black fields be put into a separate union. The SAUC president supported the idea, suggesting that this would give Blacks opportunities for leadership. History was moving that way--the UK had begun to push for Black leadership in the colonies in 1960, causing the Church to create a crash course to train Black leaders for the African colonies.

1966: a separate union, the Southern Union Mission (SUM--its mission status indicated that it was not financially self-supporting) for blacks was created. Former SAUC president and current TAD secretary W.D. Eva was willing to accept it only because of the financial situation of the Black church, for most of the special offerings and Ingathering funds were directed to the white work (letter to RH Pierson, 1/27/65, cited by Hartley). Eva was concerned about the SDA Church in South Africa having a united voice. He recognized that the problems for Group II were rooted in the attitudes of Group I (Letter to JD Harcombe, president of Group II, 3/8/65, cited by Hartley).

Dynamics of the decision: made at the TAD, now in Rhodesia, without a union session. Only 4 of the 23 committee members voting the change in 12/65 were Black. In fact, Blacks were upset by the change, for their goal had been shared leadership positions in the union, even though the lower conference/mission level was segregated. However, the whites claimed that the separation had taken place at Black initiative because of their demand for leadership experience (Armer).

This excuse lost all credibility when the leaders installed in the new "Black" union were all White.

Because of low SUM salaries, some blacks pushed for their own conference within the SAUC. However, this was not realized because of the timidity of others and opposition from leaders who stood to lose their positions. Black leadership was eventually realized within SUM a decade later--Mabena was the first president.

Segregated schools and colleges: Adventist institutions remained totally segregated, despite the refusal or Anglicans and Catholics to segregate. [check the dates of the latter]

Adventist Community Services (ACS): the SAUC used the funds it raised solely for services to Whites, even though the economic needs of this segment of the population were generally much less severe and

they raised the vast bulk of the funds because they "ingathered" (solicited) from an economically far more affluent community.

Separated congregations: rooted in the mandated residential segregation. But incidents when visiting blacks were sent away from white churches. For example, the notorious *Drum Magazine* incident in the 1970s, when a Black reporter checking out his reception at the white Johannesburg Central church was thrown out, the incident being photographed by a white photographer he had brought with him.

That is, Adventists had erected an "image" to the Apartheid beast, thus paralleling their own prophetic expectations of other Protestant denominations.

Meanwhile, there had been increasing Afrikaaner separatism throughout the 1960s, until in 1968 a separatist conference broke away. This never gained acceptance by the SAUC.

4. GROWING INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID STIMULATES FAINT ECHOES WITHIN ADVENTISM

During the 1970s there appeared within Black Adventism the beginnings of opposition to government- and church-mandated separation. The most prominent figure was Tiro, an Adventist student who rose to prominence within the student leadership of his university and then, and then, as a result of a fiery speech he delivered there at a graduation ceremony, nationally. When he was assassinated by a letter-bomb, a common government strategy at the time, other black Adventists were moved to follow in his footsteps, focusing their attention on the church as well as the state.

Helderberg College, the previously all-white Adventist college, began to admit quotas of Coloured and then Black students during the 1970s:

Mid-70s: following the closing of the Coloured Good Hope College, the first Coloured day students were admitted. initially they could attend only as day students, and were not permitted to eat in the cafeteria.

1979: Black students were admitted when Solusi College was closed during the war to end colonialism in Rhodesia. These were allowed to live on campus, but in separate accommodations. The Coloureds were then given the same deal.

1982: because of pressure, both groups were admitted to the dormitories. There were problems when mixed dating occurred: such students were sent home because this was against the rules.

When I carried out research at Helderberg in 1986, 5 of the 172 students were Black, 16 Coloured, and 3 Asian (14% nonwhite). There were no nonwhite teachers. All the money to support the College came from the conferences of the SAUC.

The College administration explained that the low number of nonwhite students was because of government quotas; but they were insisting on adhering to an outdated law.

1975: A SAUC committee studying the race issue recommended that the Church work towards a single union. Consequently, the new SAUC president, Eric Armer, worked for the unification of the SAUC constituency (whites, Coloureds and Asians).

1978: The Coloured and Indian fields were merged into the white Natal/Orange Free State and the Transvaal conferences. Such a structure had never been illegal. However, negotiations to do the same in the Cape failed continually because there the Coloured membership exceeded the White. Some whites there came to push for a union of churches to protect the whites from becoming a minority in a combined conference. (There was as yet no thought of merging the Blacks—the government had not led the way, and they were, after all, members of a totally separate union.)

1979: Armer, accused of pushing the race issue (though in fact Adventism was slow by national standards and international demands), was forced out of office.

The Blacks, realizing that their status as fields rendered them politically impotent, with whites choosing pliant leaders, began to push for conference status.

With growing international opposition to Apartheid, and the cause taken up by American Blacks, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) became nervous that it could be embarrassed by the South African segregation. There was also a growing realization within South Africa that the issue of separation needed to be addressed.

Coloured consciousness was raised by the tensions. Claiming that the Adventist segregation was hampering their evangelism, the Coloured Good Hope Conference in the Cape Province began, in 1980, to press for a single union with integrated leadership, merged conferences, and integrated schools under a single education department. The students at the Good Hope High School became radicalized.

Fruitless GC commissions

1981, Henri, Eva, Baasch--1982--contact group between SAUC and SUM established, but met only during that year. When the chair passed to the SUM the next year, it was never called again, for the SUM, for internal political reasons, embraced the position that the SAUC should first put its own house in order--that is, unite the whites and Coloureds in the Cape.

1983: Alf Birch, the new SAUC president, began to fashion a statement on race relations against the backdrop of increasing tension in society.

The separation of South Africa from the TAD [date-1983?] meant that the SAUC and SUM had no formal reason to continue to rub shoulders.

The South African Black youth were also politicized. They organized a black boycott when Neal Wilson, president of the General Conference, visited Johannesburg in 1985, and opposed a merger of the unions until it would bring blacks to power.

1985: Wilson issued a mild statement at the quinquennial General Conference Session condemning Apartheid, the first such Adventist statement.

- the SAUC and the SUM then echoed this sentiment at their annual sessions.
- but the SAUC statement called on its members to put their energy into preaching, not political activism.
- the preamble to the SUM statement recognized that there was also separation within the church, and vowed to work against it.

None of these statements produced any action. However, pressure from Wilson secured the election of a Coloured as Secretary of the SAUC.

1986: Sedeven High School, a boarding academy supported by the Afrikaaner-dominated Transvaal Conference, under pressure voted painfully to admit its first Coloured student, even though the Coloureds had been part of the Conference for several years before this. The principal told me that they hoped that their high fees would severely restrict the number applying.

Meanwhile, the Black church had become an object of scorn within its community because it was not involved in supporting Black issues: for example, a colporteur was killed. Its constituency tended to be divided along generational lines concerning participation in the Black movement. Wakaba, SUM president, increasingly distanced himself from the SAUC--he had a lot to lose from being publicly identified with it.

The Good Hope Conference, after fruitless calls in several successive Sessions for unity to proceed with the white Cape Conference and for a merger of the unions, in frustration asked the GC to intervene to secure unity towards the end of the 1980s. Nevertheless, the conference president gained press publicity for urging members NOT to join a key protest march to free Mandela the day before it was scheduled to take place.

In 1986 the Dutch Reformed Church reversed its long-held position, declaring Apartheid immoral. The National Party government, so long linked to that church, then began to slowly alter its position.

Interviewees predicted to me in that year that the Adventists would then begin to move against internal separation--always tagging behind the government. It was stated to me that it was widely believed that if the Church had chosen to confront the government this would have split the Church. Adventists waited for the government to lead the way because they were loyal, apolitical, and unwilling to rock the boat. Because there was so little contact between Adventists of different races, relations were marked by suspicion and self-interest.

12/90: The SAUC session endorsed a motion to initiate negotiations towards merger with the SUM. A committee met once before a GC action pre-empted it. That is, the South African Adventist Church had taken reluctant steps towards integration because of the growing pressures to do so from society. A quiet revolution had taken some steps forward, propelled by key leaders, all of whom had considerable political naivete.

5. INTERVENTION BY THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ATTEMPTS AT MERGER

By this time the GC was realizing that it could be embarrassed by the dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa, much as it had been embarrassed elsewhere in Africa by not preparing for indigenous leadership in advance of the overthrow of colonialism.

However, in some ways the changing demographics of Adventism in South Africa during the 1980s made mergers more difficult to accomplish: whereas the membership of the two unions had been almost equal in 1980 (SAUC 18,009, SUM 18,155), by 1990 the SUM membership was almost twice that of the SAUC (40,595 to 21,962), having increased by 123.6% during the decade while the SAUC membership had increased by merely 22.1%. The separation of the SUM had also achieved Black leadership there, and financial independence.

1990: Because Wakaba, then SUM president, was unwilling to accept merger at the union level, leaving segregated conferences/fields, he was removed from his position at the GC Session--without a constituency, because of the union's mission status.

1991: The "Paulson Commission" from the GC (Paulson, Bediako, Battle, Robinson, W.D. Eva, plus four representatives from each of the unions including the two presidents) visited South Africa for hearings, and in its report recommended the merger of the unions by the end of 1991 and of the conferences by 1992. This report generated great debate among the white membership in South Africa, many of whom believed that the separation had been at the request of Blacks and that the proposed merger was in response to political changes in South Africa and the desire of Blacks to take over the finances and institutions that the whites had built up. Some feared that a single union would cause cultural friction and impede church growth; also that the Black majority would impose Black leadership rather than the most efficient, Spirit-filled leadership. This debate was fueled when the Adventist Review, the general church paper, reported the merger as already decided, with only the date open: the GC was viewed as paternalistically orchestrating the changes.

1991: The Annual Council of the GC, held in Perth, Australia, acted on the report of the Paulson Commission, calling for a merger of the two unions to be followed quickly by mergers at the conference level. The GC used both carrots and sticks in attempts to secure the mergers.

The Merger of the Unions

- dynamics: not so difficult to achieve because this structural level does not impinge directly on local congregations.
- broad representation in the merged union.
- Black theological training was moved from the traditional Black Bethel College in the former Black homeland of the Transkei to Helderberg College.

Although church leaders expected that conference mergers would follow quickly, this was not to be, for conference mergers are likely to have a greater impact on the grassroots.

Natal/Free State Negotiations

Why first? The Black:white membership ratio was more balanced than elsewhere, and the white leadership was more supportive of merger. The newly merged conference elected a white president, but a racially balanced team.

Negotiations in the Cape and the Transvaal

When these got under way in both provinces, opposition emerged: fearing that a merger at the conference level would turn its constituency into an inconsequential minority within the conference and that its members would feel overrun by an influx of others into their congregations, the Cape Conference voted in favor of a "union of churches" which would disband the conferences and link the congregations as such directly to the union, thus ensuring them far greater independence. However, this was seen by the other conferences and the union as a way of preserving some of the benefits whites had accrued under Apartheid, and they rejected it, as did also the GC. The white fears in the Transvaal were similar, with the added issue that the Afrikaaners feared the loss of their language and culture.

6. THE IMPACT OF DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS AND THE SWEEPING AWAY OF GOVERNMENT-MANDATED APARTHEID ON ADVENTISM FROM 1994 ONWARDS

ACS was merged in each of the provinces ahead of the merger of the conferences--because government pressure was felt or anticipated, for ACS was much more open to regulation because it raised funds from the public. This merger was also justified as providing a case study where the impact of local mergers within Adventism could be evaluated.

City English-speaking churches have increasingly integrated: This process actually began in the 1980s with the influx of African immigrants from the countries to the north who did not speak the local Black languages.

It has increased steadily since 1994, when Blacks gained freedom to live where they would, as long as they could afford it, and began to move into the cities. For example, Johannesburg Central Church,

where the Black reporter from *Drum* magazine had been thrown out in the 1970s, became increasingly Black, until the remaining white members decided recently to form another congregation. However, integration of Afrikaans-speaking churches was much rarer because of the language barrier. Also, Black churches did not usually integrate because of their location in the Black townships and the fact that integration was up the status ladder.

Similarly, the formerly white college and schools (Helderberg, Helderberg High School, Sedeven High School, and the various primary schools) fully integrated. However, as with their churches, the black schools did not integrate because of their locations and status.

Fearing a changing society and church, many white pastors chose to emigrate, finding it easy to arrange calls to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the US, swelling what had been a steady stream since at least the mid-1980s. This left the White churches short of pastors, especially those of middle age, and their conferences short of good candidates for leadership.

After several years of heavy negotiations and discussions and votes at business sessions, the 3 conferences in the Cape took a proposal to merge to back-to-back sessions in 1997. However, the White Cape Conference failed to get the constitutionally required 75% majority to dissolve and merge, even though its vote of 70% was solidly in favor. When the GC and Union representatives there called for further prayer and another vote immediately, discontent erupted. Had they not prayed for God's guidance before the vote was taken?

The Coloured Good Hope Conference and the Black Southern Conference, having secured overwhelming votes to dissolve and merge, proceeded with a partial merger which created the Southern Hope Conference (SHC), leaving the door open for the Cape Conference to join them by, for example, choosing to put the new combined headquarters in a part of Port Elizabeth that Whites would regard as acceptable.

Meanwhile, the presidents of the White/Coloured Transvaal Conference (TC) and the black Trans-Orange Conference (TOC) held amicable discussions, isolated a list of issues to be settled, and then set up subcommittees to work on each of these. However, these discussions came to nothing when Blacks failed to attend many of the meetings, causing confusion among the Whites concerning the Black commitment to merger.

The reasons for this: the two conferences had been given differing mandates (The Black leadership had been instructed to merge first as a way of removing the sin of separation and then to work out problems, while the White leadership was to explore the possibility of merger.) Behind these lay the different cultures, mutual misunderstandings, suspicions and fears, and a White approach that examined the potential merger as if it were considering the pros and cons of a corporate merger, not seeing it as a moral imperative and not at all sure that there was anything in merger for them while fearing that it might mark the death-knell of evangelism among whites.

7. THE CURRENT SITUATION (1999)

Merger problems and consciousness-raising

In the new SHC, Blacks caucused in advance of the first Session in 1997. Consequently, when the nominating committee, which had 17 Blacks and 10 Coloured members, met, while several Coloureds were nominated for the position of president, only one black was submitted, and he received 17 votes in the first ballot and was thus elected. However, when it became clear to the Coloureds that the Blacks had caucused and that their candidate, Mbazza, had met with them in advance, they regarded this as a betrayal of the concept of merger. They subsequently bombarded the new president with calls telling him that they could have no confidence in him, persuading him to resign. Wakaba, the Union president, who was chairing the meeting of the SHC executive committee when the resignation was tendered, refused to allow a recess until the next day, knowing that that would allow time for another caucus. The committee then elected a Coloured member as president.

At the second session of the new Kwazulu-Natal-Free State Conference in 1998?, the selection committee, which inevitably had a Black majority, initially elected an all-black nominating committee. Again Wakaba intervened, telling them that such a result was not kosher in a merged conference, where it was important that all groups feel represented. The committee then agreed on minimum quotas for Whites, Coloureds, and Indians, and elected a new Nominating Committee, which still produced a representative black majority. It then nominated the incumbent Black conference secretary as president; however, when he refused the post, it elected a new white, Van Niekerk, as president.

That is, after conscious-raising, both conferences elected non-black presidents.

It is not clear to what extent the lesson of the danger of using a majority in a democratic system to disfranchise the minority/ies been learned. Neither is it clear what will happen in the future if a new union president does not play the role played in these instances by Wakaba.

The Natal merger seems to be fairly amicable and successful at the conference level, and there is considerable pride at the speed with which black ministerial salaries were raised and in the vast improvement of the housing of black pastors. However, the merger seems to be really little more than administrative. The pastors continue to have racially matching districts (except for some crossing within the former white/coloured/Indian segment of the conference) which are vastly unequal in size: a typical Black district includes 8-10 congregations, while a typical white district has 2 or 3. Efforts to bring the whole constituency together for shared meetings/programs have failed, whether these be campmeetings or youth camps or programs. Consequently, members of the different racial groups are not mixing and getting to know one another apart from the process of integration of the city English-speaking churches, which would have happened whether or not the conferences had merged. Some of the pastors of different races do seem to have formed friendships; however, this is not yet widespread.

In contrast with Natal, the newer SHC opted to equalize the size of districts and to avoid overlapping districts, thus creating districts containing both Black and Coloured congregations and where some

congregations were inevitably served by pastors of a different race. This occurred especially in the Western Cape, where Coloured congregations are concentrated. This decision was made after merger, and was backed strongly by the new Coloured president, who feels that such blending is necessary, especially initially, to make merger meaningful. It thus ignored the recommendation of the GC Commission that pastors be allocated according to the tithe received from churches--indeed, its president explicitly rejected that recommendation as unfair, since the churches with better educated members have more preaching talent available internally.

However, the Coloured pastors have protested having their load raised to that of the Blacks and for having to have their sermons and conversations with parishioners translated. Similarly, Coloured congregations have complained about having to share their pastor with so many churches and, when so, about being assigned a Black pastor. The largest Coloured congregation has demanded the right to pay its own pastor just for it alone. The changes are causing pain, and may have come with too little preparation. Some Coloured members have switched to churches in the White Cape Conference.

ACS tensions: I was told at the union that this was their most intractable problem. The White churches and conferences were able to raise far greater funds than their Black counterparts, which were committed to ongoing institutions and programs serving Whites, many of whom had in fact social rather than material needs; they were unwilling to divert these funds towards the most needy, who were mostly Black. The merged organizations were therefore marked by conflict. The Cape director told of struggles to persuade service centers operated by whites to open their doors to blacks or to release funds so that new centers could be opened in the Black townships. In the Transvaal I was told of conflict with the TOC over the appointment of personnel which left positions unfilled for lengthy periods. While some new projects had been opened in the Black areas, it was clear that these were sparse compared with the long-established white projects, in part because of the withdrawal of traditional donors once it became evident that black projects were now included in the program and the failure of the merged organization to focus on increasing fund-raising as originally planned. In both the Cape and the Transvaal it was stated that, rather than proving that a merged organization could work well and therefore encouraging moves towards merger of the conferences, the ACS tensions had had the impact of retarding the latter goal.

Indeed, tensions have been so great that the GC appointed a commission to examine the situation and find solutions. This recommended that ACS be reorganized under the banner of ADRA International (the Adventist Development and Relief Agency). It is hoped that the connection to ADRA will result in a flow of funds for black projects from abroad.

In 1998, South Africa and other parts of the continent were blanketed by "Pentecost '98," the first evangelistic series there relayed by satellite, featuring FitzHenry, a layperson imported from Jamaica for the occasion, who spoke from a university campus in Soweto. Since this originated in their territories, the white Transvaal and Black Trans-Orange conferences cooperated in the production. The former provided most of the technical expertise but few of those attending; the latter reaped most of the converts, but then discovered that its records of who had been baptized were poor. The TC, in

particular, found many reasons to complain about the TOC's role in the cooperative effort, so that the experience added to the distrust between the two entities.

Since this was such a striking event, President Mandela was invited to be present on the opening night of the campaign. However, he refused the invitation, citing the fact that the Adventist Church is still racially separated, and did not even send a lower-level official. This reaction told Church leaders that the government was aware of the slow progress of their endeavors to dismantle internal apartheid.

Some English-speaking city churches have "tipped" as the influx of Blacks has triggered discomfort and bitterness among Whites, with complaints about being crowded in their seats, mothers breast-feeding infants in church, changes in music, and a sense of being "swamped," and ultimately their exit, leaving an almost totally Black congregation at Johannesburg Central and another clearly headed that way in Sunnyside, Pretoria, with fears that many other congregations in all major cities are on the same route. None of these congregations has yet been assigned a Black pastor--or even a Coloured pastor.

Meanwhile, the dormitories at both Sedeven High School and Helderberg College have also become almost totally Black, as Whites have withdrawn from integrated living or failed to enroll as expected; the Helderberg students are also largely separated by race in their worship choices. The future of Sedeven is under a cloud, as the sudden decline of students has left its budget in disarray and the Transvaal Conference complains that it is supporting a school that is being utilized primarily by another constituency. It is widely being predicted that Helderberg will also become a black school, in spite of the fact that the number of Black and White students are equal this year, with most of White students choosing to live off-campus. The drop in the number of White students at both schools has so far occurred among those from Afrikaaner families. However, it is clear that when some White students initially flee integrated dorms, often complaining that Black students are noisy and render the sanitation in the toilets unacceptable but probably also simply feeling that an integrated facility does not feel like "home," this then sets up a chain reaction as the remaining White students then feel increasingly outnumbered and then often also choose to withdraw.

The tipping of the City churches and of Sedeven High School would likely have occurred without the merging of the Adventist unions, but merely because of the end of the restrictions on where Blacks can live and the opening of job opportunities to some of them under the new political regime.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in addition to hearing confessions from the operatives of Apartheid, also sought statements from churches. Although most churches received invitations to do this, the Adventist Church was somehow forgotten. However, pushed by some conferences, the Union sought, at almost the last moment, to make such a statement. However, the statement which it drew up was strongly attacked by those who thought it too weak or too strong, and also by those who felt that the Church should not make any statement. However, having already sought extra time because of its late initiative, the Union would have been embarrassed not to produce a statement. Grasping a suggestion that the statement should be couched in theological terms, it gave the task of rewriting the statement to the religion department at Helderberg College.

The statement, as presented, is surprising to a non-South African Adventist, for it is unique in its tone of institutional confession: the Remnant Church is not used to confessing that it has sinned corporately. However, the statement was less surprising to South Africans, for this was the tone typically adopted by the statements of the other denominations to the TRC. The statement was unusual, however, in proclaiming that it had failed Adventist theological beliefs.

However, the statement was not published in full in the South African church paper, nor was it read and discussed in the churches. It was merely approved by the Union executive committee and circulated to the conferences. Its low profile was no doubt related to the fact that it would have created controversy among the members. As it was, many of the Blacks interviewed, apparently not understanding the principle of institutional confession, expressed dismay that a union headed by a black, who had himself been victimized by Apartheid, had issued such a statement: they felt that the apology should have been issued by whites. Even those whites who felt that a public apology was in order would have been likely to reply to such an argument that they had been born after the imposition of Adventist segregation, and that it was the missionaries and perhaps some of their ancestors who were to blame.

For whom then, does the statement submitted to the TRC speak? It is window dressing supplied by the Union, and cannot be said to represent the very divided opinions of Adventists on the issues addressed in it.

After the failure of the Cape Conference's vote to dissolve and merge with the other conferences in the Cape Province, the president who had guided that process resigned and emigrated. When the conference committee elected a Coloured pastor as his successor, this was widely interpreted as a setback to merger, as window-dressing in place of merger. However, after waiting to consolidate his position and to gain re-election by a full Session in 1998, this president then secured a mandate to renew merger talks with what was now the already merged Southern Hope Conference. However, since the latter considers that it created a merger that was based on the template drawn up during the tripartite negotiations that included the Cape Conference, it is insisting, I am told, that the negotiation phase is over and that the Cape Conference must join when it is ready under those agreed conditions. However, it is unlikely that President Baxen would be able to procure the required 75% majority for dissolution at a Session without further negotiations, for the white pastors are likely to prove unwilling to accept the much larger districts that the SHC system would bring them, and both its pastors and members are similarly likely to reject the SHC practice of placing pastors in churches which they do not match racially.

On the other hand, given the fact that most of the Conference's churches are English-speaking and are therefore already integrating, this conference is being integrated from the grassroots upwards while it waits to culminate administrative merger. However, because the Blacks and Coloureds joining its churches tend to be upwardly mobile, it remains to be seen whether they will be willing to vote for merger, realizing that this will leave them with far less pastoral attention.

The new administrations elected in both the TC and the TOC in 1995 abandoned merger negotiations on the ground, according to the TC, that it was important that the leaders, pastors and members first get to know one another better. However, no initiative was taken towards that, although there were contacts in the merged ACS and in organizing the satellite evangelistic campaign, both of which seemed to provide mostly irritants rather than fellowship. Eventually a retreat for pastors was arranged where a neutral non-Adventist facilitator presided over group discussions of the pros and cons of merger, and where the TC pastors retreated when TOC pastors spoke sermons arguing that merger was a biblically required.

In 1998 the TC took a poll among members which, without educating the members and providing answers to their fears of the unknown, resulted in a strong majority voting for remaining separate; it also showed that a substantial majority would consider forming a breakaway white conference if the conferences did merge. At its subsequent session, the TC leadership gained a mandate to call a special session in November 1999 to decide, once and for all, whether or not to merge with the TOC. No negotiations have been held to find solutions to the fears of their members; moreover, the leaders feel that the TC has "nothing to gain" from a merger. Consequently, the documents being distributed to members before the Session, which list a summary of the pros and cons of merger that came out of the group discussions among the pastors of the two conferences along with comments and interpretation, are transparently seeking to heighten rather than allay the members' fears of the unknown. That is, the conference administration is seeking a vote rejecting merger.

Meanwhile, the TOC has also had some divisions about the question of merger, with some pastors influenced by the Africanist(?) thought espoused by the Pan-Africanist Congress rejecting merger with non-blacks. However, this has never been a large group and its influence has waned with the heavy losses experienced by the PAC in the 1999 national elections. TOC pastors are broadly in favor of merger, believing disunity to be sinful. However, the conference showed its frustration with the TC's failure to embrace a mandate to merge forthwith and to work out the problems that arise afterwards by voting in its 1998 session to wait for the TC to take the initiative.

It seems at this point, then, that the effort to complete the structural dismantling of Adventist apartheid has bogged down. While, at the top level, the Unions have merged and one of the white conferences has also merged administratively with its black counterpart, and there has also been a partial merger of the coloureds and blacks in the Cape Province, the two other white conferences have so far failed to merge with their counterparts. The GC Commission had foreseen a rapid merger of the union and then the conferences, with the process being completed no later than the end of 1993. However, the latter goal is still far from realization.

What will happen if these conferences do not merge, and especially if they take a firm position against merger, which seems to be the likely result of the special Session called by the Transvaal Conference in November 1999? To retain a partially segregated structure in a South Africa where the evils of Apartheid have been repudiated, confessed and forsaken by government and other churches alike will be at least an embarrassment. Several interviewees expressed the fear that such a situation might encourage black

Adventists with links to politicians to arrange for government pressure to be placed on the Adventist Church. Such a situation would be likely to take the matter beyond embarrassment. It is difficult at this point to gauge whether the new Mbeke administration would be willing to apply direct pressure to a church.

Meanwhile, although some of the English-speaking churches have integrated--to the point of causing severe pain and white flight in some instances--most Adventists remain in racially homogeneous congregations and rarely know Adventists of another race well. My interviews demonstrated that they do not know one another's stories.

The Adventist Church in South Africa has typically tagged along behind the government, changing its positions after the government has changed its. Because it was so slow to recognize that the winds of change were blowing and would soon sweep the Apartheid government and its system away, it now finds itself in a position where it has been left behind by the rapidly changing society, and even urgent demands from the GC have proved insufficient.

8. WHAT IS THE RELEVANCE OF ADVENTISM TO THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA?

I have argued that the history of Adventism in South Africa shows a Church that merely follows where the government leads: that when the government imposed Apartheid laws, Adventism then responded by creating Group I and Group II; that Adventists waited until not only Catholics, Anglicans, and even the Dutch Reformed Church had declared Apartheid immoral, but also for the government to begin moving towards dismantling it, before it began to do anything to desegregate the Adventist structure; and that once again its efforts to dismantle internal apartheid are moving to the beat of the new government while lagging behind it. That is, Adventism has failed to speak prophetically within the South African situation. Its evangelists have warned that the Roman Catholic Church would somehow achieve the power to legally enforce the observance of Sunday in South Africa, but failed to recognize the beast-like qualities of the Apartheid regime: Adventism failed to scratch where South Africa itched. Indeed, some Adventists cautioned that because the new democratically elected government of Nelson Mandela had overthrown a government which had been so closely identified with the Protestant Dutch Reformed churches, it could be seen as preparing for the rise of the Catholic Church to power.

When I asked interviewees what was the relevance of Adventism to the new South Africa, they typically looked at me blankly: they had not previously considered the question. Some declared Adventism irrelevant, others replied that its message was as relevant in the new situation as it had been in the old one.

During the recent genocide in Rwanda, where the Adventist Church was second in size to the Catholic Church, it has been documented that Hutu Adventists killed Tutsi Adventists: they gave their tribal, or ethnic, identity priority over their religious identity. It is difficult to see how Adventism can be relevant to the new South Africa while the race of its members is accorded priority. Adventism's growth rate plunged from 73.0% during the 1980s to 15.5% 1990-97.

My visit to Bethel College, which was created by Adventists to train black pastors and teachers, coincided with a retreat held there by the Seventh-day Adventist Student Association (SDASA). Bethel, which is located in the Eastern Cape in the former black homeland formerly called the Transkei, still has a totally Black student body; all of SDASA's members are also Black--they are students at non-Adventist universities. I was eager to discover the focus of this meeting of 500 university students: they had chosen "Watching the Horizon," and their own brief presentations made it clear that they had intended to focus on urgent apocalypticism--the rapid fulfillment of the signs of the Second Coming of Christ. Such a focus at a time when South Africa's health and educational systems were collapsing, when citizens lived in such fear of crime that even some Adventist pastors carried guns, fitted Karl Marx's description of religion as being the "opiate of the masses."

However, the invited speaker, a popular black pastor who is secretary of the Southern Hope Conference, was seemingly unhappy with the chosen theme, for he declared that what was important was not the signs of the Coming, but who was coming, and he then shaped his main sermon, at the worship hour on Sabbath morning, as a challenge to Adventists to love one another--which he explicitly noted must include those across the racial divide. Such an emphasis is clearly relevant to South African Adventism, given the separation of the races within it and the white flight that has followed the integration of churches, schools, and dormitories; but it is not heard often in Adventist sermons.

What of the relevance of Adventism to the broader society? I did not hear any attempt to raise the consciousness of the university students concerning this. Nor am I aware of any attempt to bring Adventist expertise in healthcare and education to bear on the needs of this society, which is in travail as it seeks to reinvent itself. As the quality of care given at public hospitals collapses, Adventist clinics are sorely needed in the black townships.

Meanwhile, Bethel College and High School are on the point of extinction, without the funds to pay the salaries of teachers until the end of the year, as its enrollment has plummeted because of the government's inability to hire teachers. (Teacher training became the college's main program after the training of black pastors was moved to Helderberg College.) The Rector (President) of the College, together with his wife, who was the principal of the high school, had both resigned suddenly as of the end of June 1999, deepening the sense of doom among the faculty. With the end of Apartheid and the collapse of the education system, Bethel cannot compete academically with Helderberg, for blacks seeking higher education now want to move up to the new opportunities open to them. However, Bethel is surrounded by unemployed, unskilled people in the former Transkei. If it changed its focus it could become a valuable resource to its community. (Bethel's buildings are new, built after it was the recipient of a Thirteenth Sabbath offering towards the end of the 1980s.)

I see the Adventist Church in South Africa as needing desperately to address two closely related issues. The first is how it can become a true multicultural, united church without racial barriers while fostering diversity in worship and thus protecting the deep concerns of the racial minorities as well as other

categories of members. The second issue is to become relevant to the society in which it is operating. It will take leadership with vision and a new consciousness to find the needed answers.

If South African Adventism does not find a visionary leadership and a new consciousness, the tensions recounted above will prove to be the signs of the death throes of the white church--a repetition of a road that was traversed some years ago in Zimbabwe, where the Adventist membership is now approaching 300,000, only 200 of whom are white. The black church is likely to continue to grow, as its message that a strict life here will be rewarded in the hereafter proves relevant to the poor and downtrodden of a society in travail.

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