Lewis Sheafe: Adventism's Forgotten Apostle to Black America
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In November 1902 one of Washington, D.C.'s African American newspapers, the *Colored American*, reported the unusual occurrence of a minister from a different denomination occupying the pulpit of the Metropolitan A.M.E. church. The paper referred to the guest preacher, Lewis Sheafe, as the "noted apostle of Seventh Day Adventism."[1] A century later, though he is beginning to draw some attention in historical writing,[2] the once-noted apostle remains largely lost to Adventist historical memory.

The newspaper's appellation, though, points us in the right direction for assessing the significance of this now-obscure figure from the Adventist past. Though not the first black Adventist minister, Lewis C. Sheafe (1859-1938) was the movement's first major "apostle" to the nation's urban black population. Moreover, during his years of connection with the denomination (1896-1916), Sheafe was indisputably the leading figure in the corps of preachers who emerged during those two decades to lay the foundations of Adventism among Americans of African heritage.

His tumultuous career pioneered, or was a major stimulus for, much of what made Adventism a significant and viable movement in America's urban black communities. At the same time, the struggles and controversies that plagued Sheafe's endeavors foreshadowed obstacles that would work against Adventism more fully realizing its initial promise as an empowering alternative for African Americans as they faced an onslaught of deepening repression around the turn of the century.

"Go, Preach to Your People"

On November 16, 1859, Lewis Charles Sheafe was born to Joseph and Louise Beaulette Sheafe in Baltimore, Maryland. His parents had been slaves, but had gained their freedom before he was born.[3]

In 1865, Louise Sheafe took five-year-old Lewis and his brother with her to live in Boston. His father's disappearance from the scene is unexplained. An eye injury and other health difficulties prevented Lewis from attaining formal education beyond a few months here and there, though his mother taught him in the "elementary branches."

As a young man, Lewis went into farming in West Dedham, Massachusetts, not far from Boston. He experienced conversion to Christ at age fifteen, but his mind remained restless as to which of the many denominations he should join. It was only after "long and prayerful study of God's Word" for himself over a period

of several years that he reached his decision to become a Baptist.

The spiritually serious young farmer also began sense a call – "Go, preach to your people" – which by 1885 he could no longer resist. At the age of twenty-six, he enrolled at Wayland Seminary, a Baptist institution in Washington, DC founded to educate freedmen for the ministry. There he excelled academically, completing both the normal and theological courses at an accelerated pace.

In brief recollections about his Wayland years, Sheafe later expressed gratitude to Dr. George Mellen Prentiss King, the school's president, but otherwise made little mention of the faculty. We do know, however, that he became particularly fond of one of his teachers, Miss Annie C. Howard, for she became his wife. Annie and Lewis married on June 6, 1888, just after his graduation, and after a few years of married life, Lewis acknowledged that his former teacher "is still my teacher in many things."[4] A poet and, as was her husband, a talented musician, Annie took a leading role in church work along the lines of teaching and benevolent service. Thus, both Annie and Lewis Sheafe embodied what W.E.B. Du Bois would call the "Talented Tenth" – the educated vanguard that Du Bois believed should be cultivated to lead the uplift of the black masses.[5]

Lewis's first pastorate after seminary was at Pilgrim Baptist Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he preached his first sermon on November 4, 1888, just as the Seventh-day Adventists were concluding their momentous 1888 General Conference session in nearby Minneapolis.

The founders of Pilgrim Baptist Church had made their pilgrimage up the Mississippi river after escaping from slavery in Missouri during the midst of the Civil War. By the time Sheafe arrived, the congregation was bitterly divided and struggling to make payments on its church building debt. He found a mere 36 souls in attendance for services in a sanctuary that seated 500. Under his preaching and leadership, the average attendance for Sunday evening services rose to 300 by 1890[6] and the debt was brought under control.[7]

As pastor of Pilgrim Baptist, Sheafe spoke out passionately for racial justice and became involved in early efforts to challenge the gathering repression that was crushing hopes raised during Reconstruction. St. Paul's relatively small black community of about 1500 included a professional and business elite of energetic, outspoken advocates for civil rights and black progress. Among these were J.Q. Adams, editor and publisher of *The Appeal* newspaper – a rich source of information on Sheafe, and attorney Frederick McGhee, who would later become a highly-valued colleague of W.E.B. Du Bois in the Niagara movement and in the formation of the NAACP.[8]

In 1891 the St. Paul Afro-American League became frustrated by the

inaction of the national Afro-American League, which had organized in 1889 under the leadership of T. Thomas Fortune. Reconstituting themselves as the Minnesota Civil Rights Committee, the St. Paul group undertook a challenge to the constitutionality of a law for racial segregation of railroad passengers recently enacted by the state of Tennessee. The legal challenge eventually fizzled, but the Minnesotans had at least taken an initiative ahead of the rest of nation in the fight for equality. And for our purposes, Sheafe's involvement is of considerable significance.

The first meeting in the Minnesota Civil Rights Committee's campaign to generate support for "testing the validity of the separate car acts of the South" took place on Sunday evening, September 27 at Pilgrim Baptist Church. Sheafe preached a special sermon on "Rights, Civil and Otherwise," which the *Appeal* commended as "replete with sound logic and wholesome advice" and "very well received by the large audience."[9]

In 1892, the Sheafe family, which now included two small children, left St. Paul for Youngstown, Ohio, where the Elder became pastor of the Mahoning Avenue Baptist Church, a move he later attributed to "domestic reasons and climatic considerations." After two years in Youngstown, during which the congregation grew from 55 to 300 members and a new sanctuary was constructed, Sheafe accepted a call to the Jerusalem Baptist Church in Urbana, west of Columbus.[10]

During his years in Ohio, Sheafe's reputation as a preacher of exceptional eloquence and power spread:

In November 1894, the *Salem Daily News* noted: "Rev. Lewis C. Sheafe, the eloquent colored divine of Youngstown, will preach at the Methodist church [in Ellsworth] next Sunday..."[11]

In October 1895, the *Columbus Dispatch* reported: "Rev. Mr. Sheafe achieved quite a reputation here as a pulpit orator and was accorded unusual privileges by the white people of this city [Urbana]."[12]

"This Message for My People"

Then, in 1896, this "eloquent colored divine" stood before his congregation in Urbana and made the stunning announcement that he had accepted the tenets of the Seventh-day Adventists and thus felt compelled to sever his connection with the Baptist faith, and give up his pulpit.

How did this dramatic change come about? Sheafe identified one major factor when, at the 1899 General Conference session he testified that "it was largely through benefit derived from treatment at the [Battle Creek] sanitarium, what I learned from its health foods and principles, that my eyes opened to

present truth."[13]

While the search continues for more evidence that sheds light on his conversion, it seems clear that Sheafe saw in Adventism the promise of redemption for black America at a time when racial oppression was rapidly reaching its severest level in the nation's post-emancipation history. That promise indeed centered on the soon return of Christ, yet at the same time offered uplift here and now through education and health reform. He told the delegates at the 1899 session that "to-day my heart's desire and prayer is that this message may go to my people all over the United States.... The message is now reaching out for the poor negroes of the United States of America. I praise the Lord that many of their hearts are opening to receive it."[14]

The General Conference granted Sheafe a ministerial license in March 1897 and over the next five years he engaged in evangelistic ministry, principally in Kentucky, Tennessee and South Carolina. When Sheafe began these labors, the Adventist work among African Americans was still in its infancy. At least four black congregations had been established in Kentucky and Tennessee.[15] The black membership of the integrated and growing congregation in Washington, D.C. was likely no more than 50.[16] And, the work launched by Edson White along the banks of the Mississippi river was still in its early stages.

The small groups of believers planted or built up by Sheafe's labors during these years thus were of pioneering significance, if not large in numbers. Moreover, the crowds he drew *were* large, and he generated considerable attention for the Adventist cause wherever he went.[17]

His remarkable abilities and diligent labors did not go unrecognized by the brethren in Battle Creek. At some point between 1897 and 1902, Sheafe was either the first or one of the first two black persons appointed to the board of the Oakwood Industrial School.[18] He was invited to preach at the 1901 General Conference session and also rendered musical selections for a number of the meetings.

Along with these indications of recognition and acceptance, however, racial tensions involving Sheafe also surfaced in 1901. In accordance with the administrative reorganization voted at that session, Sheafe, who had been part of the General Conference's itinerant evangelistic work force, was assigned to the newly-formed Southern Union. However, the Southern Union leadership did not want him in that territory. In his refusal to accommodate segregation, Sheafe's work "widened the breach between the races," they charged. They recommended

that he be re-assigned to work in the North.[19] Uncertain to whom he should report, Sheafe continued working in South Carolina on a project he had initiated to establish bases for ministry at black colleges. But months went by without pay.[20]

By October, General Conference president A.G. Daniells patched up the situation and Sheafe was returned to the General Conference work force. Though seeds of mistrust had no doubt been planted, they soon were submerged by an exciting new prospect in the nation's capital. Organized in 1889 as an outgrowth of one of the several city missions planted by the denomination in that decade, the Adventist congregation in Washington, DC had grown to around 150 members by the turn of the century. Most of the growth was coming from Washington's large black population, so that by 1900 about two-thirds of the members were black.[21]

For many of the reasons that would soon become rationale for re-locating General Conference headquarters there, Daniells recognized the critical significance of the nation's capital to the Adventist cause. He was willing to make a major investment of General Conference resources in building up the work in Washington, on the condition that the racial dilemma be handled along clear lines that had been agreed upon at a meeting of the Southern Union conference in Nashville in January 1902. At that meeting, Daniells wrote in a letter to Atlantic Union president H.W. Cottrell, unanimous agreement had been reached on a two-point policy on race relations:

1) Adventists should not devote their energies to bringing about "an equality of the races";
2) the races should meet separately "in those parts of the country where it causes offense for them to mix."[22]

We "did not feel free to draft a statement of our decision," Daniells related, but clearly he regarded the agreement as firm and binding policy.

As for Washington, Daniells was certain that in this city of Southern ways, capital to a nation in which an increasingly ominous racial atmosphere prevailed as a whole, the Adventist cause could move forward only with segregated congregations. White people would not be induced to join congregations with a large black presence. Men of social standing and political influence would not look with favor on a movement with a reputation for race-mixing and agitating for equality.

The General Conference president's firm convictions along these lines ran head on into the absolute commitment of leaders of the Washington congregation, both black and white, to the principle of the equality of all believers united by faith in Christ. Dr. James Howard, uncle of Eva B. Dykes, and

Andrew Kalstrom, for several years the church's head elder, took the lead in advancing this principle as central to the Adventist movement's restoration of biblical Christianity for the latter days and preparation for living in the future state soon to come.[23]

As they looked toward plans for a major, General Conference-funded evangelistic effort in 1902, Daniells and the Washington church leaders did agree on an important tactical matter: two evangelists, one black and the other white would be needed in order to get a hearing from both races. It was on the next step that they differed: Daniells wanted the effort to result in two racially separate congregations. Howard and Kalstrom wanted new believers to be brought together into the one congregation, with refusal to make distinctions based on race taught as one of the principles of their new faith.

Sheafe was the obvious, perhaps only viable choice as the black preacher required by the plan. "Personally I like the man very much," Daniells said of Sheafe, describing him as "a talented man, both as a speaker and a singer." But would he follow the plan for separate congregations? Daniells worked hard to secure the preacher's assurance on that point, and convinced himself that he had obtained it.[24]

"Noted Apostle of Seventh-day Adventism"

So, Sheafe and Judson S. Washburn went to work in Washington, setting up their separate evangelistic tents in June. The response to Sheafe's preaching was nothing short of dramatic. For a few brief, shining months, an Adventist evangelist galvanized the attention of the nation's capital. On September 1, 1902, a substantial article in the *Washington Post* reported that a mixed-race crowd of 2,000 had gathered to hear Sheafe preach on "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb" in a tent that seated only 800. With children seated around him on the platform, the "tall and angular" preacher gave a rapid-fire exposition of numerous biblical texts in "a rich, resonant voice" that "goes low in range [and then] swells in volume."[25]

The city's two black newspapers gave Sheafe extensive and favorable coverage. The *Colored American* extolled his eloquence, his "perfect familiarity with the Holy Bible," and his "prompt and ready sympathy." His ministry had "awakened this sated city, among both the whites and blacks, to the impulses of a higher and truer Christian life."[26] The *Washington Bee* observed that "Negro ministers abuse him especially the Baptist but they do not dare to answer his argument, many of them have attempted but failed. . . ."[27]

By mid-August, the number of converts to Adventism through Sheafe's efforts

was at twenty-eight and would eventually grow to sixty.[28] These new members became part of the Washington Adventist church that was still a single congregation. The following month, however, a wrenching separation was effected by General Conference and Atlantic Union officers, in which about half of the white members formed a new congregation pastored by Washburn, with the other half remaining in the original congregation, pastored by Sheafe, which quickly took the name *First* Seventh-day Adventist Church of Washington.[29]

Though enormously consequential, the separation did not derail Sheafe's progress in advancing the Adventist cause in Washington. Indeed, he followed Daniells' plan in modified form. After another successful evangelistic campaign in 1903, he formed in December a third Adventist congregation in Washington – the predominantly black People's Church. By 1905 the membership at People's Church had reached 130.[30]

As a Seventh-day Adventist minister, Sheafe was fully engaged with the black elite of the nation's capital as they worked to advance the interests of their people. Sheafe, identified by the *Post* as "the well-known evangelist" was one of the "representative colored citizens" invited to speak for the formal celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, held at Metropolitan A.M.E. Church on January 1, 1903.[31] The roster of speakers also included P.B.S. Pinchback, the former governor of Louisiana, and Howard University sociologist Kelly Miller. In September 1903 Sheafe spoke at the initial meeting of the Negro Suffrage League of the District of Columbia, which was seen as part of the growing challenge to Booker T. Washington's program of gradualism in race relations. According to the *Post*, the speakers "inveigh[ed] against restriction of civil rights and urge[d] united and systematic resistance."[32]

"The Separation Was a Sad Mistake"

The storm within Adventism that dashed the bright hopes of the 1902-1904 was caused not so much segregation, but failure to live up to the "separate but equal" formula which the Supreme Court had only recently declared for the nation and which the denominational leadership had adopted for the church. In 1905 the People's church had acquired its own building at 10th and V streets, NW, right next to black Washington's cultural center along the U street corridor. Sheafe's congregation had financed the deal entirely on its own, a fact that gains significance when seen alongside a recently concluded denomination-wide campaign to raise $10,000 for the Second, or Memorial, church, and a current

$100,000-campaign to build up the church's institutions in its new Takoma Park headquarters.[33]

In 1906, the People's Church sent a petition to the General Conference, asking if they would have equal access to the new school and sanitarium in Takoma Park. If not, the petitioners asked, could they be permitted to use their church monies to establish a training institute and treatment rooms in the city for use by blacks? The General Conference leadership, while looking favorably on the possibility of allocating funds for that purpose in the not-too-distant future, both rejected the financial autonomy plan the People's Church had put forward, and refused to commit General Conference funds in the near term.[34]

By the fall of 1906, Sheafe's frustration with the compounded injustices led him to turn to friends – John Harvey Kellogg and Alonzo T. Jones – who by now had become entrenched opponents of the General Conference as reorganized under the leadership of A.G. Daniells. If options were closed to young black Adventists for training along medical missionary lines in Washington, Sheafe thought, perhaps arrangements could be made for their education with Dr. Kellogg. During extended visit to Battle Creek, Sheafe sent a letter to his congregation reporting that the doctor was not the dangerous heretic that the General Conference portrayed him as being. He also found Jones's anti-hierarchical organization views useful in supporting an assertion of congregational authority, which is what Sheafe, as a Baptist, had been familiar with anyway. In February 1907, the People's Church declared its congregational independence from General Conference control, while otherwise retaining Adventist beliefs and practices.

Other black Adventist ministers, such as Sydney Scott and W.H. Green, the former attorney who joined the church in response to Sheafe's evangelism, began attempts at reconciliation almost as soon as the People's Church announced its "secession," and the General Conference was not closed to these initiatives. However, formidable barriers had cemented which would not easily crumble. Daniells would brook no compromise regarding church organization at time when it was under attack from powerful enemies. Everything accomplished in the painstaking implementation of the reorganization of 1901, which he believed had divine endorsement, and the hard-fought battles over it, was at stake. For his part, Sheafe refused to be swayed from his course by a testimony from Ellen White warning against his coming under the influence of Battle Creek, thus taking on the stigma of antagonism to the Spirit of Prophecy. These elements of conflict, formidable enough in themselves, mixed with racial prejudices and mistrust to form a truly potent compound.

It took six years to effect reconciliation, and the embattled pastor's domestic life was a catalyst to making it finally happen, even as it had been a

factor leading to the alienation in the first place. Lewis and Annie's marital relationship had grown tempestuous, and it was not a secret confined within the walls of their home. That situation, along with the dangers of Battle Creek and of "spiritual pride", were the main concerns of Ellen White's testimony sent in February of 1907. (It contains, by the way, not one word of rebuke for his views or activities on racial matters).[35] At any rate A.G. Daniells' knowledge of, and use of, information concerning the Sheafes' marital problems seems likely to have further antagonized Lewis.

Then, even greater tragedy struck. Only months after the church's separation from the General Conference in 1907, both Annie and eighteen-year-old Clara – beloved and talented daughter who played the organ for her father's meetings – contracted tuberculosis. Clara died in December 1907, followed by Annie in February 1908.

Three years later, here in Madison County, Alabama, Sheafe married the former Lucy P. Whitsel, who openly and confidently declared that she would influence him to rejoin the denominational fold. Sure enough, early in 1912, Sheafe extended an "olive branch" to the General Conference by inviting religious liberty director K.C. Russell to preach at the People's Church on Sabbath, February 3. With Daniells out of town, Russell went ahead without permission, and in so doing opened a process by which the People's Church was accepted into the fellowship of churches comprising the District of Columbia Conference a little more than a year later.[36]

While the strong will of the second Mrs. Sheafe was a precipitant, I do not mean to suggest that it was the only or major cause of Sheafe's return to the organized ranks of Seventh-day Adventist ministry. In his letter of rapprochement to Daniells, Sheafe observed that neither side had prospered since the separation of 1907. The work of the People's Church, he acknowledged, "has been neutralized, to a great extent."[37] The public prominence Sheafe had enjoyed in 1902-1904 appears to have waned. Thus, there seems little reason to doubt the sincerity of his confession in front of the General Conference session of 1913 that the separation had been a "sad mistake."

Sheafe's remarks in this public act of contrition attest to his sense of being called to lead in the liberation of black Americans by means of the Seventh-day Adventist message. Referring to his acceptance of the Adventist message eighteen years earlier, he said, "I saw in it wonderful possibilities for my people. I had no special personal aims or ambitions, but I felt that this message could do so much for my people;…." Now, he felt that perhaps his situation paralleled that of Moses:

> [W]hen he came out and saw the Egyptian ill-treating the Hebrew, you remember he took off

> his coat and rolled up his sleeves and pitched in to deliver Israel himself. He was forty years ahead of God, and therefore God had to put him in the mountains tending sheep to teach him his lesson. God had a thought for Israel and for the Hebrews deeper, grander than Moses had, and afterward used him wonderfully in leading his people forward.[38]

Along with Daniells, at least eight ministers, black and white, took the floor to express warm praise for Sheafe and joy at the healing of the breach.

In addition to acknowledging the error of his ways, Sheafe agreed to accept assignment to minister in a venue far removed from Washington – Los Angeles, California. Though flashes of the success and accolades that had accompanied his work elsewhere appear,[39] Sheafe's ministry in southern California quickly became mired in a dispute with the Southern California Conference leadership over his stance toward the statements on racial matters published in Volume 9 of the *Testimonies* by Ellen White. Within two years his work there would be over.

In a letter to Daniells, Sheafe wrote:

> We would have gone on and said nothing more about "Vol. 9" – but they objected to our silence. We stated plainly that we believed in Sister White as having the gift of prophecy – but – did not believe she wrote those statements in the book which to us don't at all harmonize with God's Word.[40]

Meanwhile, at the People's Church in Washington, A.T. Jones re-appeared late in 1915, adding volatility to an already-flammable atmosphere. Sheafe's return in July 1916, at the invitation – he claimed – of People's Church pastor Fred Seeney, to join in conducting evangelistic meetings with Seeney and Jones, the arch-enemy of church organization, sealed the doom of his re-union with the denomination.

While Seeney, in the end, opted for denominational loyalty, the People's Church, with Sheafe once again at the helm, officially declared its independence from "denominational bands and fetters" in February 1917, ten years to the month after it had done so the first time.[41] The members who wished to remain connected with the Seventh-day Adventist organization were organized into a church that took the name "Ephesus."

The hopes, so recently re-kindled, that the extraordinary gifts of Lewis Sheafe could be once again marshaled for the cause of bringing to black America the Adventist message, with the rich potential its holistic message contained for an oppressed people, had been extinguished, this time for good.

Final Years

As for the two decades remaining before Sheafe's death in 1938, I will simply note a few points that seem particularly significant, based on thus-far sketchy evidence:

- Sheafe and the People's Church, in cutting ties with the denomination, nonetheless continued to claim identity as Seventh-day Adventists and

vigorously asserted belief in the Third Angel's message. Sheafe apparently envisioned and made some efforts toward forming an association of like-minded Seventh-day Adventist congregations. Such efforts came to naught. However, the congregation retained the name People's Seventh-day Adventist Church until 1925.

- According to Richard Nikkels' *History of the Seventh Day Church of God*, the People's Church affiliated with the Church of God (Seventh Day) in 1923 and Sheafe became a credentialed minister of that denomination and associate editor of its periodical, the *Bible Advocate* in 1924.[42]
- In 1927, Sheafe became an accredited Seventh Day Baptist minister and the church name changed to People's Seventh Day Baptist Church. In 1931, as a member of an "examining council," he made the motion in favor of the accreditation of another alienated Adventist leader, L.R. Conradi, as a Seventh Day Baptist minister.[43]
- Along side his ministerial work, Sheafe began practice as a chiropractor in 1923, having earned his degree from Central Chiropractic College in Washington at the age of 63.[44]
- In the 1920s Sheafe also became active in the Washington division of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. In 1922 he purchased a $100 bond issued by the UNIA in New York that promised to yield interest at 5% per annum. And, in August 1926, he was the main speaker for the opening night of the third local convention of the UNIA and African Communities League held at Walker Memorial Church in Washington.[45]

Through the vicissitudes of a turbulent career, with its wide-ranging, frequently-shifting affiliations, Sheafe never wavered from, nor was anything less than bold in advocacy for three enduring convictions: 1) the truth of the Christian gospel; 2) the seventh-day Sabbath as central to the commandment-observing way of gospel believers; and, 3) the full equality of all people before God requiring corresponding practice in the life of the church and in its action in the world, no matter how out of step such may be with ruling powers and authorities.

Sheafe's Significance: Preliminary Observations

I am still quite a distance from reaching carefully weighed and sorted judgments about Lewis Sheafe's historical significance, but will in conclusion offer some preliminary observations and questions:

First, a life that weaves together northern black Baptist church life before

the great migration, the Christian Endeavor, early holiness and Pentecostal influences, Seventh-day Adventism, the quest for innovative therapies, the Afro-American League, the NAACP and the UNIA, would seem a rewarding study for the broader field of American religion and culture, not just of Adventist history.

Within the more specific frame of Adventist history, the term "apostle" seems appropriate for Sheafe in both its pioneering and leadership connotations. He established the first, to my knowledge, thriving black Adventist congregation in a major city. He was the preeminent figure in the first generation of black Adventist ministers. He fostered, mentored, trained – in some significant way influenced – several ministers whose influences would in turn ripple out broadly in shaping the Adventist work among black Americans over the next several decades, for example: W.H. Green, first black minister to head the North American Negro Department; John H. Wagner, first president of the Allegheny Conference and principal founder of Pine Forge Academy; Frank L. Peterson, who would become president of Oakwood College and vice president of the General Conference.

Beyond these facts, I am interested in another question: What might we learn about the character of Adventism, ca. 1890-1920, from the fact that someone of Sheafe's ability, training, relative prominence, and high level of involvement in struggles for racial justice would be won over to the movement and stay with it as long as he did, despite repeated and compounded provocations? I am inclined to think that he had plausible reasons for seeing great "possibilities" for his people in the "present truth" of Adventism. The possibilities were there for the Adventist church to be the head and not the tail in embodying the principles of the gospel to race relations in its corporate life, to be a counter-witness to the capitulation to racism that was sweeping along the nation's churches as well as the society as a whole. The tragedy of Sheafe's alienation is the tragedy of the church's failure to realize that opportunity – a failure in which temporizing and accommodations would turn into institutionalized racism, causing incalculable damage to the Adventist witness down to the present day.

"Tragedy" is not the last word in this story, though. The great institution hosting us for this conference is proof enough of that. The trauma of the Sheafe "defections" from the organized work provided loyal black Adventists leverage for gaining a greater measure of just and equitable treatment in the denomination.

- The first defection of 1907 gave impetus to the formation of the North American Negro Department in 1909.
- After the second defection finalized in 1917, the General Conference, which had over the past decade pled various exigencies as reason for appropriating precisely $0 for the development of black institutions in

Washington, suddenly came up with $18,000 for a property with a church building and facilities to accommodate a school for the new Ephesus congregation.[46]

Conversely, the tenacious loyalty to the denomination that became a defining feature of black Adventism must have at least in part been formed in response to the departures of Sheafe, J.W. Manns, and J.K. Humphrey,[47] all of which took place within a fifteen-year time span (1916-1930, if one starts with Sheafe's second and final exit). Those who stayed with the denomination geared their lives to it as the flawed but God-ordained instrument for "present truth" – the final and destiny-determining message for the last days. No less acutely burdened by racial injustices than Sheafe and the others, they put their Seventh-day Adventist identity ahead of immediate resolution of the problems, even while laboring diligently to redress them from within.

So, while we find much that informs and inspires through historical recovery of Sheafe's career, perhaps the most significant of all is the way in which it throws into relief those who continued to see the possibilities – the treasure in earthen vessels – that he once saw, and thus dedicated their lives to building up black Adventist churches and institutions from scratch and in the face of serious opposition on multiple fronts. They are the ones who thereby extended new opportunities to hundreds of thousands of people constricted by disadvantages not of their own making – opportunities for education, for a healthier and happier way of life, for the warm embrace of a community that supports and prods them, and for an enduring hope that carries them through it all.

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[1] Untitled editorial comment, *Colored American* (8 November 1902): 8

[2] Sheafe is not mentioned in the most widely-recognized history of Adventism: Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, rev. ed (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), nor in Gary Land, ed. *Adventism in America* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), nor is there an entry for him in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. However, his historiographical fortunes have undergone a mild up-tick during the past thirty years. Jacob Justiss referred to Sheafe's preaching exploits in Washington and his conflicts with the denomination in *Angels in Ebony* (1975), 45, 84, 109. In his six-volume biography of Ellen White, Arthur White mentioned Sheafe in connection with Mrs. White's extended visit to Washington in 1904 (*Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years, 1900-1905*, Vol. 5 [Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981], 326) and with the culmination of conflicts with J.H. Kellogg and A.T. Jones in *Ellen G. White: The Final Years, 1905-1915*, Vol. 6 (Review, 1982), 120-121. Roy Branson touches

on Sheafe's role in the denomination's first major crisis over race relations in the chapter, "Adventism's Rainbow Coalition," in Delber Baker, ed., *Make Us One: Celebrating Spiritual Unity In the Midst of Cultural Diversity* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1995), 71-72.

The first narrative account of Sheafe's role in the origins of Adventism in Washington, D.C. came in Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists With an African Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1984), 270-273. George Knight's subsequent inclusion of Sheafe in his brief history, *Anticipating the Advent: A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 112, reflects growing awareness of his significance. Knight also draws attention Sheafe's role in the organizational battles of the first decade of the twentieth century in *From 1888 to Apostasy: The Case of A.T. Jones* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), 240-242, and in *Organizing to Beat the Devil: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001), 120-121.

Four works appeared in the final five years of the twentieth century bringing to light previously-unpublished information about Sheafe, critical in importance but not large in quantity: Delbert W. Baker, compiler, *Telling the Story: An Anthology on the Development of the Black SDA Work* (Atlanta and Nashville: Black Caucus of SDA Administrators, 1996; full text also available at the General Conference Archives web site under the heading "Ethnic Adventism" http://www.adventistarchives.org/DocArchives.asp; Mervyn A. Warren, *Oakwood! A Vision Splendid 1896-1996* (Huntsville, AL: Oakwood College, 1996); Charles Edward Dudley, *Thou Who Hast Brought Us Thus Far On Our Way – II: The Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination among African Americans* (Nashville: Dudley Publications, 2000); and Alven Makapela, *The Problem With Africanity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, African Studies Volume 42 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).

Makapela provides the most extensive discussion of Sheafe in print, but the book is relatively difficult to access for American readers. Two quite recently published books that draw on Makapela for information about Sheafe should reach a somewhat wider readership: R. Clifford Jones, *James K. Humphrey and the Sabbath-Day Adventists* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006) and Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking A Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, rev. ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2007).

[3] Information about Sheafe's early life comes from two biographical profiles published in newspapers, based largely on interviews with Sheafe: "A New Faith Comes," *Colored American* (13 September 1902): 1-2; "Rev. L.C. Sheafe," *The Appeal* (17 January 1891): 1-2.

[4] "Rev. L.C. Sheafe".

[5] Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham points out Wayland's president was among the leading advocates for developing a "Female Talented Tenth." Slavery, said King, had deprived black mothers of the ability to read the Bible to their children. The roles of wife, mother, church worker, and schoolteacher, he maintained, required an educated womanhood. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 21-22.

[6] "Pilgrim Baptist Church," *Appeal* (1 November 1890): 2.

[7] "Pilgrim Baptist Church Parts With their Pastor Rev. L.C. Sheafe With Much Regret," *Appeal* (9 July 1892): 3.

[8] Paul D. Nelson, *Frederick L. McGhee: A Life on the Color Line, 1861-1912* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2002).

[9] "The Jim Crow Car Must Go," *Appeal* (3 October 1891): 2; and "Civil Rights," *Appeal* (26 September 1891): 2.

[10] "A New Faith Comes," *Colored American* (13 September 1892): 2.

[11] "Ellsworth," *Salem Daily News* (14 November 1894): 7(?)

[12] "To New Fields," *Columbus Dispatch* (17 October 1895): ?

[13] *General Conference Daily Bulletin* (22 February 1899): 50.

[14] *General Conference Daily Bulletin* (16 February 1899): 5.

[15] Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists With an African Heritage* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1984), 112-113.

[16] I base this on research cited my unpublished manuscript, "'A Living Miracle': A History of the First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Washington, D.C., Vol. 1, 1889-1924."

[17] See, for example, E.H. Gates, "Cumberland Mission Field," *Review and Herald* (6 December 1898): 12, which

gives information on Sheafe's work in Georgetown, Kentucky.

[18] Mervyn A. Warren, *Oakwood! A Vision Splendid, 1896-1996* (Oakwood College, 1996), 35.

[19] General Conference Committee minutes, 27 October 1901; R.M. Kilgore to A.G. Daniells, 20 May 1901, General Conference Archives (GCA).

[20] Lewis C. Sheafe (LCS) to A.G. Daniells (AGD), 17 June 1901, GCA; LCS to H.E. Rogers, 2 August 1901, GCA.

[21] Andrew Kahlstrom to H.W. Cottrell (HWC), 3 September 1900, GCA.

[22] AGD to HWC, 21 January and 3 February 1902, GCA

[23] Letters from Dr. Howard to A.G. Daniells and E.G. White are included in Edwin J. Humphrey, Sr. with Emory J. Tolbert, *My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord* (Huntsville, AL: Oakwood College Publishing Association, 2001), 78-83. Unpublished correspondence from Kahlstrom in the General Conference Archives convey his convictions, for example, AK to AGD, 30 March 1903

[24] AGD to HWC, 21 January 1901, GCA, and several other letters analyzed in "'A Living Miracle.'"

[25] "Thousands Hear Him, Negro Minister Draws Large Crowds to His Tent, Preaches a Simple Gospel," *Washington Post* (1 September 1902): ?.

[26] "New Faith Comes," p. 2.

[27] "A Small Thing," *Washington Bee* (29 November 1902): 1.

[28] LCS to H.E. Osborne, 1 August 1902, GCA; L.C. Sheafe and F.H. Seeney, "Washington, D.C.," *Atlantic Union Gleaner* (20 August 1902): 7; Lewis C. Sheafe, "People's Seventh-day Adventist Church of Washington, D.C.," *Review and Herald* (24 August 1905): 15.

[29] H.W. Cottrell, "Washington, D.C,." *Atlantic Union Gleaner* (1 October 1902): 5-6; HWC to AGD, 24 September 1902, GCA.

[30] Sheafe, "People's Seventh-day Adventist Church".

[31] "Celebration of Lincoln's Proclamation," *Washington Post* (1 January 1903): 3; "Emancipation Celebration" *Colored American* (3 January 1903): 9.

[32] "Negro's Status Here," *Washington Post* (26 September 1903): 4.

[33] Sheafe, "People's Seventh-day Adventist Church".

[34] General Conference Committee Minutes, 28 May 1906, GCA web site <http://www.adventistarchives.org/DocArchives.asp>

[35] Ellen G. White to LCS, 4 February 1907, Ellen G. White Manuscript Release #1023, *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 13, 159-165.

[36] K.C. Russell to AGD, 5 February 1912, GCA.

[37] LCS to AGD, 12 April 1913, GCA.

[38] GCB, 1 June 1913: 212-213.

[39] Lewis C. Sheafe, "The Week of Prayer at the Furlong [Los Angeles] Church," *Pacific Union Recorder* (8 January 1914); 2-3; "Education Theme of Adventists," *Los Angeles Times* (13 August 1914): II8; Lewis C. Sheafe, "Work for the Colored Population of Los Angeles, Cal.," *Review and Herald* (28 January 1915): 17-18; "Southern California Session," *Pacific Union Recorder* (11 March 1915): 10-11.

[40] LCS and wife to AGD, 26 October 1915.

[41] *Experience of the People's S.D.A. Church*, undated pamphlet, c. 1917, Ellen G. White Estate, DF 53.

[42] Richard Nikkels, *History of the Seventh Day Church of God*, Vol. 1, chapter IX, 19; at the "Giving and Sharing" web site < http://www.giveshare.org/churchhistory/historysdcog/history9.html>.

[43] *Albert N. Rogers, Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America, Vol. III, 1900-1955* (Plainfield, NJ: Seventh Day Baptist Publishing House, 1972), 52, 92, 229.

[44] "Sheafe, Lewis Charles" in *Who's Who in Colored America – 1944*, 461.

[45] "Negro Associations Will Honor Garvey," *Washington Post* (17 August 1926): 13. The author possesses a photocopy of the bond note, graciously provided by

[46] T.E. Bowen to AGD, 26 December 1916; 25 April 1917, GCA.

[47] Jones, 19-35, provides an excellent overview.