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# The Father of Black Adventism

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## **The Father of Black Adventism: Charles M. Kinny**

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### **Introduction**

Charles M. Kinny<sup>1</sup> was the first African American ordained minister in the Seventh-day Adventist church, yet so little has been written about him that he is virtually unknown. His contributions to the work among Blacks within the Adventist church have been largely ignored and forgotten by the scholars of the church.

Although, a number of works have tried to document the history of Black Adventism,<sup>2</sup> very few works, with the exception of Michael

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<sup>1</sup> There is a discrepancy with the spelling of his name in various documents where it appears as Kinney rather than Kinny. In most of the official church documents about Kinny, his name is spelled as Kinney, and so the vast majority of scholars who have mentioned him in print have continued using the name Kinney. I am departing from this practice and will use Kinny since all the letters, every single one of them without exception that were signed by him used the spelling "Kinny." A few examples of these are: C. M Kinny Letter to Eld. W. A. Colcord, Bowling Green, KY, Sept. 7, 1892; C. M. Kinny Letter to W. A. Colcord No. 80 Race Street, New Orleans, LA, Sept 11. 1892. C. M. Kinny Letter to Eld. W. A. Colcord, Fulton, KY, July 20th, 1892. All these letters can be found at the Adventist Heritage Center, see file 013316 at the James White Library, Andrews University.

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of books over the years that have tried to document the history of Black Adventism, some of them have focused on significant events or individuals. Some of the most notable works are: Louis Reynolds, *We have Tomorrow, the Story of American Seventh-day Adventists with an African Heritage*, Review and Herald, Hagerstown, MD 1984; Delbert Baker, *The Unknown Prophet*, Review and Herald, Hagerstown, MD 1987; *Make Us One*, Pacific Press, Boise, ID, 1995; and "Telling the Story of Anthology on the Development of the Black SDA Work," a collection of historical document articles and visuals on selected topics relevant to the Black SDA work, Loma Linda, CA, University Printing Services, 1996; Walter Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, Review and Herald, Hagerstown, MD, 1990; Ronald Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations*, Review

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Utzinger's work<sup>3</sup> and a short but interesting biographical sketch by Ronald Graybill, actually deals with Kinny as a significant figure in early Adventism. According to Ron Graybill "from the beginning of Adventist work among Blacks in the early 1880s down to the time when Edson White reached Vicksburg in 1895, Kinny was the preeminent figure in Black Adventism. Most of what Adventists learned about the progress of the work among Blacks they learned from the pen of Charles M. Kinney who wrote regular and detailed reports for the *Review and Herald*."<sup>4</sup>

The intent of this paper is to provide a brief survey of the first Adventist Black preacher and his contribution to the history of early Adventism. Because the leaders of early Adventism had little experience in evangelizing Blacks they looked to Kinny to provide them a model for how the work should be done among Blacks. "Kinny wrote to the General Conference secretary asking whether he should concentrate in preaching, giving Bible studies or colporteur work."<sup>5</sup> The secretary

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and Herald, Hagerstown, MD, 1970; Jacob Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, Jet Printing Services, Toledo, OH, 1975; Norwida Marshall, *A Star Gives Light: Seventh-day Adventist, African-American Heritage*, Southern Union Conference of SDA, Decatur, GA, 1989; J. L. McElhany, "Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey." General Conference Archives, Washington, DC, circa 1930-31; G. E. Peters, *Organization of Negro Conferences*, Book 1, Spring Council, Huntsville, AL, 1944; W. R. Robinson, *Roots, Race and Religion*, vol 2. Terrell's Bindery & Graphic Industries, Nashville, TN, 1988; Calvin B. Rock, *Go On!*, Review and Herald, Hagerstown, MD, 1994; Douglas Morgan, history professor at Washington Adventist University, has recently published an important biography that marks an important addition to this collection. (Lewis Sheafe: *Apostle to Black America*, Review and Herald, Hagerstown, MD, 2010); Samuel G. London, Jr., *Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, MS, 2009. This work by London is the first major study of Adventism and the Civil Rights Movement. Clifford Jones, *James K. Humphrey and the Sabbath-day Adventists*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, MS, 2006. This work by Dr. Clifford Jones, Associate Dean at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary, Andrews University is a ground breaking study on the life of probably the most influential Black Adventist pastor of the 1920s.

<sup>3</sup> J. Michael Utzinger, "The Third Angel's Message for My People: Charles M. Kinny and the Founding of the Adventist Missions Among Southern African Americans, 1889-1895," *Fides et Historia* 31(Spring 1998): 26-40. This is the best scholarly article that I am aware of on the life of Charles M. Kinny.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald D. Graybill, "Charles M. Kinney: Founder of Black Adventism," Lecture presented for Black History Week at Andrews University, Tuesday, February 11, 1975 (available for consultation at the Andrews University Center for Adventist Research, see file DF 3133 at Andrews University). Ronald Graybill, *Charles M. Kinny-Founder of Black Adventism*, Review and Herald 30 (13 January 1977): 6-8.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from D. T. Jones to C. M. Kinny, June 26, 1889 quoted in Graybill, 1, 2.

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having no precedent to guide him gave Kinny the privilege to experiment and determine for himself what would be most successful. He, however, placed a huge responsibility on Kinny's shoulders by suggesting that the success or failure of his methods would shape the General Conference policy regarding the work among Blacks.

#### **The Early Life and Conversion of Charles M. Kinny**

Charles M. Kinny was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1855, eleven years after the Disappointment of 1844. He was ten years old by the end of the Civil War. There is no record of his childhood experience in Virginia and the next time we hear of Charles, he is in Reno, Nevada. We can only speculate from this that his parents left Virginia for the West looking for a better life and ended up in Reno, Nevada.<sup>6</sup>

It was in Reno, Nevada, in 1878 at the age of 23 that Kinny attended a series of evangelistic sermons by J. N. Loughborough. Ellen White visited during the meetings and spoke to about four hundred listeners on the subject of the "Love of God." Her message was well received and her presence added much to the interest of the people and "left a favorable impression upon the public mind." Loughborough reported that "the question of the Sabbath and the Law would be addressed and he ended his report by praying that souls may be won as a result of their labors."<sup>7</sup>

Charles M. Kinny experienced conversion during those meetings. He never forgot Sister White's sermon and joyfully embraced the love of God and accepted the truth about the Sabbath and the Second Advent. He kept his first Sabbath on the last Saturday of September, 1878, at the age of 23. He was one of the seven charter members and the only Black member of the Reno Seventh-day Adventist church. He was welcomed warmly by the church and was later appointed secretary of their tract society.<sup>8</sup>

#### **The Early Work of Charles M. Kinny**

Charles Kinny began working shortly after his baptism as secretary of the Tract and Missionary Society at the Seventh-day Adventist church in Reno, Nevada, organized on November 17, 1878. Kinny sent a report of labor for the five quarters ending March 31, 1888, to the *Review and*

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<sup>6</sup> J. N. Loughborough, "Reno Nevada," *Review & Herald* 107, (February 6, 1930): 23.

<sup>7</sup> J. N. Loughborough. "Reno Nevada" *Signs of the Times* 4, (August 8, 1878): 240.

<sup>8</sup> "Obituary," *Review and Herald* 128, (August, 1951), 20.

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*Herald*, May 3, 1881.<sup>9</sup> The report revealed a conscientious, meticulous secretary and a clear writer, zealous for his new faith. Some conversions occurred because of this literature distribution, and Kinny commented that, “A colored teacher in Richmond, Virginia has accepted the truth as the result of receiving *Signs* from our society with correspondence and others are interested. In many of these cases our labor is like casting of bread upon the waters to be gathered after many days.”<sup>10</sup>

Kinny had an ongoing correspondence with interests from all across the nation. An example of this was a letter he received from a young Baptist minister in Richmond Virginia: “I have received all your papers, and find them interesting and containing valuable information. I am thankful for the knowledge I have received from your paper. I need all the aid I can get and if I can aid in the proclamation of the Third Angel’s Message, I shall be glad to do so.”<sup>11</sup>

Kinny served in this post until 1883 and learned many valuable lessons, including expressing himself in print with clarity and persuasion. He developed a passion and love for sharing his new found faith with others, as he became aware of the spiritual hunger that afflicted people all across the nation. He also developed a special sensitivity towards the needs of his own downtrodden people. Kinny matured spiritually on this job and it prepared him for future assignments. Charles Kinny would become the prominent figure in early Black Adventism and most of what Adventists learned about the early progress of the work among Blacks they learned from the writings of Charles Kinny. Church leaders looked to him to develop the best methods of evangelism among Blacks.<sup>12</sup>

As a new convert, Kinny made such a powerful impact while serving his local church that his church members, together with the California Conference, sent him to Healdsburg College in California in 1883 for further education. After his training, in 1885, the California Conference sent Kinny to Topeka, Kansas, to begin work among the Blacks there. According to Graybill, “he began working on the first of June and by mid-October he had canvassed a third of the town with Adventist books and tracts. He gave Bible studies as well and before

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Kinny, “Reno Nevada Missionary Society,” *Review and Herald* 57, (May 3, 1881): 285.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Roy Graybill, *Charles M. Kinny: Founder of Black Adventism*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Kinny “Labor among the Colored People of Topeka Kansas,” *Review & Herald* 62, (October 27, 1885): 668.

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long had succeeded in making three converts and showing up the Black Baptist minister of the town.”<sup>13</sup>

Kinny reported that his work stirred up opposition among the colored (Baptist) ministers and reported that one such minister attempted to demolish the biblical Sabbath and promoted Sunday as the Sabbath. Kinny attempted to meet with the pastor to review his issue, but was turned down. They met in the city park the following Sunday and Kinny successfully answered many of the objections raised by this Baptist minister.

What is noteworthy about Kinny's attitude was his determination to press on with the mission of taking the truth to his people. He cited three great obstacles that stood in the way: ignorance, superstition, and poverty. He then added a fourth: “they have drank deep of the wine of Babylon,” in the light of these challenges he noted that large conversions of these people would not be possible at the present time, but he asked for prayers so that “he would have physical, mental and spiritual strength to work for his people.”<sup>14</sup> Kinny embraced the challenge for he knew it would require painstaking and difficult effort before any notable results would be forthcoming, but he gave himself to the task and pledged his unyielding commitment.

While working in Topeka, Kansas, Kinny learned better how to work among his own people. He said that he made no special effort to preach the truth to them but based on his experience of working with them, he identified three strategies, namely: 1. Gaining their friendship was critical because of the strong influence of their ministers and their reticence to listen to strangers. 2. If one wanted them to attend the meetings, it was not a good idea to give them a direct and personal invitation. 3. Because of their commitments to their own meetings during the week, they could only attend one reading a week. Although the work progressed slowly, Kinny expressed optimism about the future and suggested that faithful and persistent effort would win many.<sup>15</sup>

Judging from Kinny's report, much of his early work was not public evangelism, but personal evangelism. He spoke of the difficulty of getting a public place at a reasonable rate, so he made personal calls

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Charles M. Kinny, “Labor Among the Colored People,” *Review & Herald* 63, (May 28, 1886): 333.

<sup>15</sup> Charles M. Kinny, “Topeka, Fort Scott Kansas,” *Review & Herald* 64, (Sept. 6, 1887): 572.

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going from house to house giving Bible studies, selling, loaning, and giving away Adventist literature.<sup>16</sup>

Kinny continued to labor in Kansas throughout 1886 and 1887 focusing primarily on Topeka and Emporia. Reporting from Emporia he sent a summary of his work. As a result of his effort six people began keeping the Sabbath, and ten signed a covenant to keep all the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

Kinny's hard work was beginning to show results. Graybill noted that the work was slow and difficult because his work seemed to focus on people who were members of well established Baptist and Methodist churches and tearing themselves away from the social matrix which bound the Black community together was no easy task.<sup>18</sup>

This was probably the major reason why Kinny found it difficult to convert Blacks. The majority of Blacks already belonged to other black churches. The Black church was the most important institution for Blacks. "It functioned not only as a house of worship, but also an agency of social controls, forum of discussion and debate, promoter of education and economic cooperation, and arena for the development and assertion of leadership."<sup>19</sup> E. Franklin Frazier called the Black church a veritable "nation within a nation."<sup>20</sup> At the individual level, but especially collectively joined in association, Black churches represented not just an escapist or otherworldly orientation, but also the only bastion of a community under assault. For many members, the church remained a focus for perpetuation of community identity and for its leaders it was the only vehicle to fight for racial self-reliance. Since Black Adventists had not yet formed a critical mass for organized churches, all of the newly baptized Blacks would be incorporated in already established White Adventist churches. Since their churches meant so much to Blacks it is no wonder Kinny found it so difficult to convert them to essentially a "white organization," which had very few Black members.

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<sup>16</sup> Charles M. Kinny, "Emporia," *Review & Herald* 64, (15 October 1887): 716.

<sup>17</sup> Graybill, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Evelyn B. Higginbotham, "The Black Church: A Gender Perspective" in Timothy E. Fulop and Albert Raboteau (eds.), *African-American Religion; Interpretive Essays in History and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 207.

<sup>19</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schafer Books, 1964), chapter 3.

<sup>20</sup> Charles M. Kinny, "Canvassing in Kansas and Missouri" *Review & Herald* 66, (Jan 29, 1898), 77.

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Towards the end of 1887, Kinny began to focus more on canvassing. In Kansas and Missouri he reported selling 439 books and quite a number of ministers bought books from him and expressed praise concerning their purchase. He also preached several times and distributed ninety copies of the *Sentinel*. He was passionate about his work and writes that “this is no time to be idle.” For the first time we find Kinny extending his labors into a new state: Missouri.<sup>21</sup>

Kinny continued his labor in St. Louis, Missouri, and reported a company of colored members of nine, not including children and a Sabbath School of around thirty. He continued his canvassing work and holding Bible readings. He expressed praise about the work and the desire of the small company for organization.<sup>22</sup>

According to Graybill, it was in St. Louis that Kinny experienced the first taste of racial prejudice within the Adventist community. Kinny mentioned nothing about his experiences in this letter to the *Review*. He was so focused on his work among his people he would not let this issue distract him. But he did write letters to D. T. Jones, General Conference secretary at the time, and it is from these correspondences that we get an idea of some of the issues that Kinny faced.<sup>23</sup>

D. T. Jones wrote to Kinny on Feb 20, 1889: “Like you, I think that race prejudice in religion ought not to exist. But we find it does exist and very strong, too, in the South. We have to take things as we find them and not as we would have them or as they ought to be.”

On March 6, 1889, Jones writes Kinny again, saying:

I feel glad, Bro. Kinny, that you are doing something for the colored people in St. Louis, and I shall feel sorry to have you leave there before you have finished your work. I have always felt deeply for the colored people, knowing that even now they labor under many disadvantages. I have sympathy for the race and have always had. I early imbibed the abolitionist sentiments, though I was not old enough to go into the war. I now want to see the race rise to an equal position with others in this nation. But the only way it can be accomplished is by education and refinement. The members of the white race that neglect these [that is, the whites who neglect their own education and refinement] sink down

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<sup>21</sup> Charles M. Kinny, “Labor Among the Colored People” *Review & Herald* 66, (Nov 12, 1889), 716.

<sup>22</sup> Graybill, 5, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Graybill, 5, 6.



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to a lower level. It is a natural law of society that we cannot change. I wish you the best of success in your efforts to help your people. You are doing a noble work.<sup>24</sup>

Kinny must have been very encouraged by these words considering that he was doing pioneering work among his people with very limited resources and experiencing little success. Writing three years later from Louisville, Kentucky, Kinny described the discouragement of some of the new converts because of racial prejudice. He described the humiliations that they suffered, but they found much comfort in the testimony of Ellen White concerning them. Kinny advised them not to use the racial issue as a stumbling block and to hope and pray for better days.<sup>25</sup> Kinny refused to exploit the racial issue for any personal advantage and always advised prudence and caution in dealing with this volatile issue.

**Pioneering Work Among Blacks in the South**

Kinny's work took him across several states from the West to the Midwest and finally to the South. He raised up a number of churches and companies all over these areas. His faithful and fruitful labor among his own people finally led to his ordination in 1889 at the Southern District Camp Meeting in Louisville, Kentucky. Kinny thus became the first African-American to be ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist minister.<sup>26</sup> Ten months after his ordination Kinny went to work at Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, the first Black organized Seventh-day Adventist church in the United States. This group had been organized seven years earlier in 1883, and was led by Harry Lowe, a local member who had been granted a ministerial license. Kinny gave great service to the people of Edgefield, but later we find him in Nebo, Kentucky preaching the gospel.<sup>27</sup>

Kinny worked under the direct supervision of the General Conference. He sent a weekly letter to the General Conference of his activities. He continued working in this capacity until 1911, when the failing health of his wife made it impossible for him to continue in full-

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<sup>24</sup> C. M. Kinny, "Letter to Elder W.A. Colcord," June 22, 1892.

<sup>25</sup> R.M Kilgore, "Tennessee Camp Meeting and Nashville Institute" *Review and Herald* 66, (October 29, 1889), 663.

<sup>26</sup> Graybill, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

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time ministry. During those 22 years of service after his ordination, Kinny was the most respected and revered spokesman for his people. From his pen and the pulpit he urged his church to invest resources for reaching Blacks all across America. Many of his pleas fell upon deaf ears, but he continued his advocacy nonetheless.

Kinny attended the General Conference of 1891, and in that meeting stated that there were eight or nine million of his people wanting to hear the Adventist message. He noted that there were only two organized churches among the colored people and some unorganized companies. He assured the conference that much could be done by the circulation of literature, but that the greater part of the work had to be done by a living preacher. He appealed for at least one White laborer of experience to devote his entire time to work among his people.<sup>28</sup>

Kinny's appeal for help for his people did not go unanswered. Ellen G. White, who attended the same meeting, supported Kinny's call by making a historic appeal herself in her famous "Our Duty to the Colored People" speech to the General Conference. In this speech she exclaimed:

I know that which I now speak will bring me into conflict. This I do not covet, for the conflict has seemed to be continuous of late years; but I do not mean to live a coward or die a coward, leaving my work undone. I must follow in my master's footsteps. It has been fashionable to look down upon the poor, and upon the colored race in particular. But Jesus, the master, was poor, and he sympathizes with the poor, the discarded, the oppressed and declares that every insult shown to them is as if shown to himself. . . The color of the skin does not determine character in the heavenly courts.<sup>29</sup>

The prophetic voice of this remarkable woman added weight to Kinny's words and strengthened his resolve. At this General Conference, Kinny laid the foundation for the regional work among Blacks in America. He wrote a significant document in which he outlined the rationale for the establishment of Black organization to spearhead the work among Blacks. "Owing to the prejudice which exists, it was evident

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<sup>28</sup> General Conference Bulletin vol.4. no.5, March 11, 1891, 71.

<sup>29</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966), 10, 11.

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that the work for the colored people will have to carry on a work from that of the White population of the South.”<sup>30</sup>

This was not the first time that Kinny had raised the issue of Black organization to work for Blacks. In 1889, during his ordination service some of his members who were present at his ordination were relegated to the back of the tent because of their color. This created feelings of humiliation among them and Kinny spoke to this situation:

It is probable that my ideas may be a little different from what has been expressed by some. . . . In the first place, a separation of the colored people. . . . is a great sacrifice upon our part; we lose the blessings of learning the truth—I have reference especially to general meetings. . . . It would be a great sacrifice upon the part of my people to miss the information that these general meetings would give them, and another thing, it seems to me that a separation in the general meetings would have a tendency to destroy the unity of the Third Angel’s message. Now, then, this question to me is one of great embarrassment and humiliation and not only to me, but to my people also.<sup>31</sup>

Here, Kinny raised some practical concerns. He considered segregation in the church detrimental to understanding of the truth by his people. Most of Kinny’s members were recent converts and he saw these spiritual convocations as essential venues to help solidify their faith. Kinny also addressed the issue of unity and the public relations image of the church. Kinny continued:

I am glad that the Third Angel’s message has the power in it to eliminate and remove this race prejudice upon the part of those who get hold of the truth. The colored-line question is an obstacle, in other words, the very presence of the colored people in church relation and in our general meetings is an obstacle, a barrier that hinders the progress of the Third Angel’s message from reaching many of the White people.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> C. M. Kinny, “Louisiana,” *Review & Herald* 69, (February 2, 1892), 476.

<sup>31</sup> Delbert Baker, *Telling the Story: An Anthology of the Development of the Black SDA Work* 2 vols. (Nashville, TN: Black Caucus of SDA Administrators), 2: 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

(1) A frank understanding between the two races on all questions affecting each. This would avoid much trouble that would otherwise occur.

(2) That colored laborers shall have no special desire to labor among white people,

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Kinny did not underestimate the issue of racial prejudice but in his usual optimistic spirit, he pointed to the power of the Adventist message to remove this evil. He described it as a barrier and an obstacle in the evangelization of White people. So while he believed in the power of the Gospel to change lives, he accepted the sociological reality of living in a

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except an occasional invitation where to accept would cause no trouble.

(3) That the colored brethren do not interfere with the outside interest among the white people; the minister in charge of such work to be judge of such interference.

(4) Where the two races cannot meet together without limitation in the church, it is better to separate.

(5) That missions be established among them, thus raising up separate churches. White laborers giving their time exclusively to this work. I realize the difficulty of white laborers attempting to labor for both classes in the South, for if they labor for the colored people they will lose their influence among the white people, but in laboring among the colored people exclusively that difficulty is obviated.

(6) That in view of the outside feeling on the race question, and the hindrance it makes in accomplishing the work desired among the whites, the attendance of the colored brethren at the general meetings should not be encouraged, yet not positively forbidden. If they do attend let there be a private, mutual understanding as to the position they should assume on every phase of the meeting. I would say in this connection that in my judgment a separate meeting for the colored people to be held in, connection with the general meetings, or a clear-cut distinction, by having them occupy the back seats, etc., would not meet with as much favor from my people as a total separation. I am willing, however, to abide by whatever the General Conference may recommend in the matter, and advise my people to do the same.

(7) In those churches where there are two or more let them remain until an effort can be made to raise up a church among them; then have them to unite with it.

(8) Until there is enough to form a conference of colored people, let the colored churches, companies or individuals pay their tithes and other contributions to the regular state officers, and be considered a part of the state conference.

(9) That the General Conference do what it can in educating worthy colored laborers to engage in various branches of the work among them, when such can be found.

(10) That Christian feeling between the two races be zealously inculcated everywhere, so that the cause of separation may not be because of the existence of prejudice within, but because of those on the outside whom you hope to reach.

(11) That when colored conferences are formed they bear the same relation to the General Conference that white conferences do.

(12) That these principles be applied only where this prejudice exists to the injury of the cause.

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racist society and he suggested how to adjust to this reality without harming the mission of the Church among both Whites and Blacks. While he did not believe in segregation, he was willing to work within its narrow confines for the ultimate good of the church. He therefore presented twelve propositions<sup>33</sup> to deal with the issue. In proposition four he states, "Where the two races cannot meet together without limitation in the church, it is better to separate." In proposition six he suggested that a clear-cut separation would be preferable rather than meeting together where Blacks are placed in the back seat.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, meeting and organizing separately would be far better than second-class treatment. Kinny went beyond just separate meetings. He advocated a more radical kind of separation. He proposed an organizational separation under the direct supervision of the General Conference. His proposal, although farsighted and visionary, was perhaps premature, for Black Adventism was still in its infancy. On the other hand, Kinny's proposal revealed his vision for Black Adventists at a time when they were few in numbers and scattered across America. His proposal envisioned a strong, vibrant, Black Adventist community capable of self-rule and materially prosperous. He lived to see the fulfillment of that vision. Kinny's vision for separate conferences for Black Adventists was finally realized in 1945. Black Adventism was given organizational separation along conference lines and since that momentous event the work among Black Adventists has experienced unprecedented growth.

Although the General Conference rejected Kinny's proposal, he continued working, and on June 13, 1891, he organized the third Black SDA church in Bowling Green, KY.<sup>35</sup> A year later, in New Orleans, he organized the fourth Black SDA church, June 4, 1892. On September 15 and 16, 1894, he organized the fifth Black SDA church in Nashville, TN.<sup>36</sup> As Kinny worked among his people, to broaden his appeal he began to sell literature on religious liberty, health, and temperance. He gave literature to visiting ministers, Sunday school superintendents, teachers, doctors. He preached sermons on these topics and received

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Below is a full account of Kinny's propositions.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> C. M. Kinny, "Kentucky and Tennessee," *Review and Herald* 68, (July 21, 1891), 459.

<sup>36</sup> C. M. Kinny, "Kentucky and Tennessee," *Review and Herald* 69, (July 26, 1892), 476.

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favorable responses. Kinny wrote about his successes, but he also wrote of his detractors. He quoted from the editor of *The Southwestern Christian Advocate*, a paper representing the colored Methodist church, expressing their opposition to his work. At the end of the article, he responded that he was not discouraged or dissuaded from his mission, "The enemy's wrath is our opportunity, I want to press the battle until the war is over." In the following quote Kinny gives us an idea of how others were warning their members about Adventists.

We warn our people against the insinuating literature and arguments of the missionaries of the Seventh-day Adventists who are operating, . . . under disguised and deceptive means, . . . passing as great defenders of religious liberty, by which they hope to gull you into their species of heresy. They are stealthily seeking thereby to undermine the Christian Sabbath. As they cannot force the adoption of Saturday for the Christian Sabbath, their sole purpose is to seek the overthrow of all Sunday laws.<sup>37</sup>

Kinny's challenges were not just external; he never had sufficient money to live comfortably and to finance his work. He wrote numerous letters seeking funding for his salary and to finance his work. In a letter typical of many others, dated January 24, 1894, he wrote Elder Nicola from Huntsville asking for \$35. In that same letter he continued by stating that during the past six months he had given to the cause \$90, which crippled him financially.<sup>38</sup> On one occasion he reminded Elder Nicola from the General Conference that he hadn't been paid in seven months and with each passing day his debts increased.<sup>39</sup> His money problems were not due to any financial irresponsibility on his part, but due to the lack of consistent support from the General Conference. Kinny gave sacrificially to the cause that he believed in, he made it very clear that he was not working for money, but for the glory of God and the

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<sup>37</sup> C. M. Kinny, "Louisiana," *Review & Herald* 69, (February 2, 1892), 77.

<sup>38</sup> See C. M. Kinny, Letter to Elder Nicola, August 4, 1883; Letter To Eld. L. T. Nicola, Nov. 5, 1894; Letter to Eld. L. T. Nicola, April 23, 1895; Eld. L.T Nicola, May 31, 1895; Eld. L.T. Nicola, July 16, 1895; Eld L. T. Nicola, May 8, 1894; Eld. L. T. Nicola, December 20, 1894; Eld. L. T. Nicola, January 27, 1896; Eld. L. T. Nicola, February 14, 1896; Eld L. T. Nicola, October 25, 1896; Eld. L. T. Nicola, August 2, 1897. All these letters can be found at the Adventist Heritage Center, Document File 013316, James White Library, Andrews University.

<sup>39</sup> C. M. Kinny, "Letter to Eld. L. T. Nicola," April 30, 1894.

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salvation of souls.<sup>40</sup> Kinny's tireless work among his people was not matched with the same level of effort from his church, but he carried on courageously, never faltering, and laid a strong foundation for the work among Blacks.

**Summary and Conclusions**

Charles M. Kinny was a pioneer Black Adventist pastor who worked primarily alone because he was the first, and for a time the only, Black Adventist pastor. His working peers were all white pastors and knowing the social and political context of his time, it was very unlikely Kinny had any meaningful relationships with any of them. He therefore received little encouragement from his colleagues except on occasions when he received a letter from a General Conference official. He had to deal with a racist society and a segregated church.

Kinny was a passionate worker, crisscrossing several states establishing communities of Black Adventists. He advocated and pleaded for more resources to be used on behalf of evangelism for the Blacks. Edson White, son of Ellen White, answered Kinny's call for whites to work on behalf of his people. Kinny described the desperate straits of his people in numerous letters soliciting support, but received little help from conference leadership. In spite of their reluctance to invest resources for the Black work, he was always respectful of the church leadership. While other Black leaders who came after him ran afoul of church leadership and left the organization, Kinny remained loyal to the end of his life. He refused to allow the racist attitudes of some of the leaders of his church to drive him away from the church he loved and worked for so tirelessly.

Although he proposed a separate governing structure for Blacks, what he proposed was not intended to be outside the Adventist church governance system. The concept of a separate conference for Blacks would follow the pattern of the white conferences, but would be under the direct supervision of the General Conference. Kinny supported the Adventist system but recommended an adjustment to the system that would address the needs of his people. For Kinny, the governing structure of the church exists to serve the needs of people. For him,

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<sup>40</sup> C. M. Kinny, "Letter to Eld. L. T. Nicola," May 11, 1894.

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structure was not set in stone, but was intended to further the mission of the Church.

Kinny was like the Apostle Paul to his people, encouraging, preaching, teaching, praying, and counseling to establish them in the truth. He suffered the fatigue of travel, the criticism of opponents, the racism of Whites, the reluctance of his church to invest resources for his people, opposition from colored pastors whose members he was proselytizing, and personal attacks from the great adversary; but he soldiered on relentlessly.

His belief in the Advent message remained strong throughout his life and he was confident that the message would have a profound and lasting impact upon his people. He saw the Adventist message as a ladder upon which his people could climb out of their situation, for it was not just a future “pie in the sky” promise of eternal life, but delivered present blessings and social and economic upliftment for his people.

Kinny was an effective evangelist always adapting his strategy to fit the people, time, and place. He studied his people and realized that friendship evangelism would be the most effective strategy, so he poured his energy into personal work. He sold books, gave Bible readings, visited, and befriended people. He tried not to antagonize his adversaries, and at times preached sermons on health, temperance, and religious liberties. He discovered that many, who disagreed with him theologically, found common ground in these areas. By developing common interests, he found it easier to study the Bible with many of them.

Kinny was a not flamboyant evangelist or even an eloquent preacher like some who would come after him. The strength of his work was in personal evangelism, meeting people in their homes and sharing the word of God with them. Time after time he describes visiting families, praying for them, giving them Bible studies, and encouraging them to stay faithful.<sup>41</sup>

Kinny had a passion for the lost in a time when Black lives were lightly valued. In this post Reconstruction American society, Blacks were being forced back into a kind of neo-slavery and treated like second

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<sup>41</sup> C. M. Kinny, “Letter to Eld. W. A. Colcord,” March 28, 1892; C. M. Kinny, “Letter to W. A. Colcord,” April 11, 1892; C. M. Kinny, “Letter to W. A. Colcord,” September 7, 1892; C. M. Kinny, “Letter to W. A. Colcord,” October 20, 1892.



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class citizens all across America. The last decade of the nineteenth century showed the highest rates of lynching in the nation. Blacks were subjected to mob justice for the slightest allegations, especially in the South. Kinny must have been aware of these things and might have even witnessed lynchings himself. As a black man he had little feeling of security in his own country, knowing full well what people like him were subjected to. Kinny chose not to focus on the events around him. He had one goal in mind, bringing the Adventist message to his people. He was driven by a supernatural power that kept him motivated and energized in his mission.

Graybill said it well, “Black ministers in better times made many more converts than C. M. Kinny, but no one faced the lonely task he faced.” None laid a more solid foundation than Kinny. His spirituality, his work ethic, his optimism, his passion, his love for the work of God and God’s people are virtues that are worth emulating by every Seventh-day Adventist Christian.

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