

APPROACHES TO CHURCH REORGANIZATION

By Bert Haloviak

Commission on World Church Organization

March 23 to 29, 1993

Cohutta Springs, GA

Office of Archives and Statistics
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

February, 1993

Introduction

This paper reviews certain reorganizational schemes within the SDA church. It should not be construed as an extended essay. It does not hold together by a single, consistent thesis. It does argue, however, that reorganization has occurred both formally and informally within the SDA church.

Its focus begins in 1901 when Ellen White moved the church toward a democratic reform. Crises situations, real and imagined, tended to enhance the role of the General Conference president since that time. This factor becomes especially relevant during the presidency of Robert Pierson. His view of the state of the church propelled him to amass such authority at the presidential level that his office indeed functioned as a separate "level of authority." This occurred more informally than by a specific reorganizational scheme.

This paper also exhibits that, while various reorganizational commissions generated membership input about consolidating departments, avoiding duplication in the name of efficiency, etc, they did not seek widescale input about views of the nature of the church or church leadership authority. This usually occurred by legislative action or presidential fiat.

A somewhat "accidental" exception occurred in 1980 during a period of "theological consultation" between major theologians and administrators. Not to be confused with the Desmond Ford experience, the "consultation" provided a healthy interchange between the groups. While extremely important papers and varying views were presented, this focus on the nature of the church seems to have died and again been decided rather at the presidential level.

Thus despite minimal official constitutional/structural modifications between 1901 and 1990, Arthur Daniells, the president elected in 1901, would note telling differences in the operation of the SDA church in 1990. This brief study outlines some of the formal and informal actions that might account for Daniells' "amazement."ⁱ

Initial Organization

When the SDA church began formal organization in the 1860s, its leadership had to overcome opposing predispositions. James White threw open the pages of the Review for the fullest input from the church membership. Intense Bible study interpreting the New Testament plan of organization became the basis for the organizational principles established. Documents reveal that far more scriptural analysis than is evident in the Review [although much is in the Review] went into the initial study of church structure.ⁱⁱ

1901 "Democratization" of Adventism

Authoritarian abuses occurred within the 19th century SDA church. One day before the 1901 GC session Ellen White observed:

The management of the regular lines must be entirely changed....The principles are wrong. These principles are so foreign to God's principles that God cannot bless those who work upon them.

Ellen White called for a democratization of the Adventist organization. She wanted the closest relationships to exist between members and administrators. She suggested that church leaders "should not be afraid to open to the light of day everything in the management of the work." She wanted SDAs to "have firm confidence" in church administrators.

Alluding to Ellen White's role in the 1901 reorganization, A G Daniells said: "We were instructed to so arrange our conference organizations as to distribute the responsibilities of this great cause to all to whom they rightly belong."ⁱⁱⁱ

When Daniells discussed the reorganization movement of 1901-03, he described it as "decentralization," and "distribution of responsibilities." The thrust was to allow decision-making at the most relevant level. Daniells rejoiced to see the GC abolishing supervision over denominational institutions.

The system allowed for, indeed demanded, local experimentation. Daniells rejoiced: "For a long time I have felt that we should be more democratic in our government."^{iv} The church reaped major dividends. Conferences donated surplus tithes for mission work; they financed laborers going to mission service. Tithes and mission offerings vastly increased and the mission program expanded far beyond previous dimensions.

Daniells jubilantly wrote, "The spirit of reform has swept through the entire denomination." He noticed, "Many feel that 1901 is the beginning of a new era, a blessed experience to this people....Nearly everybody throughout the country believe[s]...that a wholesome revolution has set in." "I am glad to tell you that to quite an extent the spirit of the [1901] General

ⁱ This study makes no claim to completeness. It does not relate itself to financial matters, institutions, departments, recent developments relating to the NAD and union constitutions, laymen task forces on SDA church organization, ethnic organizational structures.

ⁱⁱ This early scriptural analysis was really the last time that Biblical principles were carefully analyzed prior to major organizational proposals.

ⁱⁱⁱ AGD Address, March 30, 1903, 1903 GCB, p 18.

^{iv} AGD to N P Nelson, July 17, 1901.

Conference has extended to the State Conferences in all parts of America."^v

Church members responded well to the democratization of Adventism.

Division Idea, 1913-1918

Fifty years after the GC initially organized in 1863, the church at the 1913 GC session, approved establishing "Division Conferences" as full-fledged constituent members of the organizational structure. The division idea was perceived as a further dispersal of authority from the GC. Although the proposal originated in Europe, events that transpired at the 1913 session resulted in the creation of five division conferences.

After its formation, the NAD considered attractive offers to locate in College View or Kansas City. The locating committee decided to recommend the headquarters site in Takoma Park since, without NAD officers, "it would be difficult to secure a working quorum" on the General Conference Committee.^{vi}

Before long, the NAD president, I H Evans (a strong administrator) and A G Daniells (another strong administrator) were on a collision course. As early as 1915 Daniells sought to return to the pre-1913 arrangement. He could not, at that time, overcome the opposition of the NAD union presidents.

While W A Spicer, GC Secretary, apparently favored a separate NAD, he did observe that "the only working quorum of the General Conference [Committee] is really made up of the [North American] Division Executive."^{vii}

An interpretation of why the NAD Conference arrangement failed is offered by Correspondence Secretary Tyler Bowen:

Confidentially, between you and me, the NAD Conference president sort of carried the whole thing around under his hat, and the Union men seemed to feel they were restricted somewhat and not much latitude was given in administrative affairs. Since 1901 the policy has been to push out responsibilities on the men in the different sections of the field rather than gathering up the reigns of government into the hands of a few men at headquarters. The tendency here in the NAD seemed along the lines of operation prior to 1901 rather than since.^{viii}

Daniells gave his view of the situation to W A Spicer in 1917:

I consider it a very serious situation to have a strong, self-directing, practically independent organization thrown in between the General Conference and its resources. In the important matter of securing workers and funds, and in placing returned workers it subordinates the General Conference to the Division Conference. It transfers the control of the base of supplies from the General Conference to the Division.^{ix}

Daniells recalled how the 1915 Autumn Council agreed upon a specific mission goal for NAD. Later, however, at a GCC meeting [whose membership was primarily from NAD] the action was modified to retain more of the funds in North America.

Leroy Froom, after working closely with both Daniells and Evans for a number of years, gave this explanation of the reason for the failure of a separate NAD:

During those years back between 1913 and 1918, when Daniells was still president of the GC,

^v AGD to W W Prescott, July 21, 1901; to M H Brown, June 17, 1901; to B G Wilkinson, Aug 30, 1901.

^{vi} It is of interest that the creation of the NAD as a separate structural level of authority pushed the authorization for ordination from the conference to the union level. When the NAD was abolished in 1918, however, ordination authority remained at the union level.

^{vii} WAS to IHE, Jan 24, 1915.

^{viii} TEB to W B White, Nov 7, 1917.

^{ix} AGD to WAS, Oct 9, 1917.

definite problems developed. The North American Division, as I understand it, was more or less of an entity on its own. It had control of the territory and a heavy hand on the finances. Brother Evans, who was the NA president...was a very strong and tenacious character. He exercised the functions of every office he held with effectiveness.

Brother Daniells was also a very strong character. But he found himself with his hands tied under the set-up. He had to beg for whatever the NA Division chose to give in means and men.

Brother Evans was a strong mission man when he was in the mission field. But here in the NA Division he was a very strong home base division man. So, as I learned from Daniells, there was tension under that particular set-up, and there were difficulties and problems. These were never resolved until the arrangement for those five years--1913 to 1918--was terminated, or changed.^x

The "official" explanation for the break-up of the NAD used such terms as "simplicity," "economy," "dispatch," "efficiency," "avoiding administrative duplication," "greatest possible efficiency in our administrative machinery."^{xi}

In 1922, the delegates to the GC session restored most of the administrative authority to all divisions, except North America.

"Informal" Reorganization, 1920s

There were no commissions dealing with church structure in the 1920s. Nevertheless "reorganization" occurred. Church administrators feared "innovations" entering Adventism. An overriding concern was the development of the local pastorate. This was occurring in larger city churches. Administrators feared the church would lose its evangelistic thrust by a stationary pastorate "hovering" over local churches.^{xii}

Administrators thus restructured those departments that had most directly touched the local church. Educational secretaries/superintendents were to have "practical experience in teaching and in soul-winning work." Those elected for home missionary and missionary volunteer leadership positions were "to be selected who have had successful experience in evangelistic work, preferably ordained ministers."

By the reorganization of the 1920s, women, being ineligible for ordination, were thereby legislatively eliminated from the departmental leadership roles they had traditionally held. The result was a change in the composition of the leadership structure within the church.

Depression era

An interesting organizational scheme of the 1930s was the inauguration of a plan suggested by a "Committee on Tenure of Office," appointed by GC president C H Watson. The plan, approved by the 1931 Annual Council, limited GC executive officers and heads of departments, including divisions, to 12 consecutive years in any one position. Union executives were limited to 8 years and local conference executives to 6 consecutive years. That "Tenure of Office" policy remained until 1942.

The 1931 Autumn Council also approved a series of resolutions brought to it by a "Special Committee on Administrative Matters," consisting of the GC officers, 12 union presidents and a number of conference presidents. The committee recommended that unions be reduced from 12 to 8. It also suggested a combining of a number of local conferences.

The Committee on Administration "recognizing the value of a greater representation at union conference sessions, of our lay people whose counsel and cooperation are needed in every feature of our great work," encouraged the unions to seek means of increasing that representation. Although the Annual Council kept the representation nebulous, the Committee had recommended that 25% of the delegates at union sessions be laymen.

The question of a separate North American Division structure arose during the reorganization discussions in 1931.

^x "History of NAD," Interview with L E Froom.

^{xi} AGD and IHE in RH, Nov 29, 1917.

^{xii} It is of surpassing interest that local pastorates were so late in coming into Adventism. Their very lateness, however, meant that the concept of the local pastorate never really impacted the "levels of church authority" system that was well established by the 1920s. Coming slowly and informally, no administrative transition ever occurred from the time the local church was largely guided by laypersons and when the pastorate became stationary.

After some discussion, the GC officers agreed not to list that question for the Autumn Council.

The 1932 Autumn Council recommended that SDA organizations adjust employees to prevent both husband and wife being "remuneratively" employed. If, under special cases, both were employed, the wife should receive "greatly reduced" wages.

In 1932, an independently-appointed 14-member Survey Commission, "composed of persons not of the General Conference administrative staff" recommended GC staff reductions after surveying GC administrative and departmental operations. The GC president observed:

There has grown up a feeling in the field that the headquarters staff of the General Conference is larger than it needs to be at present, and the wish is expressed that the matter be studied and changes made.

The commission was selected by the General Conference officers, departmental heads and union presidents. It made some 32 specific recommendations that included reduction or elimination of some periodicals; reduction of the size of SDA Yearbook and statistical reports; more reliance upon local decision-making rather than on the GC. It suggested some reduction of the GC staff. Some GC officers voluntarily retired; one vice-president was also to head a department; certain field secretaries were either retired or employed by unions; certain part-time professional employees were to receive only part-time pay; fewer departmental conventions were to be held; less traveling for sermons, graduations, etc.

The Commission recommended:

In departments where we have union conference secretaries, our General Conference departmental leaders carry on their promotional work with the union conference secretaries only, and not with the local conference secretaries, nor local church elders and leaders, thus eliminating a lot of duplications and greatly reducing the number of circular and other letters sent out by the departments, with a consequent reduction in stenographic help and postage expense. We also believe that this plan will result in greatly strengthening the work of union conference secretaries, to whom local conference secretaries should look for their promotional material and general detail instruction.

Pierson and Wilson Administrations: Structural Modifications

In 1863, principles based upon scriptural analysis guided the church in its organizational decisions. In 1901, organizational principles again impacted upon the structure. Mrs White's input assured that. The spontaneity of the 1901 situation, however, apparently precluded any in-depth scriptural rationale.^{xiii}

In the Pierson and Wilson administrations, we seem to witness the separation of structural developments and significant organizational principles. Evidence indicates that church membership enjoyed a high level of input relative to structural modifications. Decisions relating to church authority, however, occurred primarily administratively.

Early in the Pierson administration, a "Consolidation Committee" began to look at denominational structure. That committee, chaired by R R Bietz, reported to the officers, April 23, 1969:

Development of the work in recent years has brought an increase in the number of departments, an increase in the number of departmental leaders serving on local, union, and General Conference levels, and an increase in the size of administrative staffs. The result is that a large proportion of conference funds is going into the support of the headquarters operations as compared to operations in the field. It was pointed out that there is a topheaviness in the office and promotional areas as compared to pastoral and evangelistic activities. At the same time the great value of the departments of the church in specialized planning, staff work, promotion, and training is recognized.

We recommend, That a committee so chosen as to be able to view the problem with balance and objectivity be appointed to survey carefully the present state of our organization on all levels, the place of the departments and general administration, and the effectiveness and strength of the evangelistic and pastoral program, with a view to bringing about a streamlining of administrative and departmental operations, and a more acceptable balance between headquarters and field activities.

^{xiii} This is not to say that the church limited itself solely to its perception of NT structure or that Mrs White had any role in outlining the specifics of structure. Recent dissertations by Andrew Mustard and Barry Oliver clearly demonstrate Mrs White's avoidance of structural specifics. They also show the church modeling itself upon scriptural principles rather than attempting to reconstitute the specifics of the NT structure.

By the next year, the General Conference Committee appointed a "representative committee to take ample time to make a survey of union and local conferences and institutions in North America and suggest ways to effect savings through consolidation of certain units. This survey would include both administrative and departmental operations, finances, estimated savings, geographical boundaries and historic backgrounds." A 14-item evaluative instrument was drawn up for the committee's guidance.

In the introduction to its 45-page report, the committee expressed "deep concern because it is recognized that the report would call for considerable reshaping of the present organization within the North American Division, and such changes always affect the lives of people."

The committee "preceded its work with a careful review of the Ellen G White counsels on church organization, confederation, and consolidation, with the express intent of keeping recommendations in harmony with such counsel."

While the committee recommended that the union structure be maintained to preclude "undue centralization of responsibility and labor in the North American Division," it recommended decreasing the total number of unions from 10 to 6.

Actually, the preferred recommendation of the Survey Committee was its recommendation of reducing the North American Division unions from 10 to 4 [3 in US and the Canadian Union].

Committee member Harley Rice made these comments concerning the thrust of what would become the abortive reorganization attempts of the early 1970s:

There are the two organizational extremes of centralized authority on the one hand and independent action on the other....Your committee felt that neither extreme is desirable for our church institutions of today. Rather there is needed some of both. This calls for separate corporate entities with local operating boards with local representation thereon, but higher area-wide boards on which each institution is represented for unity of action, for economy of operation and for the purpose of solving many local problems at a level less local and less parochial in outlook. It also felt we should avoid such a centralization of authority as would create a power block at Division level. It therefore recommended that in each of the merged Union Conferences there be one general Educational Board under the chairmanship of a Vice President in that Union Conference. This would tend to avoid competition within ourselves and make possible the solving of many educational problems above the level of local conference interests. We operate some educational institutions today for reason of local conference pride and the resulting problems can not be solved at a local level. A directing board at Union Conference level might deal much more wisely with these problems. This could effect major economies in operation.

This same recommendation that there be one general Board under the chairmanship of an interested and informed Vice President in each Union conference is made as relates to our Health Care Institutions.

The 1970 committee made observations that would set the reorganizational tone for much of the 1970s-1990s: "A study and re-evaluation of administrative and departmental structure and function at union conference and local conference levels points up the need for a corresponding study of relationships and functions of administrative and departmental organization at North American Division and General Conference levels."

A large "Reorganization Committee," containing six separate task forces was constituted. Various subgroups or committees were also formed and each was assigned various projects.

Insight into the dimensions of the work of the Reorganization Committee can be seen from this report of "Consolidation Task Force Sub-Committee No 2":

This committee was appointed to screen and compile the material presented by the department heads relative to the philosophy and job description of their departments and their replies to certain questions posed by the original committee as to the future operation of the departments. There were five questions posed to the department heads and they were consistent throughout the entire group.

Another ad hoc group of the Reorganization Committee made this report in August of 1972:

The subcommittee on reorganization was asked to "indicate the structure of a departmental organization through consolidation or otherwise that will best meet the needs and fulfill the functions of the local church."

All General Conference departments were surveyed, requesting complete lists of programs, items and functions which were intended for implementation on a local church level. Of these 168 were reviewed....Several areas of redundancy became apparent with several departments having overlapping

programs. A survey of churches indicated which programs were currently being given serious, passive or no attention. This information helped determine needs and functions of the local church as pertains to church life and outreach, and which programs were not meeting their needs or had fallen into disuse.

Study was given to the structure of a departmental organization on all levels that would best meet the needs and fulfill the functions of the local church. It was agreed that this could be accomplished by the merging of the functions of various departments with overlapping interests and programs, and the setting up of coordinate councils to guide the work of the department for North America.

The studies of the early 1970s led to minimal tangible results. In 1983, another commission was appointed. Chairman of the Role and Function Committee, F W Wernick outlined its terms of reference:

This Commission was appointed by the GCC on Sept 8, 1983 and was asked to give study to several areas of our church structure. (1) To define the functions and programs on all levels of denominational organization. (2) To analyze how these functions on each level relate to those on other levels and (3) to identify the organizational level at which specific functions should apply and be most effectively administered, and (4) to recommend which functions might be shifted or eliminated or modified.

He described its methodology:

The returns from 600 questionnaires that were sent out to departmental and administrative leaders in 85 church organizations worldwide, those that were returned were carefully recorded, the results of those returns were carefully recorded. The returns from 1000 short questionnaires sent to pastors and laypersons on conference and union committees in North America were tabulated....The results of an extensive survey of the General Conference departments themselves which included personal interviews with the heads of 20 departments and services, those results were all tabulated and fed into the material prepared for the Commission. There were personal visits, there were teams to conduct personal visits with leaders, pastors, teachers and laypersons, teams of Commission members visited those individuals in 41 church organizations in seven of the world divisions and five of the union conferences in North America....A notebook of materials gleaned from Ellen G White's writings and church leaders of the past who had participated in the formation of our church structure was made available to all of the Commission members. This represented the most massive organizational study in the history of the church.

R H Pierson and Decision-Making: Legislative

In October, 1972, Elder Pierson wrote his "closest adviser," Willis Hackett:

Work out some plan that would cut down the involvement of more officers in routine administration by (a) smaller ad hoc committees (perhaps one president, one secretary, one treasurer); (b) reduce the size of standing and advisory committees. [6] Recommend more standing committees with power to act. [7] Suggest ways of cutting down all Officer travel to keep more men in the office to do the work. [8] Suggest a plan whereby more authority to act would be invested in individuals in routine affairs.

He concluded: "Willis, see what you can do in presenting a plan to us that may help us out of the quicksand administrative procedures we find ourselves in at the present, hopefully freeing the top officers for more creative and larger problem assignments."

Robert Pierson also sought input from D W Holbrook and Holbrook wrote him:

We need to review our changing [emphasis mine] thinking about administration as it relates to the decision-making processes of our church. We need to review how major decisions are currently made, who makes them, who ought to be making them; are the people most vitally affected allowed enough in-put in decision-making....The fundamental question, I believe, is how can decisions be best made--what's the best process of arriving at decisions. "Best process" should be defined as the most effective and most efficient method of decision-making, so that those decisions will have willing support, will be readily and enthusiastically accepted, and will demonstrate a high percentage of right decisions, thereby heading off

mounting frustrations, bitterness, and cynicism....

It seems to me that the officers are not a representative group for making decisions, and the departmental administrative council has not functioned as effectively as it was hoped.

Holbrook went on to suggest what eventually became PRADCO, PREXAD and ADCOM. He concluded with a p.s.: "You may dispose of this letter in any way that's convenient, including the wastebasket--there are no copies or blind copies going to anyone." Pierson wisely retained it.

Hackett had suggested a similar arrangement, but wanted only PREXAD to deal with major issues as institutional trends, theological problems, organizational studies, top leadership appointments, spiritual trends, etc.

The new arrangement followed the more centralized approach. Delmer Holbrook made this observation to the General Conference Committee:

Whether we like it or not, or whether we realize it or not, I believe that we have just seen within the past couple of weeks a quiet, but very radical revolution in the organization of the General Conference. I doubt that any of us realize how far-reaching the actions that have just been taken will go. It is not so much a change in structure as a more subtle change in approach, attitudes and philosophy. The General Conference is a very different organization today than it was just a few years ago.

Elder Holbrook's observation seems pertinent. Major reorganization can occur with minimal church input or even knowledge that it has occurred.

Consider the impact or potential impact of a few of the legislative proposals during the Pierson administration. Some became effective, some didn't. But all illustrate the reorganization potential of legislation that calls for minimal general church input.

1. In 1972 a proposal was made to remove the GC president from the authority of the General Conference Committee by deleting the phrase "as the Executive Committee may advise" from the description of the authority of the presidential office. That move was defeated.

2. A proposal suggested creating the position of a general vice president for administration with authority directly under the GC president. This would have superseded the authority of both the treasurer and secretary of the GC. Elder Pierson eventually moved away from that suggestion.

3. Elder Pierson approved the suggestion that the composition of the GC session nominating committee be modified to enhance representation from North America. The inclusion of delegates from GC institutions on the nominating committee was implemented.

4. In attempting to illustrate a "hierarchical" structure, the General Conference Committee in 1975 counseled Pacific Press to fire Merikay Silver and Lorna Tobler in opposition to court injunctions. The GCC also recommended that the local church boards be "apprised" of the action against the women in an obvious attempt to influence local church action.

5. In 1978, the following became part of the Working Policy:

General Conference Session Nominating Committee Guidelines -- 1. The President of each division is the executive officer placed in general administrative oversight of all activities in the division. As a vice-president of the General Conference he is an officer of the General Conference responsible to that body for administration of the work in harmony with General Conference policies. Because he stands in this special and constitutional relationship the General Conference has a major interest in the nomination of the division president.

2. In order to ensure proper representation of the interest of the General Conference in the nomination of such a vice-president as well as that of the division to which he will be assigned, the following shall be the procedure: Under the chairmanship of the newly elected General Conference president or his designee, the members of the Session Nominating Committee from each division shall suggest a mutually agreed upon name [emphasis mine] to the Nominating Committee for nomination in plenary session.

In this last action we see the acceptance of a plan whereby the GC president has effective veto power over the selection of all division presidents.

In 1932, Hampton Cottrell gave his version of the SDA organizational system:

It may be truthfully said to be the most masterly and effective religious organization in Christendom. In evidence of this statement, the figurative electric button may be touched by the chief executive of the denominational organization at its headquarters, and the great wheel in the divine system is set in motion, and the personnel of the denomination in the entire world is at once in action, each one at his particular post of duty. Such a system could be created and made operational only by the divine hand.^{xiv}

While no GC president ever had such an "electric button," Robert Pierson felt the need of one. He sensed the frustration of what he considered liberalizing tendencies within the church. He actively sought to nullify those inroads. He used as much authority as his office would allow to guide the theology and philosophy of the SDA church. He was propelled by his interpretation of Ellen White's dream during the Kellogg crisis when she received Divine guidance to confront the "iceberg." She was assured that the church, while being shaken, would survive.

Pierson and W J Hackett had looked at the recent Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod experience and concluded it was better to confront liberalism earlier than later. Both believed the "conservatives" consistently "lost" over a delayed confrontation. It was this perspective that caused Pierson to amass an unusual amount of authority at the presidential level.

The following is a partial listing of some of the actions taken at the presidential level:

- * A direct hand in the research at Geoscience Research Institute--"Carefully screening the personnel who will be teaching in our geoscience areas"
- * Bringing medical and educational institutions "into line with the blueprint"
- * Establishing so-called "consensus" statements on revelation/inspiration, age of earth, Ellen White, as evaluative instruments
- * Obtaining contributions to finance the college or graduate education of "hand-picked" individuals "whom we are going to train to teach our theology around the world"
- * Controlling appointments at Andrews University: "I feel that we simply must assure that every person we place in a key position in that institution is fully with the church in our theological and hermeneutical positions"
- * Unilaterally defining authority/structure of the church based upon the supposed requirements of court cases
- * High level meetings with hospital administrators and certain theologians to advance the principles held by the president
- * Evaluations of loyal/disloyal SDAs based upon the principles held by the president

The system misfired only at the point when it publicized its intentions. Willis Hackett wrote a "Guest Editorial" for the Review entitled "Preserve the Landmarks."

Consistently proclaiming that he was speaking on behalf of "the church," Elder Hackett mentioned the need to "forestall possible tragedy," the danger of a "liberal theology" destroying SDA identity as it had in other churches. Hackett mentioned "carefully formulated statements" that "the church" was preparing. Besides mentioning science-related issues as the flood, age of life on the earth, etc, Hackett noted:

Other areas that will receive attention are: the unity of the Bible, the unique mission of the remnant church, the nearness of the Advent, the doctrine of the sanctuary, the place and work of Ellen White, the historicist approach to prophetic interpretation, and standards of Christian living.

The intended use of the statements was rather forthrightly stated by Elder Hackett:

With the spelling out of what the church believes to be the basic tenets of faith, not as a creed but simply as the current majority understanding under the "Bible-and-the-Bible-alone" principle, administrators, church leaders, controlling boards, and leaders at all levels of the church will find it easier to evaluate persons already serving the church, and those hereafter appointed, as to their commitment to what is considered basic Adventism. Thus the church will be protected against the subtle influence of those who have

^{xiv} RH, March 24, 1932.

become unclear and doubtful as to God's self-revelation in His Word and in the counsels of the Holy Spirit.^{xv}

The academic and general church community reacted to such proposals as being out of harmony with the historic SDA position opposing creedalism. The question of such extended elaborations of SDA beliefs was put in limbo as a result of massive opposition.

McBride Report

In 1989, Elder Wilson outlined the rationale for another study of GC workers:

Good administration and good management mandate that in the life of an institution or organization periodic reviews be made of operations to determine whether, with changing conditions and needs, the structure and leadership philosophy are still effective in achieving the goals and mission of the organization.

For some time there have been questions as to whether the General Conference is organized in such a way as to be responsive to, and meet today's expectations and needs in harmony with the Lord's global assignment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church....The question naturally arises as to whether the role of the General Conference should be modified or refined....

A number of requests have been made that careful study be given to the possibility of reduction of staff at the General Conference without sacrificing leadership, efficiency and quality of service to the world constituency....

Duane McBride will work very closely with designated individuals at the General Conference at every stage of the project. The final report will be made only to the General Conference President for his review, distribution, and implementation....

The results of the McBride evaluation will be given to the General Conference President who in turn will share it with the General Conference Officers who will determine its implementation. It must be determined what the world expects and what the General Conference has to offer. The General Conference must be strong enough to implement the changes that should be made in light of the McBride study.

Theological Consultation

Safely preserved in the General Conference archives are a number of papers in the "Theological Consultation" files of former GC vice president, Duncan Eva. The theological consultation idea, as originally developed in the Pierson administration, was really designed to bring "straying" theologians into line. It took another path, however. The "Theological Consultation Planning Group," chaired by Elder Eva contained a wideranging membership that offered evidence of a credible committee. The committee's purpose was to plan for a theological consultation between church leaders and Bible scholars that would take place in 1980. The major topic of discussion at the consultation was the "nature and authority of the church, with three evening sessions devoted to discussions about the future of the church in the eighties, in pastoral, administrative, and theological areas." Papers were assigned to top church theologians and administrators. The relevant questions were asked:

"To what extent do administrators have the right and responsibility to establish and announce the beliefs of the church? To what extent do theologians have the obligation and duty to teach traditional beliefs and to what extent do they have the duty of re-evaluating those beliefs?"

"Is, or should our church be hierarchical? Does such a question have any theological significance? Does power flow downward from the top administrative officer, or upward from the laity? Is the authority of administrators inherent or delegated?"

The committee optimistically suggested "That a system of communication be considered to inform the institutions of higher learning of the occasions on which the special talents of church scholars [would be] called upon in the decision-making processes of the church."

Neal Wilson served as chairman of the meetings held August 15-20, 1980. Here is a portion of the official report of the consultation:

Two concepts emerged as keys to the resolution of the tensions that sometimes exist between administrators and theologians. These were: a sound doctrine of the church and a proper understanding of the respective roles of theologians and administrators in service to the church....

^{xv} RH, May 26, 1977.

A consensus emerged that the whole church, including laity, pastors, theologians, and administrators, must be involved in the resolution of doctrinal conflicts, the definition of essential doctrines, and the ongoing quest for better understanding and proclamation of the church's message. It was clearly seen that no one group or individual could justly or safely carry on these tasks alone.

A number of the papers presented at this consultation offer the potential of becoming a springboard for a Biblical rationale for reorganization. Here indeed was a corporate and varied approach to ecclesiology.

Conclusion

Mrs White suggested the importance of church organization when she made this statement the day before the 1901 GC session began:

Let the work be woven after the same pattern that it has in the past and it will finally come to naught.

Mrs White's writings after the 1901 reorganization reveal her continuing concern about abuse of authority. She wrote this in 1903:

We are church members, believers in the Bible, and we are not to make the Lord Jesus ashamed to call us brethren, because we have no confidence in one another. We are to be afraid of those who have little confidence in their fellow-workers, and who demand that they should be bound about by agreements and restrictions, which can be misinterpreted and used to do harm.^{xvi}

Indeed, Mrs White had urged a democratic revolution within Adventism even earlier. In 1896 she asked:

Have those in Battle Creek been given reason and wisdom that God will not give those in the churches and state conferences?^{xvii}

She rejoiced in diversity:

Each believer is to be benefited and improved by the refining and transforming influence of the varied capabilities of the other members, that the things lacking in one may be more abundantly displayed in another....In the church there is to be maintained a discipline which guards the rights of all and increases the sense of mutual dependence. God never designed that one man's mind and judgment should be a controlling power. He never designed that one man should rule and plan and devise without the careful and prayerful consideration of the whole body, in order that all may move in a sound, thorough, harmonious manner.^{xviii}

Just as Christ is the head of the church, so is the cross the center of our structure:

Our work in all its lines is to demonstrate the influence of the cross....The plan that provided the influence of the cross provided also the methods of its diffusion. This method is simple in its principles and comprehensive in its plain, distinct lines. Part is connected with part in perfect order and relation.^{xix}

The time seems appropriate for a fresh look at the principles and organization that would most appropriately demonstrate the influence of that cross.

^{xvi} EGW to "Leaders in Our Work," May 23, 1903.

^{xvii} EGW, Testimonies on Organization, March 13, 1896.

^{xviii} EGW, Letter 26, 1900.

^{xix} EGW, "The Medical Missionary Work and the Gospel Ministry," Dec 22, 1899.

NOTES