

# A Study of Church Governance and Unity

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## I. Introduction

This study of the foundations and function of Seventh-day Adventist Church policy and its relationship to unity brings together references from the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and Adventist history for the purpose of informing and guiding the Church in relation to policies concerning the ordaining and credentialing of Seventh-day Adventist pastors. It also contributes to the discussion about unity in light of the vote at the 2015 General Conference (GC) Session not to allow divisions to decide on the matter of women's ordination in their territories. As we move forward, there will continue to be dialogue at administrative levels regarding the issue of compliance with policy.

But what is the connection between unity and policy? The present *GC Working Policy* is the fruit of 150 years of collegial, prayerful, and frequently prolonged discussions among church leaders from around the world chosen by church members to represent them. Measures became policy only when a majority agreed on them, and usually only after a wider consensus was reached. Although the *GC Working Policy* is set out in numbered and lettered paragraphs, its chief purpose is not to produce a perfect bureaucratic system but to foster unity and mission. Its role in promoting unity has assumed even greater importance as a result of developments since the 2015 GC Session, arising from its vote on ordination.

Ever since the Seventh-day Adventist Church first established criteria for the ordination of ministers at the 18th GC Session in 1879, the world Church has set such criteria. Since 1930, the GC Executive Committee has delegated to unions responsibility for selecting candidates for ordination, based on the criteria set by the world Church.<sup>1</sup>

Starting in 2012, however, a few unions have, in effect, claimed the right to set criteria for ordination, disregarding the 1990 GC Session action not to allow women to be ordained to gospel ministry,<sup>2</sup> and the decisions of the 1995 and 2015 Sessions not to allow variances from this policy. Since the 2015 GC Session, some unions and conferences have diverged from *GC Working Policy* by discontinuing ordinations, and commissioning or licensing all new pastors; issuing ministerial licenses and/or commissioned-minister credentials or licenses to all pastors in their territories, including those previously ordained; and allowing commissioned or licensed ministers to function as ordained ministers.

This study articulates the world Church's position on ordination, ecclesiastical governance, and church unity. It explores the relevant issues at a greater length than is possible in a summative statement. While it analyzes *GC Working Policy* and other governing documents of the Church, because Adventists hold that "the Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of [God's] will" and that the writings of Ellen G White "speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church,"<sup>3</sup> it also considers passages from the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy that provide important context for the provisions of denominational policy. Church organization and governance, like all aspects of church life, should be based on the Bible, as Ellen White indicated shortly after the landmark 1901 reorganization of the Church.<sup>4</sup> This study shows that there is a spiritual and theological dimension

to policy compliance—that sometimes complying with church policies, is a matter of living according to biblical principles, and applying Christ’s commands to the life of the Church. The study sketches out important historical and contemporary principles of Adventist Church governance and in particular our practice and policies relating to church workers engaged in pastoral ministry. It makes the case that inspired writings, our history, and denominational policy all plainly indicate that unions and conferences should not unilaterally depart from what has been agreed by the world Church.

## II. Unity and Policy

### 1. The Biblical Doctrine of Unity

Unity is of central importance in Scripture and is one of the most important doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Two of the Fundamental Beliefs are relevant here.<sup>5</sup> Belief #12, “The Church,” begins by declaring: “The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.” It is vitally important that the body of believers is a community; we have mutual responsibilities to each other, including “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21 ESV) and “bearing with each other, and forgiving each other” (Col 3:13 NASB), as the apostle Paul wrote (see p 4). These obligations might not exist if the Church were conceived of in Scripture as a state or other polity, rather than a community. But in the New Testament it is not so. As our Fundamental Belief #14, “Unity in the Body of Christ,” states:

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.

These are the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s official doctrinal statements on unity in the Church.

As Jesus faced the ultimate trial of the cross, what was uppermost in His mind? It was not His own imminent torment, but the fate of His followers, for whom He interceded with His Father in a long prayer recorded in John 17. “I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours” (17:9). Our Lord was concerned not only for His followers’ safety, but also for their unity, praying: “Holy Father, protect them . . . that they may be one as we are one” (17:11). Jesus also prayed for His disciples through the ages: “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (17: 20-21). He wanted the same unity for His future disciples—that is, for the Church; but true unity among His followers is possible only when they are also in union with Him. Jesus prayed “that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity” (17: 22–23). He depicts unity among His followers as a litmus test: “May they also be in us *so that the world may believe that you have sent me,*” He prayed, stating also that,

once “brought to complete unity . . . the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (17:21, italics supplied, and 23).\*

Christ’s desire, then, for “those who believe in [Him is] that all of them may be one” in the same way the different members of the Godhead are one. That profound triune unity, from which creation sprang, is the quality Christ wants for us, His followers. It is by our “complete unity” and love for each other that the world will know the truth of our claims about Christ and Christianity.

Following the ascension, the disciples in Jerusalem lived up to Jesus’s desires for them as Luke makes clear in the book of Acts. They “continued with one accord in prayer” for ten days and it was *then*, “when the Day of Pentecost had come [and] they were all together” that they were baptized by the Holy Spirit (1:14, 2:1-4). The disciples’ togetherness is repeatedly underscored in Acts. We are told that the believers ‘continu[ed] daily with one accord in the temple,” that the apostles and their companions “raised their voice to God with one accord” and regularly met “all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch,” and that “among the large number who had become believers there was complete agreement of heart and soul” (2:46, 4:24, 5:12, 4:32). Luke indicates that their sense of unity arose from a deep sense of community: believers ate meals together (2:42, 46), shared their money and goods with each other (2: 44-45, 4:32, 34), and worshiped together (Luke 24:53, Acts 2:42, 47, 3:24). Luke links their sense of accord, moreover, to their success in preaching the Gospel. When the believers were united in one accord, eating together, praising God together, and praying together, “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved,” and the united believers “were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 2: 46-47, 4:31).†

Unity was also a constant theme of the Apostle Paul. For example, writing to the believers in Rome, he urged them that, though they might have different opinions about what foods should or should not be eaten, or which days ought or ought not be kept as religious festivals, nevertheless, these things were not important in comparison to belief in Christ’s divinity and saving power (Rom 14 and 15). Paul prayed that God would give the Roman disciples “a spirit of unity as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:5-6 NIV). He encouraged the believers of Ephesus “to be at one in the Spirit,” because then they would “be bound together in peace,” then memorably declared: “There is one Body and one Spirit, just as it was to one hope that you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is the one over all, the one working through all and the one living in all” (Eph. 4:3-6 Phillips). He enjoined them further: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21 NIV). Similarly, Paul charged the Christians of Colossae: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Col 3: 13-14 NIV).

It is important to note that the biblical picture is not of uniformity but of unity amidst diversity. Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul famously likens the Church to a body with different organs, using that metaphor to emphasize the diversity within the body of Christ and

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\* Quotations in this paragraph are all from the NIV.

† Quotations in this paragraph are all from the NKJV, except Acts 2:1 and 4:32, which are from the NASB and the J. B. Phillips translation, respectively. Other translations used in this paper are the ESV and NIV.

portray it in positive terms (1 Cor 12: 12-27). However, his ultimate point is that the various parts of the body of Christ should act unitedly: “As the human body, which has many parts, is a unity, and those parts, despite their multiplicity, constitute one single body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by the one Spirit into one body, whether we were Jews, Greeks, slaves or free men, and we have all had experience of the same spirit.” He concludes by affirming: “Now you are together the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it” (12: 12-13, 27 Phillips).

The apostle returned to his image of dissimilar people retaining distinctive characteristics yet being united in belief in Christ when writing to the churches in Galatia. Paul makes it plain that salvation applies to all human beings regardless of gender, class, wealth, or ethnicity: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28 NKJV).

## 2. Unity in the Writings of Ellen G White<sup>6</sup>

In writing about unity, Ellen G White often expounds on the scriptural examples noted above, particularly Christ’s prayer in John 17. It was a passage she repeatedly cited, using it for various purposes, including to inspire and to underscore Trinitarian doctrine. It was also a go-to text when writing to the Church on the necessity of unity and united action, and she ascribed exceptional importance to this passage.

For example, in 1875, believing that “A great work may be done . . . in bringing souls to the knowledge of the truth if there is united action,” she referenced John 17, declaring: “If all who have influence felt the necessity of cooperation and would seek to answer the prayer of Christ, that they may be one as He is one with the Father, the cause of present truth” would be farther advanced than it was. Later in what is a long testimony, she references Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:21 in her pronouncement that “Christ would have His followers . . . all subject one to another, esteeming others better than themselves. Union and confidence are essential to the prosperity of the church . . . [which] depend[s] upon the prompt, united action and mutual confidence of its members.”<sup>7</sup> She returns to John 17, however, affirming that “God wants His people to be united in the closest bonds of Christian fellowship,” before quoting John 17: 21-23 verbatim, and posing a rhetorical question: if every church member pushes “his views of Bible truth without regard to the opinions of his brethren . . . asserting his right to believe and talk what he pleases without reference to the faith of the body, where will be that harmony . . . which Christ prayed might exist among his brethren?”<sup>8</sup>

In 1886 she counseled a husband and wife against too much self-reliance, affirming that “God requires concerted action” and reminding them: “Christ prayed that his disciples might be one with Him, as he was one with the Father.”<sup>9</sup> Here we see the Spirit of Prophecy underscoring and amplifying Christ’s teaching that unity in the body of Christ is based on their unity with Christ. It is a sentiment she would repeat.

In a testimony on “Christian unity,” published in 1882, Ellen White states: “Unity is strength; division is weakness.” (It was a formula she would reiterate.) She counsels that “the people of God should press together,” then reminds her readers: “That union and love might exist among His disciples was the burden of our Saviour’s last prayer for them prior to His crucifixion. With the agony of the cross before Him, His solicitude was not for Himself, but for those whom



He should leave to carry forward His work in the earth.”<sup>10</sup> She quotes John 17: 17-21 before affirming: “That prayer of Christ embraces all His followers to the close of time. Our Saviour foresaw the trials and dangers of His people; He is not unmindful of the dissensions and divisions that distract and weaken His church.”<sup>11</sup> Later in this testimony, she quotes at length from Ephesians 4, then declares: “There is but one body, and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith. As members of the body of Christ all believers are animated by the same spirit and the same hope. Divisions in the church dishonor the religion of Christ before the world.” She applies this to Seventh-day Adventists and poses a powerful question: “Paul’s instructions were not written alone for the church in his day. God designed that they should be sent down to us. What are we doing to preserve unity in the bonds of peace?”<sup>12</sup>

In 1898, in *Desire of Ages*, she reflects at length on Christ’s oft-repeated “great desire” for “His disciples . . . that they might love one another as He had loved them.” She comments: “All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another.” The result would be believers “bound together . . . by love.” She concludes: “Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity”.<sup>13</sup> Also in 1898, in a general testimony, she urges church members: “Study prayerfully the seventeenth chapter of John. . . . God calls upon those who profess to be His children to study” the words of Jesus in this prayer, “to eat them, to live them. He calls upon them to seek for unity and love.”<sup>14</sup> In 1902, Ellen White counselled her elder son, Edson, in similar terms but expands the response she wants from him (and her later readers). In addition to studying John 17, Edson should endeavor to be a personal answer to the prayer of Jesus: “We are to do all in our power to answer the prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John—Christ’s prayer for unity.”<sup>15</sup>

Nearly two years later, she penned a powerful testimony in which she again appeals to church members not just to study, but “to learn to answer the prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John”. Adventists, she affirms, “are to make this prayer our first study. Every gospel minister, every medical missionary, is to learn the science of this prayer.”<sup>16</sup> After quoting Christ’s words at length, she continues: “It is the purpose of God that His children shall blend in unity. Do they not expect to live together in the same heaven? Is Christ divided against Himself? Will He give His people success before . . . the laborers, with unity of purpose, devote heart and mind and strength to the work so holy in God’s sight?” Then she restates a sentiment from 1882, though in different words: “Union brings strength; disunion, weakness.” She goes on to Christ’s words that, by His followers’ unity, the world would know He was sent from God: “The world is looking with gratification at the disunion amongst Christians. Infidelity is well pleased. God calls for a change among His people. Union with Christ and with one another is our only safety in these last days. Let us not make it possible for Satan to point to our church members, saying ‘Behold how these people . . . hate one another.’”<sup>17</sup> She concludes: “When Christ’s prayer is fully believed, when its instruction is brought into the daily life of God’s people, unity of action will be seen in our ranks.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1905, counseling European church leaders, Ellen White repeats her appeal to Adventists to attempt, in our own lives, to fulfil Christ’s prayer. She writes: “Our effort should be to answer Christ’s prayer for His disciples, that they should be one.” She then quotes John 17:17-21 verbatim, before continuing: “It should be understood that perfect unity among the laborers is necessary to the successful accomplishment of the work of God.” After expressing her deep dissatisfaction at the way national differences were impeding unity in Europe, she concludes the testimony: “I again

repeat the words of Christ. I would impress them deeply upon your minds”—before quoting John 17: 20-23, again verbatim.<sup>19</sup> The same year, after a GC Executive Committee meeting had been marred by divisions arising from national and ethnic differences, she received a vision about unity. Sharing her impressions, she stresses “the unity that should attend our work” and urges church leaders: “Strive earnestly for unity. Pray for it, work for it.” She concludes by telling them, in words redolent of Jesus’s prayer in John 17 that if they “esteem others better than yourselves . . . you will be brought into oneness with Christ. Before the . . . world, you will bear unmistakable evidence that you are God’s sons and daughters. God will be glorified in the example that you set.”<sup>20</sup>

As well as reflecting on John 17, Ellen White depicts unity among believers as an essential ingredient in the “outpouring of the Spirit upon the day of Pentecost” and the early church’s extraordinary missional success. “One interest prevailed” among the disciples. “No longer were they a collection of independent units or discordant, conflicting elements. . . . They were of ‘one accord,’ ‘of one heart and of one soul.’ Christ filled their thoughts; the advancement of His kingdom was their aim.”<sup>21</sup>

Only as they were united with Christ could the disciples hope to have the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit and the co-operation of angels of heaven. . . . As they should continue to labor unitedly, heavenly messengers would go before them, opening the way . . . and many would be won to Christ. So long as they remained united, the church would go forth [with great success].<sup>22</sup>

Probably thinking of analogous developments in Adventist experience she observes: “Later in the history of the early church, when in various parts of the world many groups of believers had been formed into churches, the organization of the church was further perfected, so that order and harmonious action might be maintained.”<sup>23</sup> She counsels Adventist church leaders “to take their position unitedly on the side of right” and thus “have a uniting influence upon the entire flock.”<sup>24</sup> Later, considering Paul’s metaphor of the body, she affirms that “the apostle aptly illustrated the close and harmonious relationship that should exist among all members of the church of Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, in addition to commenting on Holy Scripture, Ellen G White also gave inspired counsel to contemporary church members, repeatedly stressing the importance of unity and of working unitedly. In 1886, for example, she counseled church workers in Europe that, “in every effort, in every place where the truth is introduced, there is need of different minds, different gifts, different plans and methods of labor being united. . . . All should be perfectly harmonious in the work.”<sup>26</sup> In 1894, distressed at the tendency of different ministries to work independently of each other, she counseled church leaders: “God and Christ are one, Christ and His disciples are one, we in Christ, and Christ in God. The Lord designs that His work shall move forward in perfect harmony without friction.”<sup>27</sup> In 1899, concerned about John Harvey Kellogg’s increasing independent-mindedness, she penned a testimony that adapts Paul’s metaphor of internal organs: the “church on earth,” she writes, is like “a temple built of living stones. . . . Not all the stones are of the same form or shape. Some are large, some are small; but each has its own place to fill.” Furthermore, she continues, “The Lord has wrought with you, enabling you to act your part as His workman; but there are other workmen also who are to act their part. . . . These help to compose the whole body.”<sup>28</sup>

Concerned about divisions emerging in the denomination, Ellen White told the 1903 GC Session: “In the church of God there is to be done a work of cementing heart to heart.”<sup>29</sup> In a testimony from the same year she identifies greater unity as one of the benefits that would flow from revival and reformation. “When this reformation begins,” she writes, “the spirit of discord and strife” would disappear. “Those who have not been living in Christian fellowship will draw close to one another. . . . There will be no confusion, because all will be in harmony with the mind of the Spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

These are eloquent and powerful statements. In them, Ellen White stresses, as she so often did, that it is only through union with Christ that His followers can find union with each other; union in Christ, in turn, is only achieved through the working of the Holy Spirit. Ellen White also articulates why unity in Christ is essential. Our “dissensions and divisions” do more than “distract and weaken [the] church,” they “dishonor the religion of Christ before the world.” Our goal as Adventists is to be “bound together . . . by love.” If we “seek for unity and love,” “esteeming others better than ourselves,” and “draw[ing] close to one another,” then, we are promised, “all will be in harmony with the mind of the Spirit”—we “will be brought into oneness with Christ,” and “God will be glorified in the example [we] set.” All of us, then, would do well to ask ourselves: “What are we doing to preserve unity in the bonds of peace?”

### 3. The Role of Policy

In the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy, unity in Christ is surpassingly important. God’s message to His people in biblical times and His remnant church at the end of time, conveyed by the pens of inspiration, cannot be ignored. The implications for our governance are clear. We are to work collaboratively and unitedly, rather than unilaterally. Only when we are united will we succeed in making disciples and building up the Church. Even more profoundly, our unity is the litmus test of our claim to follow Jesus Christ, as He Himself declared (John 17:23).

What, however, is the connection between the unity and policy? Having laid the biblical foundations for our understanding of church unity and governance, it will be helpful to say something about the nature of Adventist Church policy, in which we apply biblical principles and patterns to the Church visible in an attempt to make it conform as closely as possible to what Christ would have His Church be.

#### a. Adventist Policy Documents

The governing documents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have all been approved by either a GC Session or the GC Executive Committee. A common shorthand for these documents is “policy,” but they include more than just the General Conference’s *Working Policy* and Mission Statement, which were created by the GC Executive Committee, can be amended only by that body meeting in an Annual Council (or by a GC Session), and are published in an annually updated one-volume edition as General Conference *Working Policy*. Other policy documents include the GC Constitution and Bylaws (included in the published *Working Policy*), which originated with and can only be changed by a GC Session; the constitutions and bylaws, or operating policies, of the GC’s member unions and their respective conferences and missions; the “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” and the *Church Manual* (both of which also can only be amended by

a GC Session); and several divisions' own versions of Working Policy (applying and sometimes expanding the provisions of GC *Working Policy* to their contexts). Finally, statements or other actions approved by a GC Session or the GC Executive Committee are also considered an expression of Church policy.<sup>31</sup>

The different documents apply to different spheres: the Fundamental Beliefs are solely doctrinal; the *Church Manual* governs procedures and policies at the level of the local church (though sometimes with implications for broader policy and other levels of structure); the GC Constitution, Bylaws, and *Working Policy* deal with policies and procedures at the regional and global levels, and with the interrelationship of different levels of structure.<sup>32</sup> This study draws on the GC Constitution and Bylaws, GC *Working Policy*, GC Session actions, statements voted by the GC Executive Committee, and, to a lesser extent, the Fundamental Beliefs and *Church Manual*.

#### b. The Character of Working Policy

The importance of the Constitution and Fundamental Beliefs is widely appreciated, but, as noted earlier, GC *Working Policy* is widely misunderstood—this is true both of its nature and of its role in the Church. Some regard it as administrative trivia, but others almost as like medieval canon law, while those who stress conformity to its stipulations can be portrayed as legalists. Unlike the Mosaic Law, however, the provisions of Adventist Church policy are not a series of divine mandates, requirements for salvation, or regulations for daily life. Unlike canon law (the legal code of the Roman Catholic Church), they do not operate at the level of civil law and are not enforced by the courts. Although GC *Working Policy* does primarily relate to administration and undoubtedly deals with some minutiae, it is not trivial.

Throughout the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, all its governing documents have been subject to revision, which reflects that they are imperfect, as any attempt to apply heavenly principles to the earthly Church visible is bound to be. Policies—even if agreed to by representative bodies, following consultation at different levels of denominational structure, and after sustained debate and deliberation—can only achieve so much. Church leaders are aware that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6 NKJV); they affirm that Church policies must not impede mission; they accept that policy does not apply perfectly to all cases and circumstances (and for this reason there are processes in place to allow for it to be varied; see pp 18-20 below); and, finally, they acknowledge that Seventh-day Adventist policies, as the human creation of a dynamic movement, can always be improved and often require updating. These caveats notwithstanding, policies provide a clear record of what representatives of the world Church have discussed and agreed is essential for the global body of believers to engage effectively in mission and ministry. “Christ would have His followers brought together in church capacity, observing order, having rules and discipline.”<sup>33</sup>

In addition to its general role in regulating the administration of a worldwide denomination, GC *Working Policy* has a particular (and particularly important) role to play in building unity and community among Seventh-day Adventist Christians. As one church leader, explaining Adventist policies to church members, wrote 85 years ago, “a well-defined working policy” was “one strong factor in binding and cementing the personnel of the body of Seventh-day Adventists together as one in purpose in Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Of course, unity is about relationships: the believer's with Christ and

with other church members; and those of church organizations and institutions to each other, and to the wider whole. Policies cannot fully do justice to human emotions and so policies, alone, will not produce unity. A recent report to the GC Executive Committee recognizes that “the relationship among entities of the Church is more than a matter of law and policy” and thus “attempts to codify that relationship will always be inadequate.” As it affirms, the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “primary strength” is neither its policies nor “its structure but . . . its collective desire to live out a commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup> An important part of the role of church leadership is to facilitate the living out of that commitment to Christ, and the fashioning of that unity among us for which the Son petitioned the Father. But the decisions made with those goals in mind become policy, which thus has a role to play in building unity in the Church.

From the movement’s earliest days, Seventh-day Adventist leaders have been keenly aware of the need for unity, and denominational policy has always been one of the means to achieve it. In the 1850s and 1860s, as Seventh-day Adventists gradually coalesced into a distinct denomination, the other sects and denominations that emerged from Millerism were constantly fragmenting, their witness to the Second Advent undermined by their tendency towards heated disagreement and self-destruction. Their example had to be avoided.<sup>36</sup> Geographical dispersion was another challenge; seventh-day Sabbath-keeping Adventists were scattered across the Northeast and Midwest of the United States—some of the delegates who founded the General Conference in 1863 would have taken days of travel to reach Battle Creek. All these factors made our founders keenly aware of the need to take steps to preserve the unity that was, after all, one of their reasons for founding the General Conference in 1863.<sup>37</sup> They therefore initially staged GC Sessions every year, but as the Church began to spread around the world, the interval between sessions inevitably increased. Leaders therefore eventually expanded the membership of the Executive Committee and began to reserve certain business to “councils,” which would be attended by committee members from outside the GC headquarters. As the denomination grew further and the first two generations passed away, longstanding practices were codified in the *Church Manual* and *GC Working Policy*, and our Fundamental Beliefs were formulated. The Constitution and *Working Policy* have been continually tweaked to reflect changing realities and the Executive Committee repeatedly enlarged to ensure wide representation.

Quinquennial GC Sessions and regular meetings of a large and representative Executive Committee; the GC Constitution and Bylaws; *GC Working Policy*; the Fundamental Beliefs; and the *Church Manual*—all have multiple purposes, including organizational efficiency. But more importantly, they are tools to help *achieve* unity. Policy also *expresses* our unity, for, in the succinct words of a recent statement by world Church leaders, “General Conference Session actions and voted policies are agreements that the body of Christ make together.”<sup>38</sup>

#### 4. Policy and Unity

Ultimately, of course, it is the power of the Holy Spirit that holds us together, but the Holy Spirit works through human instrumentalities and avenues. Policy is one of a number of factors that promotes unity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>39</sup> We are united by our:

- *Commitment to Christ*
- *Common biblical beliefs*

- *Shared passion for mission to the world*
- *Joint weekly study of the Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*
- *Interdependent worldwide organizational structure*
- *Mutually agreed practices and policies*

What binds Seventh-day Adventists together, ultimately, are our shared beliefs and our common mission “to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the three angels’ messages, and to prepare the world for Christ’s soon return.”<sup>40</sup> Church policies strengthen all the other unifying factors. They are tools to enable every member to become ever more effective in fulfilling our prophetic mission and to become ever more united in “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14). Upholding the provisions of denominational policy does not, then, denote legalism (with all the negative connotations that holds); rather, it reflects a desire to draw closer to God and to each other, and to most efficiently lift up Jesus Christ before the world.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church takes seriously the doctrine of unity and unreservedly echoes Christ’s appeal to God in John 17:23, praying that the Church “may be brought to complete unity” as a witness to the world.

### III. Diversity, Unity, and Authority

The question naturally arises, however: What about diversity? This was not an issue in ancient Israel, which was homogenous ethnically and, on the whole, economically and culturally. At Christ’s ascension, however, the apostles were instructed to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation,” “mak[ing] disciples of all nations,” witnessing to the good news not only in Jerusalem and Judaea or even in Samaria, “but to the very ends of the earth” (Mark 16:15, Matt. 28:18, NIV; Acts 1:8, Phillips). Diversity henceforth would be one of the chief characteristics of spiritual Israel. Understanding diversity in the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy reveals that unity can flourish in diversity, but the relationships of the varied members of the body of Christ to each other must be characterized by interdependence rather than independence.

#### 1. Diversity in Inspired Writings

In the Bible, diversity is a positive quality, not a negative one. The first, fundamental thing we know about God is that He is Creator. It follows that He must value variety and multiplicity, for His self-expression in creation is extraordinarily, almost infinitely, rich and diverse. We know, too, that our triune God is, truly essentially, manifold in His very nature.

The New Testament in particular speaks to the virtue of diversity in God’s eyes. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the early church was the gift of tongues, which, by providing for communication in different languages, affirmed the different national and linguistic identities of believers; a later attempt to impose one language—Latin—on the church was unhelpful. Peter’s vision in Joppa, of “all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds,” and the divine commentary on it—“What God has made clean, do not call common”—led Peter to realize that God does not discriminate based on nationality, ethnicity or race: that instead, “in every nation

whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him;” the result was that “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard,” Jew and Gentile alike (Acts 10:12 NIV, 10:15 ESV, 10:35, 44 NKJV). We have already seen that Paul writes in positive terms not only about unity but also about diversity; he values a degree of diversity but encourages unity in diversity (see above, p 4).

Like the Bible, the inspired writings of Ellen G White place great value on diversity. She explicitly uses, several times, the language of “unity in diversity.” Writing in 1894, in a lengthy letter to a wide group of leaders, she declares:

In the different branches of this great work there is to be unity in diversity. This is God’s plan, the principle which runs through the entire universe. In God’s wise arrangement there is diversity . . . yet He has so related each part to others, that all work in harmony to carry out His great plan . . . . However there may appear to be dissimilarity, the work is one great whole, and bears the stamp of infinite wisdom. . . . Jesus said: “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” The branches are many and diverse, yet all are united in the parent stock . . . . Jesus Christ is in God, the great masterpiece of infinite wisdom and power and sufficiency, from whom all diversity springs. Each branch bears its burden of fruit, and altogether make a harmonious whole, a complete, beautiful unity. This is harmony according to God’s order.<sup>41</sup>

The language of “unity in diversity” reappears in a sermon to the 1903 GC Session, again deploying powerful imagery: “Do you not know that of the leaves on a tree there are no two exactly alike? From this God would teach us that among His servants there is to be unity in diversity.” She concludes: “To every man is given his work. But though our work is different, we need . . . one another. . . . God uses different minds.”<sup>42</sup>

Ellen G White certainly never believed in a “one size fits all” approach. In an address to the 1909 GC Session, for example, she explicitly warns the “brethren in responsibility” to “be slow to criticize movements that are not in perfect harmony with their methods of labor. Let them never suppose that every plan should reflect their own personality.”<sup>43</sup> She then references the first chapter of Ezekiel, telling the listening church leaders: “To the prophet, the wheel within a wheel, the appearance of living creatures connected with them, all seemed intricate and unexplainable. But the hand of infinite wisdom is seen among the wheels, and perfect order is the result of its work. Every wheel, directed by the hand of God, works in perfect harmony with every other wheel.”<sup>44</sup> This is both another injunction to church members to be united, but it also makes the point that God often works through multiplicity, which we find confusing, to achieve His goals—and, again, that there can be unity in diversity.

All these statements affirm that unity and diversity can coexist but remind us of the overarching importance of unity. They set out an important principle, but do not offer guidance on how the principle is to be put into practice, or on the limits of tolerable diversity. Yet, implicit in the Scriptural and Spirit of Prophecy statements on unity, considered earlier (pp 2-6), is that diversity can lead to unacceptable degrees of discord, confusion, and conflict. What decision-making process, then, is appropriate among God’s people in order to preserve unity, while allowing acceptable diversity to flourish?

As will be seen below, the New Testament indicates that, when God's people determine whether or not to allow diverse approaches among them, they should make their decision collectively and collaboratively, not unilaterally. This was true even in the face of cultural diversity—regions with particular cultural problems consulted with the wider body of believers and jointly took decisions about how to proceed.

## 2. Decision-Making and Diversity in the Early Church

Jesus invested His disciples with plenary power: “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt 18:18 NKJV). Ellen G White repeatedly referenced this text in testimonies, over a 40-year period, underscoring the significance and plenitude of the authority awarded to the apostles.<sup>45</sup> Yet how was this authority to be implemented in practice? How were decisions to be made in light of Christ's commands? They include, after all: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave” (Matt 20:25-27 NKJV). Lest any believers doubted Christ's meaning, Peter underscored it with his admonition: “Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be . . . not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:2-3 NIV). But the situation was to be greatly complicated by the diverse nature of the early church.

The first believers in Jerusalem, though all Jews, were from many different countries (Acts 2:5, 6:1). Ellen G White writes thus about them: “Despite former prejudices, all were in harmony with one another. Satan knew that so long as this union continued to exist, he would be powerless to check the progress of gospel truth; and he sought to take advantage of former habits of thought, in the hope that thereby he might be able to introduce into the church elements of disunion.”<sup>46</sup> The result was dissension between Greek- and Hebrew-speaking believers, the former alleging that the latter treated Greek widows unfairly (Acts 6:1). Despite their unhappiness, however, the Greek-speaking Jews did not take matters into their own hands. Instead, the apostles, as leaders of the whole community of believers, considered the situation and, as Ellen White describes, “led by the Holy Spirit,” they conceived “a plan for the better organization of all the working forces of the church.” The majority made a plan to care for the needs and desires of the minority group by appointing the first deacons, an approach which had positive results.<sup>47</sup>

As the believers spread out from Judaea, there could no longer be one local community of Christians (as they became known). As they began to convert not just Jews who spoke various languages, but Gentiles too, controversy was perhaps inevitable. When crucial issues arose, however, they were not resolved independently, but collectively. This approach ensured that unity was preserved, even though the challenges arising from diversity were so serious that in theory they could have resulted in a disastrous schism. At Antioch there was “sharp dispute and debate” between, on the one hand, “believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees,” who maintained that all Christians had to be circumcised, and Paul and Barnabas on the other hand, who did not require this of their Gentile converts (Acts 15:2, 5 NIV). There was so “much discussion and contention” at Antioch that the local believers, “fearing . . . a division among them . . . decided to



send Paul and Barnabas, with some responsible men from the church, to Jerusalem to lay the matter before the apostles and elders.”<sup>48</sup>

What is often called the “Jerusalem Council” is significant almost as much for its process as for the theological decision that resulted. It is noteworthy that “the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter” and that it was they who took a decision that was evidently regarded as binding on churches everywhere.<sup>49</sup> Just who these “elders” were, it is unclear, but Ellen White indicates that they came from Jerusalem, Antioch, “and the most influential churches”; and she writes: “The council . . . was composed of apostles and teachers who had been prominent in raising up the Jewish and Gentile Christian churches, with chosen delegates from various places. . . . The entire body of Christians was not called to vote upon the question. The ‘apostles and elders,’ men of influence and judgment, framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches.”<sup>50</sup> Their decision was to affirm diversity in key religious practices: Jewish Christians would continue to circumcise and adhere to the full panoply of the Mosaic law, whereas converted Gentiles were excepted from most of its provisions, except that they were encouraged to “remember the poor” and instructed to “abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality” (Gal 2:10 and Acts 15:29 NKJV).

To many Jewish believers, the twin-track approach would have seemed like apostasy and some “were not . . . prepared to accept willingly the decision of the council”. This, though, was a minority reaction. “The broad and far-reaching decisions of the general council brought confidence into the ranks of the Gentile believers, and the cause of God prospered.”<sup>51</sup>

The lesson of this episode, however, is not that “anything goes”—that local churches can respond to controversies as they see fit. There were almost certainly no Gentile converts in Jerusalem, so the Antiochene church could have claimed that circumcision was an issue only for the churches in Syria and Cilicia (*cf.* Acts 15:23). But a different model was established by the Jerusalem Council, as Ellen White observes. “When dissension arose in a local church,” as it did in Antioch and elsewhere, “such matters were not permitted to create a division in the church, but were referred to a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility. Thus the efforts of Satan to attack the church in isolated places were met by concerted action on the part of all, and the plans of the enemy . . . were thwarted.”<sup>52</sup>

In summary, the lesson of the Jerusalem Council is this: in the Church, *diversity of practice can be allowed, but only after a representative body has agreed to allow some variation*. A key New Testament principle emerges from both this episode and that of the widows and deacons: decision-making issues with implications that may extend beyond the local or regional, should be collective, rather than unilateral.

### 3. Diversity and Authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Seventh-day Adventists follow this New Testament model, drawing also on the writings of Ellen G White. We believe the authority granted the Church by Jesus enables church leaders to make decisions that bind all members; we further believe that the apostles affirmed the principle

of collective decision-making by leaders representing the whole body of believers. In furtherance of this principle, we collectively subordinate ourselves to decisions taken at General Conference Sessions, which have always been representative bodies, and by Annual Councils, whose membership became representative of the world Church in the second half of the twentieth century. These bodies are our highest authorities, reflecting both the model of the Jerusalem Council and Ellen G White's explicit counsel (see below, pp 19-26, 31-32, 36-37). Adventists further follow the New Testament model in providing, as we do, for as much diversity as possible without imperiling unity. This arises, both from our biblical understanding and from a longstanding recognition that, in the words of William A Spicer, who served as one of the executive officers of the GC for an unequalled 27 years, "The details of organization may vary according to conditions and work," but should always be subject to "the spiritual gift of order and of government" (and subsequent generations of church leaders have concurred).<sup>53</sup> Decision-making takes place at the local and regional levels as much as possible, but major decisions which have wider implications—including decisions about diversity—are taken at the highest level by representative bodies.

Unity in diversity is a vital characteristic of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Church encourages/maintains diversity in three ways: (a) by assigning authority to different levels of structure, (b) by prescribing policy only when necessary, and (c) by allowing diversity of ecclesiastical practice where there is consensus.

a. Delegated Authority

Adventist ecclesiastical polity, as defined and described in *GC Working Policy*, is unique. While there is a hierarchy of organizational units, "internal governance" is not hierarchical but rather "representative in form with executive responsibility and authority assigned to a variety of entities and institutions and their respective constituencies, boards, and officers through constitutions or articles of incorporation, bylaws, and operating policies and guidelines" (B 05, 1.).

Each organizational unit with a "defined membership, also known as a constituency" (local church, mission/conference, and union), has certain "elements of organizational authority and responsibility" delegated to it; these differ at each of "the various levels of denominational organization" (B 05, 2. and 6.). Each unit is typically a member of the constituency of the unit immediately above it (with the unions comprising the GC constituency). Not only does each constituency-based unit have certain powers, but, in addition, members of its constituency participate both in its own "deliberation and decision-making" process and in the selection of delegates who represent their unit in the decision-making process of units at higher levels of structure (B 05, 2. and 4.). Frequent consultation between officers of different levels is strongly encouraged in *Working Policy*, beyond the formally mandated processes (B 40 20; 40 25; 45 05). The "representative character of church organization" (B 40 10) means that every unit "is dependent to some extent on the realm of authority exercised by other levels of organization" and that its identity "cannot be fully defined or viewed in isolation from its relationships with . . . other levels of denominational organization." Furthermore, "each level of organization exercises a realm of final authority and responsibility that may have implications for other levels of organization." (B 05, 6. and 8.)

In sum, the decision-making process at each level involves input from other levels. Unlike traditional hierarchical denominations, authority derives from the lowest level of structure (the local church) and flows upward through constituency-based units to the highest level, the General Conference, but the GC then has plenary authority, within mutually prescribed and agreed limits, over all the elements of the world Church; as part of its exercise of authority, the GC delegates some powers to lower levels. In the words of a recent world Church statement, “the Seventh-day Adventist Church has developed on the principle of interdependence rather than independence.”<sup>54</sup> As a veteran administrator put it nearly 75 years ago, in our ecclesiastical polity, “believer is united to believer, church to church, conference to conference, union to union, in one church organization throughout the entire world.”<sup>55</sup>

Inherent in our system of representative, consultative, consensus-based decision-making is that organizational units and church-member representatives have input into the decisions of organizations at higher levels of structure. However, having had input, reciprocity means that there must be acceptance of the collective decision. Also inherent in the system, then, is that the authority of an organizational unit at any level is plenary in its territory, encompassing all constituent or component organizations at lower levels. The latter are bound by the decisions of the higher-level units of which they form a part, and of any executive committees entrusted by *Working Policy* with far-reaching authority. These include, of course, the GC Executive Committee.

The authority of the Executive Committee should be self-evident from the nature of the system, but it is made explicit in the Church’s policy documents. Since some have questioned whether these govern unions, however, it may be helpful to show, from these documents, that the authority of the GC Executive Committee applies not only to divisions, but also to unions, and in consequence to conferences and missions.

Unions are the members of the General Conference.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the provisions of the GC Constitution and Bylaws apply to and are binding on unions. Article III of the GC Constitution mandates that “Each division of the General Conference . . . shall act in full harmony with the General Conference Constitution and Bylaws, the General Conference *Working Policy*, and actions of the Executive Committee” so that “actions of division committees shall, of necessity, be in harmony with and complementary to the decisions of the General Conference in Session, and the actions of the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions.”<sup>57</sup> Article I of the Bylaws extends this, in turn, to unions, providing that “all organizations and institutions within a division’s territory,” while “responsible to their respective executive committees/boards,” must still “operate in harmony with division and General Conference Executive Committee actions and policies.”<sup>58</sup> Article XIII of the Bylaws further empowers an “Annual Council” of the Executive Committee to transact certain world Church business, including “the adoption of policies that may be necessary in the operation of the worldwide work.”<sup>59</sup> This is the specific warrant for *Working Policy*, but the other provisions cited make it clear that policies approved by the GC Executive Committee apply to unions. Unmistakably, then, unions are constitutionally obliged to act in harmony with GC *Working Policy*.

Furthermore, the Constitution and Bylaws specify that the GC Executive Committee “speaks for the world Church” because its membership “includes representatives of all the divisions of the world field and the presidents of all unions” and is representative of the world field

not only geographically, for in addition to administrators, it includes pastors, other “frontline” workers, laypeople, and “young adults.”<sup>60</sup> In consequence: “The authority . . . of the General Conference Executive Committee is the authority of the world Church.”<sup>61</sup> These are significant stipulations in their own right, but the Constitution’s elevation (Article III) of the authority of the GC Executive Committee “between Sessions” adds further weight to *Working Policy*, since its provisions all derive from Annual Council actions.

GC *Working Policy* itself underscores the constitutional provisos. It is described as “the authoritative voice of the Church in all matters pertaining to the mission and to the administration of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in all parts of the world” (B 15 05). Strict adherence to *Policy* is required of “all organizations in every part of the world field,” with “work in every organization [to] be administered in full harmony with the policies of the General Conference and of the divisions” (B 15 10, 1). All conference/mission, union and division “Officers and administrators” are, moreover, “expected to work in harmony with the General Conference *Working Policy*” (B 15 15). Crucially, too, “departure from these policies” requires “prior approval from the General Conference Executive Committee” (B 15 10, 1).

What, then, does GC *Working Policy* indicate about the authority of constituency-based organizational units *vis-à-vis* the GC or division executive committees? No mission, conference, or union has a right to take unilateral decisions on important matters, or to depart from decisions taken by units at a higher level of structure with wider authority. While the local church, the conference/mission, and the union each have their own constituency and constitution, their status “is not self-generated, automatic, or perpetual.” Instead, it “is granted to a constituency as a trust . . . by an executive committee or a constituency session at higher levels of denominational organization” (B 05, 3.), only “by vote of the appropriate constituency [or] actions of properly authorized executive committees” (B 10 25). Recognition as a conference/mission or union brings with it decision-making authority in defined areas and the right of representation at higher levels of denominational structure, but “status” is contingent on “compliance with denominational practices and policies” and “can be reviewed, revised, amended, or withdrawn by the level of organization that granted it” (B 05, 3.).

In sum, it is very clear that even though unions have their own constituencies and their own constitutions, in the interdependent Adventist system of church governance they do not have a right to disregard actions of GC Sessions or policies voted by the GC Executive Committee. This is true, too, of other organizational units. The responsibility of unions, conferences and missions, and local churches to comply with world Church “practices and policies” supersedes all other considerations.

The exercise of authority at different levels inevitably results in some diversity of practice. However, “individual units of the Church are given freedom to function in ways appropriate to their role and culture,” as long as these are “in harmony with the teachings and policies of the Church, and the actions of the world Church in the General Conference Executive Committee or in General Conference Session” (B 10 25). Thus, GC *Working Policy* allows diversity of practice within certain broad parameters and so it is simply not the case that complying with church policy means uniformity rather than unity. GC *Working Policy* is wide-ranging, however, and reserves to Annual Councils or GC Sessions the right to determine major aspects of ecclesiastical practice,

including relationships between organizations at different levels. As a result, diversity arising from the devolution of authority is mostly local in nature. It follows that examples of global diversity of practice arise from decisions both taken and not taken by the world Church.

b. Tacit Diversity

We have seen that the GC Constitution, Bylaws and *Working Policy* grant extensive powers to representative bodies of the world Church: to GC Sessions and to the GC Executive Committee between Sessions. However, the world Church simply has not considered, or pronounced on, a great many topics. In the absence of definite policy provisions, diversity exists—what could be termed tacit diversity (or unspecified diversity), since the diverse practices arise from church leaders' lack of action, rather than their explicit approval. Still, where policy is silent, a range of practices can and do flourish.

For example: church members all around the globe praise God with music and song during Sabbath School and divine service. But worship music in the Middle East is different to that in Southern Asia, and in both regions it typically differs from church music in Western countries. This has little to do with perceived differences between “classical” and “contemporary” styles, for that rift exists in all three regions, but is expressed differently in each, which reflects that regional variations go beyond the merely stylistic: tonal and rhythmic concepts are very different. The style, layout and decoration of church buildings in general, and sanctuaries in particular, can vary significantly, as well. And while the majority of church members probably dress well for church, “dressing well” means different things in different localities. Postures in prayer that are acceptable in some places are perceived as disrespectful in others. The Adventist Church universally teaches that a plant-based diet is the healthiest option and the biblical ideal, but both the incidence of vegetarianism and its interpretation (whether it includes eggs, milk, or fish) vary globally. In contrast, use of alcohol and tobacco are official Adventist tests of fellowship everywhere. Such examples of passively allowed diversity could be multiplied. When a GC Session or the GC Executive Committee has formally taken a stance on an issue, however, that cannot simply be ignored.

c. Active Diversity

Finally, a number of variances from policy have been officially permitted, resulting in what could be termed active diversity, since it arises because of positive action rather than by default.

Sometimes instances of active diversity have been specific regional variations permitted in particular fields. For example, the GC Executive Committee in 1962 approved a request from the Middle East Division to abolish unions in its territory and have the division headquarters work directly with the missions. This was a very significant variance in terms of Adventist ecclesiastical polity and it lasted for the rest of the division's life (it was dissolved in 1970). It reflected the realities of mission in this heavily Islamic territory, including, as the division officers noted, “the small constituency and the need for concentrated effort in the Middle East Division”.<sup>62</sup>

There are also, however, instances in GC *Working Policy* of, in effect, blanket variations from standard policy that any local union or conference/mission is permitted to adopt, in the

interest of mission in its particular context. These include some models of organization that were once controversial (such as the union of churches) because they involved adaptation of the structure adopted at the 1901 GC Session. However, after prolonged consideration by the world Church, over a period of many years, provision was made in *GC Working Policy* for four “Alternatives in organizational structure” (B 10 28). This allowed diversity at the global level as a response to the challenges arising in diverse cultures and societies. Today the 1901 structure remains the official “standard model” of organization, but variant organizational models have been implemented in several divisions, and their potential utilization is widely accepted (though not widely adopted). A decision by the world Church permitted system-wide diversity of practice, on a case-by-case basis, while preserving standard practice.

As a report to the 2012 Annual Council commented, in practice “organizations have adapted General Conference and/or division working policy in a manner that reveals considerable diversity of application.”<sup>63</sup> In and of itself, this is not necessarily problematic: as a recent GC commission on denominational structure reported, the “ideal” of “a single system of uniform structure and procedures” in the world Church is attractive, but is very “difficult to achieve . . . because of vast differences in cultural and political environments, in the availability and use of technology, and in the needs or expectations that various areas and groups of members have from organizational structure.”<sup>64</sup> Consequently, the (unrealistic) expectation “that every entity of the world will look and function exactly like every other entity of its type” could “in itself become an impediment to mission.”<sup>65</sup> As these quotations from GC Executive Committee minutes reveal, *GC Working Policy* is not a straitjacket. The world Church has not infrequently permitted variations in response to particular regional challenges: these variances have been granted not lightly or casually, but carefully and prayerfully, often after considerable discussion.

*GC Working Policy* includes two sub-sections entitled “Structural Flexibility” and “Alternatives in Organizational Structure.”<sup>66</sup> These provide for variations to the structure approved at the 1901 GC Session, which had four levels of constituency-based units, three with similar staffing. This model served well and there was reluctance to alter it, but eventually, as the Church expanded geographically, it no longer seemed ideal in some parts of the world. Local leaders identified ways mission could be served by adjusting the standard 1901 model. Some of the “alternatives” were initially controversial and faced opposition over a number of years, and not all were approved by world Church leaders.<sup>67</sup>

For example, the union of churches model of structure was first mooted in 1967 as an *ad hoc* response by the Southern European Division (SED) to a particular set of circumstances in Austria, though the organization of the country as the first “union of churches” was not taken unilaterally by SED, but only after consultation with and approval by the GC Officers.<sup>68</sup> The GC Executive Committee at Annual Council only approved adding the union of churches to the list of possible organizations, as a variation of the union conference/union mission (rather than as a status granted to individual unions) in 1983 (and thus the first warrant in *GC Working Policy* was not until 1984). The language of the Executive Committee action approving this variance expressed disapproval of it. (“The Church does not encourage the organizational arrangement termed union of churches . . .”).<sup>69</sup> This language went into *GC Working Policy* and was retained for 24 years.<sup>70</sup>

By 1999, attitudes were shifting: a report to the GC and Division Officers (GCDO) proposed allowing four variances in structure (broadly similar though not identical to those currently allowed for in GC *Working Policy*) and this was recommended to Annual Council.<sup>71</sup> Yet despite GCDO's support, no action was taken by the GC Executive Committee at this time. Not until 2007, when the Commission on Ministries, Services, and Structures (appointed 2005) finally reported, did Annual Council at last add provisions for "Structural Flexibility" and "Alternatives in Organizational Structure" to GC *Working Policy*, thus officially endorsing the four specified "alternatives" and removing the previous censorious language.<sup>72</sup> Today, the 1901 structure remains the "standard model," both officially,<sup>73</sup> and in practice around the world field; but the union of churches and other alternative organizational models are stipulated in *Working Policy* without any negative implication, they have been implemented in several divisions, and their potential utilization is widely accepted (though not widely adopted).<sup>74</sup> A considered decision at the world Church level permitted system-wide diversity of practice, in a minority of cases, as a response to challenges in particular missional contexts, all while still preserving the standard practice.

Crucially, all the variances discussed were authorized by the world Church. They reflect decisions taken after representatives of all Seventh-day Adventists, meeting together, agreed that some Adventists could organize differently. "Structural relationships in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are dynamic," but they change "not by independent initiative but through deliberative, consultative, and collaborative action."<sup>75</sup> This, again, is in keeping with the example of the Jerusalem Council, which allowed significant diversity after all had discussed it and reached a consensus.

#### 4. Acting Collaboratively, not Unilaterally

In sum, longstanding Adventist practice, reflecting the model found in the book of Acts, is to let diversity flourish whenever possible, but to reserve to the world Church decisions about whether to allow diversity in matters of significance. The Adventist equivalent of the Jerusalem Council traditionally was a GC Session, but, as the denomination expanded, a greater role has been accorded to the GC Executive Committee, which is now, in its defined areas of authority, equivalent to the Jerusalem Council, for both are representative bodies, reflective of the Church as a whole.

We have seen that diversity of practice exists where the world Church has *not* spoken or where a representative body has deliberated and agreed to allow some variation in particular places or situations. But what happens where issues arise from cultural diversity and the world Church *has* spoken, and its collective decision has been not to allow diverse practices? After world Church representative bodies, composed of delegates from around the world, meeting and discussing together in good faith, have made a decision, that decision must be respected. To be sure, world Church leaders recently acknowledged "the need for and legitimacy of local adaptation of policies and procedures that facilitate the mission while not diminishing the worldwide identity, harmony and unity of the Church."<sup>76</sup> But *unilateral* action at the union and conference levels *does* diminish "the worldwide identity, harmony and unity of the Church." Rather than affirming diversity, such unilateral action rejects it and rejects the reciprocity that is at the heart of the system.

Decisions taken at the world Church level are binding on all levels of structure; where there are apparent exceptions they are typically in areas where policy is silent or where the world Church has devolved powers to other levels (but the delegation of authority itself points to the overarching authority of the world Church). When it comes to the interrelationship of different levels of structure, the work of general departments, regulating the credentialing and licensing of church workers, the employment of International Service Employees, and broad financial policies, the GC Executive Committee generally takes decisions, but the GC Session the is supreme authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and in the Adventist Church polity and it always has been. This is mandated by the GC Constitution, Bylaws, and *Working Policy*.<sup>77</sup> Yet these documents are, as they acknowledge, a means to an ends, which is to preserve “oneness in mission, purpose, and belief” while maintaining biblical truth and upholding Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.<sup>78</sup> The key point, then, is that in ascribing highest authority on earth to the GC Session, Seventh-day Adventists are applying the biblical model found in Acts: the decision of a group that is representative of the whole body of believers should be followed. Furthermore, Adventists are also following the counsel of Ellen G White, who writes about this issue in the strongest terms.

#### IV. Authority in the Spirit of Prophecy

GC *Working Policy* mandates that all denominational organizations and institutions are to “recognize the authority of the General Conference Session as the highest authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church under God” (B 10 22). This overarching authority of the GC Session was upheld by Ellen G White; indeed, the just-quoted proviso in *Working Policy* derives from her statements. However, there has been some confusion about what she wrote concerning authority in the Adventist Church, so a brief analysis follows.

At first sight it can seem that Ellen White’s views on the authority of the General Conference or of General Conference Sessions changed; certainly some have alleged this and claimed, in consequence, that some very clear statements can be discounted.<sup>79</sup> In fact, a consistent thread runs through her writings on this subject.

##### 1. The 1875 Testimonies

The first statements on the authority of the Church and the General Conference are from 1875.<sup>80</sup> In a testimony rebuking Charles Lee (one of the first Swedish-American Adventists) for his “individual independence,” she declared: “God has made His church a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give one an experience independent of the church. He does not give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church, while the church, Christ’s body, is left in darkness.”<sup>81</sup> What is implicit here she makes explicit later in the lengthy testimony: “God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for in so doing he despises the voice of God.”<sup>82</sup> In a separate testimony (also from 1875), Ellen White writes in similar terms: “God has bestowed the highest power under heaven upon His church. It is the voice of God in His united people . . . [and] is to be respected.”<sup>83</sup> Back in the testimony to Lee, White continues:

The word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against



the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body. There have ever been individuals of independent minds who have claimed that they were right, that God had especially taught, impressed, and led them. Each has a theory of his own, views peculiar to himself, and each claims that his views are in accordance with the word of God. Each one has a different theory and faith, yet each claims special light from God. These draw away from the body.<sup>84</sup>

In these testimonies Ellen White emphasizes that the Church is a body of believers so that, though at times God inspires individuals, they should work through the body. They ought not to elevate their personal views above the collective views, but should seek to persuade the rest of the body of believers; and, until successful, they should submit to the authority of the body.

This view was developed in another testimony published later that year, written to George Butler, who had been GC president earlier in the 1870s, but had reached misguided conclusions about presidential authority. She counseled Butler:

I have been shown that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered. Your error was in persistently maintaining your private judgment of your duty against the voice of the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth. . . . You firmly maintained that you had done right in following your own convictions of duty. You considered it a virtue in you to persistently maintain your position of independence. You did not seem to have a true sense of the power that God has given to His church in the voice of the General Conference. You thought that in responding to the call made to you by the General Conference you were submitting to the judgment and mind of one man. You accordingly manifested an independence, a set, willful spirit, which was all wrong.<sup>85</sup>

She later added: "You greatly err in giving to one man's mind and judgment that authority and influence which God has invested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference."<sup>86</sup>

Ellen White's position in 1875 is plain. Church members were obliged to defer to divinely constituted authority, but in the Seventh-day Adventist Church the highest authority is not entrusted to one man—a point explicated in a fourth testimony from 1875, in which she states plainly that "one man's mind, one man's judgment, is not sufficient to be trusted."<sup>87</sup> Instead "God has invested" divine "authority and influence . . . in the judgment and voice of the General Conference." It is "the General Conference," she explicitly states, that is "the highest authority that God has upon the earth." But what did she mean by "General Conference"? Today, Adventists would probably understand it to mean the permanent overarching organization and world headquarters. In our first two or three decades, however, there was almost no permanent structure or staff.<sup>88</sup> When church members and church leaders wrote of the "General Conference" in these early years, they typically meant the GC Session. This fits with Ellen White's contextual comments: negative about individual exercise of authority, positive about it being exercised by the Church as the collective body of

believers. Furthermore, the “call made to” Butler, which he wrongly viewed as coming from one man, actually was the action of a GC Session.<sup>89</sup>

What Ellen White is saying, then, in these 1875 testimonies, is that when a General Conference *Session*, which represents the entire body of believers, deliberates and reaches a decision, then, if church members’ “private judgment” is different to the verdict of the body, they must not “maintain” their “judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church.” Instead they are obliged to harken to “the voice of the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth,” “surrender” their “independence,” and defer to the common decision.

## 2. Developments in the 1890s

During a ten-year period (1891-1901) Ellen White made a number of statements about the authority of the General Conference that apparently contradict those she made in the 1870s. Some have argued that “it is clear that sometimes Ellen White considered the decisions of the General Conference to represent God’s leading and sometimes she did not.”<sup>90</sup> The context of the statements makes it clear, however, that her views remained essentially consonant with those of 1875: her concern was with claims to exercise ecclesiastical authority by one man, or (in the 1890s) by a small group, rather than the entire body of Adventist believers. This becomes clearer if we distinguish between different possible meanings of “General Conference”: the GC administration (the president and permanent staff around him) which in the 1890s had a permanent existence; the GC Executive Committee (which in this period was tiny); and the GC Session. Ellen G White consistently held the GC Session to be the voice of God—even in the 1890s. It was the “GC” in the first two senses which she denied represented the voice of God, rather than the Session—there is little or no evidence that she ever altered her 1875 view that the Session spoke with the authority of God.

The context was the growth in the denomination and in its permanent administration in the 1880s and 1890s. From 1863 to 1883, there were only three officers, who usually held other positions in denominational employ, and the GC Executive Committee (usually called simply “the GC Committee”) also had just three members, not including the secretary or treasurer. But in 1883 the secretary’s position was split in two, because handling correspondence had become a specialist job, while two members were added to the Executive Committee. From 1887, three subordinate secretaries supported the secretary in various administrative tasks—testimony to the burgeoning complexity of administration, which reflected in turn the expansion out from the United States. From six conferences in 1863, all in North America, by 1889 there were 36 conferences and missions, the latter a new creation, functionally equivalent to a conference but requiring support from the American “home” base; these organizational units were located on four continents; and by 1889 one could for the first time speak meaningfully of a “GC administration.” But while the headquarters thereafter had a permanent and largely full-time staff it was still relatively small.<sup>91</sup> The GC Committee membership gradually increased in the 1890s, but in 1900 still only numbered 13, of whom 11 were from North America, yet the denomination now had 46 conferences and missions and, with a large number of mission stations, had a presence on all six inhabited continents. In any case, the five members who lived in Battle Creek transacted most of the business. The committee was definitely not a representative body for a worldwide church.<sup>92</sup>

Ellen White clearly distinguished between the GC administration and the GC Session. As early as 1891, she felt “obliged to take the position that there was not the voice of God in the General Conference”—but she did not end there. She actually wrote “that there was not the voice of God in the General Conference management and decisions. Methods and plans would be devised that God did not sanction, and yet [the GC president] made it appear that the decisions of the General Conference were as the voice of God.”<sup>93</sup> The problem, then, was with those *managing* the GC: or GC administration, as we would now say. The problem was that this meant control was concentrated in just a few hands, rather than a representative body, as Ellen White points out: “One or more men gave assent to measures laid out before the board or councils, but all the time they decided they would have their own way and carry out the matter as they chose.” Furthermore, the president was unduly swayed by two other officers—hence Ellen White’s comment that the president’s “advisers were blinding his eyes” and her verdict: “Many of the positions taken, going forth as the voice of the General Conference, have been the voice of one, two, or three men who were misleading the Conference.”<sup>94</sup>

Similar attitudes are evident in an 1895 statement: “The voice of the General Conference has been represented as an authority to be heeded as the voice of the Holy Spirit. But when the members of the G.C. Committee become entangled in business affairs and financial perplexities, the sacred, elevated character of their work is in a great degree lost.”<sup>95</sup> There were, it must be remembered, only seven members of the GC Committee at this time and evidently the committee could too easily be sidetracked, as a result. In a testimony written later in 1895, Ellen White writes, with some bitterness: “As for your book committee, under the present administration, with the men who now preside, I would not entrust to them, for publication in books, the light given me of God . . . . As for the voice of the General Conference, there is no voice from God through that body that is reliable.” She uses the term “General Conference” when speaking of the body in Battle Creek and states that God does not speak through it. The GC Session had met in 1895, but more than eight months before this testimony; not only is it unlikely, then, that she is describing it, but also her earlier comments are revealing: it was “the present administration,” and the committees it had chosen, which were the problem.<sup>96</sup>

This distinction between Session and administration emerges, too, from what seems to be a strident renunciation of the 1875 view that God spoke to His people on earth in the voice of the GC. Writing from Australia to friends in the US, in the middle of 1898, Ellen White bluntly states that “it has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God,” later bemoaning that she does not have a “stronger faith . . . in Battle Creek and the working of the cause of God in the institutions there.”<sup>97</sup> Not only is the reference to Battle Creek (site of the GC headquarters but of neither the past 1897 GC Session nor the upcoming 1899 Session) and “the institutions there” telling, but so, too, is the date of the letter: nearly 18 months after the 1897 Session. Palpably, she is writing, again, about the GC administration and perhaps the unrepresentative Executive Committee, not the Session, against which Ellen White had still to issue any strictures.

### 3. The 1901 Statements

In 1901, around that year's epochal GC Session, Ellen White made strong statements about the voice of the General Conference and about kingly power that helped shape the future development of Adventist ecclesiastical organization. Yet they have also been misunderstood.<sup>98</sup>

Speaking in the opening meeting of the Session, on April 2, she indignantly rejects the claim of a few men "to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be," a view to which she returns in a testimony written two days after the Session ended: "For men to claim that the voice of their councils in their past management is the voice of God seems to me to be almost blasphemy."<sup>99</sup> These are two stark rebukes but the context of her other remarks to the 1901 Session make it plain that they refer to the over-concentration of authority in the administration and Executive Committee during the preceding decade, not to the GC Session and, indeed, not to the GC Committee and administration that emerged after 1901.

The first statement was made to support Ellen White's goal of major structural reform; she follows it immediately with an appeal: "What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle."<sup>100</sup> She goes on to express regret that the church leaders, assembled from around the world for the Session, were not more involved in making plans, and affirms: "There are to be more than one or two or three men to consider the whole vast field." Later she adds: "Now I want to say, God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line."<sup>101</sup>

Her Session speech articulates views similar to those expressed to a small group of church leaders on the previous afternoon, April 1st.<sup>102</sup> In that address she begins with the striking observation: "Over and over again men have said, 'The voice of the Conference is the voice of God; therefore, everything must be referred to the Conference. The Conference must permit or restrict in the various lines of work.'" But she rejects this view: "As the matter has been presented to me, there is a narrow compass, and within this narrow compass . . . are those who would like to exercise kingly power. But the work carried on all over the field demands an entirely different course of action." She subsequently states: "The burden of the work in this broad field should not rest upon two or three men;" and later reiterates: "God wants us to come to the place where we shall be united in the work, where the whole burden will not be laid on two or three men."<sup>103</sup> She insists on "an entire change, an entire new organization," including a General Conference "committee that shall take in not merely a half a dozen that are to be a ruling and a controlling power, but . . . the voice of those that are placed in responsibilities in our educational interests, in our Sanitarium," so "that every institution, that bears a responsibility, bear a voice in the working of this cause which they have a decided interest in."<sup>104</sup>

Ellen White's rebuke about what "we once believed the General Conference to be" develops her sustained criticisms of the 1890s rather than being a denunciation of the GC Session, as her other statements on April 1 and 2, 1901, makes clear; but it was also Ellen White's reproof to those church leaders who, to her dismay, had "over and over again" quoted her 1875 statements against those who disagreed with them, her counsels of the 1890s notwithstanding! Her other negative comment about the voice of God was written post-Session but likewise plainly refers to

the preceding years, evident in her reference to the “past management” of the men whose claims to speak with divine authority she denounces as blasphemous. There is no contradiction between her counsels of 1875 and her views in 1901. Just as in 1875 she had cautioned against granting too much authority to individuals, so in 1901 she warns against unrepresentative or uncounseled authority, exercised by individuals (“kingly power”) or tiny groups of leaders (“two or three men”). It is such leadership, the abuses of which she had reproofed repeatedly in the 1890s, which in 1901 she makes clear cannot claim to be “the voice of God.”

Far from downplaying the authority of a GC Session, Ellen White turned to the 1901 Session to reform the church’s polity, and especially its higher administration, to enhance the Adventist Church’s mission effectiveness. And the representatives of the whole body duly delivered, thanks in part to Ellen White’s charge to them: “There must be a renovation, a reorganization.”<sup>105</sup>

Many reforms of great significance were adopted by the 1901 Session.<sup>106</sup> They included the creation of unions throughout North America as well as in Australia and Europe, with provision for the creation of many more, for, in the new organizational model, conferences became members of union constituencies, with unions now becoming the constituent members of the General Conference. That unions had considerable authority delegated to them (discussed above) was partly the fruit of Ellen White’s counsel against over-concentration of authority in too few hands, but so too was a major reform of the GC Executive Committee. She had urged that “a power and strength must be brought into the committees” by expanding the membership and that the “men who are standing at the head of our various institutions . . . and of the Conferences in different localities . . . [should] stand as representative men, to have a voice in molding and fashioning the plans that shall be carried out.”<sup>107</sup> The GC Executive Committee’s membership was increased to 25, virtually doubled, with dedicated representation for health work leaders; in addition, every union president became an *ex officio* member, with the recognition that, as new unions were organized, so the membership would steadily increase. The Committee thus became much more representative and reflected Ellen G White’s desire that regional voices should be heard in “molding and fashioning” plans.<sup>108</sup>

Ellen White commented on the change in 1901, counselling her own son to stop pursuing a dispute with GC leaders.

I am again much burdened as I see you selecting words from writings that I have sent you, and using them to force decisions that the brethren do not regard with clearness. . . . Your course would have been the course to be pursued if no change had been made in the General Conference. But a change has been made, and many more changes will be made and great developments will be seen. . . . Remember, Edson, that you are not to carry your own ideas against the judgment of the brethren and the general interests of the cause.<sup>109</sup>

There was not one rule for the Whites and one for others. The need to submit to counsel applied equally, and Ellen White’s respect for the authority of GC administration had clearly been restored.

#### 4. Kellogg and “Kingly Power”

In some respects, the work of reform was left unfinished in 1901 and some issues came up again at the 1903 Session, including control of Adventist medical institutions.<sup>110</sup> This was, indeed, an ongoing sore point for the next few years. John H Kellogg tried to gain control of the major medical institutions, which had implications also for some educational institutions and evangelistic centers. This prompted further counsels against “kingly power” and authority being vested in one or two individuals.

In a short testimony on the work of the General Conference, written in the spring of 1903, Ellen White states that not “all our printing plants and all our sanitariums are to be under the control of the General Conference.” But they were still to be under collective control, rather than of individuals of the newly “organize[d] Union Conferences,” rather than of individuals or small groups not answering to a constituency. Ellen White stresses yet again: “In the work of God no kingly authority is to be exercised by any human being, or by two or three.”<sup>111</sup> That summer, she counselled the leaders of Adventist medical work against what she repeatedly calls “kingly power”—referring not to GC administration but rather to Kellogg’s tendency to centralize authority in his own person, which was one of Ellen White’s longstanding concerns about Kellogg.<sup>112</sup> Later in 1903, in a reflection prompted by coverage in mainstream news media of the dispute between church leaders and Kellogg, White returned to earlier themes, repudiating the notion that one man, wielding “kingly power,” could “control the *whole body*” (italics supplied). She contrasts the situation in 1903 with that during “the early days of our denominational work” when “the Lord did designate” one leader (James White) to take a preeminent role “in the advancement of this work.” But that was an exception, she continues and, since then, God had “*not* provided that the burden of leadership shall rest upon *a few men* (italics supplied).”<sup>113</sup>

Again we see Ellen G White’s consistent concern that Church leadership should represent the body of believers and the whole Adventist Church, as opposed to being concentrated in one man and a small circle around him.

#### 5. Later Pronouncements

Addressing the 37th GC Session on May 30, 1909, Ellen White returned to the issue of the authority of the General Conference, repeating several points and expanding on some.

I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. But when in a General Conference the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, *private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence contrary to the decision of the general body* [emphasis supplied].<sup>114</sup>

At times, when a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God’s work, I have said that I could no longer regard the voice of the General

Conference, represented by these few men, as the voice of God. But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field should not be respected. God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority. The error that some are in danger of committing is in giving to the mind and judgment of one man, or of a small group of men, the full measure of authority and influence that God has vested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work.<sup>115</sup>

When this power, which God has placed in the church, is accredited wholly to one man, and he is invested with the authority to be judgment for other minds, then the true Bible order is changed. . . . Let us give to the highest organized authority in the church that which we are prone to give to one man or to a small group of men.<sup>116</sup>

Ellen White's position in 1909 is consistent with those espoused in 1875 and to some extent in 1901 and 1903. In the 1875 testimonies she stresses that no one leader could embody the Church on earth or represent God's will; in 1909 she reiterates her view of "the mind and judgment of one man" but extends it now to include "a small group of men," asserting that neither they nor any "one man" should be ascribed "the full measure of authority and influence God has vested in His church."<sup>117</sup>

Knowing that many of the delegates in 1909, or readers of the text of her address (published in the *General Conference Bulletin*), would be aware of what she had written about the "voice of God" from 1891-1901, she explains why she had repeatedly had harsh things to say about the GC leadership. The issue was that a "small group" of leaders had been "entrusted with the general management of the work," and that group, acting "in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans."<sup>118</sup> In effect, Ellen White states that they were only *acting* in the name of the GC, not with its full authority; this makes sense if by "General Conference" she means the GC *Session*. Since "these few men" could not legitimately claim to speak with "the voice of the General Conference," she "could no longer regard" this ostensible voice of the General Conference as being "the voice of God." But she then draws an explicit contrast with "the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field."<sup>119</sup> This language is palpably that of a GC Session, though as time passed it would come to be applicable to a council of the enlarged Executive Committee as well (especially given the language about "men . . . assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work"). That some authority is reserved to a Session is evident, however, in her admonition that "private independence and judgment" is to be "surrendered" when "*in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised*" (emphasis supplied).<sup>120</sup> The distinction between a GC Session, on the one hand, and GC administration, on the other, is transparently clear in this address.

This was not Ellen White's last word, on the subject, however. In 1911 she returned to and reiterated themes she had addressed before.

God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an

experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church, while the church—Christ’s body—is left in darkness. . . . God has invested His church with special authority and power, which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising; for he who does this despises the voice of God.<sup>121</sup>

We see here, again, the same assertion that Christ has given the Church plenary power, and the same distrust of single-handed ecclesiastical leadership, yet also the same endorsement of the Church’s authority when it is the expression of the entire Church rather than an individual, with a similar assertion that, in such a case, there is no justification for resisting the authority of the whole body of believers. The continuities over the 35-year period since 1875 are striking.

## 6. Analysis

What is especially striking is Ellen White’s consistency on the supremacy of a body that represents the whole Church and what this ultimately must mean for individuals or parties in dispute with Adventist Church leaders.

### a. 1875 (i)

“God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for in so doing he despises the voice of God.”<sup>122</sup>

### b. 1875 (ii)

“I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”<sup>123</sup>

“You greatly err in giving to one man’s mind and judgment that authority and influence which God has invested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference.”<sup>124</sup>

### c. 1909

“I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. But when in a General Conference the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered.”<sup>125</sup>

“. . . the full measure of the authority and influence that God has invested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work.”<sup>126</sup>



d. 1911

“God has invested His church with special authority and power, which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising; for he who does this despises the voice of God.”<sup>127</sup>

Remarkably, 36 years apart, Ellen G White chose to repeat, in *Acts of the Apostles*, a book for general readership, her testimony to Charles Lee: that no church member can ignore the voice of the Church, “for in doing so he despises the voice of God.” Likewise, 34 years apart, she in effect chose to share with the 1909 GC Session her testimony to former president, George Butler, (who was present in 1909 and may have recognized her words, though Ellen White did not reveal to whom they had previously been directed). Some have misrepresented Ellen White’s views in 1909 by selective misquotation, but the actuality is very clear.<sup>128</sup> She amplified and nuanced the 1875 testimony, no doubt in light of the events of the 1890s. In 1909 she allows “the minds of a few men” to be challenged as well as “the mind of one man”; and she makes it clear that, by “the General Conference” she means a representative body “of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field,” and/or when “assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work.” However, “when, in a General Conference, the judgment of [these] brethren is exercised,” her conclusions in 1875 and 1909 are the same.

*Firstly*, “the judgment and voice of the General Conference” represent “the authority and influence that God has invested in His church”;

*Secondly*, and most importantly, “private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered” (indeed, having in some ways qualified the 1875 statement, in 1909, she strengthens the conclusion by adding the word “stubbornly” before “maintained”).

## V. Unilateralism

Unilateral action on important matters is contrary to the biblical model and to longstanding Adventist practice. Significant decisions should be made after prior consultation with other levels of church structure and should be in harmony with decisions already taken by the wider body of believers. This approach helps to guard against distraction and division, promoting unity in church life and an emphasis on mission.

### 1. Biblical Principles

Christ warned His disciples of the danger of distraction (e.g. Matt 24:24). The apostle Paul urged the early believers to emulate him in “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,” and to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way” (Phil. 3:13-15 ESV). Our calling is clear: to witness to Jesus, making disciples by teaching and baptizing, and proclaiming the prophetic truths of Revelation 14. There is a danger that internal disputes will cause us to lose focus on the prophetic mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The divisiveness latent within unilateralism is inconsistent with the biblical model. When Paul famously uses the metaphor of the body for the Church, he describes different organs of the

body criticizing each other and imagining that they can be independent, before affirming that “God has harmonised the whole body,” intending its different parts to “work together as a whole with all the members in sympathetic relationship with one another.” Paul’s conclusion was quoted earlier, but deserves repetition: “Now you are together the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12: 24-25, 27 Phillips).

Implicit, moreover, in Paul’s call to believers to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21 NIV) is that diversity and difference of opinion or practice will exist in the body of believers; and that that, at times, some believers will find themselves in a minority, having failed to persuade fellow church-members of their view. Paul does not depict this as a problem *per se*. What matters is how believers respond to this situation. Mutual submission excludes unilateralism.

In Ephesians 5, Paul takes for granted that believers, at times, will disagree—unsurprising, given that the first disciples had a history of “dissension,” sometimes expressed in strong terms, as in Paul’s disagreements with Barnabas and Peter (Acts 15:2, 37-39, Gal 2:4, 11-14). Yet though some of the new believers were initially inclined to forge independent identities, the early church did not split into separate sects; it remained united because leaders like Peter and Paul stressed unity in Christ, and, despite disagreeing on some specifics, endorsed each other’s ministries, urging harmony among believers (see 1 Cor 1: 10-13, 3: 22-23, 4: 6-7, 15, 16:12; Titus 3:13; 2 Pet 3: 14-16; *cf.* Acts 18: 24-27, 1 Cor 9: 5-6, 15: 5-9). Despite disagreements, too, they did not create mutually exclusive leadership teams, but worked without factionalism: John Mark’s rejection by Paul led the latter to fall out with Barnabas, but Mark, having assisted Barnabas later worked with and was commended by Paul, before subsequently working closely with Peter; meanwhile, Silas, who may have been an associate of James, replaced Barnabas as Paul’s main colleague, and later collaborated with Peter (e.g. Acts 15:22, 39-40; 2 Cor 1:19; Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Phil 1:24; 1 Pet 5: 12-13). Instead of independent, parallel movements, operating with little reference to each other, there was mutual respect, and continued crossover between different leadership teams.

In practice, then, first-generation church leaders did submit to one another, as Paul enjoins the Ephesians, for, in spite of sometimes significant disagreements they forged a common path, focused on growing the kingdom of God. Unilateralism was absent from the early church. The New Testament consistently upholds cooperation and interdependence, rather than any one part of the body of Christ acting independently.

## 2. Ellen G White’s Warnings

Unilateral decision-making was a particular concern of Ellen White. As we will see, she consistently counsels against it. It is important to note that the Church has never faced a situation exactly like the one that currently exists, and so it is necessary to work out relevant principles from her counsels in other situations. A number of the following statements were written to individuals, to correct personal doctrinal divergence, and a degree of caution is necessary in applying such counsels to organizations (for this reason, testimonies correcting departures from moral standards have not been quoted). However, some of the statements quoted below were written during the period of notable contention over medical institutions in the late 1890s and early 1900s, when the independence of hospital leaders such as John Harvey Kellogg, supported by the boards of some

of the institutions they led, is analogous to the current circumstances of unilateral action by Church organizational units. Furthermore, the number and consistency of statements is itself telling, and principles do emerge. This subsection is longer than the preceding analysis of biblical principles, which some may feel imbalanced, but Ellen White's repeated testimonies indicate that overly independent, unilateral action poses a special danger to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

At times her concern seems to be chiefly that the Adventist Church not be distracted from mission and become less effective. For example, in a testimony from the early 1880s on unity, she counsels church members: "When those who believe present truth are united, they exert a telling influence. Satan well understands this" and is "determined . . . to make of none effect the truth of God by causing bitterness and dissension among the Lord's people."<sup>129</sup> In an 1886 testimony to believers in California, she cautions that "Satan will make special efforts to distract the interest" of God's people "from the all-important subjects that should arrest every mind to concentrated action."<sup>130</sup> A similar concern is evident in a 1908 testimony on the work in the South of the United States, which had been characterized by different individual approaches and debates about which was superior. Ellen White urges: "Let every believer do his best to prepare the way for the gospel missionary work that is to be done. But let no one enter into controversy" with other church members. She then pronounces a stark warning: "It is Satan's object to keep Christians occupied in controversies among themselves. . . . We have no time now to give place to the spirit of the enemy"<sup>131</sup>.

Ellen White was, however, not only concerned with internal debates, lest they distract from mission by making us focus inwards; her counsel also stresses that independent action makes outreach less effective. In her 1882 testimony on unity, she declares plainly: "Union is strength; division is weakness." She connects this to mission, continuing: "The last message of mercy is now going forth. . . . How careful should we be in every word and act to follow closely the Pattern."<sup>132</sup> Two years later she told leaders of the embryonic Adventist mission in Europe: "We have not six patterns to follow, nor five; we have only one, and that is Christ Jesus. . . . We should endeavor to bring all into the harmony that there is in Jesus, laboring for the one object, the salvation of our fellow men."<sup>133</sup>

In the 1886 testimony quoted above, she employs a martial metaphor and stresses that joint action is vital if the Church is to be effective in mission: "An army could do nothing successfully if its different parts did not work in concert. . . . Instead of gathering strength from concentrated action, it would be wasted in desultory, meaningless efforts. . . . Whatever good qualities a man may have, he cannot be a good soldier if he acts independently." She stresses: "A limited number, united under one head, all obeying orders, will accomplish more than ten times the number who are drawing apart, who expend their strength on many things at the same time. . . . All must pull in one direction in order to render efficient service to the cause."<sup>134</sup> In 1900, while sailing back to the United States from Australia, she reflected in her diary in similar terms: "Those who belong to Christ's army must work with concerted action. . . . United action is essential."<sup>135</sup>

Often, however, White articulates her opposition to unilateralism not merely in practical or missiological terms, but as a principled objection. She repeatedly maintains that collective and collaborative (rather than independent or unilateral) decision-making processes should be the norm in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, because the Church is one body. For example, in an 1875

testimony, she declares that God's "people . . . will not be at variance," with different members believing or practicing differently, "each moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith." She rebukes the recipient, urging him to "yield his judgment and opinions, and come to the body."<sup>136</sup> In a testimony written in the mid to late 1880s (first published in 1889), she states firmly: "One point will have to be guarded [against], and that is individual independence." Employing the military metaphor again, she suggests: "As soldiers in Christ's army, there should be concert of action in the various departments of the work." She continues: "Each laborer should act with reference to the others. Followers of Jesus Christ will not act independently one of another. Our strength must be in God, and it must be husbanded, to be put forth in noble, concentrated action. . . . In union there is strength."<sup>137</sup>

Around the same time, in 1885, she enjoined Adventist leaders in Europe: "All should make it a point to counsel together . . . . No one worker has all the wisdom that is needed. There should be a comparing of plans, a counseling together."<sup>138</sup> Twenty years later she counseled church leaders who disagreed about how to work for different national and ethnic groups; writing of divisions arising from ethnic differences, she encourages them to "put all this aside." She charges them to "work together in harmony . . . forgetting that they are Americans or Europeans, Germans or Frenchmen, Swedes, Danes, or Norwegians," before warning: "We have no right to keep our minds stayed on ourselves, our preferences, and our fancies. We are not to seek to maintain a peculiar identity of our own . . . which will separate us from our fellow laborers."<sup>139</sup>

In 1898, Ellen White counseled a member of longstanding and considerable influence, "Your judgment is to be one among the judgment of other minds. You are to take your fellow workers with you, and regard their judgment as of some value. Through your entire life you have rather encouraged a preference to differ from others. The judgment of others is not to be discarded as of no value. . . . Unity of mind must be preserved. It is necessary that our opinions harmonize."<sup>140</sup> The same year, in the face of increasingly uncooperative and independent behavior by the longstanding leader of Adventist medical work, John H Kellogg, and some of his followers, White had written to Kellogg of the danger of "standing apart from our people." She warns him not "to think that in order to carry forward the medical missionary you must stand aloof from church organization. To stand thus would place you on an unsound footing." Even if he were joined by "those of your own mind," they could not stand "apart from the church, which is Christ's body . . . for no union can stand but that which God has framed."<sup>141</sup>

She counseled Kellogg again the following year, telling him: "This is God's plan. He desires all His workers to fill their appointed places in the work for this time." All, together, "compose the whole body. All are to be united as parts of one great organism."<sup>142</sup> These concerns went wider than Kellogg and the medical work. Writing in 1900, in words published in 1902, she stresses that "It is the Lord's plan that His workers shall consult together . . . . Those who have any part to act in the work are to labor in connection with the whole heart [of the work]."<sup>143</sup> A testimony of 1902 declares: "Matters of grave import come up for settlement by the church. God's ministers ordained by Him as guides of His people, after doing their part, are to submit the whole matter to the church, that there may be unity in the decisions made."<sup>144</sup> In the spring of 1903, tensions with Kellogg and his supporters were rising; speaking to that year's GC Session Ellen White is clear: "No one is to gather around him a party of men who will think as he thinks, and say, Amen, to

everything that he says.”<sup>145</sup> Writing to publishing leaders in 1905 White affirms that it is the “union of heart *and* action which testifies to the world that we are children of God” [emphasis supplied].<sup>146</sup> She admonished the 1909 Session: “It is not a good sign when men refuse to unite with their brethren and prefer to act alone.”<sup>147</sup>

The lessons are clear. Neither individuals nor small groups of leaders should act without consulting widely. Further, they ought not to act contrary to the counsel of the wider body, once it has been given.

Ellen White makes it plain, moreover, that unilateralism can arise not just from independent-mindedness, but sometimes from the influence of evil forces. She also emphasizes its damaging effects. In 1875, for example, in a strongly worded testimony to an independent-minded church member in California, she reproaches him because: “The church of Christ is in constant peril. Satan is seeking to destroy the people of God,” and were “each member of the church . . . to move independently of the others, taking his own peculiar course,” then how, she asks, could “the church be in any safety in the hour of danger and peril?”<sup>148</sup>

In the 1886 testimony to Californian Adventists, quoted earlier, in which she alerts them of the devil’s interest in distracting Adventists, Ellen White goes on to warn that many church members make “independent assertions . . . not realizing the order that must be observed in the church of God. Such are a greater affliction to the church than any of the influences we meet with from unbelievers.” Furthermore, she writes in stark terms, Satan will seek “sympathizers” and then set them “to work, to clog the wheels, to question, to find fault, to create suspicion, disunion, and a disordered state of things; and all the time they will think they are doing God’s service.”<sup>149</sup>

In a testimony written two years later (1888), she likewise cautions that in the “last days” there would be, “among the remnant . . . as there was with ancient Israel, those who wish to move independently of the body, who are not willing to be subject to the body of the church, but . . . that God has a church upon the earth, and [to] that church God has delegated power.”<sup>150</sup> She warns that “those who . . . do not labor to have harmony of purpose and action are verily doing the work of Satan, not the work of God” and continues in similar vein: “It is a delusion of the enemy for anyone to feel that he can disconnect from the body and work on an independent scale of his own and think he is doing God’s work. We are one body, and every member is to be united to the body.”<sup>151</sup>

Addressing the 1909 Session, she warned against some “deceived souls” who “regard it a virtue to boast of their freedom to think and act independently. They declare that they will not take any man’s say-so, that they are amenable to no man.” Yet Ellen White explicitly states that “the persistent maintenance” by a church worker of a “position of independence contrary to the decision of the general body” is *not* a “virtue.”<sup>152</sup> On the contrary, she also writes: “I have been instructed that it is Satan’s special effort to lead men to feel that God is pleased to have them choose their own course independent of the counsel of their brethren.” Indeed, “Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people, and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential.”<sup>153</sup> This testimony continues: “Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as

every man's being independent." Instead, Ellen White powerfully affirms, "in order that the Lord's work may advance, healthfully and solidly, His people must draw together."<sup>154</sup>

In 1911, she returned to this theme, commenting on the book of Acts: "There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself, and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people."<sup>155</sup>

Words that Ellen G White penned in the early 1880s regarding "Christian unity" are both indicative of her wider thought on the need to preserve unity and applicable to the Adventist Church today: "We cannot afford now to give place to Satan by cherishing disunion, discord, and strife."<sup>156</sup>

## VI. Application

The apostle Peter, concluding the second of two epistles written to encourage early Christians, presages the events of the latter days, and then poses a crucial question: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?" (2 Pet 3:11 NIV)

This is a key question for Seventh-day Adventists, too, not just in general but in the particular context of how we collectively conduct ourselves and relate to each other. Having surveyed relevant teachings of Jesus, the apostles, and Ellen G White; early church practice; and Adventist practice and policy—how, then, should we live? How should we act? What does all this mean for us today?

### 1. Representation and Decision-Making

As we consider Ellen G White's counsel, it is vital to note that the situation which prompted prophetic censure, of "two or three men" trying to control all aspects of the church's mission, or "merely a half a dozen" at the world headquarters seeking "to be a ruling and a controlling power," is a world away from the situation today. In the 1890s, GC administration was effectively obliged to take an interest in every local field because it interacted directly with conference presidents, but it took an unhealthy interest, intervening almost dictatorially at times and limiting local initiative, while conference presidents were not represented on a tiny and utterly unrepresentative GC Executive Committee.

Today, in contrast, there are, in addition to several hundred local conferences and missions, a total of 135 unions and 13 divisions, each with defined authority in its territory and its own executive committee, making collaborative decisions (while unions also have constituencies, which have their own sessions). Every union president sits on the GC Executive Committee, which additionally includes frontline workers and lay people from every division, and youth representation. Its several hundred members are of both genders and are drawn from around the world. Thus, even between GC Sessions (when over two thousand delegates from every union do business), a body representative of the world Church takes major decisions delivering "the

judgment and voice of the General Conference,” while reserving the most important matters to the GC Session, “the highest authority that God has upon the earth,” whose judgment is definitive.<sup>157</sup>

## 2. Invalid Practices

As we have seen, denominational policy results from deliberations by representatives from around the world. Ignoring what was commonly agreed upon sets a dangerous precedent in organizational terms. It also strikes a serious blow against unity.

### a. Invalid Ordinations

Criteria for ordination, as noted earlier, have always been set by the world Church: initially by GC Sessions, but by the GC Executive Committee since 1930 when responsibility for the selection of candidates for ordination was devolved to unions, who would apply the criteria set by the world Church.<sup>158</sup> For the first sixty years of the denomination’s history, women regularly received ministerial licenses, while since 1981 they have been commissioned as ministers, but women have never been ordained to gospel ministry, which the Seventh-day Adventist Church has consistently regarded as qualitatively different to licensing or commissioning.<sup>159</sup> The 1881 GC Session briefly debated a subcommittee’s proposal to allow the ordination of women, but referred it to the GC Executive Committee, where it died. The issue did not come to a Session again until 1990. That year’s GC Session considered at length whether or not to permit female pastors to be ordained and did more than decline to change the status quo; it took a definite action: “we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry”.<sup>160</sup> Proposals came to both the 1995 and 2015 GC Sessions to allow regional variation of the gender-limited policy, but both were rejected.<sup>161</sup>

It is thus incorrect to assert that there is nothing in denominational policy to stop unions from ordaining females to gospel ministry. Such ordinations have been explicitly disallowed by a GC Session action, a decision reinforced by two other GC Session votes.

### b. Credentials and Licenses

What, however, of the unorthodox credentialing practices? Is it perhaps the case that the world Church has not taken a position on them? As we have seen, in the absence of an agreed and stated view, organizational units could continue to act. In fact, however, these *are* practices about which the world Church has deliberated and pronounced, meaning that it is necessary for all to accept the decision of the wider body.

Current GC *Working Policy* states that the ministerial credential is “Issued to ministerial employees who have demonstrated a divine call to ministry and have been ordained to the gospel ministry” (E 5 10, 1. a). It thus provides that pastors who have been ordained should receive the ministerial credential, though not specifying that it must be issued. GC *Working Policy* further stipulates that a commissioned minister credential will be issued to certain types of church worker “unless they hold ministerial credentials” (E 5 10, 2.a), which means that workers holding ministerial credentials are not to receive commissioned minister credentials; and it states that “Licensed ministers are on the path toward ordination to the gospel ministry” (E 05 10, 3), which invalidates the award of a ministerial license to one who has been ordained.

It must be acknowledged that *GC Working Policy* does not contemplate the current situation in which either (a) pastors who have been ordained are requesting and/or are being issued with commissioned minister credentials or ministerial licenses, or (b) pastors are not being ordained at all and being commissioned or licensed instead. Such practices are not explicitly prohibited in *Working Policy*. Yet relevant issues have been considered by the world Church and been the subject of “the judgment and voice of the General Conference.” Pertinent principles, and the world Church actions associated with them, are sketched out below.

First, a statement approved by the GC Executive Committee in 1930, then embodied in *GC Working Policy*, sets out a foundational principle: that “any shadow of uncertainty in the matter of what ministerial credentials stand for in one field reflects a shadow upon all credentials, and is a matter of general denominational concern.”<sup>162</sup> Where there is any question about policy’s provisions, then, the GC Executive Committee is obliged to take an interest and reach a verdict.

A second foundational principle is that *ordination in Adventist ecclesiology and practice undoubtedly is for life*, except in wholly unusual circumstances. Ministerial *credentials* are not necessarily held for life; however, where there is a change in credential it is because a pastor has moved into a line of work that is conspicuously not pastoral or spiritual and it does not affect his ordination—ministerial credentials can be restored if the line of work alters. The *ordination* itself can only become void as a result of disciplinary action.

The question of the permanence of ministerial ordination did not arise in an Adventist context for many years. Elders’ ordination provides the first precedent. The 1885 GC Session had to deal with a question that, after twenty years, had arisen in local church practice, namely whether “an elder of a church upon removing to another church [could] be elected to the eldership of this last church without re-ordination?”<sup>163</sup> As delegates acknowledged, there was “a difference in practice in different conferences,” but after considerable discussion they agreed a common way forward: if an elder was “re-elected,” in his local church, “or properly elected elder of another church, his ordination shall stand good. He need not be re-ordained.” This followed from a principle that was explicitly adopted: the elder’s “ordination shall stand good for all time, except in case of apostasy.”<sup>164</sup> This is an example of the way ordination, for elders as well as for pastors, has been regarded for most of our history as a matter in which consistency across the world Church is important.

It is likely that early Adventists regarded the duration of the elder’s ordination as applying also to the minister’s ordination as well. Eventually, in 1938, the GC Executive Committee voted: “That it be ever recognized that while ordination to the ministry is for life, the call to administrative service is temporary, therefore, those chosen for administrative responsibility from time to time, should ever hold themselves in readiness cheerfully to engage in full-time ministerial service when called again to do so.”<sup>165</sup> Four years later, this proviso (with slightly revised wording) was formally added to *GC Working Policy*: “those who are ordained to this sacred work” of “gospel ministry . . . should recognize that while ordination to the ministry is for life, the call to administrative service is temporary; therefore, those chosen for administrative responsibility from time to time, should ever hold themselves in readiness cheerfully to engage in full-time ministerial service when called again to do so.”<sup>166</sup> It has been in *GC Working Policy* ever since.<sup>167</sup>



The lifelong nature of ordination was taken for granted in the 1938 action; its main focus was to make plain that, precisely because of its enduring nature, ministers might become administrators but be called back to pastoral duties again. It is an important point because, while policy currently stipulates that ministerial credentials will normally be given up if an ordained pastor is neither engaged in nor administering pastoral or evangelistic work, this does not void his ordination.<sup>168</sup> This is clearly implied in the stipulation by the 1938 and 1942 GC Executive Committee actions (and *GC Working Policy*), “that . . . ordination to the ministry is for life,” but it was, moreover, made explicit in guidelines issued by Annual Council in 1975. These were “not guidelines for the ordination of persons to the ministry” (that being governed by *GC Working Policy*) but were “to assist committees in the issuance of ministerial credentials to those already ordained, especially those whose areas of work appear not to require the service of ordained ministers.” The guidelines specified: “Where because of the nature of the duties they are performing, the Ministerial Credentials of ordained workers are not continued or renewed, *their ordination is not thereby invalidated* [emphasis supplied], nor is any reflection intended or cast upon their lives or their service.”<sup>169</sup>

In other words, the type of work a pastor does is temporary, but ordination is permanent. It is an important and positive point. If a pastor’s status could be changed by administrators, there would be potential for abuse of power. Instead, the denomination’s recognition of a pastor’s call to gospel ministry and his ordination can be altered only in limited, exceptional, and unfortunate circumstances.

Ministerial ordination can be annulled for apostasy or for moral failings. Initially, this was simply taken for granted, and was not explicitly provided for. Yet it has been the case at least since the 1870s. Wolcott H. Littlejohn, who had been ordained in 1871, was disfellowshipped in 1876 and evidently it was assumed that this made his ordination null, because two and a half years later, after he had been restored to membership, he was reordained at the 1878 GC Session (something no longer allowed by *Working Policy*).<sup>170</sup> In 1897, the GC Executive Committee took an action revoking the credentials of a pastor due to improper relationships with “young ladies.”<sup>171</sup> But there was as yet no explicit provision for making ordination null; not until 1941 was the basis for annulling ordination and removing credentials added to policy. That year’s GC Session voted that, in the case of a “moral fall by any minister . . . he has by that transgression made void his ordination . . . In such case the conference which last issued him credentials shall annul his ordination and withdraw his credentials.”<sup>172</sup> A few months later, Annual Council voted to add the following provision to *GC Working Policy*:

In the case of apostasy on the part of any minister . . . it is to be recognized that he has by such disloyalty proved himself unworthy of a place or part in the gospel ministry of this church. In such case the conference employing him shall annul his ordination and withdraw his credentials, thus divesting him of all authority and privileges that pertain to the gospel ministry.<sup>173</sup>

In 1946, the language of *GC Working Policy* was amended to declare that, by certain actions, including moral fall or apostasy, a minister had “by that transgression made void his ordination to the sacred office of the ministry.” Ever since, the language in *Working Policy* has been that of the ordination being “made void.”<sup>174</sup> On rare occasions, ministerial credentials have been suspended or withdrawn without the ordination itself being declared null or void.<sup>175</sup> GC

*Working Policy* does currently allow the ministerial credential to be temporarily withdrawn (L 60 25, 1). More typically, however, the withdrawing of credentials has been associated with what was termed either the annulment (up to 1981) or the voiding of ordination.<sup>176</sup> These are, however, the only exceptions to the lifelong validity of ordination.

In sum, the only circumstances in which Adventist Church policy or practice countenances a change of credential for an ordained pastor is if he leaves pastoral work (whether temporarily or permanently); if he suffers a moral fall or apostatizes; or if he resigns his ordination. If these do not apply, then the existing provisions of *GC Working Policy* (as analyzed above) prevail: “ministerial employees who . . . have been ordained to the gospel ministry” are to be issued with ministerial credentials; but neither commissioned minister credentials nor ministerial licenses are to be issued to church workers who have been ordained. Ordained pastors cannot be turned, retrospectively, into commissioned pastors or licensed pastors, and if they qualify for a ministerial credential then they must receive it, rather than another credential or license. *GC Working Policy* excludes any other possibility.

In theory, a union or conference could vote that, thenceforth, it would only issue licenses to new pastors, because, in certain circumstances, a licensed minister can perform the functions of an ordained minister. Such a decision would have serious implications for the future, since presidents of unions and conferences must be ordained, but additionally, in any case, *GC Working Policy* and the *Church Manual* allow for such a decision to be made, even in theory, only further to decisions by a division executive committee. Given that no division executive committee has taken an action allowing a union of churches or conference entirely to delegate the ministerial functions of the ordained pastor to the licensed pastor, recent moves to exclusively license pastors are contrary to policies voted both by the GC Executive Committee and by GC Sessions.<sup>177</sup> It should be noted, too, that even if taken with the blessing of a division executive committee, such actions would be against the spirit of *GC Working Policy*, given its plain statement: “Licensed ministers are on the path toward ordination to the gospel ministry” (E 05 05, 3).

It might perhaps be argued that an ordained pastor could repudiate his ordination without it being intended, or taken by his employing organization, as “dissidence” (which is grounds for voiding of ordination, in which case, of course, reemployment as a pastor is prohibited).<sup>178</sup> If that were the case, ordained pastors might request to be commissioned (though given the *Policy* provision that licentiates “are on the path toward ordination to the gospel ministry” [E 05 10, 3] they could not credibly request licensing). Because ordination is the Church’s recognition of a divine calling, it cannot be given up on individual impulse. Thus, what would have to be repudiated would be a pastor’s entire vocation and his calling to ministry. Even if one were to accept such a process as theoretically permissible, however, presently no pastor with ministerial credentials has denied his call to ministry; and it seems highly unlikely that any pastor would do that. Repudiation is not actively prohibited but certainly *GC Working Policy* does not countenance such a course of action.

This brings us to the final and perhaps most important point. For, after all, *GC Working Policy* can be amended, and its provisions can be waived in certain circumstances, but either requires consultation and consensus. Organizations that have departed from Adventist practice in credentialing and licensing have done so without consulting and taking counsel—and that, too, is

a departure (perhaps a more egregious one) from our established practice. Given that credentials and licenses have for many years been regulated by the GC Executive Committee, rather than GC Sessions, the divergent organizations might plead that they are not defying “the highest authority that God has upon the earth.” However, the world Church has established common policies for all, in meetings of the GC Executive Committee. Of course, policies are not like the Fundamental Beliefs. There should be some flexibility, permitting local responses to particular situations. As we have already seen, however, this is allowed for in *GC Working Policy* (see above, pp 13-17). While generally requiring strict adherence, it provides that local organizations can adapt, even depart from, the policies—but this requires “prior approval from the General Conference Executive Committee” (B 15 10, 1). Such approval has not been granted. If unions wish to vary the mutually agreed rules for managing the pastorate, they should raise the matter in the appropriate forum.

### 3. How Then Should We Live?

The Apostle Peter posed a rhetorical question (quoted at the start of this section) to the first-century Christian church. His answer is highly relevant for the 21st-century Adventist Church: “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.” For, truly, as Seventh-day Adventists, “we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.” And so we, too, should “be diligent to be found by Him without spot, or blemish, *and at peace*.” (2 Pet 3:11-13 NIV; 3:14 ESV, emphasis supplied). Another question highly relevant to Adventists today is one that Ellen G White put to church members 135 years ago (quoted above, p 5), but that bears repeating: “What are we doing to preserve unity in the bonds of peace?”<sup>179</sup>

All the matters surveyed in this section are ones on which the world Church has pronounced in a series of clear decisions by Annual Councils or Sessions. Action taken without counsel, or contrary to counsel, distracts from mission and leads to disunity, which precludes peace.

What does this all mean for us as Seventh-day Adventists? The New Testament model points to the need for collaborative decision-making and for a united agreement to allow diversity of practice. For many years, *GC Working Policy* has done likewise, reflecting the teaching of the Bible. In our ecclesiastical polity, there are clear functional equivalents of New Testament decision-making bodies. These include meetings of all the apostles or “the apostles and elders” (Acts 15:6, 22–3, *cf.* 1:15, 6:6). Most significant is what Ellen G White calls “a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility.”<sup>180</sup> The first Adventist equivalent to such a council has been the GC Session, but in the last half-century or so there has been a second, the GC Executive Committee, when dealing with certain defined aspects of church governance. Our policy documents assert both the supremacy of a Session, and the authority of the GC Executive Committee in many circumstances. Ellen G White’s prophetic counsel confirms that the GC Session has a unique authority, while her assertion of the significance of a meeting of representatives of “all parts of the field” upholds the Executive Committee as having significant authority, too, albeit less than a Session.<sup>181</sup> The GC Constitution, Bylaws, and *Working Policy* harmonize with the Holy Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy. All point to the importance of collective deliberation and decision-making.

Consultation among a large leadership group that is representative of the body of believers is a key Adventist principle in dealing with important matters. Another is reciprocity, which allows for accountability. Where there is participation in decision-making and all parties have discussed and deliberated in good faith, the final decision must be accepted by all those who contributed to making it. All parties must adhere to policies into which they all had input. This is fundamental.

In a representative and consultative process, we cannot accept what we agree with and set aside what we disagree with. We have to accept all decisions, the good with the bad, remembering that in others' eyes our perceptions of these may be reversed. As Ellen G White counseled a discontented church member shortly after the General Conference was founded: "You should have submitted to the judgment of the church. If they decided wrong, God could take hold of this matter in His own time and vindicate the right."<sup>182</sup> This is not an issue of "liberty of conscience," for the Church is a voluntary organization and no one is or can be legally compelled to accept any of its decisions—but when representatives of all regions and all points of view have had input into discussions, the decision of the whole body is binding on those who have entered into deliberations, either in person or through their representatives. This is not only the New Testament model; it is also a matter of ethical conduct.

If everyone defies decisions that they disagree with, there is no point in having a decision-making process. To take part in a process, and then to disregard it if it does not go our way is contrary to the biblical principles of unity and of mutual submission (especially since, implicit in that latter concept, is that we are bound, at some point, to disagree with something, but are enjoined to accept it anyway).

Equality and unity in Christ oblige church members and church leaders to make decisions together and then to respect fellow brothers and sisters in Jesus by respecting the decisions that have been reached together. As the GC Executive Committee articulated the situation in 2012, Seventh-day Adventists have a "collective desire to live out a commitment to . . . Jesus Christ. Such a commitment embraces a call to community."<sup>183</sup> Communities can only function if all the members agree together that they will accept communal decisions; otherwise there is not community, but disunity.

Thus, if a GC Session or, in certain areas of responsibility, the GC Executive Committee, permits variations, then we accept that verdict; but where it does not, we accept that decision also. Ordination is plainly an important matter, since pastoral ministry is so fundamental to the life of the Church. The criteria for ordination have, as noted earlier, been set by the world Church, first by Sessions, subsequently by Annual Councils, for most of our history: thus, by longstanding practice as well as policy, we have deemed this a matter for the world Church—for joint decision-making. The same is true of regulations for pastoral credentials and licenses.

Furthermore, ordination has recently been treated as a matter of particular, global import. The Theology of Ordination Study Committee's meetings in 2013-2014 were the culmination of a worldwide study process—one that, while not wholly unprecedented, was exceptional. From 1973 to 1989, "five special committees or commissions considered the 'role of women in the Church,'" but none fully "did . . . justice to the theological question that was at stake" and none reflected "the global nature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church." The study process in the last quinquennium

was “the first time that the worldwide Church has explored the theology of ordination.” Voices from around the world and from all sides were heard; the arguments and supporting documents of all perspectives were made freely available online to church members for their own study and prayerful consideration. The process was unmatched in both breadth and depth.<sup>184</sup>

When, after such a process, a GC Session takes a decision, one obviously intended to apply to the world (since variation of practice was part of the motion put to the Session), it cannot be disregarded. The decision cannot be called a matter of little significance on which everyone could reasonably go their own way. That is because we all, together, considered it, and collectively decided it was not such a matter, but one in which we should act together. The biblical principle of unity in decision-making requires compliance. Whatever our views as individuals, “private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered.”<sup>185</sup>

## VII. Conclusion

In this document, we have seen Our Lord and Savior’s heartfelt desire that His disciples be united; the apostles’ teachings on unity, especially Paul’s compelling conceptualization of the church as the body of Christ; Ellen G White’s powerful and repeated endorsements of Jesus’s plea for unity; the New Testament principle of collective decision-making by the body of believers, with diversity of practice permitted when all agree to it; Ellen White’s warnings of the danger of disunity, her consistent evocation of the authority of the General Conference, and her admonitions against unilateral action. All these indicate very clearly how Seventh-day Adventists should relate to each other and how the Remnant Church should conduct itself.

Mutual submission (Eph 5:21), bearing and forgiving (Col 3:12-14): these are obligations for the followers of Jesus, but they are, moreover, absolutely essential in discussions among Seventh-day Adventist about ordination. As a result of the study process, three positions were proposed and what the 2015 GC Session voted accords entirely with none of them. While many church members are not closely aligned with any of these positions, this tripartite division highlights that *all* who felt strongly for one position or another are disappointed to a greater or lesser extent. All have to submit to the wider body. All will do well to submerge differences, bearing in mind that the issues that divide Seventh-day Adventists are fewer and less significant than those on which we agree.

The danger to our unity lies not primarily in who we ordain, or what credentials we issue to them. The chief danger lies in accepting the possibility of unilateral action. That has potential implications which go far beyond this immediate issue. Yet if we were to sacrifice the overarching principle of representative, collegial, consensus-based decision-making—if we were to accept that organizational units can act unilaterally—then our whole ecclesiastical polity and system of church governance would be in danger of breaking down. Unions would decline to follow divisions’ guidance; conferences will ignore unions when it suits them; local churches would flout conferences or missions. We would do well to look to the wider principles of interconnectedness and interdependence. They have been the basis for 150 years of powerful proclamation of the gospel and prophetic truth, of extraordinary service to humanity, and of remarkable growth. They should not be lightly abandoned.

The ordaining and commissioning of pastors, and the issuing of credentials and licenses, are not matters essential to salvation, but they are essential to the unity of the Church. They are also important elements in the Church's smooth functioning as an organization: that is, they are important for mission. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are part of a larger body—the body of Christ—and need to mutually submit to the body's decision. We need to redouble our efforts to proclaim “this gospel of the kingdom . . . throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14 ESV). This was the commission the Master gave to all His followers; its reference to the end times points to this denomination's particular prophetic mission, embodied in the angels of Revelation 14.

We also, however, need to do as Ellen G White urged us, to make Christ's prayer for unity in John 17 our “first study” and to cultivate loving relationships with our fellow church-members. This is true for adherents of all positions on ordination, for debates in recent years have created considerable ill feeling, across all shades of Adventist theological opinion. At a time in our history of great divisiveness, Ellen White implored church leaders:

Labor in harmony with one another, even though you are not alike. Bring all the pleasantness that you can into your lives. . . . Do not let trifling differences destroy your fellowship with one another. Do not say that because your brethren differ with you in some particular, you cannot stand by their side in service. They do not differ with you any more than you differ with them.

We are commanded to love one another as Christ has loved us. So great was His love for us that He willingly gave His life for us. And our love for one another is to make us willing to sacrifice our feelings and ideas if by so doing we can help them.<sup>186</sup>

Here, she draws church members' attention to John 17 and Jesus's prayer that His followers be characterized by their love for each other, and to the need for us to be willing to make sacrifices for the unity that He desires for us. But here, too, as so often in her writings, Ellen G White writes of the importance of harmony—a musical figure of speech. The Bible tells us that earthly history as we know it will end in music—when “those who have the victory over the beast,” drawn from all nations and races, will gather “on the sea of glass,” and, using harps given them by God, will “sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb,” hymning our praises to the “Lord God Almighty” (Revelation 15:2–3 NKJV). The most beautiful music is polyphonic, in which a number of parts, each forming an individual melody, nevertheless harmonize with each other. There is not merely a place for diversity; it is essential in creating a greater, more beautiful whole. But it is thoughtful diversity, each part composed and performed with awareness of, sensitivity to, and in harmony with, every other part. If a melody is added unilaterally it can all too easily result in dissonance. Acting unilaterally undermines the harmony that Christ desires for the Church.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has periodically experienced internal dissension yet, remarkably, it has always emerged stronger and more focused on mission. Tensions among leaders in the young denomination in the late 1860s and early 1870s were mostly resolved. Energies were refocused outward, instead of inward, and in 1874 the denomination sent its first missionary overseas. Sustained debates about theology and the institutional work in the late 1890s and early 1900s gave way to a golden age of missionary expansion. Some will look at the current situation and wonder whether it is possible for history to repeat itself. However, Ellen G White, writing on

John 17 made this promise to God's people: "When we strive for this unity as God desires us to strive for it, it will come to us."<sup>187</sup> It is a promise to claim.

If we—all of us—involve ourselves totally in the mission and ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in ways appropriate to our different spiritual gifts; if we enthusiastically endeavor to make disciples, teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded (Matt 28:20); if we gladly bear with each other, putting aside whatever grievances we may feel we have against others, forgiving as the Lord forgives us (Col 3:13); if we ardently strive to "be one" with our brothers and sisters as Christ is one with the Father, and to embody, in our relations with fellow church members, Christ's love for His Father and His people (John 17: 22-23)—then "this unity" that "God desires us to strive for," the unity Christ prayed for, the unity God desires for us, "will come to us."

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> See "Unions and Ordination," GC Secretariat Statement (Aug. 2015), available at <https://www.adventistarchives.org/unions-and-ordination-statement.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Fifty-fifth Session, July 11, 1990, Session minutes in GCC Minutes, 1990: 1039–40 (available at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1990-07.pdf>). See below, n. 160.

<sup>3</sup> "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," nos. 1 and 18. The Fundamental Beliefs are printed in the *Yearbook (Seventh-day Adventist Church Yearbook 2016, 6–9)*, and are available to download at <https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, "Consumers, but not Producers," April 25, 1901 (*i.e.*, two days after the conclusion of the GC Session of that year), MS 35, 1901: "The Lord declares that His church is not to be governed by human rules or precedents. . . . I am oppressed with the thought of the objectionable human management seen in our work." It should instead be a manifestation of "truth-loving, *Bible-believing Christians*" (emphasis supplied).

<sup>5</sup> In *Seventh-day Adventist Church Yearbook 2016, 6–9*; <https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from Ellen G. White are cited, in the first instance, to the original letter or manuscript, including title or recipients and date, where these are known, and to any publications during her lifetime. Subsequent references are to the published text (if any), or to letter/manuscript in abbreviated form. Modern compilations are not cited, because all the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, even previously unpublished letters and manuscripts, are now available online at <https://egwwritings.org>.

<sup>7</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (orig. eds., 1885-1909; 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press, 1948), 3:434, 445.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:446.

<sup>9</sup> White to Brother and Sister E. P. Daniels, Aug. 6, 1886, Letter 11a, 1886.

<sup>10</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 5:236. (Cf. *Testimonies* 2:165 and 6:292.)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>13</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages* (orig. ed., 1898; Mountain View, Calif. & Oshawa, Ont.: Pacific Press, 1940), 677–78.

<sup>14</sup> White, "An Appeal to the Brethren in Battle Creek," 1898, in *Testimonies*, 8:80.

<sup>15</sup> White to J. Edson and Emma White, Jan. 22, 1902, Letter 8, 1902. In an undated testimony of c.1903 she cites John 17 again and quotes John 17:23-30, commenting "Wonderful statement!" (*Testimonies*, 8:269)—but this passage is chiefly an affirmation of the Trinity.

<sup>16</sup> White, “One with Christ in God,” Dec. 31, 1903, MS 149, 1903; published in *The Southern Watchman* 13.5, “One with Christ in God” (Feb. 2, 1904): 73, and immediately republished in *Testimonies*, 8:239.

<sup>17</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 8:240 and cf. 242. The final part of the quoted statement additionally references John 13:35 and perhaps the early church father Tertullian’s celebrated claim about pagan attitudes to Christians: “Behold, they [i.e., pagans] say, ‘how they [i.e., Christians] love one another’.”

<sup>18</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 8:243.

<sup>19</sup> White to Brethren, Sept. 1, 1905, in *Testimonies*, 9: 195–98, quotations at 195, 196, 198.

<sup>20</sup> White, “To Our Brethren Connected with the Publishing Work at College View,” Aug. 24, 1905, in *Testimonies*, 9: 184–88, quotations at 184, 188.

<sup>21</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3:209, 8:19; *The Acts of the Apostles* (orig. ed., 1911; Mountain View, Calif. & Oshawa, Ont.: Pacific Press, n.d.), 45; cf. *Testimonies*, 8:241 and 9:196.

<sup>22</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>26</sup> White to “My Brother Laborers at Lausanne,” n.d., Letter 66, 1886.

<sup>27</sup> White to Members of General Conference Committee and Publishing Boards of the Review and Herald and Pacific Press, April 8, 1894, Letter 71, 1894; published in *General Conference Bulletin* [hereafter *GCB*], 1, extra, 15 (Feb. 27, 1895): 373; in *Selections from the Testimonies Setting Forth Important Principles Relating to Our Work in General, The Publishing Work in Particular, and the Relation of Our Institutions to Each Other* ([Oakland, CA]: Pacific Press, 1898), 20.

<sup>28</sup> White to Kellogg, April 17, 1899, Letter 73, 1899; published in *Testimonies*, 8: 173–74.

<sup>29</sup> White, “Sermon by Mrs E. G. White at General Conference, Sabbath, March 28, 1903,” MS 10, 1903; published in “The Work Before Us,” *GCB* 5.1 (March 30, 1903): 11.

<sup>30</sup> White, “Found Wanting,” April 21, 1903, MS 32, 1903; published in *Testimonies* 8: 251.

<sup>31</sup> See the Executive Committee’s effective definition when it decided to create a separate published Working Policy [hereafter WP] in 1926: a “careful digest” of all previous “General Conference actions voted in . . . sessions and Councils,” which was to “constitute a working policy”: *Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee* (1926), 20 (GC Archives, Leaflet 6375). Cf. W. A. Spicer, “Proceedings of the General Conference,” *Review and Herald* 103/30 (June 10, 1926): 2, an article explaining to church members why *Working Policy* was being created.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (2015–2016 edition), B 05, 8. [Citations hereafter to WP without dates are to the 2015–2016 edition.].

<sup>33</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3:445.

<sup>34</sup> H.W. Cottrell, “The Growth of Denominational Organizations,” *Review and Herald* 109/12 (March 24, 1932): 267.

<sup>35</sup> “The General Conference and Its Divisions—A Description of Roles and Relationships in Light of Organizational Structure Development, Current Governance Documents, and Practices,” report received by Spring Meeting, Apr. 17, 2012, General Conference Executive Committee [hereafter GCC], Minutes, 2012: 54–69, quotation at 69.

<sup>36</sup> See White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (1923), 26; *Testimonies*, 5:534.

<sup>37</sup> From “Constitution of the General Conference” (see endnote 1): “For the purpose of securing unity and efficiency in labor, and promoting the general interests of the cause of present truth, and of perfecting the organization of the Seventh-day Adventists, we, the delegates from the several State Conferences, hereby proceed to organize a General Conference.”

<sup>38</sup> “An Appeal and Appreciation to all Church Entities and Members from the General Conference and Division Officers Regarding the 2015 General Conference Session Vote on Ordination,” recorded (not voted as an action) by Annual Council, Oct. 11, 2015, in GCC Minutes, 2015: 102–103.



<sup>39</sup> Cf. “An Appeal and Appreciation to all Church Entities and Members from the General Conference and Division Officers Regarding the 2015 General Conference Session Vote on Ordination,” recorded (not voted as an action) by Annual Council, Oct. 11, 2015, in GCC Minutes, 2015: 102–103.

<sup>40</sup> “Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” WP A 05 05.

<sup>41</sup> White, Letter 71, 1894 (cited in n. 27).

<sup>42</sup> White, MS 10, 1903 (cited in n. 29).

<sup>43</sup> White, “Unity in Diversity,” MS 38a, 1909; published in “The Spirit of Independence, Read to the General Conference Session by E. G. White, May 30, 1909,” *GCB* 6:15. May 31, 1909: 221, and republished in *Testimonies*, 9:259–60.

<sup>44</sup> *Testimonies*, 9:259.

<sup>45</sup> White, “Rebellion Within the Ranks,” MS 1, 1865; “Testimony Concerning Moses Hull and Wife, Also Brother Whitney,” MS 6, 1862; “Regarding James White as a Laborer,” MS 4, 1866; “Testimony Regarding a Young Licentiate in Minnesota,” MS 8, 1883; “Treatment of the Erring,” MS 11, 1888; “Instruction Regarding Church Discipline,” MS 61, 1902; White to Brother and Sister Scott, July 6, 1863, Letter 5, 1863; White to Brethren Atwood and Pratt, May 28, 1890 Letter 1c, 1890.

<sup>46</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 87.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 89; cf. Acts 6: 2–7. See Mark A. Finley, “Toward Unity in the Body of Christ,” paper presented to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Columbia, Md., Jan. 24, 2014: <https://www.adventistarchives.org/toward-unity-in-the-body-of-christ.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 190.

<sup>49</sup> See Acts 15:6, 22–23 and cf. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 190, 196, and 383.

<sup>50</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 196.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>53</sup> W. A. Spicer, “Gospel Order, No. 1, The Divine Principle of Organization,” *Review and Herald* 86/12 (March 25, 1909): 5. Spicer was GC Secretary at the time he wrote this, an office he held for 19 years, followed by eight as President. The GC Executive Committee, just over a century later, similarly endorsed the principle of allowing variations, “according to conditions and work”: “The General Conference and Its Divisions,” GCC Minutes, 2012:68.

<sup>54</sup> “Statement on Church Polity, Procedures, and the Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Actions on Ministerial Ordination,” Annual Council, Oct. 16, 2012, GCC Minutes 2012: 205–208 quotation at 206.

<sup>55</sup> Oliver O. Montgomery, *Principles of Church Organization and Administration* (Takoma Park, Washington, D. C.: Review & Herald Publishing, 1942), 98.

<sup>56</sup> Constitution, art. IV.

<sup>57</sup> Constitution, art. III.

<sup>58</sup> General Conference Bylaws, art. I, sec. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Bylaws, art. XIII, sec. 2.a.

<sup>60</sup> Bylaws, art. XIII, sec. 1.a; Constitution, art. VIII, sec. 1.b.

<sup>61</sup> Bylaws, art. XIII, sec. 1.a.

<sup>62</sup> Middle East Division Committee, Apr. 17 and May 16, 1962, actions 62/34 and 62/47, Division Committee Minutes, pp. 954, 957. GCC Minutes, May 3, 1962, pp.1238.

<sup>63</sup> “The General Conference and Its Divisions,” GCC Minutes, 2012: 63, with examples on 63–64.

<sup>64</sup> “Principles and Practices in Organizational Flexibility for Seventh-day Adventist Denominational Structure,” Report of the Commission on Ministries, Services, and Structures, Annual Council, Oct. 15, 2007, GCC Minutes, 2007: 139–64, quotation at 143.

<sup>65</sup> “The General Conference and Its Divisions,” GCC Minutes, 2012: 68.

<sup>66</sup> WP B 10 27 and B 10 28.

<sup>67</sup> On the 1901 Session, see n. 107 and above pp. 22-23. The approved variations in the organizational model are summarized in WP B 10 28, nos. 2–5.

<sup>68</sup> See, e.g., GC Officers Meetings, Aug. 21 and 31, 1967, GC Officers Minutes, 1967: 244, 256–57: the title originally suggested was “Austrian Union of Seventh-day Adventist Churches” (*Ibid.*, 256) but was immediately simplified: see *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1968*, 237.

<sup>69</sup> Annual Council, Oct. 7, 1983, GCC Minutes, 1983: 293–95, at 293. Vote on 293, quote on 294.

<sup>70</sup> It first appears in WP (1984), B 10 05; it appears for the last time in WP (2006–2007), B 85 05.

<sup>71</sup> General Conference and Division Officers, Mar. 9, 1999, in ADCOM Minutes, 1999: 68–69 (action), 72ff. (copy of report: “Variations in Administrative Relationships Within Seventh-day Adventist Denominational Structure,” 11 pp).

<sup>72</sup> They first appear in WP (2007–2008), B 10 27–28. The actions adding the new sections were taken Oct. 15, 2007, see GCC Minutes, 2007: 155–58.

<sup>73</sup> WP BA 10 28, no. 1.

<sup>74</sup> As of 2015 there were 14 unions of churches, in five divisions (ESD, EUD, IAD, SAD and TED), out of 132 unions of all kinds, i.e., 11% of the total. See *Annual Statistical Report*, 152 (2016), 8, table 15.

<sup>75</sup> “The General Conference and Its Divisions,” GCC Minutes, 2012:69.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>77</sup> WP B 10 22; cf. Constitution, art. III; Bylaws, art. XIII, sec. 1.a.

<sup>78</sup> WP B 40 05, cf. B 05, 1; and A 05 05, A 09 05.

<sup>79</sup> E.g., Gerry Chudleigh, *Who runs the Church? Understanding the Unity, Structure and Authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, [2013]), 27–30.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. George E. Rice, “The church: Voice of God?”, *Ministry* 60:12 (Dec. 1987): 4.

<sup>81</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3:414, and also cf. 433 (later in the same testimony) and 450–51 (from another testimony from 1875, cited separately below), both of which make similar points using similar language. The identity of Lee as the recipient was supplied by the Ellen G. White Estate, drawing on documents in their possession.

<sup>82</sup> *Testimonies*, 3:417.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

<sup>85</sup> *Testimonies*, 3:492. The identity of Butler as the recipient was, again, supplied by the Ellen G. White Estate, though it is fairly clear from the language of the testimony and the context.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

<sup>88</sup> See D. J. B. Trim, “Fit for purpose? The General Conference Secretariat and Seventh-day Adventist mission in historical purpose,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 11/2 (Fall 2015): 184.

<sup>89</sup> Special meetings, August 17, 1875, GC Session minutes, pp. 90-91.

<sup>90</sup> Chudleigh, *Who runs the Church?*, 30.

<sup>91</sup> Trim, “Fit for purpose,” 184–85; Cf. George Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth: The development of Adventist church structure*. Hagerstown, Md.: RHPA, 2006), 75.

<sup>92</sup> Joe Engelkemier, “Independent Ministries: Should they cooperate with church leaders?,” part 3, “A look at ‘kingly power,’ responsibility, and unity,” *Adventist Review* 166/51 (Dec. 21, 1989): 17; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook: 1890*, 53, 115, and *1893*, 60; “Statistics of European Union Conference” and “Summary of Statistics of Conferences and Missions for the Year Ending Dec. 31, 1900,” *GCB* 4, extra, no. 6 (April 9, 1901): 161–63.

<sup>93</sup> White, “Board and Council meetings,” n.d., MS 33, 1891.

<sup>94</sup> White, MS 33, 1891. See Rice, “The church,” 5.

<sup>95</sup> White, “Relation of the G. C. Committee to Business Interests,” n.d., MS 33, 1895.

<sup>96</sup> White, “Concerning the Review and Herald Publishing Association,” Oct. 12, 1895, MS 57, 1895.

<sup>97</sup> White to Brother and Sister Waggoner, Aug. 26, 1898, Letter 77, 1898.

<sup>98</sup> See Engelkemier, “Independent Ministries,” 16–17; cf. Chudleigh, *Who runs the Church?*, 29.

<sup>99</sup> “General Conference Proceedings,” Thirty-fourth Session, 1st meeting, April 2, 1901, in *GCB* 4, extra, 1 (April 3, 1901): 25; MS 35, 1901 (cited n. 4).

<sup>100</sup> “General Conference Proceedings,” 25.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 26.

<sup>102</sup> A. G. Daniells commented after her speech (“General Conference Proceedings,” 27, cited in n. 100): “A number of the brethren . . . met yesterday in an informal way . . . Sister White was present and spoke very plainly to us. . . . We received substantially the same instruction that has been given us to-day.”

<sup>103</sup> White, “Talk by Mrs E. G. White in College Library, April 1, 1901,” MS 43, 1901.

<sup>104</sup> This is not in Ellen White’s prepared text (MS 43, 1901, cited in n. 104) but she certainly departed from the text at points, extemporizing, as is evident at multiple points in the shorthand notes of her address taken by C. C. Crisler (who was then President Irwin’s private secretary but later Ellen White’s), from which these statements are taken: “Talk of Mrs E. G. White, before representative brethren, in the College Library, April 1, 1901,” MS 43a, 1901.

<sup>105</sup> April 2, 1901, in “General Conference Proceedings,” 26 (cited in n. 99).

<sup>106</sup> The authoritative study of the 1901 Session and the organizational model it introduced is Barry Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present and Future* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1989).

<sup>107</sup> April 2, 1901, in “General Conference Proceedings,” 25 (cited in n. 99).

<sup>108</sup> See Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, rev. ed. (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000), 277.

<sup>109</sup> White to J. Edson White, June, 1901 (two-part letter, no date specified for first part, June 5 for second), Letter 54, 1901. In the June 5 continuation, Ellen White reiterated her sentiments for emphasis: “It hurts me to think that you are using words which I wrote prior to the Conference. Since the Conference, great changes have been made.”

<sup>110</sup> See Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, vol. V, *The Early Elmshaven years: 1900–1905* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing, 1981), 243–46, 248–53, 255–57. Cf. Rice, “The church,” 16.

<sup>111</sup> White, “Regarding Work of General Conference,” Apr. 3, 1903, MS 26, 1903.

<sup>112</sup> White to “the Leaders in the Medical Work,” Aug. 4, 1903, in *Testimonies*, 8: 232–33; she uses the term three times. Cf. White to Kellogg, Nov. 10, 1899, Letter 232, 1899: “you took so many responsibilities upon yourself that it was as though one man’s brain, and that your own, was brain for all the others.”

<sup>113</sup> White, Nov. 17, 1903, *Testimonies*, 8:236–37.

<sup>114</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:260.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 260–61.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 260. For a similar assessment of White’s meaning, cf. Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth*, 74–75.

<sup>120</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:260 (see n. 115).

<sup>121</sup> This was first published in May 1911, in the *Review and Herald*, but was evidently drawn from the MS of *Acts of the Apostles*, which appeared later that year. See Ellen G. White, “Separated Unto the Gospel,” *Review and Herald* 88/19 (May 11, 1911): 4.; *Acts of the Apostles*, 163–64; *Gospel workers: Instruction for all who are “Laborers together with God”* (Washington, D.C.: RHPA, 1915), 443. This passage is not in the first edition of *Gospel workers* (1892).

<sup>122</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3:417.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

<sup>125</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:260 (see n. 115).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 260 (cited in n. 115).

<sup>127</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

<sup>128</sup> A recent study states that Ellen G White renounced her 1875 position in the 1890s and never fully returned to it. This claim, however, is based on an extraordinary misreading or rather misquotation of Ellen White's writings. Chudleigh, *Who runs the church?*, 30, asserts that "in the 1909 statement, she does not use the strong terms she used earlier [in 1875]. Instead, her strongest counsel in 1909 is that the decisions of the GC in session should 'be respected' and 'shall have authority.'"

This argument can only be advanced because the author *omits the entire paragraph* that ends: "private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence contrary to the decision of the general body." (This paragraph is quoted in full in the text above.) I.e., the author does not quote the two sentences that explicitly say what he denies is said—thus, contrary to his claim, Ellen White *does* use precisely the "strong terms she used earlier." The best that can be said of this analysis is that it is careless.

<sup>129</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 5:236. This testimony, on "Christian Unity," is analyzed at greater length above, pp. 4-5.

<sup>130</sup> White, Letter 11a, 1886 (cited n. 9).

<sup>131</sup> White, "The color line," Oct. 21, 1908, MS 107, 1908; published in *Testimonies*, 9: 213–22, quotation at 216.

<sup>132</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 5: 236–37, quotation at 236.

<sup>133</sup> White, address at Basel, Switzerland, Sept. 24, 1885, *Testimonies*, 9: 181.

<sup>134</sup> White, Letter 11a, 1886 (cited n. 9).

<sup>135</sup> White, Sept. 8, 1900, diary entry, MS 82, 1900.

<sup>136</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3: 446–47, quotation on 447.

<sup>137</sup> White to "Brethren and Sisters at Oakland," Mar. 1, 1887, in *Testimonies*, 5:534–35.

<sup>138</sup> White, Letter 66, 1886.

<sup>139</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:187.

<sup>140</sup> White, "Testimony Concerning Sister Haskell," June 28, 1898, MS 83, 1898.

<sup>141</sup> White to Kellogg, [March 3, 1898], Letter 123, 1898; published in *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:161. The quotation comes from the *Testimonies*; the letters reads with slightly different wordings for two sentences, while still retaining the same meaning: "To stand thus would place you on an unsound footing" and "no confederacy can stand but that which God has framed".

<sup>142</sup> White to Kellogg, April 17, 1899, Letter 73, 1899; published in *Testimonies*, 8:173–74.

<sup>143</sup> White, "Words of Instruction Regarding the Building of the Sanitarium," July 13, 1900, MS 39, 1900; published in "Work in Christ's Lines," *Review and Herald* 79/25 (June 24, 1902): 8.

<sup>144</sup> "Instruction Regarding Church Discipline," May 13, 1902, MS 61, 1902.

<sup>145</sup> White, MS 10, 1903 (cited in n. 29).

<sup>146</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:187 (cited n. 139).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, repr. *Gospel Workers* [1915], 487.

<sup>148</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3: 445. See also MS 135, 1901.

<sup>149</sup> White, Letter 11a, 1886 (cited n. 9).

<sup>150</sup> White to Brother Church, March 21, 1888, Letter 33, 1888.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:257, 260.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 9: 257.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 9:258.

<sup>155</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 163–64; repr. *Gospel Workers* [1915], 443. (cited n. 121).

<sup>156</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 5:236.

<sup>157</sup> Unless/until it takes an action changing course. This has happened, though rarely, in our history. Perhaps the best-known episode of a session reversing itself, in the 1870s, is analyzed in depth by Kevin

M. Burton, “Centralized for Protection: George I. Butler and His Philosophy of One-person Leadership,” unpublished MA thesis (Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University 2015).

<sup>158</sup> See the “Unions and Ordination” Statement (cited n. 1).

<sup>159</sup> D. J. B. Trim, “The Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Policy and Practice, up to 1972,” paper presented to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Linthicum Heights, Md., July 22, 2013 (<https://www.adventistarchives.org/the-ordination-of-women-in-seventh-day-adventist-policy-and-practice.pdf>), 1–2, 6–7, 9–11, 24. The first female commissioned minister was Del Delker in 1981: GCC, Spring Meeting, Apr. 30, 1981, in GCC Minutes, 1981: 116.

<sup>160</sup> On the proposal to the Forty-first (1881) Session, which has been misunderstood and misrepresented, see Trim, “Ordination of Women,” 12–17 (cited in n. 159). For the Fifty-fifth (1990) Session action, July 11, 1990, see GCC Minutes, 1990: 1039–40, cited above, n. 2.

<sup>161</sup> Fifty-sixth Session, July 5, 1995, minutes in *Adventist Review* 172/33 (July 11, 1995): 30 (cited in n. 3); Sixtieth Session, July 8, 2015, transcript at <https://www.adventistarchives.org/general-conference-business-session-transcript,-wednesday-pm,-july-8,-2015.pdf>: 72–73.

<sup>162</sup> “Statement on Ordination to the Ministry and Ministerial Credentials,” GCC Minutes, April 3, 1930, “General Conference Committee Proceedings,” vol. 13: 1122–1123, quotation at 1123. This wording appears in policy currently: WP L 60 10.

<sup>163</sup> Twenty-fourth Session, Nov. 20, 1885, “Records of the General Conference,” vol. 2 (1879–1886): 113 (in GC Archives, box 6873).

<sup>164</sup> Twenty-fourth Session, Dec. 2 and 3, 1885, “Records of the General Conference,” vol. 2: 126 (in GC Archives, box 6873).

<sup>165</sup> Autumn Council, Oct. 21, 1938, “General Conference Committee Proceedings,” vol. 15: 894.

<sup>166</sup> Autumn Council, Oct. 27, 1942, “General Conference Committee Proceedings,” vol. 16: 661.

<sup>167</sup> Currently, WP E 50.

<sup>168</sup> WP E 10 100: “When an ordained/licensed minister changes his denominational employment to work other than that for which a ministerial credential/license is ordinarily issued, his credential/ license shall cease to be valid . . . .”

<sup>169</sup> Annual Council, Oct. 16, 1975, GCC Minutes, 1975: 408, 409.

<sup>170</sup> “The Conference,” *Review and Herald* 52 (Oct. 17, 1878): 124. See Kevin M. Burton, “Wolcott Hackley Littlejohn: Defender of the Faith,” *Andrews University Seminary Student Journal* 1 (Spring 2015): 93, 95–96. The stipulations in WP that “The credential/license of a minister who experiences a moral fall or apostatizes shall be withdrawn permanently” (WP L 60 25, 1), and that, in such cases, a credentialed minister “shall be ineligible for future employment as a Seventh-day Adventist minister” while a licensed minister “shall be ineligible for future ordination or employment as a . . . minister” (WP L 60 25, 2.a–b) have all been in place since 1982 (Annual Council, Oct. 11, 1982, GCC Minutes, 1982: 301–303).

<sup>171</sup> GCC, Sept. 24, 1897, “General Conference Committee Proceedings,” vol. 3: 9, 166.

<sup>172</sup> Forty-fourth Session, June 4, 1941, minutes in “Proceedings of the General Conference,” *Review and Herald* 118/30 (June 8, 1941; *General Conference Report*, no. 9): 203.

<sup>173</sup> Annual Council, Oct. 28, 1941, “General Conference Committee Proceedings,” vol. 16: 168.

<sup>174</sup> GCC, Dec. 16, 1946, “General Conference Committee Proceedings,” vol. 17: 340–41. WP L 60 25, 2; cf. L 60 20, 1.

<sup>175</sup> M. L. Andreasen’s credentials were suspended and later restored: GCC, Apr. 6, 1961, “Minutes of Meetings of GC Committee,” vol. 20: 900; General Conference Officers meeting, Feb. 26, Minutes 1962: 41. Desmond Ford’s credentials were withdrawn but his ordination was not annulled, at least initially: GCC Sept. 18, 1980, GCC Minutes 1980: 246. In 1945, the credentials of F. C. Carrier were “surrendered” by Carrier before the GC Executive Committee took an action “To annul his ordination” (for a moral fall): GCC, Mar. 7, 1945, “General Conference Committee Proceedings,” vol. 16: 1802. This meant that, briefly, he was in Ford’s situation, but this may have been a matter of timing, given that Carrier was employed in California and it took time for the GC Executive Committee to act in his case.

<sup>176</sup> WP L 60 25, 3. Such actions are normally taken by organizations at lower levels of structure than the GC, but since the policies regarding moral fall and apostasy were added in 1941, there have been several cases in which the GC Executive Committee has acted in accordance with what is now WP L 60: e.g., GCC, Jan. 29, 1981, Apr. 30, 1981 (two pastors), Feb. 17, 1983 and Sept. 25, 2008, in GCC Minutes, 1981: 28, 119, 1983: 47, and 2008: 55–56. In all five cases, ministerial credentials were “withdraw[n]” as part of the same disciplinary process either “to annul” (1981) ordination or record it as having been “made void” (1983, 2008). (Cf. the examples in n. 176, above.)

<sup>177</sup> The 1976 Annual Council approved a statement on the “role and status” of licensed ministers. It accepted that, in an example of diversity of practice, a licensed minister, in some places, had come to be expected to do more than “develop his ministerial gift, especially in the area of soul-winning.” In its statement the GC Executive Committee recognized: “There are circumstances in many fields . . . where it is necessary for the conference/mission to appoint [a licentiate] to carry responsibilities as pastor or assistant pastor of a church of group of churches.” However, a licentiate’s authority and right “to perform certain ministerial functions” was dependent on election and ordination as an elder in a local church, and limited to that local church, while (as Annual Council noted) “in the nature of the case” in many fields, the licentiate “also represents the conference/mission which appoints him and . . . the field may wish to extend his responsibilities and authority delegating to him certain other ministerial functions in order to enable him to discharge his responsibilities satisfactorily.” (Annual Council, Oct. 20, 1976, GCC Minutes, 1976: 347.)

The statement therefore allows: “In certain circumstances the responsibility and authority of the licensed minister may be extended to include the performance of specific functions of the ordained minister in the churches to which he is assigned.” This may seem to permit unions only to license pastors if they so choose, but the statement continued: “This responsibility belongs to the division committee which shall clearly outline for its territory the ministerial functions which may be delegated to licensed ministers”. (GCC Minutes, 1976: 347.) The following year, Annual Council (Oct. 16, 1977, GCC Minutes, 1977: 320–21) added a new policy, which used an adapted form of the statement, and is still essentially the same now (WP L 25) as when it first appeared (WP 1977 ed., L 25).

In addition, the substance of the statement was subsequently added to the *Church Manual*. Although the relevant passage has been amended by GC Sessions over the years, it still provides that “the right to permit the extension of a licensed pastor’s authority rests first with the division executive committee, it must approve the extension by specifically and clearly defining the additional functions that that licensed pastor may perform . . . . After the division committee acts, the conference committee may act.” It then expressly forbids the “conference committee [to] extend the functions of a licensed pastor beyond what has been authorized by the division committee.” Indeed, it adds: “A conference committee action cannot be substituted for church election or ordination to gospel ministry.” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* [19th ed., rev. 2015, updated 2016], 33.

<sup>178</sup> See WP L 60 20, 3; 60 25, 1 and 2.

<sup>179</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 5:239 (quoted above, pp. 5, 7).

<sup>180</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 95.

<sup>181</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:260, 261.

<sup>182</sup> White to Brother and Sister Scott, July 6, 1863 (the quoted statement was specifically directed to Sister Scott), Letter 5, 1863.

<sup>183</sup> “The General Conference and Its Divisions,” GCC Minutes, 2012:69 (see n. 75).

<sup>184</sup> See Trim, “Ordination of Women,” 22–23, quotations at 22 (cited in n. 159).

<sup>185</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 9:260 (see n. 115); cf. 3:492.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid* (cited in n. 30).

<sup>187</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 8:243 (cited in n. 18).