

An open Letter from African Scholars/Academics

Dear GC-ADCOM

Greetings from the African continent. We serve the Church as scholars and academics in diverse capacities. Some are lay leaders while others are Church employees. Hence, we are committed to God's mission of sharing the Three Angels' messages throughout Africa and around the world.

Our history as Africans in general is characterised by various forms of injustice, subjugation, unfair treatment and other forms of oppression. This was a result of colonialism and political dictatorships. But there have also been some ecclesiastical policies that have proven to be unfair to the African Church and her workers. There is also the rising forms of tribalism and nationalism throughout the world and Africa is no exception. As people of the Book we understand the Gospel to be a unifier. That is, the Gospel – the good news that Jesus brings humanity and divinity together and thus binds us as family. The unifier is the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who allows us to be transformed from our worldly thinking into the image of God. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live differently within our contexts. Thus, we lean upon the Holy Spirit to live as God's people in Africa through the various forms of injustice and other challenging experiences.

We have been drawn to Adventism as we understand Jesus to bring true freedom. This is evident in our Sabbath theology. The Sabbath was instituted as a memorial of liberation (salvation) from all forms of oppression or slavery (Deuteronomy 5). Thus, God invites former slave owners and former slaves as equals into His presence. The Sabbath brings us together as worshippers where we see ourselves for who we are – sinners saved by grace. The Adventist part of our name acknowledges God as Immanuel – God with His people. We recognize that the Creator of the Universe stepped into our world to be with us in our suffering so we can live as princes and princesses of the King of kings. Because we have experienced His freedom we want to live in His freedom and we want others to experience the same freedom.

Having suffered racial, social, colonial and even ecclesiastical injustices, it is with great sadness that we have noted that the General Conference Administrative Committee has chosen to subvert the Adventist identity of freedom by establishing and encouraging sub-entities to establish compliance review committees. One hundred and seventeen years ago (1901) our pioneers (including Ellen White) in a General Conference Session understood the dangers of consolidating decision making in the hands of a select few. The Church has always believed and encouraged that our strength is through our diversity and our unity does not mean uniformity. As African scholars we shudder to think what reversing this policy would do to our Church. Living in an age of polarization and nationalism (specific identity) we appeal to the GCADCOM to be different and find a different solution to her challenge. The General Conference (GCADCOM) was never created to act as a form of an "ecclesiastical police" or an investigating agency to determine violators and impose punitive measures on them. Given the complex diversity within the Adventist movement the existing Church policy has adequate provisions to deal with this complexity. No matter how well intended the GC Compliance Committees are, their existence will inadvertently lead to animosity between the various structures, institutions and members of the Church. There will be a sense of "selective justice" with some "violators" receiving more attention than others and some "violations" being targeted more than others. This is contrary to the very nature of the Adventist Church which has always accepted and believed in diverse views.

We are a people who have experienced grace, therefore, we practice mercy and justice. We are ministers of reconciliation because we are God's missionary people. We are world changers because we live dependent upon God's Spirit. Hence, we are intentional not to address our challenges with

worldly thinking. We must be open to different ways of dialogue. Having compliance review committees and encouraging such committees to be established runs in the face of the God we represent – a God of reconciliation and peace. We solemnly and humbly request the GCADCOM find alternative methods to address the impasse we find ourselves in. We do not wish to introduce a culture of mistrust that we experienced under colonialism and dictatorships. We want all members to remain free within the confines of our Church Manual and Working Policy.

We thank you for prayerfully considering our appeal.

African Scholars