

# Reorganisation of Church Structure, 1901 -03: Some Observations<sup>1</sup>

By Barry Oliver

## Introduction

It is the purpose of this paper to:

1. Briefly describe aspects of the denominational context and the organizational design of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863;
2. List and briefly discuss a number of factors which led to the reorganisation of the Church in 1901 – 1903;
3. List the changes that reorganization brought to the organizational structures of the Church;
4. Locate mission as the primary impetus for reorganization
5. Discuss the principles which, in 1901, undergirded the introduction of the Union as an added layer of organizational structure;
6. Distil from the historical data learnings which may be instructional for the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church.

## Perspective of the Paper

With respect to perspective, this paper should be read keeping in in mind that:

1. The paper reflects an abiding sense of loyalty to and love for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The author, now retired, has served as an ordained pastor, evangelist, associate professor, administrator, and finally as president of the South Pacific Division and vice-president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
2. Care has been taken to ensure that all quotations reflect the context from which they are taken. Thorough referencing gives the reader opportunity to investigate the extended context.
3. The paper is written in a spirit of open enquiry and discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the content of this paper is directly drawn from research conducted by the author when preparing and writing a Ph.D. dissertation at Andrews University in 1989, and from the published version of the dissertation. See Barry David Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future*, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989).

4. It is acknowledged that history is always contextual, as is the application of principle and practice in diverse contemporary contexts.

### **Limitations**

The paper assumes a working knowledge of Seventh-day Adventist organisational structure. There is no attempt to describe contemporary structure. There is limited discussion of the theological interplay between Alonzo T. Jones and those aligned with him in 1901, and Arthur G. Daniells and those aligned with him. The polemic between these two groups strongly influenced the outcome of the restructuring process.<sup>2</sup> Further, in this paper there is only passing reference to the impact of the Kellogg debacle on the individuals and decisions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Aspects of the Denominational Context and the Organizational Design of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was formally organised at a meeting of believers at Battle Creek, Michigan in 1863. At that time the membership was approximately 3500. It was decided that there would be three administrative levels of Church structure: the local church, the conference, and the General Conference with headquarters in Battle Creek. The officers of the General Conference were a president, secretary, and treasurer. Three persons were appointed as the members of a General Conference executive committee and General Conference sessions were to be held annually.<sup>3</sup>

There were those who had argued that by being organized the Church would become Babylon. But those who saw the necessity for an efficient system of organization prevailed. Indeed it was James White who, throughout the controversies surrounding the proposed organization in the late 1850s and early 1860s, was the most vocal proponent of the need for organization.<sup>4</sup> White, as editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and the unofficial

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the polemic see Barry D. Oliver, "The Development of Organizational and Leadership Paradigms in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 3/1 Spring 2007: 4-28.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of the factors which precipitated denominational organization in 1863 see Andrew G. Mustard, *James White and SDA Organization: Historical Development, 1844 – 1881* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> See Mustard, *James White and SDA Organization*.

leader of the Sabbatarian Adventists, was continually writing and speaking in support of organization. His wife also supported the need for sound organization. It appears, however, that when it came to denominational structures, the Church understood her role to be more exhortatory and advisory than definitive.

For example, in August 1861 Ellen White had reproved those who did not have the courage of their convictions:

“The agitation on the subject of organization has revealed a great lack of moral courage on the part of ministers proclaiming present truth. Some who were convinced that organization was right failed to stand up boldly and advocate it. . . . They feared blame and opposition. They watched the brethren generally to see how their pulse beat before standing manfully for what they believed to be right. . . . They were afraid of losing their influence. . . . Those who shun responsibility will meet with loss in the end. The time for ministers to stand together is when the battle goes hard.”<sup>5</sup>

The arguments which were used to persuade the believers to organize themselves into a denomination were not based strongly on biblical or theological reasoning.<sup>6</sup> Rather, pragmatism won the day. In 1907, A. G. Daniells, reflecting on the events of the 1860s listed some of the problems of disorganization, implying that organization solved these and other issues facing the Church. His list included: failure to keep proper church membership records; paucity of church officers; inability to determine the accredited representatives of the people; no regular support for the ministry; and no legal provision for holding property.<sup>7</sup>

Even a list of reasons which Ellen White compiled in 1892 was largely pragmatic, although she did leave room for more latitude. Her reasons for organizing the church in 1863 were: (1) to provide for the support of the ministry, (2) for carrying the work in new fields, (3) for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, (4) for the holding of

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<sup>5</sup>Ellen G. White, “Communication from Mrs White,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Aug. 27, 1861, 101-2.

<sup>6</sup>See Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure*, 46-48.

<sup>7</sup>A. G. Daniells, “Organization: A Brief Account of Its History in the Development of the Cause of the Third Angel’s Message,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 14, 1907, 5.

church property, (5) for the publication of truth through the press, and (6) for many other objectives.<sup>8</sup>

### **Factors which led to the reorganisation of the Church in 1901 – 1903;**

Despite the simplicity and uniqueness of the structures set up in 1863, the need for major modification of those structures became evident as the Church expanded during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. A number of contextual factors led to the need for change:

#### *1 Numerical Growth and the Beginnings of Diversity*

Although Seventh-day Adventists still understood themselves to be simply “a body of believers associating together, taking the name of Seventh-day Adventists, and attaching their names to a covenant simply to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus,” with the Bible as “their only creed and discipline,” by 1888 there were already thirty organized conferences containing 889 organized churches. There were 227 ordained and 182 licensed ministers. The constituency was supporting six publishing houses, three senior educational institutions, and two medical establishments. By the turn of the century the church had 75,000 members spread not only across the United States, but also in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and increasingly in the “mission fields.”<sup>9</sup>

As the church continued to grow and diversify, it was evident that the meager organization that was set in place in 1863 could not cope with this numerical and geographical growth.

#### *2 Institutional Growth*

Further, the organizational structures of 1863 did not anticipate the increase of organizations to care for the publishing, educational, health, and missionary interests of the Church. These entities were not a part of the conference administrative structure of the Church, but stood as independent units apart from it. Although they had a separate infrastructure, most shared personnel with the administrative structure of the denomination. Most were located in Battle Creek.

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<sup>8</sup>Ellen G. White to the Brethren at the General Conference, Letter 127, December 19, 1892, Ellen G. White Research Centre.

<sup>9</sup>*A Brief Sketch of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1888), 9, 11-12.

The major auxiliary organizations that were in existence at the beginning of 1888 were the General Tract and Missionary Society, established in 1874; the General Sabbath School Association, established in 1878; the Health and Temperance Association, established in 1879; and the General Conference Association, established in 1887. The National Religious Liberty Association was established in 1889, an autonomous Foreign Mission Board in the same year, and the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association in 1893.<sup>10</sup>

### *3 Loss of Coordination and Integration*

These organizations were legally incorporated as independent bodies that had their own officers and executive boards or committees. Although they were all part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—officers being appointed by and reporting to the General Conference session—they were not administered directly by the General Conference. Because of their independent status, coordination and integration were perennial problems during the 1890s. Not until the 1901 General Conference session and its reorganization of the administrative structures of the church were the auxiliary organizations incorporated into the conference structure as departments of the General Conference.

### *4 Administrative Centralization*

The growing global missionary consciousness of the church during the 1870s and 1880s was accompanied by increased centralization of administrative control. In 1885, George Butler, president of the General Conference from 1871-1874 and again from 1880-1888, spoke of the principles upon which the organization of the church was established. He declared:

“Supervision embraces all its [the General Conference] interests in every part of the world. There is not an institution among us, not a periodical issued, not a Conference or society, not a mission field connected with our work, that it has not a right to advise and counsel and investigate. It is the highest authority of an earthly character among Seventh-day Adventists.”<sup>11</sup>

Butler’s concept of administration grew out of his concept of leadership. After the General Conference of 1888, Ellen White wrote of Butler:

“A sick man’s mind has had a controlling power over the General Conference committee and the ministers have been the shadow and echo of Elder Butler about as long as it is

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<sup>10</sup> For a summary overview of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the beginning of 1888, see *Brief Sketch*, 9-40.

<sup>11</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book: 1888* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1889), 50.

healthy and for the good of the cause. Envy, evil surmisings, jealousies have been working like leaven until the whole lump seemed to be leavened. . . . He thinks his position gives him such power that his voice is infallible.”<sup>12</sup>

In response to some tensions that existed between James White and other church leaders, Butler had written an essay in 1873 in which he encapsulated his attitude toward leadership. His position was clear from the opening sentence: “There never was any great movement in this world without a leader; and in the nature of things it is impossible that there should be.”<sup>13</sup>

Butler described a leader as a benevolent monarch. He supported his assertion by references to numerous biblical examples of authoritarian leaders. While he was willing to concede that Christ was indeed head of the church, he insisted that some men were “placed higher in authority in the church than others.”<sup>14</sup>

Subsequently, the 1875 General Conference session passed a resolution that called for a revision of Butler’s essay.<sup>15</sup> The 1877 session rescinded all parts of the essay that referred to the leadership of the church as residing in one man. This was supported by a resolution which stated that:

“The highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience.”<sup>16</sup>

Although James White made it clear that he did not agree with Butler’s position, and despite Ellen White’s continuous appeals, Butler did not modify his leadership style very much until well after he was voted out of the presidency at the 1888 General Conference session.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ellen G. White to Mary White, Letter 82, November 4, 1888, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

<sup>13</sup>George I. Butler, “Leadership,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 18, 1873, 180.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 180-81.

<sup>15</sup>“General Conference Report,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 26, 1875, 59.

<sup>16</sup>“General Conference Report,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 4, 1877, 106.

<sup>17</sup>For a discussion of the conflict between James White and George Butler over the concept of leadership, see Mustard, *James White and SDA Organization*, 175-78; and Bert Haloviak, “SDAs and Organization, 1844-1907” (paper presented at the Central California Camp meeting, August 1987), 39-41.

In the early 1880s, Ellen White began to rebuke General Conference administrators for taking too much of the responsibility for decision-making on themselves and failing to give others opportunity to have input. In a letter to W. C. and Mary White in 1883, Ellen White pointed out that “every one of our leading men” considered that “he was the very one who must bear all the responsibilities” and “failed to educate others to think” and “to act.” In fact, she charged, the leading men gave the others “no chance.”<sup>18</sup>

Implicit in her condemnation of those who followed that practice was reproof for those who permitted them to do it without seeking to correct the situation. Conference leaders, for instance, were told that they were to make their own decisions. The president of the General Conference could not possibly “understand the situation as well as you who are on the ground.”<sup>19</sup>

As a corrective for centralization of control, Ellen White advocated proper use of the committee system that had been established when the General Conference had been organized in 1863. She made it clear that even in the operation of institutions one man’s mind was not to control the decision-making process. She emphasized that “God would not have many minds the shadow of one man’s mind,” but that “in a multitude of counselors there is safety.”<sup>20</sup>

### *5 Financial Crisis*

Another precipitating factor which led to restructuring was the state of the finances of the church. When G. A. Irwin assumed the presidency of the General Conference in 1897, he had to face a woeful financial predicament. Within a few weeks of his appointment, the situation was so desperate that he wrote to N. W. Allee that the General Conference was “living from hand to mouth, so to speak.” He told Allee that “some days we get in two or three hundred dollars, and other days we have nothing.” On the particular day that he was writing, he lamented that the treasury was “practically empty,” even though there were at that time “a number of calls for means.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ellen G. White to W. C. White and Mary White, Letter 23, August 23, 1883, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

<sup>19</sup>These words were spoken to the delegates assembled at the General Conference session in 1883. Ellen G. White, “Genuine Faith and Holiness,” Manuscript 3, 1883, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

<sup>20</sup>Ellen G. White to John Harvey Kellogg, Letter 7, April 26, 1886, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

<sup>21</sup>G. A. Irwin to N. W. Allee, May 5, 1897, Record Group 11, Letter Book 18, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Despite concerted effort by General Conference leaders, the situation did not improve substantially. While there were some periods when the predicament was not as desperate as it was at other times, at all times the situation was out of control. The financial statement for 1899 showed that at the beginning of that year the General Conference had only \$55.33 cash on hand. The same report showed that by October 1 of the same year there was an operating deficit of \$9,529.74.<sup>22</sup> At the beginning of 1901 the deficit was \$41,589.11. In August the deficit was still \$39,600.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the chronic shortage of operating capital, nothing was being done to repay debts that had been incurred in order to establish various institutions. Percy Magan, who realized that part of the problem lay in the ease with which institutions borrowed money and the ease with which church members lent it to them, charged that “all our institutions” had been in “the borrowing business.” He advocated that it was time for them “to quit” borrowing. But not only were institutions to cease borrowing: church members were to cease dabbling in “the lending business.” Had the members not been “in the lending business,” then it was certain that the institutions “would never have been in the borrowing business.”<sup>24</sup>

Desperate times called for desperate measures.

#### *6 Decreasing Ability to Support Missionary Expansion*

The inability of the denomination to financially support its growth was having an effect on its missionary expansion. In the last five years of the nineteenth century there was the slackening of missionary activity by the denomination. At the 1899 General Conference session, Allen Moon, president of the Foreign Mission Board, reported that

“During the last two years we have opened up no new work in any part of the world. It has been an impossibility. There have been demands for opening the work in China. That work ought to have been opened a year ago, yet we have been utterly unable to do anything toward opening it.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>General Conference Committee Minutes, Oct. 10, 1899, Record Group 1, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

<sup>23</sup>A. G. Daniells to Members of the General Conference Committee, August 2, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland. See also A. G. Daniells to J. E. Jayne, August 3, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

<sup>24</sup>Percy T. Magan, “Denominational Debts,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 11, 1899, 235-36.

<sup>25</sup>*General Conference Bulletin* [hereafter *GC Bulletin*], 1899, 73.



The failure to commence any new work between 1897 and 1899 and the decrease in the number of missionaries being sent abroad between 1895 and 1900 does not appear to have been the result of any marked decrease in the church's eschatological or missiological vision. A more likely explanation for the problems is that the centralized organization as it existed was just not able to cope financially and administratively with its missionary enterprise.<sup>26</sup>

Arthur Daniells realized that such a situation confronted the church as he visited Africa and Europe on his way from Australia to the 1901 General Conference session. In August 1900, while in Europe, he wrote to W. C. White that

“My heart is filled with interest that I cannot express in behalf of these foreign fields, and I sincerely hope that the next session of the General Conference will rise to the high and important position it should take in behalf of these countries. . . . I see much to encourage us, and some things that need careful management in the way of reorganization. . . . In all these places I have secured all the details I can regarding the work, the same as I did in Africa, and shall arrange these data for future use if needed.”<sup>27</sup>

Change was needed not only to accommodate the growth of the past but also to facilitate growth in the future.

### **The Changes that Reorganization Brought to the Organizational Structures of the Church;**

For all of these and perhaps other reasons in addition, the 1901 General Conference session saw a major reorganization of the administrative structures of the Church. The impetus for change continued at the 1903 General Conference session. The changes that were made at those sessions were based on the principles of organization that were established at the

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<sup>26</sup>The missionary program was being stifled because decisions which should have been made by “those on the ground” had to be referred to Battle Creek. See W. A. Spicer to A. G. Daniells, October 5, 1893, Record Group 9, A. G. Daniells Folder 2, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to E. H. Gates, May 23, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland. In his letter to D. A. Robinson, White focused on the dilemma caused by centralization. In reference to a “pioneer to a new mission field,” he said: “If he consults with the Board in everything he will be forced sometimes to vary from instruction. If he does not consult them he will get the credit of moving independently. Whichever way he does, he will wish he had done the other.” In a letter to Percy Magan, W. C. White said that “mother has been cautioned not to give? sanction to any arrangement in connection with this [missionary] enterprise by which one class of men or of institutions shall lay binding restrictions upon another class of men or institutions; that His servants in one part of the world should not dictate to or lay restrictions upon His servants in another part of the great harvest field” (W. C. White to Percy T. Magan, March 8, 1900, Letter Book 15, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

<sup>27</sup>A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, August 23, 1900, Incoming Files, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

denomination's founding in 1861-1863. By 1901 it was recognized that those principles needed to be updated and applied in the contemporary context. Ellen White was particularly pointed in her endorsement of change. On the day before the official opening of the 1901 General Conference session she declared, "God wants a change . . . right here . . . right now."<sup>28</sup> The following day when reiterating the concerns which she had communicated on the previous day, she added, "according to the light that has been given me--*and just how it is to be accomplished I cannot say*--greater strength must be brought into the managing force of the Conference."<sup>29</sup> She called for change and flexibility. She left it to the assembled delegates to determine just how that change would be accomplished and what organizational structures would be put in place

The principal changes that were made in 1901-1903 were:

1. The formation of union conferences as the constituent bodies of the General Conference;
2. The decentralization of much decision-making from the General Conference administration to union conference executive committees;
3. The consolidation of departments of the General Conference and the dissolution of independent incorporated entities that had been operating departments and some institutions;
4. The title of the chief officer of the General Conference was to be "Chairman of the Board" rather than "President. At the 1903 General Conference session the title "President" was reinstated.

### **The Development of Mission as the Major Impetus for Reorganization**

At the time of organization in 1863, mission was a relatively insignificant reason among many given for forming an organized church. But by the time of reorganization in 1901, mission was the preeminent reason for organization. It is abundantly clear that when it came to the need for organization, A. G. Daniells and his associates began with the certainty and imminence of the

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<sup>28</sup>"Talk of Mrs E. G. White, before Representative Brethren, In the College Library, April 1, 1901, 2:30 P.M.," MS 43a, 1901 (emphasis supplied). This manuscript together with MS 43, an edited edition of Ellen White's speech is available in the Ellen G. White Estate Office. The author commends to the careful reader a thorough reading of these manuscripts.

<sup>29</sup>General Conference Bulletin, 1901, 25 (emphasis supplied). Bulletins which report on General Conference sessions are available at the Ellen G. White Research Centre at Avondale College.

return of Jesus Christ. The imminence of the second coming of Christ determined the urgency of the mission.

For those allied with Daniells ecclesiology was more a function of their eschatological and missiological perceptions. The church existed because it had been commissioned to perform a specific task. That task was missionary in nature. The missionary nature of the church was the theological perspective that informed the need for and shape of the structures of the church. Writing to W. C. White in 1903, Daniells stated that “the vital object for which Seventh-day Adventists have been raised up is to prepare the world for the Coming Christ; the chief means for doing this work is the preaching of the present truth, or the third angel’s message of Rev. 14:6-12.”<sup>30</sup>

Because the need for organization arose from a perception of eschatological and missiological necessity, there was no doubt among those who held this view that the structure which they erected was biblically based. They understood that the New Testament affirmed that Christ was returning and that the transmission of the gospel to the world was the primary precondition for his return. With a consciousness of divine providence, they understood that Seventh-day Adventists had been specifically chosen within a precise time reference in order to herald the “everlasting gospel” to all the world. It was a conviction born of commitment to the necessity of a biblical foundation for their faith and practice, including their organizational practice. Daniells reflected the conviction of the denomination when, in 1906, he confidently declared that

“The doctrines we hold not only created our denomination, but our denominational aim, purpose, or *policy*, as well. *This denominational purpose or policy is formed by our view of what the Bible teaches.* It is peculiar to our denomination. It differs from the policies of other denominations and organizations as widely as our doctrinal views differ from theirs.”<sup>31</sup> (Emphasis supplied.)

Some years later, W. A. Spicer was even more emphatic than Daniells. Challenging the church to take up the “world-wide proclamation of the everlasting gospel and the finishing of the work,” he contended that “every principle in the organization of our work . . . is found in the

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<sup>30</sup>A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, May 17, 1903, Incoming Files, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

<sup>31</sup>A. G. Daniells, “A Statement Concerning Our Present Situation—No. 3,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 22, 1906, 6.

Word of God.” Clarence Crisler who was the private secretary of Ellen White from 1901 until 1915, began the foreword to a pamphlet that he wrote the year before her death by categorically stating that “the underlying principles of the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination . . . may be traced in the records of the New Testament.” Both Spicer and Crisler were careful to say that it was “principles” and not forms that were to be found in the New Testament.<sup>32</sup>

Reorganization was undertaken in the first place not because the end was coming, but because there was a “work” to do before the end could come. Reorganization, or for that matter organization, could not be substantiated on the basis of the return of Christ alone. Those who insisted that organizational form be determined only by the imminence of the return of Christ had, in the history of Adventism, often denied the necessity of any form of organization at all. It was the mission policy of the church that in 1905 was described as “the most important feature of our denominational policy,” and it was the urgency associated with that mission that was more the precipitating factor in reorganization than the imminence of the Christ’s return.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Principles Undergirding the Formation of Union Conferences**

At the 1901 General Conference session there were two opposing viewpoints with respect to the reasons for and the shape of reorganization. Alonzo T. Jones and his associates derived their principles of organization more from their individualistic understanding of soteriology and their ecclesiological emphasis. Arthur G. Daniells and his associates derived their principles of organization more from their evaluation of the pragmatic situation of the church with respect to the fulfilment of its missionary task. Having just returned from extended periods of foreign missionary service, Daniells, W. A. Spicer, Ellen G. White, and William C. White were keenly aware of the inadequacy of the existing administrative structure to cope with the needs of the Church’s global missionary enterprise. Their focus was on the reorganization of the

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<sup>32</sup>W. A. Spicer, “Divine Warnings against Disorganization,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 14, 1916, 4; C. C. Crisler, *The Value of Organization: An Historical Study*, (n.p.), 3. See also S. N. Haskell, “Organization—No. 18,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 16, 1907, 4; A. G. Daniells, “Organization as Developed by Our Pioneers,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 21, 1918, 5; and J. L. McElhany, “Principles of Conference Administration,” *Ministry*, March 1938, 5.

<sup>33</sup>A. G. Daniells, “The President’s Address: A Review and an Outlook—Suggestions for Conference Action,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 11, 1905, 8.

administrative structures of the church so that they could be an instrument rather than an inhibitor of mission.

The development of the missionary focus of the church in the years since 1863 certainly did not diminish the need for structures. Daniells contended that the principles which governed the choice of organizational structures should be those which supported the maintenance of the structures, not those which tended to destroy them. In retrospect, he pointed out that the principles which guided the church in its reorganization could not be permitted to lead the church towards disorganization or the abandonment of those "general principles" which in the 1860s had transformed a scattered group of "believers" into a viable denomination.<sup>34</sup>

Daniells would later list the advantages of reorganization and attempts would be made to systematize the theological rationale for reorganization.<sup>35</sup> However, despite repeated reference to "principles," again, no systematic treatment that could be used as a basis for decision making was forthcoming. Without a systematic ecclesiology, there was really no substantial basis upon which the church could build its principles of organization.

Those principles which can be derived from extant records and which appear to have most strongly influenced reorganization and the formation of unions were as follows:

### *1. Decentralization*

For Daniells and his associates decentralization as a principle of reorganization was paramount. In 1902, reflecting with the General Conference committee on what had been accomplished in 1901, Daniells affirmed that "the guiding principle [of reorganization] had been the decentralization of authority by the distribution of responsibility." He added that the application of that principle had led "to the organization of union conferences," and

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<sup>34</sup>A. G. Daniells, "A Statement of Facts Concerning Our Present Situation--No. 9," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 5, 1906, 6.

<sup>35</sup>At the 1903 General Conference session Daniells made reference to some of the "features" of the "work" which were the result of reorganization. See A. G. Daniells, "Some Beneficial Features of Our Organization," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 14, 1918, 6.

representation "on all operating committees" of the "four features of our work--the evangelical, medical, educational, and publishing interests."<sup>36</sup>

At the 1903 General Conference session when he was explaining his understanding of the sentence from Ellen White's 1896 letter that had been used by Jones, Waggoner, and Prescott in an attempt to do away with the presidency of the General Conference, Daniells stated that according to his understanding, Ellen White was saying that the leaders of the church needed to "decentralize responsibilities and details and place them in the hands of a larger number of men."<sup>37</sup> In this sentence he was using the term "decentralize" in the sense of the verb "to delegate." He understood Ellen White to be discussing the need for responsibility to be delegated to several persons rather than being concentrated in just one person--the president of the General Conference.

One of Daniells' favorite expressions (one that he had taken from Ellen White), was that those "on the ground" should bear the burden of administration and have the prerogative of decision making.<sup>38</sup> He saw the implementation of the union structure as the manner in which

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<sup>36</sup>General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Minutes of Meetings of the General Conference Committee, 13 November 1902, 2:30 P.M., Record Group 1, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

<sup>37</sup>"Original Reports and Stenographically Reported Discussions Thereof Had at the Thirty-Fourth Biennial Session of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, April 19, 1901," Record Group 0, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, 75.

<sup>38</sup>Ellen G. White to A. O. Tait, August 27, 1896, Letter 100, 1896, Ellen White Estate; A. G. Daniells to W. T. Knox, May 21, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to E. H. Gates, May 23, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to Edith R. Graham, May 24, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, June 19, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to Members of the General Conference Committee, August 2, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland. In 1895 Ellen White had used the phrase in a testimony to ministers. She said: "Be sure that God has not laid upon those who remain away from these foreign fields of labor, the burden of criticizing the ones on the ground where the work is being done. Those who are not on the ground know nothing about the necessities of the situation, and if they cannot say anything to help those who are on the ground, let them not hinder but show their wisdom by the eloquence of silence, and attend to the work that is close at hand. . . . Let the Lord work with the men who are on the ground, and let those who are not on the ground walk humbly with God lest they get out of their place and lose their bearings" (Ellen G. White, *Special Instruction to Ministers and Workers* [Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1895], 33).

administrative responsibility was being delegated to those "on the ground." The union administrators were, for Daniells, those "on the ground."<sup>39</sup>

Under Daniells' leadership the commitment to the principle of decentralization was never revoked. Decentralization continued to be considered as a vital principle which governed the reorganization of the church. However, the confrontation and polemics over organizational issues that began in mid-1902 and continued for the next seven years (until Jones was removed from church membership in 1909), caused a renewal of emphasis on the need for unity in the church. That desire for unity on the part of the administration of the church meant that the structures of the church became more an instrument of the centralization of authority than they did an instrument of delegation and decentralization of authority. Jones claimed that just such a tendency was built into the very structures themselves. Such was not necessarily the case, but circumstances and the disposition of the leaders themselves did indeed influence just what emphasis was evident in practice.

## *2. Unity and Diversity*

When Daniells discussed the principles which were to govern the reorganization of the church at the 1901 General Conference session and described the benefits which would accrue from the implementation of the union conference plan, he did not particularly mention unity. Certainly Ellen White had done so in the College Library Address and certainly the principle of unity had always been a top priority for Seventh-day Adventists and would continue to be so, but for both Ellen White and A. G. Daniells the immediate priorities were elsewhere. In his single, most significant explanation of the operation of the Australasian Union Conference and its application to the world church, Daniells discussed the simplification of machinery for transacting business, the need to place laborers [administrators] in the field in personal contact with the people, the advantage of having general boards in the field, the necessity of having a general organization which did not concern itself primarily with affairs in the United States, the General Conference as a "world's General Conference," and the necessity for the boards of

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<sup>39</sup>A. G. Daniells to H. W. Cottrell, June 17, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

institutions and the committees of union conferences to be composed of persons familiar with their geographical areas of administration.<sup>40</sup> But he did not even mention the need for unity.

At the second meeting of the General Conference session in 1903, however, Daniells did include unity among the list of advantages and benefits that were realized by reorganization. Having pointed out that reorganization had resulted in a distribution of responsibility and that "work in all parts of the world" was to be dealt with by those who were "on the ground," and that the "details" were to be "worked out" by them; he summarized: "in short, the plan recognizes one message, one body of people, and one general organization."<sup>41</sup>

By 1903, even though decentralization was still vital, it was now a form of a decentralization which was carried out only along 'prescribed lines.' In some respects, particularly in the organization of departments of the General Conference, there was more centralization than decentralization. Apparently some were concerned that things were going back to what had occurred during the years leading up to reorganization.<sup>42</sup>

Ellen White sensed the danger of slipping backwards and placing inordinate stress on the oneness of the organization. Her concern was that such a position would result in the need to centralize authority, resulting in organizational uniformity. Specifically with reference to the publishing concerns of the church, she said:

"No man's intelligence is to become such a controlling power that one man will have kingly authority in Battle Creek or in any other place. In no line of work is any one man to have power to turn the wheel. God forbids."<sup>43</sup>

She was particularly outspoken regarding failure to implement principles that had been introduced in 1901. Writing to Judge Arthur in January 1903, she maintained that as the delegates who had been in attendance at the session returned to their homes, they carried with

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<sup>40</sup>*GC Bulletin*, 1901, 228-29.

<sup>41</sup>*GC Bulletin*, 1903, 17-21.

<sup>42</sup>See "Original Reports and Stenographically Reported Discussions Thereof Had at the Thirty-Fourth Biennial Session of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, 9 April 1903, Record Group 0, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20-20a.

<sup>43</sup>Ellen G. White, "Principles for the Guidance of Men in Positions of Responsibility," Manuscript 140, 1902, Ellen G. White Estate Office.



them into "their work the wrong principles that had been prevailing in the work at Battle Creek."<sup>44</sup>

The context does not indicate exactly what "principles" were being discussed. Although structural changes which she approved of had been made in 1901, apparently the new structures could be abused with the same result as the former structures. Thus Ellen White once again found it necessary to reprove the leaders of the church and its departments because of the tendency to gather power about themselves. Whenever the need to promote unity was prioritized to the extent that it disrupted the maintenance of equilibrium between the principles of unity and diversity, and diversity was not taken into consideration as it should have been, centralization was the result.

During the 1890s both unity and diversity had negative and positive aspects as far as the mission of the church was concerned. Diversity was positive when it enhanced the potential of the church to reach diverse "nations, tongues, and peoples," and led to decentralization of decision-making. It was negative when it caused chaos and confusion, such as was the case with the multiplication of auxiliary organizations. Unity was positive when it bound the church into oneness in Christ. It was negative when it was interpreted to require uniformity and unnecessary centralization of authority.

Unity was necessary in order to encompass the dimensions of the mission of the church. There was no way for the Seventh-day Adventist Church with its emphasis on world-wide evangelization to succeed in that task unless there was unity of purpose, belief, and action. Unity of action required administrative co-ordination that could best facilitate strategic initiatives on a global scale. Further, the functional ecclesiological self-image that was characteristic of the church permitted a centralized administration that could co-ordinate and facilitate the mission of the church. It cannot be denied that, given the church's theological and pragmatic priorities, some centralization was necessary and legitimate. But in 1901 the principle of diversity was more determinative than the principle of unity in the establishment of an additional level of administration, and by delegating some functions which had previously been performed by the General Conference to union conferences. The emphasis was on the need to recognize diversity

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<sup>44</sup>Ellen G. White to Judge Jesse Arthur, January 14, 1903, Letter 17, 1903, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

by decentralization. Past growth had made the recognition of diversity necessary, but projected future growth made provision for diversity imperative.

### 3. *Participation/Representation*

#### Local Conference Participation

Daniells made a concerted effort to carry his emphasis on diversity and decentralization not only into union conferences but also into the local conference setting. Soon after the 1901 General Conference session, he began to promote broad-based participation in the decision-making process by encouraging the state conferences to permit all state church members to participate at their respective state sessions as delegates. Daniells' innovation in this respect was a departure from the system of permitting only duly appointed delegates to vote at the session. Daniells' idea of representation was that any and every person who was in attendance at a local conference session and a member in that conference should be a delegate to the session. He strongly advocated a participatory election process for local conferences at most of the local conference sessions that he attended in 1901, at the Lake Union Conference session (of which he was president), and at the European Union Conference in 1902. In Europe he stated his concept as a principle. He said:

“As to representation, nobody can represent anybody except himself. All should be the Lord's representatives; but nobody can represent some other person, or a church. A church is "fully represented" in a Conference when all its members are present; but nobody can delegate his mind or his conscience to another. If a person is present at any meeting, he does not want somebody else to speak for him.”<sup>45</sup>

It was further reported that while he did not presume "to dictate to any how they should do, he gave it as his conviction that just as in any church meeting all the members present are entitled to speak, so in any Conference all the members present are properly delegates." He added that his plan had "been adopted in quite a number of Conferences in America."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>*Bulletin of the European Union Conference Held in London, May 15-25, 1902, [Hereafter European Conference Bulletin], 2.*

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

Daniells was questioned at length concerning his proposal. Apparently quite a few of the delegates had read Loughborough's article, or were familiar with the early history of the development of the organizational structure of the church and saw pragmatic difficulties with the plan. They were concerned that such a plan could give one district an undue proportional influence and control. Daniells rebuffed such a suggestion on the basis that all were Christians; the implication being that no one member or group of members would exercise arbitrary or political power over others. Daniells countered even further. Given his commitment to mission, he assured the delegates that the principle of numerical representation could not be a satisfactory principle because if it were strictly followed from the local conferences right through to the General Conference, it "would leave the heathen lands wholly unprovided for, and was thus opposed to missionary effort." Each member was to "consider himself as representative of the world, and not merely of his particular locality."<sup>47</sup> He was somewhat inconsistent in his reasoning, however. He was not promoting participatory representation as a principle to be adopted at all levels of church administration. He was only concerned for its adaptation to local conference governance, and, to some extent, to union conferences. At General Conference level, Daniells' ideas of representation, especially with reference to overseas fields, were not at all participatory, nor were they even particularly representative.

#### Union Conference Representation

At the union level of administration, the concept of representation changed from broad-based participation by the people to unilateral representation of the departments and the institutions in the union. The same situation applied at the General Conference. In 1901 Daniells allowed the proposal that the executive committee elect its own chairman because he, along with W. C. White, considered the committee to be a "thoroughly representative one."<sup>48</sup> But the committee selected in 1901 comprised representatives of departments and institutions, with only the union presidents as representatives of "the people" who were supposed to be the authority base in the church. The union presidents were outnumbered seventeen to eight and could very easily be outvoted. Further, as chairmen or executive board members of the institutions within their own

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>48</sup>*GC Bulletin*, 1901, 206.

unions, union presidents were more often focused on institutional concerns than on the concerns of the local churches and the church members. They were, therefore, more likely to be sympathetic to institutional problems and needs than to the needs and concerns of the church at large. The composition of the committee inevitably led to a focus on institutional concerns. In this respect Seventh-day Adventist mission methodology was in accord with that of most mission agencies which depended to a large degree on the establishment of institutions.

### International Representation

The situation with regard to representation of the world-wide constituency of the church was even more troublesome. As the composition of the General Conference executive committee was being discussed in 1901, G. G. Rupert asked if there was any provision for the "different nationalities among us" being represented on the committee. Prescott answered him by quoting Gal 3:28 and assuring the delegates that such was not necessary because "ye are all one in Christ Jesus. The outcome was that the safest course was chosen--only North Americans were elected to the executive committee. But that is not to say that there was no commitment to the principle of representation. Representation was understood as being compatible with the higher principle of decentralization. The church and its members were very much in the mind of Daniells both at the General Conference session in 1901 and in the year that followed. Though he was conscious "more and more" of the "influence and power" that the General Conference had, he was anxious to use that power "rightly" and get into "sympathetic touch" with the "rank and file" of the church constituency. He censured conference officers for failing to consult their constituencies when decisions of importance were to be made. In 1901 he had wanted administration and government in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be "of the people, by the people, and for the people."<sup>49</sup>

#### *4. Decision by Consensus*

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<sup>49</sup>A. G. Daniells to E. A. Sutherland, December 20, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 25, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, June 18, 1901, Incoming Files, Ellen G. White Estate Office; A. G. Daniells to N. P. Nelson, July 17, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Along with his regard for the prerogatives of the members of the church and his desire to implement a participatory decision making process at local conference level, Daniells advocated decision making by consensus in 1901 and 1902, rather than by majority vote. In contrast to his concept of participation which was promoted only on the state conference level, he advocated consensus decision making at every level of administration. Daniells told E. R. Palmer, his associate and confidante in Australia, that at the 1901 General Conference session no measure "received unkind treatment." Some of the proposals advanced were "amended" and a few "dropped out," but it had all been done by "common consent," not by "majority vote." Daniells declared that he had never seen "anything like it."<sup>50</sup>

One may wonder just what Daniells had in mind when he advocated the concept of consensus decision making.<sup>51</sup> Whatever was the case, his attitude changed rapidly, again as a consequence of the confrontation with Kellogg, so that, by the General Conference Session of 1903, vital decisions were being made on the strength of majority vote.<sup>52</sup>

The church had some adjustments to make in the years immediately after 1901. Some of the plans that were made and the methods that were followed were not wise. Daniells himself admitted that. However, the shift from emphasis on participatory representation and consensus

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<sup>50</sup>A. G. Daniells to E. R. Palmer, May 3, 1901, Record Group 9, A. G. Daniells Folder 6, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

<sup>51</sup>Just before his death in 1932, R. A. Underwood made some terse observations with regard to James White's concept of consensus decision making. He said: "Elder James White was what men would call a shrewd leader--He understood the effect of being united--and one of his diplomatic moves was this in all the questions that secured a majority vote in the General Conference or district or otherwise whatever carried by a majority of even a few votes--he got the delegates to agree that it should be reported unanimous--and no opposition was referred to in the report" (R. A. Underwood to L. E. Froom, December 8, 1930, Record Group 58, 1920s-1930s Interpretation Development of Folder, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland). Underwood's punctuation was not precise and his memory was not acute--districts were not introduced into the administrative structure until eight years after the death of James White. However, one wonders how much correlation there was between the practice of White (as recalled by Underwood) to seek unanimity for the sake of the report, and that of Daniells who was not in the "habit of calling for the opposition vote to any measure" (*European Conference Bulletin*, 3).

<sup>52</sup>In the reply to Jones in 1906, it was pointed out that the decision to adopt the new constitution at the 1903 General Conference session was made by majority vote. In fact, all the decisions made at the General Conference session in 1903 were adopted by majority vote. By that time majority vote was the method being consistently followed, despite Daniells stated desire to the contrary less than one year earlier. See *A Statement Refuting Charges Made by A. T. Jones Against the Spirit of Prophecy and the Plan of Organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*, (Washington D.C.: General Conference Committee, 1906), 28. The statement can be found at <http://ellenwhite.org/content/file/statement-refuting-charges-made-t-jones-against-spirit-prophecy-and-plan-organization#document>

decision making to emphasis on more structured representation and majority-vote decision making after the clash with Kellogg and the extended polemics with those opposed to the church structure was indicative of a shift from emphasis on the need for diversity (or decentralization) to emphasis on preservation of unity.

### 5. *Constituent Authority*

In 1901 Daniells intended that the General Conference executive committee should be advisory, not executive. Referring to the plan of organizing unions, he hoped that the General Conference and the Mission Board (which had been integrated into the General Conference executive committee), would be "ultimately . . . quite free from perplexing details." He was convinced that the new plan of organization would enable the committees "to take the position of general advisory boards."<sup>53</sup> Two weeks later he wrote to the members of the General Conference Committee:

“We are glad that the details in the various Union Conferences are being so fully taken over by those who are on the ground. . . . Our hope is that we shall be left almost entirely free to study the large questions of policy affecting the entire field, and to devote our energies to fostering the work in the weak parts of the field, and also the great mission fields in the regions beyond. Thus the general machinery is being reduced to a few simple parts.”<sup>54</sup>

Some were concerned, even so, that too much power was being centralized in the hands of one board. They may have been beginning to question the wisdom of forming departments in the General Conference to replace the auxiliary organizations. Apparently in response, Daniells wrote to Edith Graham, the treasurer of the Australasian Union, that the General Conference executive committee could not possibly be guilty of centralizing because the facts of the matter were that the authority to act was being placed in the hands of "those on the ground." Daniells continued:

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<sup>53</sup>A. G. Daniells to J. J. Wessells, July 15 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

<sup>54</sup>A. G. Daniells to Members of the General Conference Committee, August 2, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

“The General Conference Committee does not propose to deal directly with the affairs in any Union Conference. We propose to interest ourselves in the welfare of every Union Conference, in every line of work. . . . So instead of centralizing our work, we have been distributing it.”<sup>55</sup>

Daniells’ answer to the centralization of power in the General Conference committee was that the committee was not going to make executive decisions. It was going to be a fostering, advisory, board whose interest was co-ordination, not supervision. With Ellen White's advice in mind, no doubt, Daniells was concerned that the General Conference committee should not exercise executive control, but that it should do everything in its power to co-ordinate the administrative functions of the church so as to respect that authority resident in the church membership. With the reforms that were suggested and implemented and with the movement away from centralization of authority, Daniells hailed the events of 1901 as the "beginning of a new era," the beginning of "our last grand march."<sup>56</sup>

By 1903 Daniells was speaking as though he still held the "advisory" concept of the role of the General Conference executive committee. But he was not speaking with the same certainty. At the General Conference session he stated: "As the work is now shaping, the province of the General Conference Committee is of an advisory character to a large extent--not altogether, by any means--and it is of a missionary character or phase."<sup>57</sup> No longer was the role of the General Conference executive committee merely advisory. A change of attitude had taken place. Notice, however, that no change had taken place with regard to the priority of mission. Any changes in the role of the General Conference executive committee with respect to

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<sup>55</sup>A. G. Daniells to Edith R. Graham, May 24, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

<sup>56</sup>A. G. Daniells to E. H. Gates, May 23, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to M. H. Brown, June 17, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

<sup>57</sup>*GC Bulletin*, 1903, 100.

coordination as set over against control were being made with reference to the missionary focus of the committee and the church.<sup>58</sup>

## 6. *Simplicity*

In view of the complication and confusion that had characterized denominational administration in the 1890s, reorganization was perceived as a simplification of the organizational system. In the 1890s Ellen White had advocated simplicity in organization and insisted that the machinery was not to be "a galling yoke."<sup>59</sup> Therefore, when reorganization was being considered in 1901, simplicity was understood to be an essential principle. The principles of representation and distribution of authority were related to the principle of decentralization. So also was the principle of simplicity.<sup>60</sup>

Daniells expressed himself most succinctly on the need for simplicity at the European Union Conference session in 1902. He said: Organization should be as simple as possible. The nearer we get to the end, the simpler will be the organization. I have no idea that we have got to the limit of simplicity.<sup>61</sup>

In 1903 simplicity was still described as a desirable principle of reorganization. In his "Chairman's Address" Daniells used the integration of the auxiliary organizations into General

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<sup>58</sup>Francis Wernick has somewhat astutely made reference to Daniells' 1901-1902 concept of the role of the General Conference as an impartial, advisory, fostering board. Wernick observed, however, that since that time, the General Conference has enlarged its role from a coordinating, counselling body to "more of a supervisory role." Wernick advised that "we need to rethink the role of the General Conference." He added: "We do need a central office to preserve unity, to give coordination, and to give counsel. . . . Supervision versus coordination needs further study and definition" (Francis W. Wernick, "Philosophy of the Role of the General Conference" [paper prepared for the committee on the role and function of denominational organizations, 1984], Record Group 500, Monographs Series, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland). Note Wernick's agenda. The preservation of unity heads the list of concerns. It has been that way ever since the mid-1902 crisis.

<sup>59</sup>*GC Bulletin*, 1893, 22-24; Ellen G. White, "Overbearing Control Reproved," Manuscript 43, 1895, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

<sup>60</sup>In early 1902 Daniells said: "I believe that we have thrown away a great amount of money and energy in trying to keep useless machinery running. I find that the less complex we make our work, and the more we center our efforts on the simple straight lines of missionary evangelization, the heartier is the response of the people, and the greater is the manifestation of life in the enterprise" (A. G. Daniells to C. H. Jones, April 21, 1902, Incoming Files, Ellen G. White Estate Office).

<sup>61</sup>*European Conference Bulletin*, 2.



Conference departments as an example of the application of the principle of simplification.<sup>62</sup> However, it was admitted that in some regards, the machinery was still too complicated. Simplicity was proving to be an elusive quality in organization and it was to remain so. Especially was that to continue to be the case in those parts of the world where the administrative machinery that may have been necessary in North America or Europe was just "too complicated."<sup>63</sup>

### 7. *Adaptability*

The principle of adaptability was, in 1901, almost too obvious to need extended treatment. The very fact that the church was willing to enter into a process of radical reorganization is sufficient to indicate that priority was given to adaptability in organizational structures. Further adaptations in 1903 indicate that the commitment to adaptability remained. In 1902, in addition to his remarks at the European Union conference regarding simplicity, Daniells insisted

“We see many things differently from what we did ten years ago, and I expect that we shall see still more. As new light comes, we ought to advance with it, and not hold rigidly to old forms and old methods. Because a thing is done a certain way in one place is not reason why it should be done in the same way in another place, or even in the same place at the same time.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>*GC Bulletin*, 1903, 18.

<sup>63</sup>At the 1903 General Conference session Daniells quoted Ellen White with reference to the simplification of machinery. He noted that she had declared that in "some parts of the work it is true, the machinery has been made too complicated" ("Original Reports and Stenographically Reported Discussions Thereof Had at the Thirty-Fourth Biennial Session of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, 9 April 1903," Record Group 0, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, 75b). Even in 1909 Ellen White found it necessary to stress that "simple organization and church order" were set forth in the New Testament and that the Lord had ordained such for "the unity and perfection of the church" (Ellen G. White to the Leading Ministers in California, December 6, 1909, Letter 178, 1909, Ellen G. White state Office).

<sup>64</sup>*European Conference Bulletin*, 2.

Further attention could be given to Ellen White's attitude to adaptability and the possibility of subsequent structural change.<sup>65</sup> Apart from Ellen White, W. A. Spicer was probably the most vocal advocate of the importance of allowing adaptability in the form that organization took in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was Spicer, an experienced missionary, who was responsible as much as anyone for the success of the missionary enterprise of the church in the early years of the twentieth century. With his wide exposure to different cultures and situations, he repeatedly said:

*“The details of organization may vary according to conditions and work, but ever as God has called his church together there has appeared in it the spiritual gift of order and government, the spirit that rules in heaven.”*<sup>66</sup> (Emphasis supplied.)

### **Learnings which may be Instructional for the Contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church.**

By way of conclusion, the major learnings derived from this paper which may be instructional for the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church are:

1. When a major discussion is needed and a decision to be made it is necessary for people of influence to speak up and participate in the discussion rather than keeping silent.
2. It is possible for leaders to take too much responsibility for decision making on their own shoulders and not listen to others or give them opportunity to participate in the process.
3. The committee system when utilized properly can be a corrective for centralization. Ellen

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<sup>65</sup> For example, soon after the General Conference session of 1901, Ellen White wrote to A. G. Daniells, regarding the work among the “colored people” in the South. She admonished Daniells to be flexible in his administration because of the unique needs of the South. The church was not to become “narrow” and confined by “regular lines.” Different methods of organization and approach were necessary in culturally diverse situations. For administration to be tied to an inflexible predetermined policy which could not adapt to diverse cultural and sociological needs was, for Ellen White, an abuse of administrative prerogative. See Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells, Letter 65, June 30, 1901, Ellen G. White Estate Office. The very same day, Ellen White wrote to her son Edson, who was working in the southern part of the United States. Edson was inclined to be too adventurous in his innovations. Whereas Daniells, the administrator, had to be counseled to allow change and innovation in a different socio-cultural milieu, Edson had to be cautioned not to be too hasty. Ellen White wrote: “You need now to be able to think and judge with clear discrimination. Great care must be exercised in making changes which differ from the old-established routine. Changes are to be made, but they are not to be made in such an abrupt manner that you will not carry the people with you. You who are working in the South must labor as if in a foreign country. You must work as pioneers, seeking to save expense in every way possible. And above all, you must study to show yourselves approved unto God” (Ellen G. White to J. Edson White, Letter 62 June 30, 1901, Ellen G. White Estate Office).

<sup>66</sup>W. A. Spicer, "The Divine Principle of Organization," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 25, 1909, 5.

White declared that “God would not have many minds the shadow of one man’s mind,” but that “in a multitude of counselors there is safety.”<sup>67</sup> Group think is not to be in evidence in the decisions of the Church.

4. The holding of position of responsibility by any individual, does not in itself guarantee the best opinions or the best decisions by that individual.
5. Position does not grant irrevocable power.
6. Financial crisis can be a powerful catalyst for change.
7. A commitment to a global mission which arises from belief in the imminence of Christ’s return is the major catalyst for efficient and effective organization. Organization must serve mission, not vice versa.
8. The determining principles of organization are derived more from an evaluation of the pragmatic situation of the church with respect to the fulfilment of its missionary task than from systematic theological considerations. A pragmatism which takes into account biblical teaching and contextual imperative has been the *modus operandi* of the Church.
9. Decentralization was the most pervasive principle of reorganization. As a corrective to centralization, as much as possible and practical, decisions are to be made by those “on the ground.”
10. Confrontation and polemics in the Church result in emphasis by leaders on the need for unity. In this context the structures of the church become more an instrument of the centralization of authority than an instrument of delegation and decentralization of authority. Circumstances and the disposition of the leaders themselves have considerable bearing on which is evident in practice.
11. No one person is to become such a controlling power that he/she has too much influence on the direction that the Church takes on any issue.
12. Both unity and diversity can have negative and positive impacts on the mission of the Church. Diversity is positive when its acceptance enhances the potential of the church to reach diverse "nations, tongues, and peoples," and decentralized decision-making is practiced. It is negative when it is taken too far, appropriate organizational boundaries are not respected, and it results in syncretism. Unity is positive when it binds the Church

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<sup>67</sup>Ellen G. White to John Harvey Kellogg, Letter 7, April 26, 1886, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

into oneness in Christ. It is negative when it is interpreted to require uniformity and unnecessary centralization of authority.

13. Given the church's theological and pragmatic priorities, some centralization is necessary and legitimate. But in 1901 the principle of diversity was more determinative than the principle of unity in the establishment of unions, and by delegating some functions which had previously been performed by the General Conference to union conferences. The emphasis was on the need to recognize diversity by decentralization.
14. In the reforms of 1901 Daniells affirmed that it was not the intention of the General Conference committee to deal directly with the affairs of any Union Conference. Daniells' answer to the centralization of power in the General Conference committee was that the committee was not going to make executive decisions. It was going to be a fostering, advisory, board whose interest was co-ordination, not supervision. By 1903 Daniells was speaking as though he still held the "advisory" concept of the role of the General Conference executive committee. But in practice, no longer was its role merely advisory. A change of attitude had taken place.

Adaptability and flexibility are vital for the fulfilment of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Not everything is to be done the same way everywhere. When there is no direct "Thus saith the Lord," the Church must be flexible if it is to be true to its reason for existence.