

JULY 2017

Welcome

to this month's issue of the General Conference *Executive Committee Newsletter*. We are already midway through the year and just about ten weeks away from Autumn Council when we meet together again as the GC Executive Committee.

In this month's issue of the newsletter, the feature article addresses the important topic of church authority. In the article, Dr. George Rice, a former associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate, reviews historical events that led to church organization and analyzes within their historical context comments made by Ellen White regarding the authority of the Church.

Pastor Mark and Ernestine Finley share a brief but powerful report showing how Christ's methods of reaching communities are still relevant and effective today. After prayerful study, the Finleys have developed a new, wholistic community outreach seminar which has been very successful in reaching people for Christ in their home state of Virginia and now in England, where it was recently presented not far from London.

In a report featuring Dr. Larry Blackmer, vice president for education in the North American Division, we learn how Dr. Blackmer, who serves as a connection between the Adventist church and a prestigious accrediting agency, shares books by Ellen White with many educators outside of our faith.

Finally, you won't want to miss the interesting news notes in the "Did You Know?" sidebar, along with an important announcement and resources link for the upcoming "End It Now" special Sabbath.

Please feel free to share this newsletter with those within your circle of influence who you believe would appreciate reading the material contained within this publication.

May you be blessed in your continued service for the Lord!

—DR. ELLA SIMMONS
*General Vice
President,
Seventh-day
Adventist Church*



CHURCH AUTHORITY: GOD-ORDAINED OR HUMAN HIERARCHY?

BY GEORGE E. RICE, PH.D., *Retired Associate Director of the Ellen G. White Estate*

Periodically throughout the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, individuals have arisen to criticize various aspects of the Church. These criticisms often include Church leadership, its organization and structure, its doctrines, its claim to be (according to Rev. 12:17) God's remnant Church, and decisions the Church has made during its worldwide business meetings known as General Conference Sessions.

Often, these critics move Spirit of Prophecy statements from their context, producing "evidence" that the Church is no longer to be trusted, and that the voice of God can no longer be heard in the decisions of the General Conference.

Because these charges are resurfacing today, it seems appropriate to review historical events that led to church organi-

zation, as well as comments made by Ellen White regarding the authority of the Church, and specifically of the General Conference.

BETTER ORGANIZATION NEEDED

Following 1844, what little organization existed in Adventist churches was congregational in nature. Each church and emerging company was a law unto itself. Belief in the Second Advent, the Sabbath, the high priestly work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, and the Spirit of Prophecy held these scattered entities together in reasonable unity. To accomplish their world mission, however, the Advent believers needed better organization.

In the early 1850s God made known His will concerning the organization of the

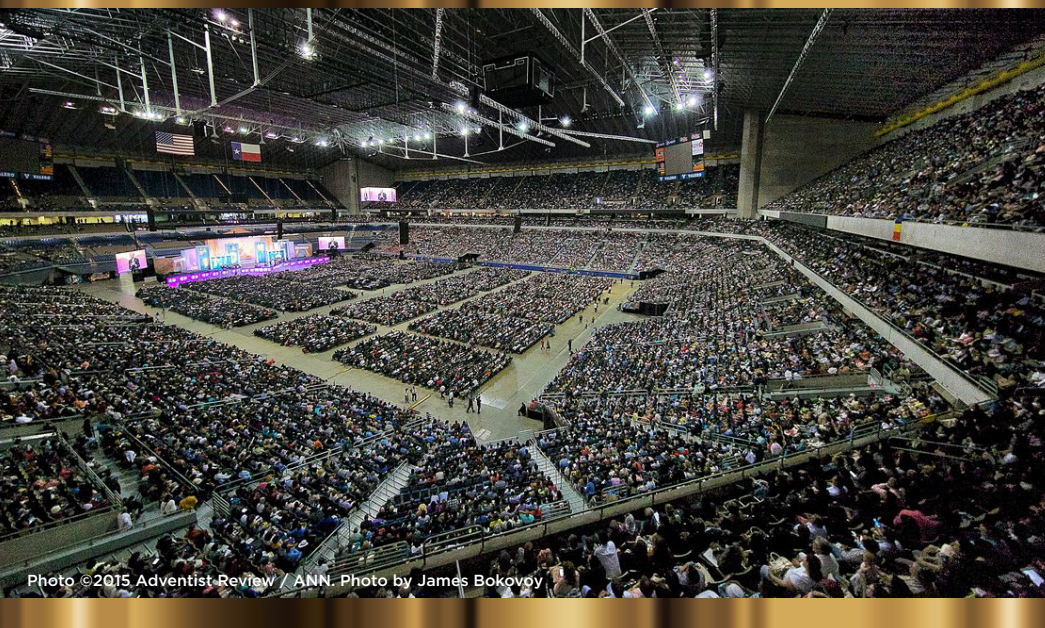


Photo ©2015 Adventist Review / ANN. Photo by James Bokovec

growing movement.

“We sought the Lord with earnest prayer that we might understand His will and light was given by His Spirit that there must be order and thorough discipline in the church—that organization was essential. System and order are manifest in all the works of God throughout the universe. Order is the law of heaven, and it should be the law of God’s people on the earth.

“We had a hard struggle in establishing organization. Notwithstanding that the Lord gave testimony after testimony upon this point, the opposition was strong, and it had to be met again and again. But we knew that the Lord God of Israel was leading us, and guiding by His providence.”¹

As James and Ellen White spoke of the merits of organizing and urged the brethren toward it, fears were expressed that if the Advent believers entered into formal church organization, they would become part of Babylon. Ellen White pointed out in 1861 that even without a formal organization, these fears had already been realized:

“August 3, 1861, I was shown that some have feared that our churches would become Babylon if they should organize; but those in central New York have been perfect Babylon, confusion.”² She warned, “Unless the churches are so organized that they can carry out and enforce order, they have nothing to hope for in the future; they must scatter into fragments.”³

In 1901, as Ellen White looked back at these early years, she wrote: “As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in new fields, for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unwor-

thy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable.”⁴

VOICE OF GOD

After the organization of the General Conference in 1863, Ellen White spoke of the authority of the church as being the voice of God. In 1875, she published a letter written to a brother who prided himself in his independence: “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.”⁵

In another letter, she said: “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 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.”⁶

Following the 1888 General Conference session there was a decided change in Ellen White’s attitude toward the voice of the General Conference. Understanding the dynamics of what happened during the 1890s and the circumstances under which Ellen White wrote can help eliminate the confusion that exists today.

ABUSE OF POWER

At the 1888 General Conference, where A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner presented their messages on righteousness by faith, O. A. Olsen was elected president. The opposition to these messages on the part of certain

“

“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.”

—ELLEN G. WHITE

key individuals is well known. Olsen chose two men from among those who were not in sympathy with these messages and made them his key advisers— A. R. Henry and Harmon Lindsay. Because of their various responsibilities in the General Conference and *Adventist Review* office, and because of their strong personalities, they were able to sway the various boards and committees to follow their line of thinking.

Repeatedly Ellen White wrote to Olsen, warning him against the counsel of these men. They were not only sweeping Olsen along with them, but they were influencing others to make wrong decisions.

The following problems were isolated by Ellen White during Olsen’s tenure:

- 1) Decisions voted by boards were deliberately not carried out by those who had the responsibility for their implementation.⁷
- 2) Olsen treated Henry and Lindsay as representative men and sent them throughout the field to give counsel, men “to whom the people shall listen and show respect as the voice of God in the conference.”⁸
- 3) These men exercised their authority as “kingly power.”⁹
- 4) While connected with the *Adventist Review*, these men dealt in an un-Christlike way with those who were to receive royalties for their writings.¹⁰
- 5) Henry and Lindsay refused to be led by the Holy Spirit and turned away from obeying God’s word.¹¹
- 6) Decisions for the whole work were made by a handful of people under the influence of these men.¹²

Although in 1875 Ellen White considered the General Conference and the decisions made by this body as “the voice of the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth,”

(Continued on page 3...)

less than 20 years later her attitude was quite different.

Taking into consideration all of the abuses that existed at the center of the work, Ellen White was forced to say: "This is the reason I was obliged to take the position that there was not the voice of God in the General Conference management and decisions. Method and plans would be devised that God did not sanction, and yet Elder Olsen made it appear that the decisions of the General Conference were as the voice of God. 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."¹³

It is not clear in the 1875 statement (*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 492) whether Ellen White is speaking of the General Conference in session, or whether she is referring to the daily and weekly

decisions that were necessary for the advancement of the work. Her statements after 1888 about the decisions of the General Conference not being the voice of God seem to reflect the daily and weekly decisions that were made. It is in this context that Elders Henry and Lindsay would have had the greatest influence. As noted above, Ellen White said in 1891, "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."¹⁴

But does this mean that God has rejected His people, and that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is no longer His representative on earth? Not at all.

ADVENTIST CHURCH NOT BABYLON

During the early 1890s, at the very time Ellen White was saying that the voice of the General Conference was no longer to be considered the voice of God, A. W. Stanton published the tract "The Loud Cry! Babylon Fallen!" Stanton proclaimed the Seventh-day Adventist Church as Babylon, and said the loud cry of Revelation was to God's true people to

come out of her.

Upon reading Stanton's tract, Ellen White picked up her pen and wrote: "I feel deep sorrow of heart that [Stanton] did not plead with God, 'Bless me, O God, bless now I see my error. Thou art communicating to Thy people the richest truths ever committed to mortals. These people are not Babylon; for Thou hast given to them righteousness and peace; and Thy joy, that their joy may be full.' ...

"How could [Stanton] come from that meeting where the power of God was revealed in so marked a manner [the 1893 General Conference session], and proclaim that the loud cry was that the commandment-keeping people were Babylon? ...

"I have no such message to give; but one of an entirely different character....

"Beware of those who arise with a great burden to denounce the church. The chosen ones

who are standing and breasting the storm of opposition from the world, and are uplifting the downtrodden commandments of God to exalt them as honorable and holy, are indeed the light of the world. ...

"When anyone is drawing apart from the organized body of God's commandment-keeping people, when he begins to weigh the church in his human scales, and begins to pronounce judgment against them, then you may know that God is not leading him. He is on the wrong track."¹⁵

COMMITTEE TO INCLUDE WORLD FIELD

As the church gathered for the General Conference session of 1901, Ellen White stressed the urgency of reorganization: "That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be—that is past. What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle."¹⁶

In this reorganization, she saw the prospects of breaking the power of those she considered to be unfaithful stewards.

(Continued on page 4 ...)



DID YOU KNOW?

- More than 1,400 people were baptized on the Philippine island of Mindoro (SSD) following a groundbreaking evangelistic drive spearheaded by Adventist World Radio working through Total Member Involvement. Thirty pastors and 19 laypeople from Japan participated in the evangelistic meetings held from June 9-24. Read more at: <http://bit.ly/BaptisminMindoro>
- Oakwood University's (NAD) select choir, the Aeolians, won the title of "Choir of the World" at the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod in Wales. Each year, more than 4,000 performers attend the festival, often attracting as many as 50,000 visitors. Read Oakwood University's news story here: <http://bit.ly/oakwoodaeolians>
- An Adventist youth miraculously survived a black bear attack at an Adventist youth camp in Colorado (NAD). When interviewed by news media, the young man gave God credit for sparing his life. Read his first-hand account and watch video at: <http://bit.ly/bearattacksurvivor>
- An Adventist Hospital in Rio de Janeiro leads Brazilian liver transplant ranking. The Silvestre Adventist Hospital (SAD) has a transplantation rate of 83%, one of the highest in the world. The South American Adventist News Agency (ASN) spoke with Dr. Eduardo de Souza Martins Fernandes, head of the General Surgery Service of the Hospital and coordinator of the Liver Transplantation Program. The interview is available in Portuguese at: <http://bit.ly/brasilhospital>
- More than 100 leaders from the Inter-American Division (IAD) visited the Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD) to see the mission challenges and learn about foreign cultures. The group visited NSD headquarters and other church institutions near Seoul, Korea. They also visited major cities in NSD, including Hong Kong, Beijing, Xian, Seoul, and Tokyo. Read more at: http://www.nsdadventist.org/news/news_1_read.html?no=776

Her hopes were realized. The General Conference Committee was enlarged to include representation from the world field. Elder A. G. Daniells was elected president. Independent entities were brought under the leadership of the General Conference, and departments were established to guide the work of these entities, including the medical work. Union conferences were established, and the day-to-day decisions of running a world work were given to the local and union conferences.

Looking back at this historic session, Ellen White wrote, "Every time I think of that meeting, a sweet solemnity comes over me,

“

"[God] has appointed that His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time."

—ELLEN G. WHITE



and sends a glow of gratitude to my soul."¹⁷

However, some months later God revealed to her that He had intended to do much more at the 1901 General Conference session. The realization that the people of God had not fully attained what God desired brought grief to her heart. She describes what God had revealed to her and the agony of disappointment she felt in "What Might Have Been."¹⁸

Be that as it may, the organizational flaws that had allowed certain men to operate in such a way that led Ellen White to say that she could no longer consider the decisions of the General Conference as the voice of God had been corrected.

"GREAT CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE"

Ellen White's son Edson, smarting under some unjust dealings he had endured at the hands of the *Review* prior to 1901, sought

compensation. To him his mother wrote: "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. ...

"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. ...

"A terribly unjust course has been pursued in the past. A want of principle has been revealed. But in pity to His people God has brought about changes. ...

"The course of action which before the conference might have been a necessity is no longer necessary; for the Lord Himself interposed to set things in order. He has given

His Holy Spirit. I am confident that He will set in order the matters that seem to be moving wrong."¹⁹

From 1901 on, Ellen White spoke positively regarding the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In 1905, she wrote: "We cannot now step off the foundation that God has established. We cannot now enter into any new organization; for this would mean apostasy from the truth."²⁰

In 1908: "I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventists the world over, God has called us a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. He has appointed that His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time."²¹

In 1909, she spoke again about the authority of the General Conference when in session: "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."²²

In 1913, she wrote: "I am encouraged and blessed as I realize that the God of Israel is still guiding His people, and that He will continue to be with them, even to the end."²³

Just prior to Ellen White's death W. C. White said: "During our conversation, I told her [Lida Scott] how Mother regarded the experience of the remnant church, and of her positive teaching that God would not permit this denomination to so fully apostatize that there would be the coming out of another church."²⁴

In considering the historical evidence of how Ellen White viewed the authority of the General Conference, four points emerge from our study:

1. When two or three men dominated the decision-making process of the General Conference in the 1890s, Ellen White could not consider the voice of the General Conference as the voice of God.

(Continued from page 4 ...)

2. Precisely at this time (in the 1890s) she defended the church against those who would destroy it by calling it Babylon and urging God's people to forsake it.
 3. God will not allow the Seventh-day Adventist Church to so fully apostatize "that there would be the coming out of another church." Rather, this church will go through to the end.
 4. Following the re-organization of the Church in 1901, Ellen White again viewed the General Conference, particularly the General Conference in Session, as the "highest authority on earth," and its decisions respected.
-
1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1962) p. 26.
 2. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 270.
 3. Ibid.
 4. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 26.
 5. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 417.
 6. Ibid., p. 492.
 7. Ellen G. White manuscript 33, 1891.
 8. Ellen G. White letter 2, 1894.
 9. Ellen G. White manuscript 43, 1901.
 10. Ellen G. White letter 7, 1896.
 11. Ellen G. White letter 4, 1896.
 12. Ellen G. White manuscript 33, 1891.
 13. Ibid.
 14. Ibid.
 15. Ellen G. White manuscript 21, 1893.
 16. Ellen G. White, in General Conference Bulletin, April 3, 1901.
 17. White, in Review and Herald, Nov. 26, 1901.
 18. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 104-106.
 19. Ellen G. White letter 54, 1901; also in A. V. Olson, *Thirteen Crisis Years: 1888-1901* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), pp. 199, 200.
 20. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), book 2, p. 390.
 21. Ibid., p. 397.
 22. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 260, 261.
 23. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943), pp. 437, 438.
 24. Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982), vol. 6, p. 428.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- I am working for the Adventist Media Center as a Hindi radio speaker. There are 400 million people in India who speak Hindi, most of whom are Hindu. I need your prayers. I came out of darkness. Thanks.
—Pastor Morris Madho, Pune, India
- I am a pastor in the South Zambia Conference and a member of the GC Executive Committee. I have been accepted into the Andrews University MA in Religion online program. Please pray for me. God bless you.
—Pastor Ian Chiinya

If you have a prayer request you would like to include in the newsletter, send it to us at ECN@gc.adventist.org



CHRIST'S METHODS STILL RELEVANT

A REPORT FROM MARK AND ERNESTINE FINLEY

This past year Teenie and I have been carefully and prayerfully studying how to more effectively integrate the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions of life in our community outreach initiatives. At our Living Hope Center in the upscale Dominion Valley Community in Virginia, we conducted eighteen comprehensive, total health outreach programs with outstanding success this past year.

Nearly 200 community members attended these programs and many of them are now exploring the deeper meaning of their faith journey as we study the Bible together either personally or in small groups.

We were eager to see how these principles would work internationally so were delighted to accept an invitation from Jacques Venter, pastor of the Stanborough Park Church

in Garston, England outside of London, to pilot our Managing Life's Stress Seminar this past May.

Managing Life's Stress deals with the four basic aspects of stress management:

1. Stress and your **body**
2. Stress and your **mind**
3. Stress and your **emotions**
4. Stress and your **spiritual life**

In each class Teenie lectured on one of the physical modalities to reduce stress such as regular exercise, a wholesome, natural diet and adequate rest and then I made a presentation on the impact of stress on the four dimensions of life. We also developed small

groups with table hosts to facilitate discussion on the topics presented.

We sensed the moving of the Holy Spirit in each class. The audience sat in rapt attention during seminar sessions and eagerly participated in the group discussions.

Although our advertising was limited more than one hundred people regularly attended the sessions with a significant number being guests or visitors. A number of our guests expressed the desire to continue exploring deeper spiritual truths in personal Bible studies or seminars.

We are convinced that Christ's methods are still relevant today and that as we meet people's felt needs they will be open to our discussing their eternal needs. Jesus' caring, compassionate, people centered ministry still touches hearts and changes lives today.

ADVENTIST EDUCATION LEADER INFLUENTIAL IN PRESTIGIOUS AGENCY

The National Council of Private School Accrediting (NCPSA) is the largest and most prestigious K-12 nongovernmental accrediting agency in North America.

It comprises 17 private school accrediting associations, including Catholic, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran, Montessori, Assemblies of God, for-profit, and more. The organization has been in existence for almost 20 years and was founded by three associations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA). Its mission is to represent private-school accrediting associations in setting standards of quality and continuous school improvement.

As a past president and a current executive committee member, Larry Blackmer, vice president for education in the North American Division, connects NCPSA and the Adventist Church.

Blackmer has shared the book *Education* by Ellen G. White and the Conflict of the Ages series with many of the leading members of the group, who report using the material for sermons and worldview lectures in their respective organizations. NCPSA board members often request to hold their meetings at the



Larry Blackmer (second from right), vice-president for education (NAD), and select members of the NCPSA met with U.S. Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, in Washington, D.C.

General Conference office, telling Blackmer that they “love the food!” They also describe the Adventist education system as “one to be envied and emulated.” Its most recent board meeting on June 5-7, 2017, was held at the Adventist Church’s world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

During their June meeting, the officers of NCPSA were invited to meet with the current U. S. secretary of education, Betsy DeVos. At the meeting Blackmer shared the recent Adventist education CognitiveGenesis research, which demonstrates the quality of Adventist education in particular and private schools

in general. The group also emphasized the value of private schools to the greater good of the United States. One in every 10 students in the U.S. attends a private school, and private schools account for nearly 25 percent of all schools in the country. Private schools save the state governments almost US\$7.2 billion a year by educating almost 2 million students at no cost to the states.

Secretary DeVos expressed affirmation and support for private education and said she appreciated the depth to which NCPSA ensures continuous school-improvement activities.

enditnow®
Adventists Say No to Violence

SABBATH
AUGUST 26



End It Now is an important program of the Seventh-day Adventist Church focusing on raising awareness and ending domestic violence and the many forms of abuse.

While obtaining reliable worldwide statistics is difficult, figures from various United States government agencies indicate that in the U.S. every 9 seconds a person is abused. Furthermore, 1 in 4 women have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner, and more than 15 million children witness domestic violence each year in the U.S. alone.

A report of child abuse is made every 10 seconds, and according to the U.S. Department of Justice, 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys will be sexually assaulted by the time they are 18. Every day, more than 4 children, most of whom are under the age of 4, die because of child abuse.

Now is the time to act. Plan now to get your church involved in raising awareness and ending domestic violence and sexual abuse!

Learn more and download free resources at:
www.enditnow.org