

# What Can We Learn from the Administrative/Authority Crisis (1901-1903)

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# The Need for Reorganization

**Numerical Growth**

**Institutional Growth**

**Increasingly International Church**

**Financial Challenges**

**The Need for Decentralization and Centralization at the Same Time**

**Dangers of “Kingly Power”**

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# Numerical Growth

**1863----3500**

**1900---66547 (75767 Sabbath keepers)**

**1900 ---1892 Churches and 437 companies**



# Institutional Growth

**Health Institutions**

**Educational Institutions**

**Publishing Institutions**

**Numerous Societies and Associations**

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# Increasingly International Church

not a complete list

**Germany-2093**

**Australia -1878**

**Russia -1079**

**Jamaica - 961**

**Great Britain – 862**

**Sweden – 748**

**Brazil - 697**

**Norway – 683**

**Central Europe – 674**

**Denmark – 626**

**New Zealand – 497**

**South Africa 425**

**Argentina - 386**

**British Guiana – 229**

**Trinidad - 220**

**Chile -160**

**Lesser Antilles – 158**

**Central America - 136**

**Finland – 60**

**India – 39**

**Japan – 24**

**Iceland – 18**

**Egypt – 10**

**Palestine - 10**

**China – 8**

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# Financial Challenges

**Although the World-wide tithe reached half a million in 1900 (510,258.97)**

**The office of the General Conference had a deficit at the beginning of 1901 \$41,589.11**

**Institutions were in the business of borrowing money**

**In 1901 Institutional dept was \$1,250,000.00**

**Inability to send out new Missionaries (1897-1899 no new work abroad opened)**

**“There is abundant means. Seventh-day Adventists have plenty of money, but it does not all belong to the Church. That is the trouble. ... And it is a question worth asking, whether, if my money belongs to the world, whether I belong to the church.”**

Sermon of Elder A.T. JONES, March 29, 1903.



# The Need for Decentralization and Centralization at the Same Time

**Mission has suffered, because all the Important Decisions needed to be approved by the Central Office**

**Those with extended foreign missionary experience (Arthur G. Daniells, Ellen G. White, William C. White, W.A. Spicer etc.) were advocating a need for change in structure**

**Institutions, Societies and Associations were not directly administered by the General Conference or State Conferences, but were legally incorporated,  
and had their own governing boards/committees**



# Dangers of “Kingly Power”

**The Question of Authority was always in the air from the beginning**

**Decision making Power in the hands of few man and sometimes only one**

**GC Executive Committee: 1863-3  
1883-5  
1887-7  
1889-9  
1893-11  
1899-13**

**Authoritarian Style of some Leaders. See George Butler’s  
concept of Leadership and the harsh response from E. G. White**

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“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...

Elder Butler, we think, has been in office three years too long and now all humility and lowliness of mind have departed from him. He thinks his position gives him such power that his voice is infallible.”

1888 183.1-2



“The president of the General Conference, if he is walking in the counsel of God, will not encourage his brethren to look to him to define their duty, but will direct them to the only Source that is untainted with the errors of humanity. He will refuse to be mind and conscience for others...” 9MR 140.3



“The Lord is the only one upon whom we can with safety depend, and He is accessible in every place and to every church in the Union. To place men where God should be placed does not honor or glorify God. Is the president of the General Conference to be the God of the people? Are the men at Battle Creek to be regarded as infinite in wisdom? When the Lord shall work upon human hearts and human intellects, principles and practices different from this will be set before the people. Cease ye from man.” TM 375.2



“Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and say what plans shall be followed.” 13MR 192.3



# Church → a multidimensional Entity

**1. Spiritual, Theological Entity**

**2. Social, Physical Entity**



Church, as a spiritual entity → the  
body of Christ

Church, as a physical entity → an  
organization



Church, as a spiritual entity → the  
Head of the Church: Jesus Christ

Church, as a physical entity → the  
leader: President/Executive Com.



If Christ is the Head of the Church, does He work through the leader(s) only, or through every member of the Body?





# IN SEARCH OF A BALANCE

**Christ the Head of the  
Church**

**One Man Leadership  
Kingly Power**

**A.T. Jones  
E.J. Waggoner  
W.W. Prescott**



**G.I. Butler  
GC President  
1871-1874  
1880-1888  
And others...**

**E. G. White**

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“O how Satan would rejoice to get in among this people, and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential, ...

We want to hold the lines evenly, that there shall be no breaking down of the system of regulation and order. ...

We are living in a time when order, system, and unity of action are most essential.” E. G. White SpTA03 60.2



“I learn that it is proposed by some of our brethren to do away with the organization of some at least of the branches of our work. No doubt what has led them to propose this step is that in some of our organizations the machinery has been made so complicated as really to hinder the work. This, however, is not an argument against organization, but against the perversion of it.” Unpublished Testimony. GCDB February 27, 1899 Par. 3



“The Lord has not placed any one of His human agencies under the dictation and control of those who are themselves but erring mortals. He has not placed upon men the power to say, You shall do this, and you shall not do that. But there is a power exercised in Battle Creek that God has not given, and He will judge those who assume this authority. ...

Far less of man’s power and authority should be exercised toward God’s human agencies.

Brethren, leave God to rule.” TM 347.3



James White:

“Organization was designed to secure unity of action, and as a protection from imposture. It was never intended as a scourge to compel obedience, but, rather, for the protection of the people of God. Christ does not drive his people. He calls them...



Human creeds cannot produce unity. Church force cannot press the church into one body. Christ never designed that human minds should be molded for Heaven by the influence merely of other human minds. "The head of every man is Christ." His part is to lead, and to mold, and to stamp his own image upon the heirs of eternal glory



However important organization may be for the protection of the church, and to secure harmony of action, it must not come in to take the disciple from the hands of the Master.”

*James White, ORGANIZATION AND DISCIPLINE, R&H  
January 4, 1881*



# In Words of James White

**Unsanctified  
Independents**

**“Between the  
two extremes,  
of church  
force, and  
unsanctified  
independence,  
we find the  
grand secret of  
unity and  
efficiency in  
the ministry  
and in the  
church of God”  
*R&H Jan 4, 1881***

**Church Force**

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**“What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle.”** E. G. White GCB April 3, 1901 Par. 25

**“There must be a renovation, a reorganization; a power and strength must be brought into the committees...”**

E. G. White GCB April 3, 1901 Par. 37

**“Now I want to say, God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line.”** E. G. White GCB April 3, 1901 Par. 34



# Key Decisions Made in 1901

- 1. Creation of Union Conferences/Missions as the Constituent Bodies of the General Conference**
- 2. Auxiliary organizations to become Departments of the Church/GC; Unions; Local Conferences...**
- 3. The Title “President” to be Replaced with “Chairman of the Executive Committee**
- 4. Executive Committee to have 25 members. Chairman to be Chosen by the Executive Committee**



“Who do you suppose has been among us since this Conference began? Who has kept away the objectionable features that generally appear in such a meeting? Who has walked up and down the aisles of this Tabernacle?— The God of heaven and his angels. And they did not come here to tear you in pieces, but to give you right and peaceable minds. They have been among us to work the works of God, to keep back the powers of darkness, that the work God designed should be done should not be hindered. The angels of God have been working among us.” GCB April 25, 1901 – GCB April 25, 1901



“During the General Conference the Lord wrought mightily for His people. Every time I think of that meeting, a sweet solemnity comes over me, and sends a glow of gratitude to my soul. We have seen the stately steppings of the Lord our Redeemer. We praise His holy name, for He has brought deliverance to His people.” R&H, November 26, 1901.

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# 1902 –Struggle for Power



**1901 – 78188** Sabbath Keepers **69356** Members in organized Churches and Companies

**1902 – 73522** Sabbath Keepers **67150** Members in organized Churches and Companies



“The result of the last General Conference has been the greatest, the most terrible, sorrow of my life. No change was made. The spirit that should have been brought into the whole work as the result of that meeting was not brought in because men did not receive the testimonies of the Spirit of God. As they went to their several fields of labor, they did not walk in the light that the Lord had flashed upon their pathway, but carried into their work the wrong principles that had been prevailing in the work at Battle Creek.” 13MR 122.3



# Key Decisions Made in 1903

- 1. All Institutions, Including the Medical Ones, to be Owned by General Conference/Union/State Conference/Organized Mission Field**
- 2. Office of the President Reinstated**
- 3. Officers Should be Elected by the Delegates in Session**



**“To the leaders in the medical missionary work I must say that no one is to claim kingly power over God’s heritage in the medical missionary work.”** E. G. White GCB April 10, 1903 Par. 7

**“The kingly power formerly exhibited in the General Conference at Battle Creek is not to be perpetuated. The publishing institution is not to be a kingdom of itself.”** E G. White GCB April 10, 1903 Par. 13





“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, ...In the church of God no one is to set himself up in kingly power and authority.” E. G. White

BTS May 1, 1903 Par. 5



Opening Prayer by C. A. Irwin at the GC Session, March 27, 1903 at the S. D. A. Church, Oakland, Calif., 2:30 pm:

“Gracious God, Our merciful heavenly Father, we thank thee that under circumstances of so much mercy, we are permitted to assemble once more in the capacity of a General Conference. ... While we can see mistakes as we look back over the past two years, that we have done those things that have displeased the Spirit of God in various instances, yet, thou hast not forsaken us; thou art still our God; thou art our Father, and thou art still inviting us to come to thee; and we would come to thee, our Father, now, today, with full purpose of heart.

...

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**We would come today surrendering ourselves anew and afresh, yielding up every will and way of our own, so that the Lord can take us and use us as he will. ... We know that we are not sufficient for the work that lies before us unless the Lord shall take the lead of our minds, unless the Lord shall take charge of every mind, unless our being is fully surrendered to thee, we will make mistakes, and mar the precious cause of God in our hands;**



but our Father, while we have sinned and come short of thy glory, while thou has been called to reprove us for our wrong principles and for many things that have displeased and grieved thy Holy Spirit, yet, dear Father, we are so glad today, that thou art still inviting us to come unto thee, and that if we will yield ourselves, if we will put



away from us the wrong things that have been grievous to thy Spirit and have turned the face of our heavenly Father away from us in a measure, then thy face will shine upon us; thy countenance upon us reconciled, and, O, Father in heaven, help in the beginning of this conference to make that sort of confession, to have that spirit of humility of heart, that spirit of humbling ourselves before thee –may it take possession of every one of us...



Father in heaven, we know that we have not always done this; we know that thou hast spoken to us times without number through the spirit of prophecy; thou hast made plain the path of duty before us, but we have held to our own opinions; we have allowed ourselves to be controlled by our own minds and judgments, and as a result, disaster has come to portions of thy work; but, O, our Father, is not this the time when we shall be willing to yield up all our own ideas and opinions when they conflict with the mind of God, and take just what he says, and be led and guided by that? ...”

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# Lessons Learned:

- 1. Structure Serves Mission**
- 2. You Can Have *De Jure* a Committee System, but *De Facto* a Presidential System**
- 3. It is Only if we have *De Jure* and *De Facto* a Committee System that “Kingly Power” can be Avoided**
- 4. It is of Utmost Importance to Make Sure, that Committee Members are Trained and Provided the Opportunity to Speak Freely, Being Guided By Christ-the Head of the Church**



# Lessons Learned:

**5. It is Only, if the Leaders and Committee Members are Connected to Christ, that Consensus can be Achieved. Holy Spirit Does Not Contradict Himself**

**6. The Danger of “Kingly Power” Exists at All Levels of Church Organization and Church Institutions**

**7. The Danger is always in the Extremes. Avoid them!**

**8. Decisions Can Be Changed. What is Good Today, Maybe Not So Good Tomorrow**





# Lessons Learned:

**9. It is Not About Decentralization or Centralization.  
It is About Finding the Right Balance**

**10. Struggle for Power and Theological heresies do not  
contribute to the growth and well being of the Church.**

**11. Decisions of the General Conference, made in an  
assembly of representatives from all parts of the earth,  
should be respected**



“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.” GW 490.1



“Let none entertain the thought, however, that we can dispense with organization. It has cost us much study, and many prayers for wisdom that we know God has answered, to erect this structure. It has been built up by His direction, through much sacrifice and conflict. Let none of our brethren be so deceived as to attempt to tear it down; for you will thus bring in a condition of things that you do not dream of. In the name of the Lord, I declare to you that it is to stand, strengthened, established, and settled.” E. G. White, GCB April 10, 1903 Par. 17



**“We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”** GCDB, February 20, 1899. Par. 16



- Materials:

### *Primary Sources:*

- \*Minutes from GC meetings 1901-1903
- \*E.G. White Writings, R&H publications, etc.

### *Secondary Sources:*

- \*Barry David Oliver, SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future, 1989
- \*George R. Knight, Organizing to beat the Devil. The Development of Adventist Church Structure, 2001
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- \*G.T. NG, The Perils of Kingly Power, 2017
- \*Zorislav Plantak, Ethical Analysis Of Abuses Of Power In Christian Leadership – A Case Study Of “Kingly Power” In The Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2017

