

2. THE CRISIS OF AUTHORITY IN THE SDA CHURCH: MISINTERPRETATION OF THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

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2015 GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION



Arise! Shine! Jesus is coming!

MOTION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHURCH AUTHORITY

WHEREAS, The Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms that “God has ordained that the representatives of His Church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference Session, shall have authority”

THE MOTION TO BE VOTED ON

THEREFORE, “After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G. White, and the reports of the study commissions, and after your careful consideration of what is best for the church and the fulfillment of its mission, is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No?”

RESULTS



 SAN ANTONIO 2015
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
Arise! Shine! Jesus is coming!



Vote Count:

Yes -	977
No -	1,381
Abstain -	5
TOTAL	2,363

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION 2018 YEAR-END MEETING RESPONSE

*to the Regard for and Practice
of General Conference Session and
General Conference Executive
Committee Actions
November 6, 2018*



NAD RESPONSE TO THE 2018 ANNUAL COUNCIL

**We recognize Christ
as the head of the
church (Col 1:18).**



NAD RESPONSE TO THE 2018 ANNUAL COUNCIL

We are guided by the Bible as our only creed, the Holy Spirit who inspired and interprets it, the writings of Ellen G. White that shine light on it, and a resulting spirit of Christlike forbearance.



NAD RESPONSE

The GC document moves us away from the principles behind the 1903 reorganization, endorsed by Ellen G. White, which decentralized denominational authority.



NAD RESPONSE

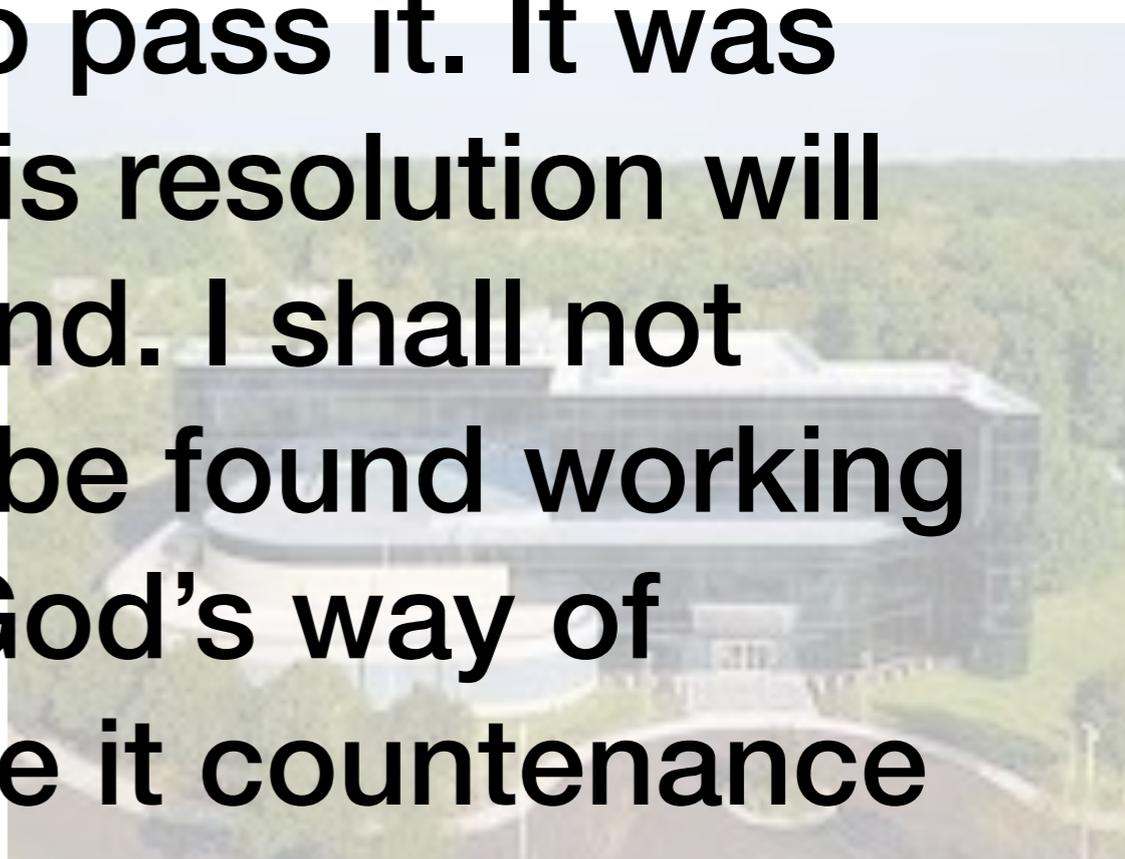
The voicing of our objection is in agreement with the 1877 General Conference voted action, which allows for questioning any General Conference vote “shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience”

(Review and Herald, October 4, 1877, p. 106).



NAD RESPONSE

Ellen G. White, in response to an 1888 General Conference Session vote she had counseled against, later wrote, “It was not right for the conference to pass it. It was not in God’s order, and this resolution will fall powerless to the ground. I shall not sustain it, for I would not be found working against God. This is not God’s way of working, and I will not give it countenance for a moment” (Letter 22, 1889, pp. 10-11).



NAD RESPONSE

We believe the church should take heed of this counsel at this moment in our history.



PRESENT PROBLEM

Confusion about what Ellen White wrote concerning authority in the SDA Church

Some argue that her views on the authority of the General Conference Session changed

Observation: We need to look at all her statements on the General Conference and Authority before coming to a final conclusion.



THE 1875 TESTIMONIES

Ellen White to Charles Lee:

“The word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body.” (3T428)

THE 1875 TESTIMONIES

Ellen White to George Butler:

“I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered. Your error was in persistently maintaining your private judgment of your duty against the voice of the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth. . . . You did not seem to have a true sense of the power that God has given to His church in the voice of the General Conference.”

THE 1875 TESTIMONIES

Ellen White's position in 1875 is plain.

“one man's mind, one man's judgment, is not sufficient to be trusted.” (3T445)

Do not give to one man that “authority and influence which God has invested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference.” (3T493)

It is “the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth.” (3T492)

WHAT IS MEANT BY “GENERAL CONFERENCE”?

Today: Adventists would probably refer it to the permanent overarching organization and world headquarters.

Church Organization 1901 - Present

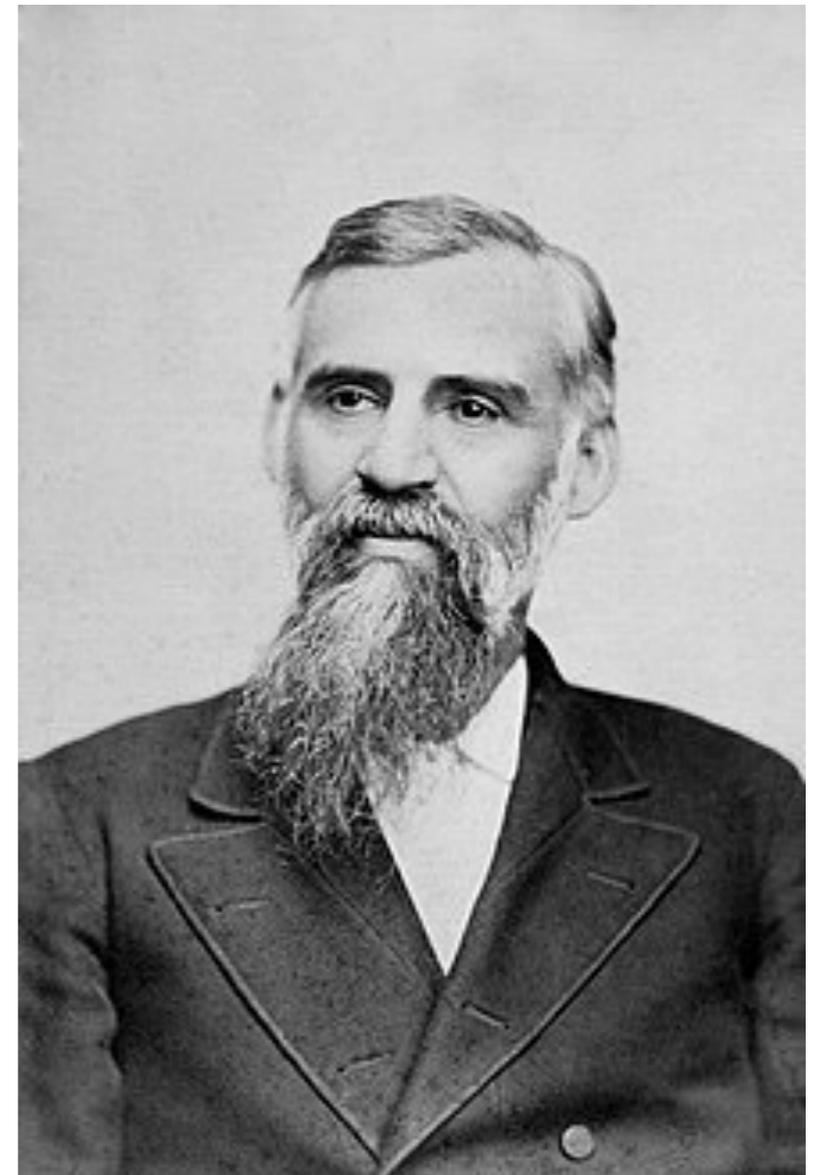


WHAT IS MEANT BY “GENERAL CONFERENCE”?



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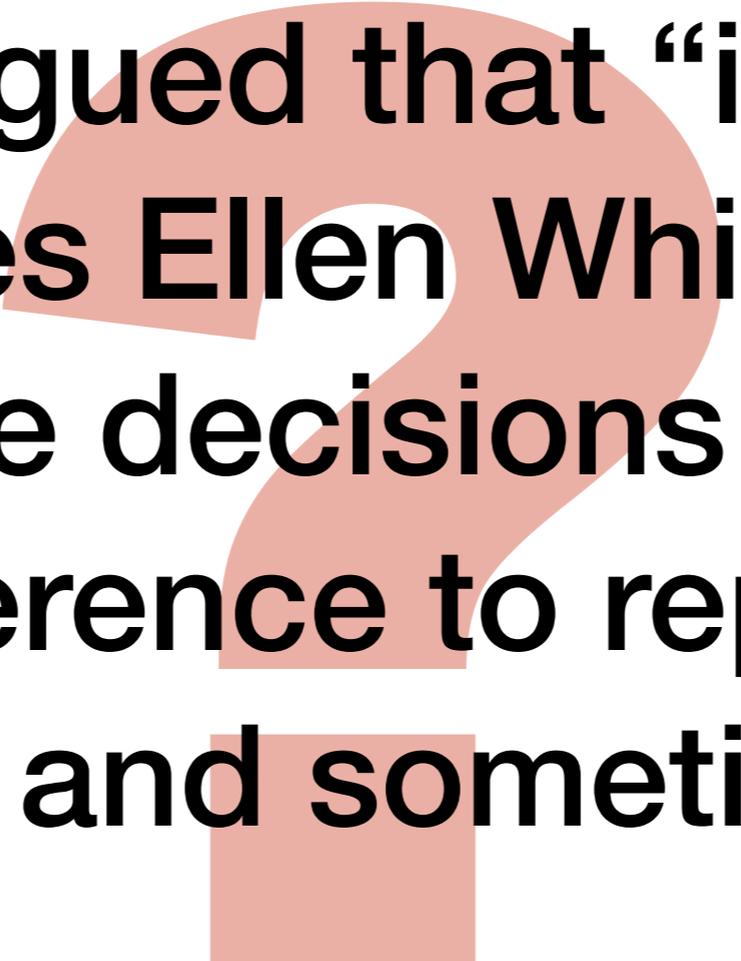
This fits with Ellen White’s comments: It is negative about individual exercise of authority, and positive about it being exercised by the Church as the collective body of believers.



WHAT IS MEANT BY “GENERAL CONFERENCE”?

E. G. White’s statements of the 1890s.

Some have argued that “it is clear that sometimes Ellen White considered the decisions of the General Conference to represent God’s leading and sometimes she did not.”



WHAT IS MEANT BY “GENERAL CONFERENCE”?

The context of White's statements makes it clear, however, that her concern was with claims to exercise authority by one man, or (in the 1890s) by a small group, rather than the entire body of Adventists.

WHAT IS MEANT BY “GENERAL CONFERENCE”?

This becomes clear if we distinguish between different meanings of “General Conference” in the 1890s:

- 1. The GC administration (the president and permanent staff around him)**

WHAT IS MEANT BY “GENERAL CONFERENCE”?

This becomes clear if we distinguish between different meanings of “General Conference” in the 1890s:

2. GC Executive Committee (which in this time was tiny)

3. The GC Session

WHAT IS MEANT BY “GENERAL CONFERENCE”?

This becomes clear if we distinguish between different meanings of “General Conference” in the 1890s:

The “GC,” in the first two senses, she denied represented the voice of God, rather than the GC Session.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN GC ADMINISTRATION AND GC SESSION

Ellen White clearly distinguished between the GC administration and the GC Session. In 1891, she wrote “that there was not the voice of God in the General Conference management and decisions. Methods and plans would be devised that God did not sanction, and yet [the GC president] made it appear that the decisions of the General Conference were as the voice of God.”

DISTINCTION BETWEEN GC

ADMINISTRATION AND GC SESSION

The problem, then, was with **those managing the GC: or GC administration**, as we would now say. The control was concentrated in just a few hands, rather than a representative body, as Ellen White points out:

“One or more men gave assent to measures laid out before the board or councils, but all the time they decided they would have their own way and carry out the matter as they chose.” Her verdict was:

“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.”(MS 33, 1891)

DISTINCTION BETWEEN GC ADMINISTRATION AND GC SESSION

Ellen White uses the term “General Conference” when speaking of the body in Battle Creek (the site of the headquarters of the GC administration). There were only seven members of the GC Committee at this time and evidently the committee could too easily be sidetracked, as a result.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN GC ADMINISTRATION AND GC SESSION

In a testimony written in 1895, Ellen White writes, “As for your book committee, under the present administration, with the men who now preside, I would not entrust to them, for publication in books, the light given me of God **As for the voice of the General Conference, there is no voice from God through that body that is reliable.**” (MS 57, 1895)

DISTINCTION BETWEEN GC ADMINISTRATION AND GC SESSION

Writing from Australia to friends in the US, in the middle of 1898, Ellen White strongly states that “it has been some years since I have considered the **General Conference as the voice of God,**” later regretting that she does not have a “stronger faith . . . in Battle Creek and the working of the cause of God in the institutions there.” (Letter 77, 1898)

ELLEN WHITE'S 1901 STATEMENTS



ELLEN WHITE'S 1901 STATEMENTS

At the 1901 GC she called for a major structural reform. She made an an appeal: “What we want now is a reorganization.”

“There are to be more than one or two or three men to consider the whole vast field.”

Later she adds: “Now I want to say, God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. ” (“General Conference Proceedings,” April 2, 1901, pp. 25, 26)

ELLEN WHITE'S 1901 STATEMENTS

“God wants us to come to the place where we shall be united in the work, where the whole burden will not be laid on two or three men.” (MS 43a, 1901)

ELLEN WHITE'S 1901 STATEMENTS

Notice that there is no contradiction between her counsels of 1875 and her views in 1901.

Just as in 1875 she had cautioned against granting too much authority to individuals, so in 1901 she warns against unrepresentative authority, exercised by individuals (“kingly power”) or tiny groups of leaders (“two or three men”). It is the abuses of such leadership, she had reproved repeatedly in the 1890s. Now in 1901 she makes clear cannot claim to be “the voice of God.”

THE 1901 REORGANIZATION OF THE OF THE SDA CHURCH

It included the creation of unions throughout North America as well as in Australia and Europe

Conferences became members of union constituencies, with unions now becoming the constituent members of the General Conference.

THE 1901 REORGANIZATION OF THE OF THE SDA CHURCH

Unions had considerable authority delegated to them to avoid over-concentration of authority in too few hands

THE 1901 REORGANIZATION OF THE OF THE SDA CHURCH

There was a major reform of the GC Executive Committee. White had urged that “a power and strength must be brought into the committees” by **increasing** the membership. (“General Conference Proceedings,” April 2, 1901, p. 25)

The GC Executive Committee’s membership was **increased to 25**, virtually doubled. Every union president became an ex officio member of the GC Executive Committee.

THE 1903 STATEMENTS AGAINST “KINGLY POWER”

In the summer of 1903, she counseled the leaders of the Adventist medical work against what she repeatedly calls “kingly power” — referring not to GC administration but rather to Kellogg’s tendency to centralize authority in his own person, which was one of Ellen White’s longstanding concerns about Kellogg. (8T232-33)



THE 1903 STATEMENTS AGAINST “KINGLY POWER”

Later in 1903, in a reflection prompted by coverage in mainstream news media of the dispute between church leaders and Kellogg, White returned to earlier themes, repudiating the notion that **one man**, wielding **“kingly power,”** could “control the whole body” (8T 236-37)



1909 STATEMENT ON AUTHORITY

Ellen White: “I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man.

“Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed.” (9T260)

1909 STATEMENT ON AUTHORITY

“But when in a General Conference the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered.

“Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence contrary to the decision of the general body.” (9T260)

1909 STATEMENT ON AUTHORITY

Ellen White: “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.” (9T260)

1909 STATEMENT ON AUTHORITY

“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.” (9T260)

ELLEN WHITE'S CONSISTENT VIEWS ON AUTHORITY IN 1875, 1901, 1903 AND 1909

Ellen White's position in 1909 is consistent with those stated in 1875, 1901, and 1903.

In the 1875 testimonies she stresses that no one leader could embody the Church on earth or represent God's will.

ELLEN WHITE'S CONSISTENT VIEWS ON AUTHORITY IN 1875, 1901, 1903 AND 1909

In 1909 she repeated her view of “the mind and judgment of one man” but extends it now to include “a small group of men.” They, nor any “one man,” should be given “the full measure of authority and influence God has vested in His church.” (9T 260)

1911 STATEMENT ON AUTHORITY

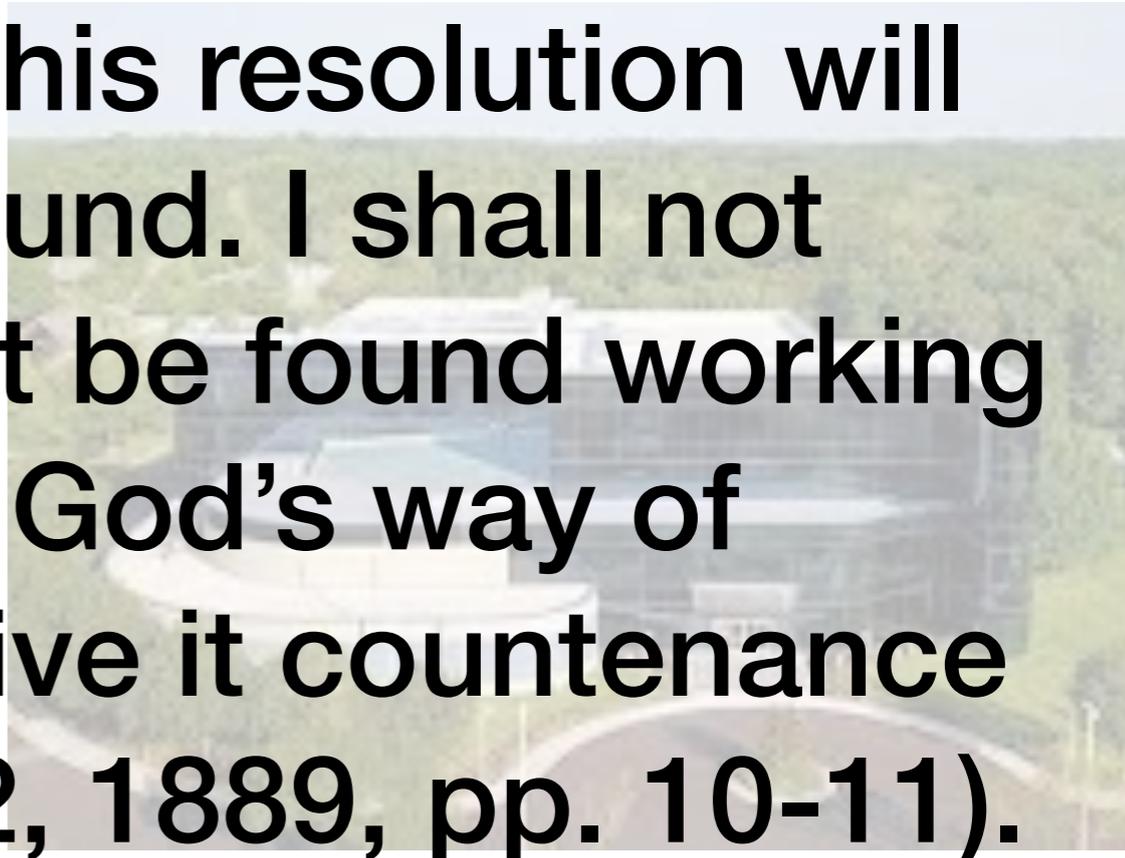
“God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to **one of His servants** an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give **one man** a knowledge of His will for the entire church, while the church — Christ’s body — is left in darkness. . . .

1911 STATEMENT ON AUTHORITY

“God has invested His church with special authority and power, which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising; for he who does this despises the voice of God.” (*Review and Herald*, May 11, 1911)

WHAT ABOUT THIS NAD ARGUMENT ?

Ellen G. White, in response to an 1888 General Conference Session vote she had counseled against, later wrote, “It was not right for the conference to pass it. It was not in God’s order, and this resolution will fall powerless to the ground. I shall not sustain it, for I would not be found working against God. This is not God’s way of working, and I will not give it countenance for a moment” (Letter 22, 1889, pp. 10-11).



THE RESOLUTION THAT ELLEN WHITE OBJECTED TO

Ellen White referred here “to training all licentiates [in the canvassing work] before permitting them to enter the ministry. This was to be an absolute rule, and notwithstanding all I had to say against this resolution, it was carried.” (Letter 22, 1889)

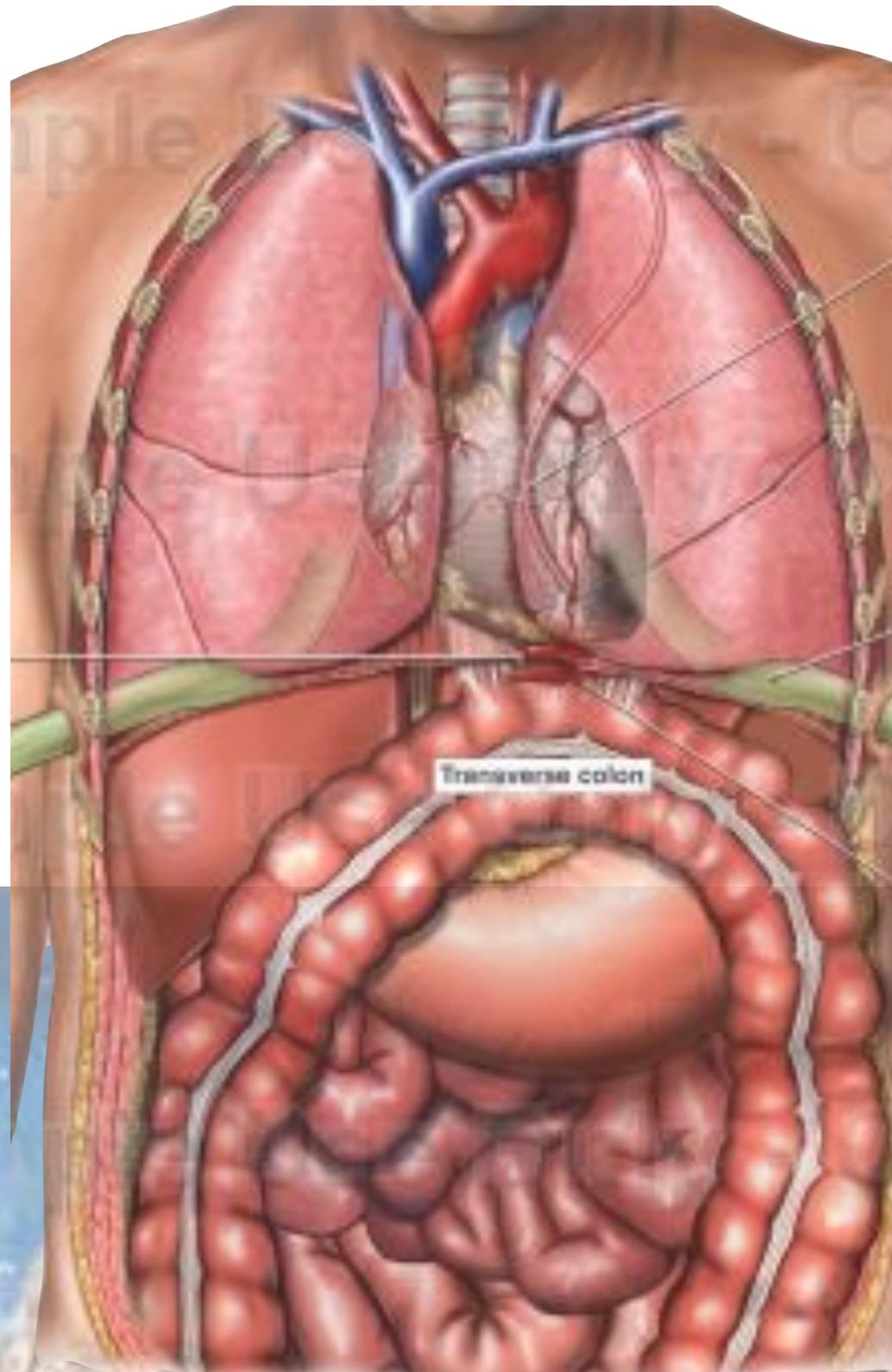
NO UNILATERALISM

Unilateral action on important matters is contrary to the biblical model and to longstanding Adventist practice.

Significant decisions should be made after prior consultation with other levels of church structure and should be in harmony with decisions already taken by the wider body of believers.

This approach helps to guard against distraction and division, promoting unity in church life and an emphasis on mission.

UNILATERALISM IS UNBIBLICAL



UNILATERALISM IS UNBIBLICAL

The divisiveness present within unilateralism is inconsistent with the biblical model of the church as a body. When Paul uses the metaphor of the body for the Church, he describes different organs of the body criticizing each other and imagining that they can be independent of each other.

The Bible emphasizes harmony of the operation of all the organs of the body. Its different parts are to work together as a whole with all the members in sympathetic relationship with one another. Paul's conclusion was that there should be no schism in the body" or church, "but that the members should have the same care for one another." (1 Cor. 12: 25).

UNILATERALISM IS UNBIBLICAL

Furthermore, Paul calls on believers to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21 NIV).

Although there can be a diversity and difference of opinion or practice in the body of believers; this should not separate them to the point of a schism or split.

What matters is how believers respond to a diverse situation. The believers’ response should be the need for mutual submission to each other to preserve unity and excludes unilateral action.



ELLEN WHITE OPPOSES UNILATERALISM

Ellen White maintains that collective and collaborative (rather than independent or unilateral) decision-making processes should be the norm in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, because the Church is one body.

In a testimony written in 1880s (first published in 1889), she states firmly: “One point will have to be guarded [against], and that is individual independence.” She wrote, “Each laborer should act with reference to the others. Followers of Jesus Christ will not act independently one of another. . . . In union there is strength.” (5T 535-35)

ELLEN WHITE OPPOSES UNILATERALISM

In 1885, she urged Adventist leaders in Europe: “All should make it a point to counsel together No one worker has all the wisdom that is needed. There should be a comparing of plans, a counseling together.” (Letter 66, 1886)



ELLEN WHITE OPPOSES UNILATERALISM

Twenty years later she counseled church leaders who disagreed about how to work for different national and ethnic groups; writing of divisions arising from ethnic differences, she encourages them to “put all this aside.”

She charges them to “work together in harmony . . . forgetting that they are Americans or Europeans, Germans or Frenchmen, Swedes, Danes, or Norwegians.”

She warned, “We are not to seek to maintain a peculiar identity of our own . . . which will separate us from our fellow laborers.” (9T187)

APPLICATION OF ELLEN WHITE'S COUNSELS



APPLICATION OF ELLEN WHITE'S COUNSELS

Representation and Decision-Making

Now every 5 years at the GC Sessions more than two thousand delegates from every union throughout the world do business.

In addition to several hundred local conferences and missions, a total of 135 unions and 13 divisions, each with defined authority in its territory and its own executive committee, are making collaborative decisions. Unions also have constituencies, which have their own sessions.

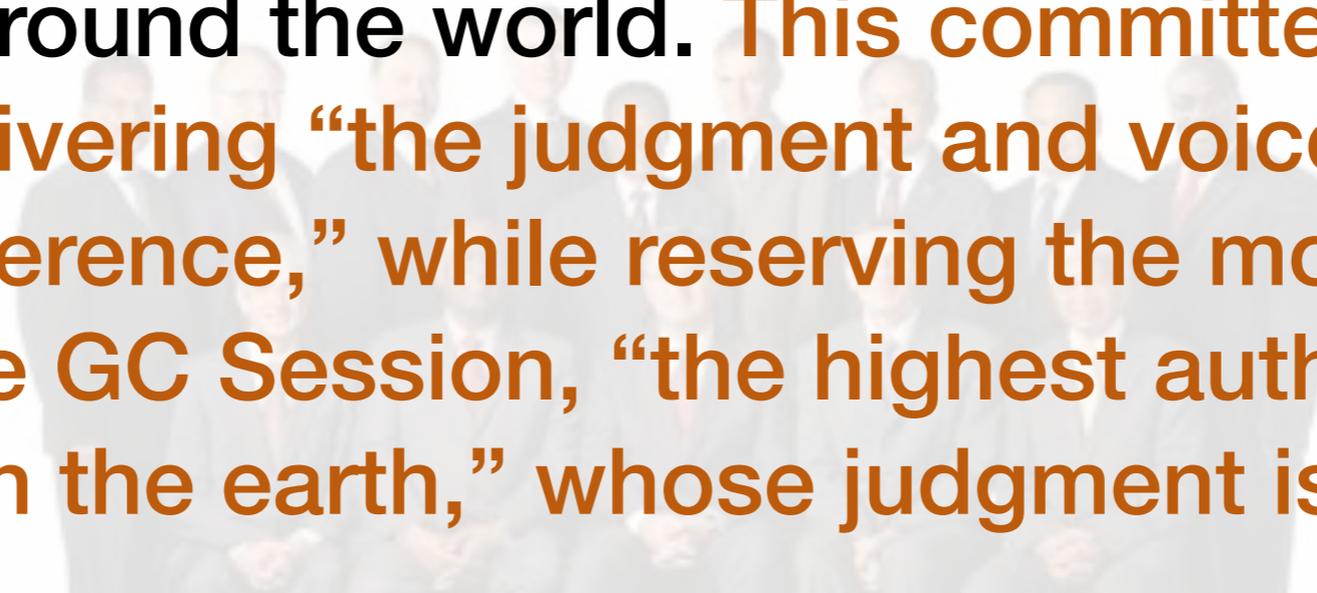
APPLICATION OF ELLEN WHITE'S COUNSELS



APPLICATION OF ELLEN WHITE'S COUNSELS

Between GC Sessions, the GC Executive Committee, which is a body representative of the world Church, meet regularly. Every union president sits on this Committee, which additionally includes frontline workers and lay people from every division, and youth representation.

Its several hundred members are of both genders and are drawn from around the world. **This committee takes major decisions delivering “the judgment and voice of the General Conference,” while reserving the most important matters to the GC Session, “the highest authority that God has upon the earth,” whose judgment is definitive.**



INVALID PRACTICES



INVALID PRACTICES

Invalid Ordinations

Criteria for ordination, as noted earlier, have always been set by the world Church: initially by GC Sessions, but by the GC Executive Committee since 1930 when responsibility for the selection of candidates for ordination was devolved to unions, who would apply the criteria set by the world Church. (“Unions and Ordination,” GC Secretariat Statement, Aug. 2015)

INVALID PRACTICES

For the first sixty years of the denomination's history, women regularly received ministerial licenses, while since 1981 they have been commissioned as ministers, but women have never been ordained to gospel ministry, which the Seventh-day Adventist Church has consistently regarded as qualitatively different to licensing or commissioning.



Minerva Jane Chapman (1829-1923) Treasurer of the General Conference 1877-1883 - Maud Sisley Boyd (1851-1937) Pioneer missionary - Nellie Druillard ...

INVALID PRACTICES

Invalid Ordinations

The 1881 GC Session briefly debated a subcommittee's proposal to allow the ordination of women, but referred it to the GC Executive Committee, where it died.

INVALID PRACTICES

The issue did not come to a Session again until 1990. That year's GC Session considered at length whether or not to permit female pastors to be ordained and did more than decline to change the status quo; it took a definite action: "we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry". (For the 55th (1990) Session action July 11, 1990, see GCC Minutes, 1990:1039-40)

INVALID PRACTICES

1995
Proposals came to both the 1995
and 2015 GC Sessions to allow
regional variation of the gender-
limited policy, but both were
rejected.

2015

INVALID PRACTICES

Invalid Ordinations

It is incorrect to assert that there is nothing in denominational policy to stop unions from ordaining females to gospel ministry.

Faiths!

INVALID PRACTICES

1995

Such ordinations have been explicitly disallowed by a GC Session action in 1990, a decision reinforced by two other GC Session votes in 1995 and 2015.

2015

**Today's issue is about Church
Authority:**

**Has the General Conference
Session the highest authority
in the SDA Church?**

OPPOSITION TO THE GC COMPLIANT DOCUMENT

**The North American Division with
the Columbia and Pacific Unions
continue to ordain females**



OPPOSITION TO THE GC COMPLIANT DOCUMENT

**Trans European Division with
some Scandinavian Unions are
abolishing ordination**



OPPOSITION TO THE GC COMPLIANT DOCUMENT

**Inter European Division with the 2 German
Unions reject the Compliance document**



OPPOSITION TO THE GC COMPLIANT DOCUMENT

South Pacific Division



OPPOSITION TO THE GC COMPLIANT DOCUMENT

**Keep in mind that these Divisions
make up barely 10% of the SDA
World Church membership.**

BASIS OF THEIR JUSTIFICATION OF REJECTING THE GC SESSION AS GOD'S HIGHEST AUTHORITY ON EARTH

**These entities have misinterpreted
Ellen White's statements on the
authority of the General Conference.**

BASIS OF THEIR JUSTIFICATION OF REJECTING THE GC SESSION AS GOD'S HIGHEST AUTHORITY ON EARTH

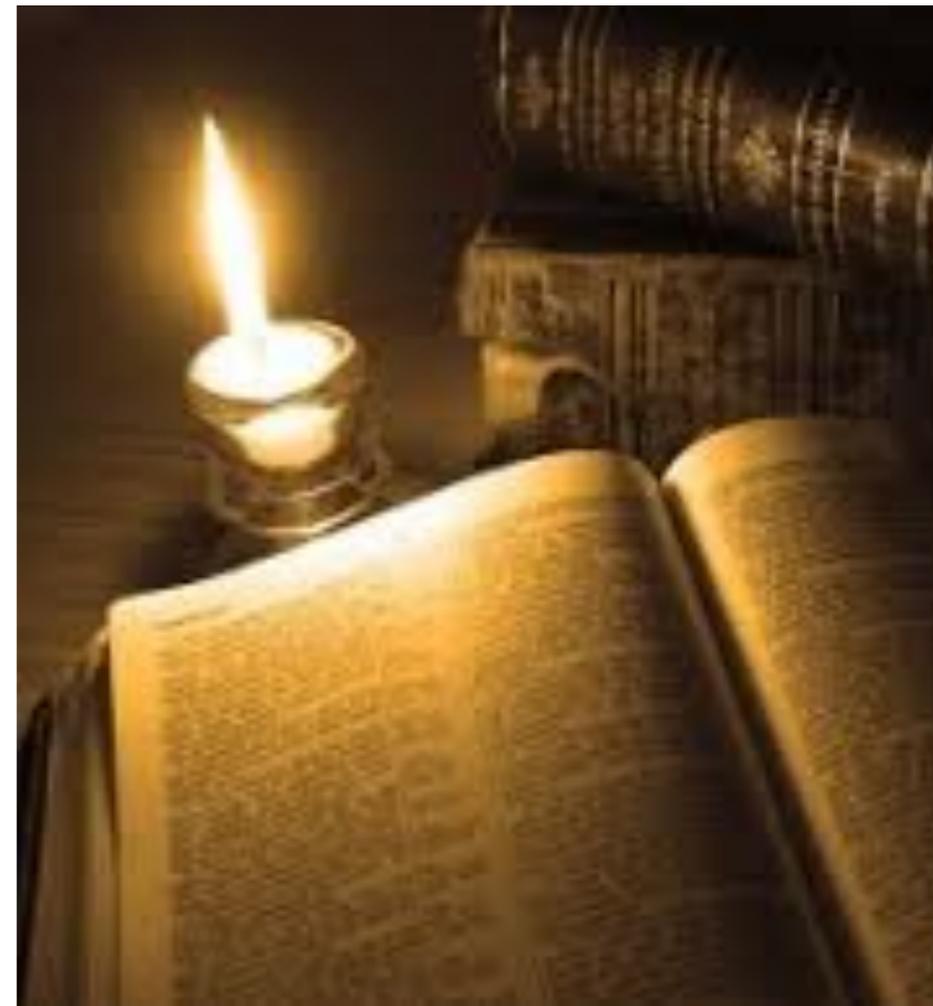
They fail to make a distinction in authority between the **GC Administration**, the **GC Executive Committee**, and the **GC Session**.

BASIS OF THEIR JUSTIFICATION OF REJECTING THE GC SESSION AS GOD'S HIGHEST AUTHORITY ON EARTH

The context of Ellen White's statements show that she did not consider the first two entities as the voice of God, but **did accept the GC Session with full representation from leaders all over the world as God's voice.**

BASIS OF THEIR JUSTIFICATION OF REJECTING THE GC SESSION AS GOD'S HIGHEST AUTHORITY ON EARTH

**As long as this misuse
of the Spirit of
Prophecy continues,
the crisis of authority in
the SDA church will not
be solved.**





Will your anchor hold?



Ellen White, “We tried to call up our greatest trials, but they looked so small **compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory** that surrounded us, that we could not speak them out, and we all cried out **Hallelujah, heaven is cheap enough**, and we touched our glorious harps and made heaven’s arches ring.” (*Word to the Little Flock*, p. 15)

DOCUMENTATION

The information for this presentation comes from

- 1. “A Study of Church Governance and Unity,” Sept 2016, Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.**
- 2. North American Division 2018 Year-end Meeting Response to the *Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions*.**
- 3. *North American Division Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report*, 2013.**