The Development of Organizational and Leadership Paradigms in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

By Barry D. Oliver

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has seen two major periods of organizational reform. The first occurred in the years 1860-1863, beginning just sixteen years after the bitter disappointment of 1844. At that time the fledgling denomination had only 3,500 members scattered in 125 local churches and six local conferences in the eastern part of the United States. Representatives from those conferences gathered in Battle Creek, Michigan, and despite considerable opposition chose a denominational name in 1860 and adopted an organizational form in 1863.

The second major period of organizational reform occurred in the years 1901-1903. In many ways these were very difficult years for the denomination. Although the membership had grown considerably since the initial organization in 1863, there were still only 75,000 members. Yet these members were becoming increasingly scattered and it was realized that other organizational structures were needed which could more adequately deal with the administrative needs of the church. In fact, a major reorganization was needed to the extent that had the church not reorganized its administrative structures at that time, its future could have been somewhat dubious.

There have been many other structural and administrative adjustments which have modified the manner in which the church is organized and administered. Subsequent to the reorganization of 1901-1903, for example, the General Conference was divided into a number of divisions which were given specific responsibility for administering large areas of the globe, e.g., the South Pacific Division, the North American Division, etc.

It is the purpose of this article to investigate the context



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which shaped the major periods of organizational reform in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to propose that continuing change needs to be made to those administrative structures in order to facilitate the realization of the mission of the church. The article will not precisely define those changes. That task belongs to the church at large. Some broad suggestions will be made, however.

Four cautions must be sounded at the outset. First, if there are some readers of this article who are inclined to use its contents as leverage to attack the church or its administrators, the author must state in the strongest possible terms that such people have no right to quote its contents because they are misquoting the intent of the paper. This article is written as a constructive contribution to the ongoing struggle of the people of this church to facilitate the accomplishment of its mission. Its perspective and presuppositions are thoroughly Seventh-day Adventist.

Second, it should not be assumed that adjustments to the organizational structures of the church are going to be the means, in themselves, of solving the problems of the church and refocusing it on its missionary task. The main problems of any organization, including the church, are not structural but attitudinal. Attitude and value genesis must be given priority. Commitment, integrity, and faith, and many other intangible realities are the most essential components of success. Structures merely play a role in the directing and shaping of the people and the organization. The structural role is supplementary, but subordinate to the other more essential ingredients of organizational function.

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Third, despite the calls for change that are made in this paper, it must be emphasized that change is best introduced in a conservative manner. There are some who would wish the church to make such radical changes that they would destroy the church. This article does not support that approach. But there are others who believe no changes are called for. Neither does this article support that attitude.

Fourth, study should continue to be given to ongoing

organizational and administrative flexibility as the church continues to grow and to diversify. Organizational structures should be maintained which promote the unity and integrity of the church as a global organization, and facilitate its missionary mandate.

The Context of Church Organization: 1860-1863

The form of organization adopted in 1863 was simple. There were three administrative levels: local churches, state conferences comprising the local churches in a designated area, and a General Conference with headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan. The officers of the General Conference were a president, secretary, and treasurer; and an executive committee of three. It was decided that General Conference sessions were to be held annually.

The form of organization was unique. It incorporated but adapted elements from Episcopal, congregational, and Presbyterian forms of governance. For example, its presidents were given administrative powers akin to those of Methodist bishops; the presidents were elected by the constituency as were bishops in the Methodist episcopacy; and the Methodist conference system was adapted to suit the needs of the emerging Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

From congregational governance Adventists adapted the broad-based authority of the constituency. From Presbyterian governance they adapted the committee system and the concept of representation. There is little evidence that the early Seventh-day Adventists intentionally set out to construct an organization which drew together these diverse elements. That such occurred was more by accident than by design.

Organization did not come easily. Many voices were raised in concerted opposition to the whole idea of organization. But those who saw the necessity for an efficient system of organization won the day with the persuasiveness of their arguments and the strength of their personalities. It was recognized then, as now, that the church needed a sound administrative system.

Significantly, the arguments which were used to persuade the believers to organize themselves into a denomination did not depend on biblical or theological reasoning. It is clear that the founding fathers of the church did not decide on a church organizational form which was strongly grounded in biblical or theological models and images of the church. While some general notions of stewardship of personnel and financial resources did influence the discussion, no evidence of a systematic theological rationale for organization can be found in the extant records of the proceedings at Battle Creek (See Oliver 1989:46-48).

What did dictate the need for organization and the shape of church structures were a

number of pragmatic necessities which, if left unattended, would have apparently stunted the growth and development of the fledgling organization. In 1907, A. G. Daniells, the General Conference President, reflecting on the events of the 1860s, listed some of the problems of disorganization. These insurmountable problems were persuasive arguments for organization at Battle Creek in 1863. His list included: (1) failure to keep proper church membership records, (2) paucity of church officers, (3) no way of determining who were the accredited representatives of the people, (4) no regular support for the ministry, and (5) no legal provision for holding property (Daniells 1907:5).

Even a list of reasons which Ellen White compiled in 1892 was oriented to the 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 church property, (5) for the publication of truth through the press, and (6) for many other objectives (White 1892).

Despite considerable opposition to any notion of organization which emerged from both ministers and laypersons during the latter 1850s and early 1860s, Ellen White had stood consistently with those who advocated church order. Her influence was not as decisive as some have led us to believe, however. It seems that her role was more consultative and pastoral than directive and prescriptive. "Order" and "organization" were themes which received her attention and approval; although *at no time did she attempt to delineate the structural form that such order was to take*. "Apart from warnings against sending inexperienced men into the field and condemnation of other 'self sent' teachers, at no time did Ellen White express herself before 1863 on the precise form of organization to be adopted" (Mustard 1987:129).

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Throughout the controversies surrounding the proposed organization in the late 1850s and early 1860s, it was James White who appeared as the more

vocal proponent of the need for organization. Godfrey Anderson has stated:

> It was James White, with the support of Ellen's testimonies and in conjunction with the other leading ministers who had provided the moving force in both the development of doctrinal unity and church organization. . . . In part because organization had thus developed from the top down, so to speak, Seventh-day Adventists chose a system more Episcopal than congregational, one operated largely by ministers rather than laypeople (Anderson 1986:64).

James White, as editor of the *Review and Herald* and the unofficial leader of the sabbatarian Adventists, was continually writing and speaking in support of organization. He was appointed as one of the nine people who were assigned the task of drawing up the proposal for church organization in 1861. His wife, Ellen, on the other hand, was not included in the group. The church understood her role to be more advisory than definitive.

In August 1861 Ellen White counseled the ministers not to be feeble and weak in their leadership. They were allowing themselves to be diverted by some who were claiming that the church would become Babylon the moment it organized itself into a denomination. Ellen White responded:

> 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. . . . Was this all God required of them? No: he was displeased with their cowardly silence and lack of action. 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 (White 1861:101, 102).

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The Context of Church Reorganization: 1901-1903

In 1901 the church began a radical reorganization of its administrative structures. While the modifications which emerged from the process were shaped by the organization that had been put in place in 1861-63, significant changes were made. The contextual factors which shaped those modifications may be summarized as follows:

Numerical Growth and the Beginnings of Diversity

By the turn of the century the church had 75,000 members spread not only across the United States, but in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, and increasingly in the "mission fields." 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.

Institutional Growth

Further, the organizational structures of 1863 did not anticipate the increase in departments and institutions which began to spring up in order to care for the publishing, educational, health, and missionary interests of the church. Each of these became a separate entity in itself, outside the existing organizational structure of the church, but calling on the services of already overextended administrators. By the turn of the century, the church was in danger of drowning in its own bureaucracy.

The major auxiliary organizations that were in existence by 1901 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; the General Conference Association, established in 1887; the National Religious Liberty Association established in 1889; an autonomous Foreign Mission Board in the same year; and the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association in 1893.

Loss of Coordination and Integration

These organizations were legally incorporated, 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.

The Role of Ellen G. White

Fortunately, the church had some far-sighted leaders who realized the danger of disintegration and the need for change. They were able to convince the young organization that it could not maintain the status quo. At the forefront of these was none other than Ellen G. White herself. While, as in the 1860s, she did not attempt to prescribe the exact form that organizational reform was to take—she left that to the delegates at the General Con-

ference sessions—she called for urgent and innovative change. The day before the commencement of the session in 1901, she called the leaders together and in no uncertain terms told them that "God wants a change . . . right here . . . right now" (Oliver 1989:167; see also 55-57, 162-70, 201-16). She was ably supported, particularly by Arthur G. Daniells who was to become General Conference President at that session, and by her son, W. C. White.

Centralization of Administrative Control

One of the reasons why Ellen White became so adamant that change must take place had been her observation that the emerging global missionary consciousness of the church was accompanied by increased centralization of administrative control by the General Conference. In 1888, George Butler said the following concerning the General Conference:

> Supervision embraces all its 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 (*Seventh-day Adventist yearbook* 1888:50).

Ellen White opposed Butler and continued to oppose the centralizing tendencies of his administration until he completed his term of office at the General Conference session in 1888 (White 1885; White 1888a). When, during the 1890s the same tendencies toward centralization re-emerged, she warned that the General Conference was not following a path that was pleasing to God. But she was far away in Australia, and the situation only deteriorated during that decade.

The centralization of authority was most evident in the tendency of the General Conference to deprive the constituent bodies of the organization of their decision making authority. In the early 1880s, Ellen White had begun to castigate General Conference administrators for taking too much of the responsibility for decision making on themselves and failing to give others opportunity to exercise their prerogatives. 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;" they gave the others "no chance" (White 1883b).

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" (White 1883a).

As a corrective to the tendency to leave the prerogative for decision making in the hands of one or two, 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" (White 1886).

leavened. . . . He thinks his position gives him such power that his voice is infallible (White 1888b).

Butler had been elected to the presidency of the General Conference in 1871. In response to some tensions that existed between James White and other church leaders, he wrote an essay in 1873 in which he encapsulated his attitude toward leadership.

In his essay, Butler described a leader as a benevolent monarch. He supported his assertion by references to numerous biblical examples of authoritarian

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Authoritarian Leadership Styles

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 healthy and for the good of the cause. Envy, evil surmising, jealousies have been working like leaven until the whole lump seemed to be

leaders. "Some men," he insisted were "placed higher in authority in the church than others." He went so far as to claim that there seemed "to have been a special precedence . . . even among the disciples themselves" (Butler 1873:180).

James and Ellen White did not agree with Butler. They maintained that authority and autocracy did not reside in one individual.

Gerard Damsteegt has pointed out that Butler's essay was an attempt to develop the idea

that "the highest authority of the church should be invested in one individual" (Damsteegt 1977:258). That one individual, according to Butler, was James White, the General Conference President at the time. Contrary to that position, James White himself maintained that "the highest authority" was not to reside in any individual but was to be found in the context of the corporate people of God. While conceding that it was possible for the General Conference to "err in some things," James White insisted that "the only sane course for our ministers and our people is to respect the decisions of our General Conference." He continued: "It shall be my pleasure, while I claim the sympathy and cooperation of Seventh-day Adventists, to respect our organization, and accept the decisions of the General Conference" (James White 1875:192).

James White's position was supported by his wife. She wrote to Butler (who had just completed his first term as president of the General Conference in August 1874, and was to be re-elected in 1880) 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 (James White 1872:42, 43).

Ellen White continued by reproving Butler for persistently maintaining his own private judgment of duty against "the voice of the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth" (James White 1872:43). What Ellen White affirmed concerning the authority of the General Conference should be understood in the context of the authoritarian attitude that Butler and some others held. Both James and Ellen White were describing the authority of the General Conference over against a centralized authority in one man or a few men. Many years later, Ellen White explained that the authority of the General Conference was derived when "the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised" (Ellen White 1949:260).

Financial Crisis

There is little doubt that one of the precipitating factors 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" (Irwin 1897a).

In a circular letter to all conference presidents written the next day, Irwin quoted a statement regarding the desperate situation of the General Conference from I. H. Evans, who was at the time president of the General Conference Association and was later to be the treasurer of the General Conference. The statement read:

> Our finances are in a very embarrassing state. . . . On our audit of last year we have overdrawn on the Review and Herald $12,500. We have on our list of audits unpaid over $5,000, so that we owe on last year's work nearly $18,000 (Irwin 1897b).

Evans added further:

> We have paid as little to our workers this year—since January—as possible. Many have not enough to live on and are in most embarrassing circumstances. . . . We must have at least $44,000.00 per annum more than we have been receiving, as we have nearly $15,000.00 interest on notes we owe the brethren (Irwin 6 May 1897).

In July it was recorded in the minutes of the General Conference executive committee that a minister by the name of Goodrich working in Quebec had actually not received any wages for a full year (General Conference Committee Minutes 27 July 1897).

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 1 October of the same year there was an operating deficit of $9,529.74 (General Conference Committee Minutes 10 October 1899). At the beginning of 1901 the General Conference was $41,589.11 in deficit. In August the deficit was still $39,600. It comprised a debt to the General Conference Association ($14.000), an unspecified loan ($3,000), debts to depositors ($6,600), wages due to laborers for 1900 ($6,000), and wages due to laborers from 1 January to 30 June 1901 ($10,000) (Daniells 1901).

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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" (Magan 1899:235, 236). Desperate times called for desperate measures.

Commitment to Mission

The inability of the denomination to financially support its growth was having an effect on its whole missionary enterprise. It has not been often realized that 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 the following:

> 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 (*General Conference Bulletin* 1899:73).

The financial and administrative crises at home were having an effect on the church's ability to commence work in new areas and were preventing the placement of new missionaries in the field. Between 1895 and 1900 the number of missionaries being sent from the shores of North America decreased markedly in comparison to the increasing number during the first half of the decade. In 1895, one hundred missionaries were sent from the United States to twenty-nine countries. In each succeeding year, the number was reduced until, at the General Conference session in 1901, the president of the Foreign Mission Board reported that "during the present board's administration" [two years], only sixty-eight new workers had been sent to

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foreign fields. He added that twenty-three had been returned for "various reasons" (*General Conference Bulletin* 1901:96).

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. 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 (Spicer 1893).

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

> My heart is filled with interest that I can not 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 (Daniells 1900).

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

The Contemporary Context and the Need for Organizational Adjustment

Circumstances in the last decade of the nineteenth century led to a major reappraisal of the organizational structures of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Many Seventh-day Adventists are convinced that there are even more urgent contextual factors in the first decade of the twenty-first century which call for organizational reform. Calls for reorganization appear to be forthcoming particularly from the professional, well-educated constituency of the church. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that many church employees are ill at ease with some aspects of the present system.

In this situation, it is of particular importance that wise church administrators separate fact from perception. Many perceptions about church organization and administration arise where there is incomplete or inaccurate information. In these circumstances communication channels need to be opened up and information shared. A pastoral approach to the problem is called for.

However, it is the contention of this article that not all of the problems are problems of perception. There is a substantive basis for organizational re-assessment.

There are a number of significant contextual factors which call the church to reconsider the effectiveness of the current system of organization. Those that are considered in this article are listed under two headings: contextual factors within the church and contextual factors outside the church.

Contextual Factors within the Church Which Call for Organizational Reassessment

The Size of the Church

With regard to the size of the church, the question we have to ask is if a basic structure which served the needs of seventy-five thousand members in 1901 is adequate to serve the needs of approximately 11 million members in 1998, or 13 million in 2000? It is highly unlikely that an organizational system which worked efficiently for 15,000 members can be just as efficient for 13 million members.

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The Diversity in the Church

Diversity is an even more challenging demographic than the size of the church. Cultural, social, geographic, economic, and linguistic diversity is present in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as in few other organizations. At the present time, approximately 93 percent of the members of the church are indigenous to countries other than North America. That figure should be compared to approximately 17 percent at the end of 1900. In addition, 87 percent of church members are indigenous to socio-cultural communities very different from the Euro-American socio-cultural community. That is to be compared to only 4 percent at the beginning of 1901. The proportion of Seventh-day Adventists indigenous to communities which are not Euro-American was well over 90 percent by the turn of the century.

Not only should the church continuously evaluate the adequacy of its structures to fulfill its missionary mandate in the context of this diversity, but that it must do so is even more obvious when it is realized that those who put the present structures in place were primarily from one specific cultural group—Anglo-American. The church should ask itself whether the best in-

terests of an international Seventh-day Adventist Church can be adequately served and its mission facilitated, by structures which were conceived largely by persons from one particular socio-cultural community, regardless of which specific community that was. There were only three delegates at the 1901 General Conference session who did not consider themselves North Americans. Those three were from northern Europe—a culturally similar environment to North America. Further, all delegates were church employees. There was no lay representation whatsoever.

Erich Baumgartner has suggested that there are two immediate implications which arise from these facts. First, with reference to the employment of the delegates, Baumgartner has said that "the 1901 reorganization was heavily oriented towards the ordained minister and those responsible to *lead* the work." He contended, in contrast, that "our time has seen new moves to recognize the ministry and mission of the laity;" his implication being that structures should now reflect that change. Second, with reference to the socio-cultural background of the delegates, Baumgartner asked:

> I wonder what wider representation would mean today in a church that has become a predominantly international church. Maybe it is time again to listen to the prophetic voices who call for the end of kingly power encapsulated this time in a cultural, racial group which has a hard time giving up the grip of control (Baumgartner 1987:68, 69).

Not only was the uni-cultural delegate composition a potential source of distortion when it came to the applicability of a structure for a world-wide organization but such distortion was most likely emphasized even more by strongly ethnocentric viewpoints on the part of the delegates, the colonial context, and their belief in the manifest destiny of the United States. Some experienced missionaries did recognize the problem. At the 1901 General Conference session, W. A. Spicer said:

> The thought of Americanism, of nationalism, is something to reckon with. I am an American. I am not ashamed of it; but I am not proud of it; and that makes all the difference in the world in being able to help people outside of America; for you take any man who is proud of the fact that he is an American, and he has erected a barrier between himself and every soul who is not an American. Anybody who has been in a foreign field has known this fact. . . . You will find this spirit of nationalism in all lands (*General Conference Bulletin* 1901:154, 155).

While Spicer is to be commended for recognizing the existence of nationalism and attempting to do something to alleviate the problems it created, it should be recognized that neither he nor anyone else in the denomination addressed the reality of the impact of cultural difference on administrative structures.

Difference was not understood as a positive value which, if addressed carefully, could enhance the suitability of structures in diverse situations.

A unique quality which should set the church apart from the world is its ability to hold in unity the very diversity that gives it life within itself. It should have the capacity to recognize the value and the contribution of each part. It was not Christ's intention that the church should have unity but no diversity. It is the maintenance of diversity which makes the nature of the church's unity in Christ unique and indispensable.

If diversity is neglected, the church will be unable to perform its task. It will neglect that very element which enables it to evangelize a multiplex world—its own diversity. Diversity facilitates the growth of the church and the realization of its mission. The church which subordinates the need to recognize diversity to a demand for unity is denying the very means by which it is best equipped to accomplish the task.

The issue is not whether unity is vital to the nature and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Unity is indispensable in the life of the church. The body of Christ is one. The witness of the New Testament is unequivocal regarding the need for unity in the church. Rather, the issue for the Seventh-day Adventist Church is whether or not unity is to be regarded as that organizing principle whose importance eclipses that of all other principles which may also be determinative of the structures of organization.

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Organizing principles can be evaluated in terms of the goals of the church. Seventh-day Adventists should continually ask themselves whether the primary goal toward which they are moving is the maintenance of unity, or whether their priority is task accomplishment—the evangelization of the world. If it is the latter, then the structures of the church should be understood and evaluated in terms which express the primacy of that goal. Subordinate goals have their

place, but the church needs to be focused, and its structures should be oriented to that which is primary.

In the context of the theological, financial, and organizational turmoil that characterized the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 1980s, it appears that emphasis on unity was used to define the structure, or, rather, to perpetuate the structure that has existed with modifications since 1903. Although commitment to the evangelization of the world remains, it appears that structures are not being related so much to the facilitation of that task as to the preservation of worldwide unity. Unity is expressed as the prerequisite of mission.

But if unity becomes the principle of first importance on the agenda of Seventh-day Adventist administrators and church members, then they may fail to achieve their goal just as surely as if the celebration of diversity were to become the primary agenda item. Unity or diversity cannot be goals in themselves. Rather they are principles of organization that together, in balance, facilitate goal accomplishment.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today should carefully seek to maintain a balance between expression of the principles of unity and diversity in its administrative structures. Tensions which may arise because of theological controversy, debate over structural and administrative issues, financial embarrassment or concern, a narrow view of the task, or remnants of ethnocentric and nationalistic thinking should not be permitted to prevent it from seeking structures which institutionalize its commitment to maintaining equilibrium between unity and diversity.

Although it is exceedingly difficult to maintain commitment to diversity in the face of the pressures which are brought to bear on the administration of the church, the shape of the church and the needs of the world make such commitment even more urgent in the twenty-first century than they did a century ago. Diversity is today a fact. The church can not repress it. It would do better to celebrate it. Structures and administrative methods can be continuously monitored and modified where necessary in such a way as to promote the self-support, self-propagation, and self-discipline of all the diverse parts of the church without compromising the unity of the church. While each part of the church may be fully the church, no part should be conceived of or conceive of itself, as totally the church. Unity is dependent on the recognition of diversity.

The Priority of Mission over Structure

If the reorganization of the administrative structure of the church was motivated by concern for the facilitation of mission, and if the purpose of organization is still the same today, then the church should take a long look at its priorities and give

attention to the place that mission holds in the church and its implications for structure. Some have been making a remarkable effort to help the church become aware of the centrality of its mission to the world. They have been far too few, however. Their voices have too often been drowned out in the clamor of theological and organizational debate.

Why maintain a structure which is based on a commitment to mission when it seems more important to maintain that structure than to demonstrate the commitment to mission by thorough theoretical and practical restatement and innovation? Do message, mission, and structure still go hand in hand, or has there been a discontinuity somewhere which should be reflected in the structure of the church? Alternatively, has the perpetuation of structure taken priority over the message and mission of the denomination? Is mission being delimited, and its methods determined by the need to perpetuate the structure? Research has shown that there is no historical or theological rationale for such a situation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (see Mustard 1978 and Oliver 1989).

Even if the Seventh-day Adventist Church was able to produce some well-researched ecclesiological thought, and some of its emphases in ecclesiology attain to a more even balance between ontological and functional categories, it is doubtful that the church would ever give up the primacy of mission as its fundamental reason for organization. Too much of Seventh-day Adventist history and theology finds its raison d'etre in the primacy of the church's mission. The church has been called into existence for "missionary purposes," and it is organized "for mission service" (Oosterwal 1971:13 and *Seventh-day Adventists believe* 1988:144).

Seventh-day Adventists for too long assumed that the greatest barriers to mission were theological, but some now recognize that the greatest barriers to mission are cultural.

Seventh-day Adventists for too long assumed that the greatest barriers to mission were theological, but some now recognize that the greatest barriers to mission are cultural (Winter 1988:4, 5). Uniformity in the name of unity has been the methodological presupposition for mission. While Seventh-day

Adventists have become one of the most ethnically diverse Christian denominations in the world, they remain, not only in danger of failing to respond adequately to the changes that their missionary success has brought, but they are even in peril of refusing to acknowledge that diversity necessitates structural adaptation. To remain viable, change should not only be respected, it must be anticipated (Rosado 1987:11).

The Nature of the Organization as a Volunteer/Professional Organization

When an organization's goal accomplishment is largely dependent on volunteers, as is the case with the church, the professionals in the organization must invest a great deal of energy in making sure that those volunteers own the goals and the processes which accomplish those goals. At the present time the volunteers appear to assume that church goals and processes are set by organizational machinery which is far removed from them. They feel powerless. They sense that they can make no impact on what happens in the church. The church is not "their" church.

At the same time, so much energy and so many personnel are directed towards maintenance functions that there are comparatively few resources available which can be deployed to empower the volunteers. This may be characteristic to some extent in most organizations, but all organizations have to continually reduce the energy absorbed in maintenance and maximize the energy input into communication, empowerment, and growth.

Especially is the empowerment of the constituency vital in a church which has a universal system of governance. Because congregational systems usually do much better in communication and empowerment, there are some who are calling for congregational governance in this church. To respond in that manner would be a terrible mistake. To fail to respond at all and allow too many resources to be absorbed by the structure would be an equally disastrous mistake.

The Strength of the Local Church

Present organizational structures are reducing the effectiveness of the local church to a critical extent. The advantages of a universal organizational structure can be disadvantages to the local church. At the present time, the organizational system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is taking too much from the local church. Local churches need a greater share of the financial, personnel, and expertise resources. Imagine, for example, what could happen if each church had an enthusiastic, trained pastor, or if tent-making ministries were supported in some way. What may be possible

if organizational overheads were reduced appropriately? We have not given enough thought to the possibilities. Some other organizations have done much more.

Decision making prerogative resides at the various levels of church organization. Naturally, people who make decisions at those levels will tend to make decisions which meet the needs of their immediate fields of vision. The greater the number of levels of organization, the greater the tendency to deploy resources in necessary functions at those levels, and the less likely the tendency towards self-deprivation of resources. This is a perfectly natural rule of business (and human nature) that cannot change unless the macro structures within which these tendencies operate are changed.

Until they are changed, the local church will remain the most powerless unit in the structure. Yet the local church is supposed to be where the "action" is. But in too many churches there is no "action." Something is wrong with a structure, or its administration, when the needs of the local church are of least priority, even if those needs are supposed to come first in theory. This is not to suggest that organizational dynamics alone dictate success or failure of the local church congregation. There are many factors, too numerous to describe in this article, which will be determinative to a greater or lesser extent of that situation.

The Preponderance of Institutional and Administrative Employees over Pastoral and Evangelistic Employees

There is no need to dwell on this statistic. Perusal of any of the statistical reports produced annually by the General Conference will reveal that the church is investing a huge share of its personnel resources in functions which are maintenance oriented rather than mission and growth oriented. Of course some of this is necessary. But the church cannot survive unless present proportions are radically altered. The church has been making some moves in the right direction, but without constant monitoring it will be easy to lose that initiative. The best way to make an impact is to reduce a level of administration.

Contextual Factors in Society Which Call for Organizational Reassessment

It is impossible in the context of this short article to do justice to the discussion of the external factors which call for reassessment of organizational structures. Passing reference can only be made. Experts in each field need to address the specifics of application to an efficient system of organization which meets the theological and missiological perspectives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Development of Organizational Emphasis from Bureaucratic to Person Centered to Systems Focus

As long ago as the 1930s a development occurred which has had a telling impact on organizations and their function. That development was the movement away from bureaucracy as the dominant organizational form. Since that time a number of significant paradigm shifts have taken place that have radically altered the way in which successful organizations of all types are structured. The first was the emphasis on people rather than task as the determinative factor in organizational structure and function. This was followed by the arrival of systems thinking which recognized the task, the people, and the context as each having a vital impact on the shape and function of the organization.

Since the 1970s a number of studies have been conducted and books written which have given varied answers to organizational dilemmas. All have one thing in common. The organization must decrease its dependence on bureaucratic, hierarchical structures and increase its flexibility, and ability to integrate all its parts within a focused understanding of its mission. Mission statements have become standard in organizations of all shapes and sizes.

The Development of Flatter Organizations

The most obvious outcome of this has been the appearance of more streamlined, "flatter" organizations. Multinational companies are endeavoring to operate with three major levels of organization. More resources are being deployed in mission than in maintenance. The people in the company are being looked after and an attempt is made to ensure that personal goals and organizational goals are congruent. Ownership of goal setting processes is sought and achieved.

This organizational focus has changed our understanding from a mechanical model to an organic model of organization, flexibility being the key operative dynamic. Whereas previously it was assumed that for things

Something is wrong with a structure, or its administration, when the needs of the local church are of least priority, even if those needs are supposed to come first in theory.

to remain the same, nothing must change, it is now assumed that for things to remain the same, something must happen. Whereas previously it could be assumed that efficiency could be best achieved by determining the best way of doing the job and repeating it, it must now be recognized that efficiency is best achieved by continually engaging the process of self assessment, mission modification, goal setting, implementation, and evaluation. Process, rather than event is the basic unit of organizational function.

Societal Evolution

Jon Paulien has briefly summarized the impact that change in the society around us should make on the way we organize and administer our church. Paulien correctly observes:

In an age of such advanced communications and technology, do we still need so many levels of administration?

Communication and Technology Revolution

In an age of such advanced communications and technology, do we still need so many levels of administration? One of the reasons why the church put so many levels of administration in place was to facilitate decision making through adequate communication. The church fathers could not possibly have foreseen what we have available today. We are in a situation today where those same levels of organization which aided communication and decision-making in the past may well be hampering it now.

The present structures were put in place when it took four months to send a communication from the United States to Australia. Decentralization was achieved by adding another level to the organizational hierarchy. The answer to the problem in 1901-03 is not the answer to the problem in 2007.

In the Industrial Age, power resided in the ownership and utilization of energy sources, by which human time and energy could be multiplied in the mass production of goods. . . . In the Information Age, on the other hand, power resides in the ownership of information, and the ability to process and distribute that information. . . . The Industrial Age called for an authoritarian style of administration. The ideal workers in a mass-production environment were those who didn't think for themselves, but were like interchangeable parts, offering a minimum of conflict and disagreement. . . . But the information society thrives when control is decentralized. The most valuable employee is no longer the "yes man" of the Industrial Age, but is a person willing to question and

challenge. Employee initiative, creativity, diversity, knowledge, and education are at a premium, and the ability to work with people is often far more valuable than skill at manipulating things. . . . We are seeing, therefore, a trend from a representative democracy to participatory democracy (Paulien 1993:228, 229).

New contexts call for new structures. Even Jesus said that old wine cannot be put into new wine skins.

"We Have No Fear for the Future Except . . ."

There is much in this brief historical study that should instruct and challenge the church as it considers the form of organization that is going to carry it into the future. With little comment, some conclusions which may well be significant for the church at the present time can be derived from the preceding discussion.

1. The church is justified in continuously looking at the efficiency of its structures. Ellen White encouraged the leaders to be discerning and reproved those who were too timid to take up the challenging task of promoting sound organization.

2. It is okay to borrow from others and learn from their strengths and weaknesses. The church did that at the beginning and can continue to learn from others.

3. There will always be those who are not aware of the need for change. There were such in the 1860s and at the time of reorganization.

4. The church needs a comprehensive organizational system. A group of believers with a universal message need a universal organization which promotes unity in diverse contexts and among diverse peoples. There should be no desire to return to anarchy (a direction that Jones and Waggoner would have taken the church had it adopted their organizational principles at the turn of the century.

5. The structures of the church are not based on a systematic biblical or theological base. They are a response to largely pragmatic needs based on some broad theological themes—e.g., stewardship, mission.

6. Ellen White was a loyal supporter of the organization, but was never prescriptive of its organizational form. She was willing to change. Hers was an advisory rather than a definitive role. She allowed the representatives of the church to shape the structures, both in 1863 and in 1901-1903.

7. The need to consider reorganization grew more urgent as the church increased in size numerically.

8. Reorganization grew out of innovations that were necessary in the context of diversity—the mission field.

9. Organization was necessary to coordinate the effectiveness of the institutions. Independent ministries must come under the umbrella of a coordinating and unifying structure.

10. Strong, innovative leadership can make a radical dif-

ference (for example, Ellen G. White, Willy C. White, and A. G. Daniells).

11. Tendencies towards administrative centralization must be guarded against. Decentralization of decision making prerogative was the major thrust of reorganization. The "people on the ground" must be given as much support by higher levels of organization as possible.

12. Autocratic leadership as a general leadership style is not acceptable.

18. Change is needed continuously. The church cannot afford to be stifled by those who do not see the need for continuous re-evaluation. At the same time, the church must not make changes without taking the majority of its constituency with it. Change is inevitable, but it must be managed with wisdom.

19. There are contemporary models of flatter, efficient organizations which can be investigated and appropriately adapted by the church.

A healthy organization is able to learn from its own history. . . . Our structures must facilitate our mission. . . . To stagnate is to die.

13. Authority in the church, resides in the corporate will of the people of God, not in any one individual or group of people.

14. All are free to speak and contribute their perspectives in the context of loyalty to Christ and His church.

15. The church must have strong financial policies which ensure the continued operation of the church.

16. Financial crisis can be a powerful catalyst for change.

17. Mission is at the very center of Seventh-day Adventist self-identity and structure. Mission must determine structure. Structure cannot inhibit mission.

20. The revolutions in communication and technology can be utilized by the church to facilitate organizational streamlining.

A healthy organization is able to learn from its own history. While the church is unique in its sacred dimension, it still partakes in the common lot of humanity—it is a human organization and as such is subject to many of the same organizational dynamics that are characteristic of large organizational systems. Our history can be of great benefit to us if we are prepared to approach it with a spirit of humility and the attitude of a learner. There is little point in diluting that history to the

point where we fail to learn from our weaknesses as well as our strengths. Ellen White herself affirmed that we have nothing to fear for the future except we forget.

Conclusion

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been well administered over the years. Its organizational structures and institutions have served the church adequately. It is in the best interests of the church that a strong global organizational structure continue to facilitate the ministry and mission of the church in the world as the church takes seriously the commission of Christ which challenges the church to take the gospel to the world.

But having affirmed the strengths of the church we need to recognize that viability in the future demands that we continually assess our structures in order to ensure that they best serve the church. While this article has not set out to describe in detail specific changes that should be made, it has argued: (1) that there should be a reduction in the number of organizational levels, (2) that the local church needs to be given higher profile and priority, (3) that authoritarian and bureaucratic models of leadership should not predominate, and (4) that appropriate flexibility and diversity needs to be built into organizational systems and policies in order to promote genuine respect and unity for each other.

Our structures must facilitate our mission. Because the context of that mission is always changing, the structures which best serve that mission must also be open to change. To stagnate is to die.

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