



*"Watchman,
what of the night?"*

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

WHERE IS THE AUTHORITY OF GOD INVESTED? IN THE GC?

A Question Which the 1985 Session Forces Every SDA to Answer

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Among the revisions of the Church Manual voted at the New Orleans Session of the General Conference was one captioned - "General Conference the Highest Authority." (Bulletin #8, p. 8) Keep in mind, that previous to this action, the Session had voted to require "faithful adherence to the Church Manual." (Ibid., #7, p. 9) This now means the recognition of the General Conference "as the highest authority, under God," on earth by every Seventh-day Adventist. Further, this authority is made to include "the Executive Committee between sessions." In fact, "during the interim between these sessions the Executive Committee shall constitute the body of final authority on all questions where a difference of viewpoint may develop." (Bulletin #8, p. 8)

The logic used to arrive at this conclusion is based on a perception of power derived from the Constitution of the General Conference. The Constitution authorizes the General Conference "to create subordinate organizations to promote specific interests in various sections of the world." (Ibid.) Naturally, that which is created is subject to its creator.

Keep in mind that while this creation extends down only to the Union Conferences in the various divisions of the world field, the created unions, in turn, create local conferences; and no local church can be organized with power to function without the permission of the local conference. It is supreme power and authority flowing down from the presidium, curia, pontifical college, or whatever name by which such authority is designated. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is called the Executive Committee, presided over by the President of the General Conference, or one of his vice-presidents whom he has designated as "cardinals." Verily, "the highest authority under God" for a Seventh-day Adventist is the General Conference in session, and the Executive Committee between sessions. Thus the Working Policy to which all denominational workers must give allegiance, the regulations of the Church Manual to which all members must adhere, and the Doctrines which all - worker and member alike - must believe, have been and are determined by the General Conference in session, or the Executive Committee between sessions. Pray tell, in what way is this structure different than the political structure of the Soviet Union, or the ecclesiastical structure of the Papacy, except cosmetically? But is this structure as voted at the New Orleans session a structure under God, or is it merely a human structure conceived by man? If under God, then let every knee bow but if under man, then let every man or woman of God rise up and break the shackles of

human bondage imposed upon them by men in high places.

To give credence to this pronouncement of ecclesiastical power, the Writings were quoted. A partial paragraph from Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 3, p. 492 was included. It reads:

I have been shown that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.

In the discussion over this revision of the Church Manual, Elder Louis Venden, senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Church advised -

I would strongly urge that three very important paragraphs from Testimonies, Vol. 9, pages 260, 261 be included in the Manual. They provide a more detailed exegesis of Ellen White's understanding than in the quotation we have. [Quoted above]

To this, Elder F. W. Wernick, a retiring "cardinal" of the Church responded:

I think we would be happy to do that. We may have to condense it, but I can understand the point you are making. (Bulletin #8, p. 6)

However, when the action was reported in the Adventist Review, no mention was made of the reference in Volume 9 as urged by Venden.

What Has Ellen G. White Said?

The reference quoted from Volume 3 above, in context, is most interesting. It is a letter written to a "Brother A" who "had strength to bear some responsibilities." (p. 495) He had, however, delayed in responding to a summons issued by the General Conference to appear in Battle Creek. He made "a mistake in relying upon [James White] to tell him what to do." It was not his understanding of the principles governing leadership that were wrong, it was "the application of them" which produced the basic difficulty. (p. 493) In the same letter, certain brethren are declared to be "deficient in the experience" they should have had because they were not self-reliant." (Ibid.) It appears that the bottom line is very simple. Exercise self-reliance and maintain your individuality, surrendering it to no man;

but counsel together with brethren placed in positions of responsibility. However, much more than this has been read into this statement, and seemingly with the full approval of Ellen G. White. In 1901, when a reorganization was called for, Ellen G. White included herself in the perception of the power and authority of the General Conference which has been deducted from the testimony sent to "Brother A." In addressing the session at Battle Creek, as soon as it was declared open for business, she stated:

That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be, - that is past. What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle. (1901 GC Bulletin, p. 25)

Two things should be noted from this statement. She called the General Conference "a sacred place." However, she declared the position that they should stand as "the voice of God to the people" - that was and is past! In other words, she was not saying that the house was being left desolate. In 1901, it was still "a sacred place." But it was not and could not be declared "as the voice of God to the people" with the policies and activities being carried out within its sacred precincts. She called for the cleansing of the temple!

The question remains - Would the General Conference be restored to its position "as the voice of God to the people" and the highest authority under God in the church, if it were cleansed, or in other words, if a reorganization occurred built on "a different principle"? Some so conclude based on a statement read by Ellen G. White at the 1909 General Conference session and appearing in Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 9, pp. 260-261.¹ This manuscript was prepared prior to the session, whether in consultation with her counselors, or was written on her own volition is not stated. It expresses concerns involving extreme positions on organization. Of one group she wrote:

The world is filled with strife for the supremacy. The spirit of pulling away from fellow laborers, the spirit of disorganization, is in the very air we breathe. By some, all efforts to establish order are regarded as dangerous, - a restriction of personal liberty, and hence to be feared as popery. These deceived souls regard it a virtue to boast of their freedom to think and act independently. They declare that they will

not take any man's say-so; that they are amenable to no man. (p. 257)

Then she cautioned of the other extreme by stating -

On the other hand, the leaders among God's people are to guard against the danger of condemning the methods of individual workers who are led by the Lord to do a special work that but few are fitted to do. Let brethren in responsibility be slow to criticize movements that are not in perfect harmony with their methods of labor. Let them never suppose that every plan should reflect their own personality. (p. 259)

In the final section of the manuscript [three paragraphs] Ellen G. White wrote of the position and authority of the General Conference. However, she never gave the Executive Committee the authority assumed in the 1985 Session actions at New Orleans. She restricted the scope of the authority of the General Conference to plans "for the prosperity and advance of [God's] work." (p. 261) She confined the authority of the General Conference to a conference "composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field" in session - "when assembled in a General Conference." (*Ibid.*) She also noted that in times past she could "no longer regard the voice of the General Conference... as the voice of God" - an unmistakable reference to the 1901 comment.

How can this question of authority be resolved, and how can the variant statements be reconciled? This brings us in our church history to the 1903 General Conference Session; to a statement made by one of the delegates; and to a prophecy written following the session.

The 1903 Session

The 1903 General Conference session convened in Oakland, California, March 27, with the least number of delegates present from the world field since 1893, and only slightly more than half the number present at the 1901 session in Battle Creek when the call for reorganization resulted in a new Constitution with the office of General Conference president eliminated. Near the close of the session the Committee on Plans and Constitution brought in two reports - a Majority and a Minority Report. The Majority Report called for a new Constitution which would restore the office of President. Elder P. T. Magan, one of three who signed the Minority Report which called for the preservation

of the Reformatory Constitution of 1901, stated during the floor discussion:

It may be stated there is nothing in this new constitution which is not abundantly safeguarded by the provisions of it; but I want to say to you that any man who has ever read Neander's History of the Christian Church, Mosheim's, or any other of the great church historians, - any man who has ever read those histories can come to no other conclusion but that the principles which are to be brought in through this proposed constitution, and in the way in which they are brought in, are the same principles, and introduced in precisely the same way, as they were hundreds of years ago when the Papacy was made.

Further: This whole house must recognize this, before we are through with this discussion, that the proposed new constitution, whatever improvements may be claimed for it, whatever advantages it may be stated that it contains, that, in principle, as far as the head of the work is concerned, it goes back precisely where we were before the reformatory steps of two years ago. (1903 GC Bulletin, p. 150)

Within eight days from the time of the adjournment of the 1903 Session in Oakland, Ellen G. White penned a prophetic warning to the Church, asking "Shall We Be Found Wanting?" She wrote:

In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence, "Found wanting." By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged. (Testimonies, Vol. 8, p. 247)

This statement is in the future tense. Those who would hold that the church was weighed in the balances in 1903 show their ignorance of the English language and totally disqualify themselves to speak on the subject of organization. There is no doubt expressed as to the fact that the Seventh-day Adventist church "is to be weighed" in the balances of the sanctuary. The "if" part of the prophecy concerns the actions of the church upon which the judgment will be rendered.

A Key Prophecy

This prophecy is the key to the present crisis and dilemma. If the church has not been weighed as yet in the balances of the sanctuary, or having been weighed found

not to be wanting, then verily, the Church is the highest visible authority under God on earth for the Holy Spirit speaks through her in the actions which the church in General Sessions vote. However, if the church has been weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, and has been found to be "wanting," the whole picture changes. No longer is the Spirit of God speaking through the church; no longer are her actions clothed in the authority of Heaven.

In this prophecy, "the heavenly Teacher" is quoted as declaring -

"What stronger delusion can beguile the mind than the pretense that you are building on the right foundation, and that God accepts your works, when in reality you are working out many things according to worldly policy, and are sinning against Jehovah? O, it is a great deception, a fascinating delusion, that takes possession of minds when men who have once known the truth, mistake the form of godliness for the spirit and power thereof; when they suppose that they are rich, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing, while in reality they are in need of everything." (*Ibid.*, pp. 249-250)

This divine "Instructor" asks a question - "How is the faithful city become an harlot?" - and declares that should this condition prevail, the church becomes "a place whence the divine presence and glory have departed!" (*Ibid.*, p. 250)

In the call to corporate repentance at the close of this prophetic testimony, the Messenger of the Lord indicated that "now" - in 1903 - the church was being "leavened with her own backsliding." (*Ibid.*) Magan had sounded the warning that should the new Constitution be adopted - and it was - papalism would finally be set up within the Seventh-day Adventist church. This has happened, even though there has been an attempt to cover the fact with a troika executive concept carrying out the actions of an all supreme committee.

In another testimony given years before the 1903 Session, but timed to the period when "Jesus is about to leave the heavenly sanctuary" (V:207), the same picture emerges. Using the symbol of Israel for the church, Ellen White wrote - "The glory of the Lord had departed from Israel; although many still continued the forms of religion, His power and presence were lacking." (V:210)

Now we may give lip service to the messages which were sent to the church in 1888 which

would have preserved the church from the present crisis; but to fail to recognize these testimonies which give God's intent and reaction under certain conditions is put one's head in the sand and invite eternal condemnation. The message of warning calling the church to repentance was sounded in 1950. The reaction of the church to this warning is a known fact and cannot be disputed. Now at this late hour, we must determine God's response to the rejection of His call to repentance. Let it be clearly understood that any repentance after God has weighed the church in the balances of the sanctuary and found it to be wanting will only be a repentance comparable to the repentance of Esau and Judas.

The bottom line returns to the all important key question - "Has the church been weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, and was the decision of Heaven - "Found wanting"? All other questions pale into insignificance in the face of the gravity of this question. At stake is the destiny of "men, maidens, and little children." (V:211) How can we blissfully go on saying that there is nothing negative about Laodicea, and that she will triumph, even if "the divine presence and glory have departed"? Should there be an apparent triumph, whose power would be thus manifest in a false "latter rain" experience? Whose messenger would such a messenger be? Is it not time to stop and reconsider where we are in the stream of time, and order our messages in harmony with the decisions of the Heavenly Sanctuary?

The True Voice of God on Earth

When Jesus walked among men on the earth, He was the voice of God on earth. Of Him, God declared - "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." (Matt. 17:5) When Jesus was about to leave the disciples - those who would constitute His church on earth - He told them He would send "another Comforter," even the Spirit of truth who would abide with them to the end. (John 14:16; 16:13) This Holy Spirit is the voice of God on earth until withdrawn. He has and does speak through men and human organizations. The decision of the first General Conference session in Jerusalem was confirmed in the name of the Holy Spirit. The written decision read - "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us. . ." (Acts 15:28)

CONFERENCE APPROVED

Clarence A. Settle

"Pastor, dear pastor, tarry, I pray.
Calm me with the words you so smoothly say -
When I am so troubled by the news that I
hear -
'Things in the Church are not quite as they
appear.'"

"Bless you, my child, for coming to me;
I will explain everything - you will see.
So don't you worry, neither be afraid.
Do as I say, you'll have it all made."

"Well, pastor, I have heard it said that in '77
To the Pope, our church a medal has given.
I'm truly shocked at such a deed,
For in Great Controversy, p. 572, I read:

A prayerful study of the Bible would show
Protestants the real character of the Papacy
and would cause them to abhor and shun it.

Pastor, I fear, we've now gone and done it."

"O, my child, you are so naive -----
There is no reason for you so to grieve.
The Church has a mission of love to fulfill;
So to Catholicism no longer holds any ill
will.
Such beliefs to be sure were held long ago,
But to the trash heap now they must go.
T'was sworn to in Court --- it's CONFERENCE
APPROVED!

So you see, my child, what the leaders say
and what's in the Review,
Is what's right for me and you!"

"O pastor, thank you indeed, those words
I just love to hear.
They quiet my conscience and calm every
fear.

There's one thing more you must explain
to me.

Why are we since '67 seated on the faith
and order commission of the WCC?

Do you not know a Catholic now chairs the
same commission of the NCC?

Tell me, dear pastor, what more need we
hear

To tell us that the judgment of Christ is
ever so near?"

"Dear child, can you not see -----
Those men are but spies and witnesses for
you and me.
Just as the Isrealites sent spies, so must
we."

"I understand, pastor, but it does bother
me.

One spy and witness [Hilgert] Presbyterian-
ism now teaches.

And our present spy and witness [Dederen]
new theology preaches."

"Well, my child, don't worry yourself so.
It's CONFERENCE APPROVED and that's all you
need know."

"Thank you kind sir, such words I truly love
to hear.

They quiet my conscience and calm every fear.

But one thing more I would like to ask;
Please don't get angry and take me to task.
When before the Judgment Bar, I stand its
sentence soon to hear,

Can I count on your words to calm every fear?

Will I then hear your calm and soothing words
declare:

'Don't worry; be not afraid. You've listened
to your pastor; done as you were told.

You're CONFERENCE APPROVED, so Welcome to
the streets of gold?'"

From page 4 - Where Is the Authority of God Invested?

So long as a person and/or an organization
remains true to the trust committed to them,
the Holy Spirit abides with them, but should
a person and/or an organization be found
by the balances of the sanctuary to have
betrayed that trust, the Spirit of God no
longers uses that person and/or organiza-
tion. It is declared to have been - "Found
wanting." This is the issue today, and
the only question to be answered at the
present time - for all else hinges on the
answer! If the answer is not determined
beyond shadow of doubt, those on the wrong
side of the answer will find themselves
ultimately to have been false prophets,
and the people who listen to them will be
deceived with eternal consequences at stake.
The true voice of God must be discerned
and followed. This is not an issue over
which we can play "tiddly-winks." To say
that we believe what Ellen G. White had
to say about the message and messengers
God sent in 1888, yet refuse to take heed
to what she wrote in prophecy following
the 1903 General Conference session is to
nullify our profession of belief in the
gift of prophecy.

An Example

In the book set aside for the time of the

end is to be found an example which sets forth the actions to be followed by those who know and understand prophecy and its fulfillment. In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, Daniel received a vision while residing at Shushan in the province of Elam. (8:2) In this prophecy, he was told plainly who the next world rulers would be - the Medes and Persians. (8:20)

Daniel was no stranger to the kings of Media. Nebuchadnezzar's sister had been given in marriage to a Median king. During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar friendly relations existed between the two courts. It is highly possible that Daniel on various occasions was sent on diplomatic missions to the Median court by the Babylonian king.

As the forces of the Medes and Persians pushed down upon Babylon, the province of Elam would have been one of the first to fall. Daniel could have remained behind as the Babylonian forces retreated and asked for "political asylum" knowing that the arms of Medo-Persia would prevail. But no, the final night of Belshazzar's reign found Daniel in Babylon. The verdict of the Heavenly Sanctuary had not been revealed to him. He dare not move ahead of God.

The story of the last night of Belshazzar is well known. While feasting in his palace, the Hand came forth and on the palace wall wrote the fateful words - "Found wanting." When Daniel read the words, he had his answer, and moved swiftly in harmony with heaven's plan. The next day, Daniel became the first of the three presidents placed over the 120 princes appointed to rule the provinces of the Kingdom of Medo-Persia.

What a lesson! Know the decision of God, and then move in harmony with it. We can know - we have been told specifically - that God would weigh the Seventh-day Adventist in the balances of the sanctuary. Further, we have been put on notice that this would occur prior to Jesus leaving the mercy-seat of the heavenly sanctuary, or in other words, prior to the close of human probation. Besides this we have been told on what evidence the decision would be based - whether the church had been true to the trust committed to her.

The sad situation at the present time is that there are those who profess to believe the Lord's messenger who will not face up

to the prophetic testimony given in 1903. There are others who know the answer to the key question for this present hour, but who are unwilling to take positive action as did Daniel as soon as he knew.

What shall the outcome be - continuance under human authority, or bowing to the fact that God has taken things into His own hands? The prophecy of Ezekiel 9, the basis for Testimonies, Vol. 5, pp. 207f, clearly indicates, that once the decision is rendered in the sanctuary - while Jesus still remains there - the One who abides between the cherubim goes to the threshold of the tabernacle and takes command of the situation resulting from the apostasy in Jerusalem. Ignorance of these things is not bliss; and deception is deadly.

¹ 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 wisdom and power to control the work, and to say what plans should be followed. 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.

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 world, 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 invested in His church, in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work.

When this power, which God has placed in the church, is accredited wholly to one man, and he is invested with the authority to be judgment for other minds,

then the Bible order is changed. Satan's efforts upon such a man's mind would be most subtle, and sometimes well-nigh overpowering; for the enemy would hope that through his mind he could effect many others. [Compare this part of the paragraph to Testimonies, Vol. 3, p. 493, par. 2. This will give you some insight as to how this manuscript was brought together.] Let us give to the highest organized authority in the church that which we are prone to give to one man or to a small group of men. (Testimonies, Vol. 9, pp. 260-261, Section - "The General Conference.") #

THE LORD PROVIDES

For some time now, we have wanted to reach out to the Spanish speaking section of the Adventist Community with the message which for eighteen years the English members have had opportunity to read. We are indebted to the untiring efforts and unceasing determination of Elder Wellesley Muir, Senior Pastor of the Central Seventh-day Adventist of Bakersfield, California, in helping to bring this about. Because of Elder Muir's objective in ridding the church he governs of all "dissident" voices, he has provided the Foundation with an editor and translator for the Thought Paper - "Watchman, What of the Night?" - in Spanish. The plans call for the Spanish edition to be edited and translated in Bakersfield; printed and distributed from Lamar, Arkansas. Those knowing Spanish speaking members of the Adventist community who need to be informed in their own language, please send us their names and addresses. The first issue is being readied for January, 1986. It has been suggested by the editor of the Spanish edition that we dedicate the first issue to Elder Muir. Elder Muir spent a number of years working in the Inca Union Mission of the South American Division. Now he is again instrumental in helping to meet the spiritual needs of those whom he served in mission service. As the Psalmist Asaph wrote - "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." (Ps. 76:10) #

OVERSEAS AIR POST

A number of readers of the Thought Paper have made arrangements to receive each issue via Air to their respective overseas' addresses. Some may not be aware of this arrangement. The air post varies from continent to continent. If you are interested in receiving "Watchman, What of the Night?" via air, write to us, and we will tell you what annual postal fee will be necessary to receive the issue each month in your part of the world. #

NEW ORDER FORM

With this mailing we are including a copy of the 1986 Order Form for both publications and cassette tapes. You will observe two things: 1) This Order Form supercedes all previous Forms; and 2) It nullifies any and all previous special offers made through the Thought Paper. However, you will notice the very special offer being made for 1986 as long as the supply of the manuscripts last. Several new titles appear among the cassette tapes listed. We have included not only factual type of presentation, but also spiritual messages for your growth in grace. #

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Please note also that our Postal address is no longer P. O. Box 178, but rather the number has been changed to 789. As our supplies are renewed they will reflect this new Postal Box number at Lamar.

May the light from the Heavenly Sanctuary guide you in 1986 amid the confusion of these last days. I John 1:7.

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