

Internationalization: The Seven Day Adventists– Governance, Norms, Finance, Exchange

Dr. Joseph F. Nielson

Introduction

In fulfillment of the divine plan the Advent Movement began its prophetic journey toward the kingdom in the year 1844. Few in number, often with unhappy memories of having been cast out of their churches because they had accepted the Advent doctrine, the movement's pioneers walked at first uncertainly. They were sure of the doctrines they held, but unsure as to the form of organization, if any, that they should adopt. Indeed, most of them so sharply remembered how strong, well-organized church bodies had used that strength to oppose the Advent truth, that they instinctively feared any centralized order and government. Nevertheless, certain pioneer leaders saw with increasing clarity that some kind of government was imperative if good order was to prevail and the movement grow strong. Their conviction was greatly strengthened by messages coming from the pen of Ellen G. White.

The result was that in 1860 a church name, Seventh-day Adventist, was chosen, and a legal body created to hold church property.

In 1863 the General Conference was organized, thus gathering into one a number of local conferences which had that time been created. This set the Advent Movement on a coordinated organized course.

Realizing increasingly how important it that everything "be done decently and in order" in their worldwide work, and that actions on church government should not only express the mind but have the full authority of the church, the 1946 General Conference session adopted the following procedure:

All changes or revisions of policy that are to be in the *Manual* shall be authorized by the General Conference session."
General Conference Report, No. 8, p. 197 (June 14, 1946).

However in different parts of the world, local conditions sometimes call for special actions. Accordingly, the 1948 Autumn Council, which had taken action to submit suggested revisions of the *Church Manual* to the 1950 General Conference session, also voted:

That each division, including the North American Division of the world field, prepare a 'Supplement' to the new *Church Manual* not in any way modifying it but containing such additional matter as is applicable to the conditions and circumstances prevailing in the division; the manuscripts for these Supplements to be submitted to the General Conference Committee for endorsement before being printed." *Autumn Council Actions*, 1948, p. 19.

This present edition incorporates all revisions and additions accepted up to and including the 1975 General Conference session.

The 1946 General Conference session action that all "changes or revisions of policy" in the *Manual* shall be "authorized by the General Conference sessions," reflects a conception of the authoritative status of General Conference sessions that has long been held among us. In the 1877 session this actions was taken:

Resolved, that the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of the individual conscience." --*Review and Herald*, vol. 50, No. 14, p.106.

Long before this--in 1875-- Mrs. White had written in the same vein: "The church of Christ is in constant peril. Satan is seeking to destroy the people of God, and one man's mind, one man's judgement, is not sufficient to be trusted." -- *Ibid*, vol. 3, p. 445. She immediately added, "Christ would have His followers brought together in church capacity, observing order, having rules and discipline, and all subjects\ one to another, esteeming others better than themselves."

In these inspired words, in the 1877 General Conference action and in the need for well-defined rules that are requisite to good order, is found not only the justification for this *Church Manual* but also its rightful claim upon us all, both ministry and laity.
General Conference Committee

Governance

1. Five steps in our organization
2. Problems attending worldwide leadership
 - a. Little by little churches, conferences, individuals, and institutions came to look to Battle Creek for guidance in nearly everything.
 - b. In line with this tendency to concentrate power and facilities in Battle Creek, the institutions were constantly becoming enlarged. As a result, more and more members were being drawn into the city.
 - c. The warnings and counsels fell on dull ears.
3. Leadership - a man is just what his vision in. Characteristics
 - a. Without a vision there is no burden
 - b. Without a burden there is no sacrifice
 - c. Without a sacrifice there is no reward
4. Why God called the Church to establish and operate institutions.
Instrumentalities of God to cooperate in the grand work represented by the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd angels in Revelations 14. The work of warning the inhabitants of the world that Christ is coming the second time with power and great glory. Institutions of learning, publishing houses, health institutions.
5. International SDA Schools Survey
 - a. Elementary 12,500
 - b. Academies 1,210
 - c. Colleges 315
 - d. Universities 15 (8 medical)

- e. Students 1.5 million
 - f. Industries (linked with schools) 20,000
 - g. Two new schools per day - largest Protestant school system
 - h. Home plus church without SDA schooling - maintain 51% of children
 - i. Each year in an SDA school increases the likelihood that student will make God priority in entire life.
6. Results of a survey of SDA medical missionaries
- a. Recruiting and training
 - b. Problems
 - 1. Overwork
 - 2. Tourists
 - 3. Education of children
 - 4. Church officials arbitrary
 - c. Focus and future
 - 1. Gap between doctor and minister
 - d. Recommendations
 - 1. Personnel
 - 2. Initial recruitment
 - 3. Composition of work force
 - 4. Paramedical staffing
 - 5. National doctors
 - 6. Orientation
 - 7. Sustentation
 - 8. Religious-medical relations
 - 9. Minister-doctor relations
 - 10. Will anything be done?

Seventh-Day Adventist Church Growth

	<i>North America</i>	<i>World Wide</i>
1980-85	186,000	1.5 million
1985-86	39,000	580 thousand

* 1980 - SDA membership = 4.6 million * 1986 - SDA membership = 7.3 million

Explanation for growth in World Areas

<i>North America</i>	<i>World Wide</i>
Multiple Leadership => Slower Growth	Fewer Leaders => Faster Growth

Norms

1. Norms are integrated into a medical-theological missionary emphasis.

2. Each member to work
3. Purpose of health evangelism
4. Medical missions breaks down prejudice
5. Heaven's plan for our success
6. Dancing, movies, card playing, TV, gambling, promiscuous sex, etc.

Finance

1. Finance is based on the tithe.
2. The tithe is not used or disbursed by the local church, but is passed on to the conference treasurer. The tithe is to be held sacred for the work of the ministry and Bible teaching, including the carrying forward of conference administration in the care of the churches and of field missionary operations. The tithe is not to be expended upon other lines of work such as church or institutional debt-paying or building operations.
3. All institutional monies are passed on to the General Conference.
4. Free-will offerings are also raised.
5. Operating budgets are required by all entities.
6. In order that there may be a uniform basis for the remuneration of various classes of workers, a denominational wage scale has been adopted. Minimum and maximum rates have been set for the different classes of workers, with the suggestion that men of long experience and tried service be rated at or near the maximum. Expenses are extra.
7. All programs are paid for by cash.
8. The tithe forms the basis of all SDA giving. More than 2/3 of the members tithe. The tithe forms the basis of Conference finances.
9. Emergencies are handled by the union and division fields; extreme emergencies by the General Council.

Exchange

1. A designated revered leader - Ellen White
2. Strong Institutions
 - a. Publishing
 - b. Medical
 - c. Educational
3. Varied and continuous evangelism
Radio, TV, Children, Health missions
4. Principal approach to finance
Research confirms health principles.
5. A distinctive behavior - the Sabbath observance
6. A distinctive belief - the Second Coming
7. A radicalism
8. What of the future?
The postwar emphasis on evangelism proved particularly effective in increasing Adventist membership outside North America. These areas averaged an annual growth rate of approximately 6 percent in the decade following the end of World War II —

twice the annual increase in North America. The following factors help explain the larger rate of increase in overseas areas: (1) the influence of the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary's evangelistic field schools, (2) less economic prosperity, with its accompanying secularization, and (3) increased expenditures for evangelism (the Southern Asia Division, for example, committed five times as much evangelism in 1951 as was spent in 1950).

Implications of Expanded Educational Opportunities in the Church and Internationalization

One of the major objectives of the SDA church was to make education available to all their young people in a Christian environment. As I read the material, the implication of expanded educational opportunities to church young people caught my attention. There are three areas that I would like to explore and show how they relate to the SDA and perhaps to any church with a strong educational program.

I. Mass Education

A. Implications

1. Devaluation of education - when everyone is educated, or many advanced degrees are earned, then devaluation sets in as to status, prestige, uniqueness, and eliteness. In order to maintain eliteness the colleges vie for eliteness within the denomination and people find attributes other than education to evidence eliteness. Status symbols become paramount.
2. Fragmentation of power - power based on education is fragmented, the old elites' power is dissipated. A few educated people no longer can control. Perhaps, control becomes more pronounced by influence than by authority.
3. Localization of skills - people no longer turn to a central authority for direction in programming. There is a decentralization of authority as educated people align themselves with local churches.

B. Emergence of contextualization

1. Educational systems in other cultures will/should produce leadership. These leaders should/will decentralize authoritative centers.
2. What has taken three generations to accomplish in America will take place in half the time in other cultures. The rapidity of change and decentralization is integrated into a single program.

II. Christian Instrumentalism

A. Implementation of programs

1. Implementation of programs in a normative environment - education in a church- related setting is designed to train people to operate in a normative environment. Church rules, political dimensions, and institutional patterns are to be observed.

2. Implementation of programs for utilitarian purposes- both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of programming are coordinated so that both objective data can be produced and subjective values can be propagated.
 3. Implementation of programs to perpetuate the institution - legitimation of obligations to the institution is carefully articulated. The institutional ideology is stated in such a way that support to the programs is unquestionable.
- B. A theology of Christian instrumentalism
1. The Bible becomes the authority for the administration of the church and its institutions - Biblical illustrations and admonitions are used to encourage people in instrumental positions, i.e. missionary and district leaders who are elected or appointed to fill roles. These role-sets and status-sets in no way are to usurp or detract from the district leadership. So, a theology of instrumentalism is unfolding though not articulated as such.

III. The Combination of "How to Live" with "How to make a Living"

- A. Church related college curriculum
1. The liberal arts program plus religious and ritualistic instruction - these aspects of education are designed to teach church related college students "how to live." These disciplines enlighten the individual to the potentials of life in intellectual pursuit and evangelize the individual for spiritual commitment.
 2. The professional training component - church related colleges have incorporated strong programs to train students for careers and occupations in society. "How to make a living" is to be incorporated in "how to live" so that Christians with skills can become leaders in society and the church.
- B. A model for Christian higher education

As I read SDA literature I was impressed with these ideas. SDA history is punctuated by intermittent upheavals of strong personalities, educational elites, and contextualization. Perhaps, all church related education has the same problems of knowing how to assimilate within the institutional setting a changing constituency that is highly trained with access to the money and technology of society as never before.

The answer for the SDA came from Ellen White in 1885. Her theme was "decentralize authority."

Bibliography

Montgomery, Oliver. *Principles of Church Organization and Administration*. Review and Herald, 1942.

Nelson, Wilbur K., Dolson, Leo. *Health Education in the SDA Church*. Loma Linda University, California.

Olsen. *Origin & Progress of Seventh Day Adventists*. Review and Herald, Washington D.C.

Olson, O. V. *Through Crisis to Victory*. 1888-1901, Review and Herald, Washington D.C.

Schwartz, R. W. *Light Bearers to the Remnant*. Pacific Press Publishing Assoc. Col., 1979.

Spalding, Arthur. *Origin and History of the Seventh Day Adventists*. Vol. 1, IV Review & Herald Publishing Co. - Washington D.C., 1962.

Stirling, Betty. *The SDA Medical Mission Program as Seen by Mission Doctors*. Loma Linda University, California, 1971.