

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Doctor of Ministry
Emphasis in Leadership

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: AFFIRMING AND PROMOTING THE AUTHORITY AND ORDER OF
THE CHURCH IN THE FACE OF DISSENTING VIEWS AND
PRACTICES IN LUSAKA CONFERENCE

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Date completed: August 2016

This research considered the above topic in relation to Lusaka Conference.

The conference is located in the Republic of Zambia in southern Africa.

Zambia has had a history of both fanaticism among church members and dissentious activism by off-shoot private ministries. While taking into account the phenomenon of dissident private ministries, the research was more inclined toward investigating the causative factors that tended to trigger dissenting views and practices among church members in local congregations. The problem of dissidence needed a methodical delineation so as to proffer solutions using empirical approaches.

The above considerations led to the researcher's employing of a mixed research approach that incorporated mainly the quantitative methodology coupled with some qualitative elements. This entailed the use of a questionnaire among members of three focus groups constituted in each of the three selected local church

congregations. Orientations and group discussions preceded the admittance of the questionnaire so as to understand the churches as well as to enable the participants to yield accurate data for analysis.

It was deduced that dissention in religious organizations was not unusual. The biblical records revealed a pattern symptomatic of flawed character traits among the perpetrators of dissention. Satan and human agents like Korah epitomized the aforesaid profile.

The above conclusions were drawn from group discussions, the admittance of the questionnaire and intervention measures tested in the three focus groups during this research. These measures included the formulation of dialogue and reconciliation committees, teaching of selected doctrines, engendering practical fellowship and nurture as well as following the stipulated grievance and disciplinary guidelines. All these were undergirded with redemptive considerations. The results from the interventions showed a greater appreciation of church order and authority. The above program needed to be implemented by churches in the conference using, and supplementary to, the existing church structure and policy guidelines in the *Church Manual*.

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IN LUSAKA CONFERENCE

A dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Silas Chabala

August 2016

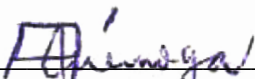
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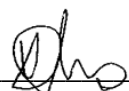
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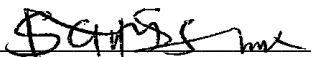
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Dedicated to clergy and laity who are committed to fostering
the biblical establishment and mission of the church

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Description of Ministry Context

The researcher ministered in the Republic of Zambia, a country located in southern Africa. The country is multi-ethnic and politically pluralistic. It is also multi-racial, although Bantu Africans are the majority. The ethnic minorities consist mainly of Asians of Indian origin, Europeans and Middle Eastern descendants.

In terms of religion, the constitution of Zambia guarantees religious liberty. In this environment Christianity is the predominant religion. It is mostly segmented among the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations. The predominant Protestant denominations consist of traditional churches like the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, New Apostolic, the Salvation Army, and the Seventh-day Adventist Churches. Other religions include Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zambia had sometimes had to contend with dissentious members and various externally organized dissident private ministries. The organized dissident private ministries manifested their inimical activities more significantly in the 1990s. Incidentally, most of the Adventist Church members that are known to have either resonated with or out rightly allied themselves with dissident ministries did so with the Davidian Shepherd's Rod ministry.

Whereas other contentious ministries like the Light Bearers (before reconciling with the Adventist Church), Heartland Institute and Hope International

made their intentions known through their publications, the Davidian Shepherd's Rod sponsored emissaries to coordinate their program in Zambia. Like the Branch Davidians led by the extremist David Koresh in America,¹ the former tended to erode the confidence in the Adventist establishment. The research, therefore, had this factor as a backdrop even though the thrust focuses on church members' attitude toward the Adventist Church, its leadership and teachings.

A case in point with regard to the mode of operation of the Davidian Shepherd's Rod concerns the documented activities of David Wilson and his followers in Zambia in 1991. Having chosen Riverside Seventh-day Adventist Church as his base, he promulgated the view that the Adventist Church had become Babylon. Furthermore, he taught them that the *Church Manual* and church policy books had no credibility. He discouraged the members of the said church from sending tithes to the Copperbelt Zambia Field office. Subsequently, efforts from the local mission field administration to bring them into compliance with church policies and teachings were consistently ignored. This led the field administration to convene a session during which Riverside Church was removed from the sisterhood of churches in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.²

David Wilson was undeterred by the development above. He proceeded to propagate his teachings in selected local churches across Zambia. He acquired a time slot on the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation's television channel and began to broadcast John Osborn's *Prophecy Countdown* videos. The content of the video

¹William G. Jonnson, ed., Alfred C. McClure and Garry Petterson, "A Special Report: Waco," *Review and Herald*, June 1993, 4-7.

²Central Zambia Conference Committee, *Caught in the Gunfire* (Lusaka, Zambia: Lierals and Reformation, 2008), 3.

tapes were detrimental to the image of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³ By that time, the Adventist Church in Zambia was getting aroused with the realization that there were polarizing elements within the corporate body of believers.

Further to the foregoing, Ms Betty Hewitt, a contemporary to Davidian Wilson, had begun to work at an Adventist mission hospital in Chipata in 1994. She joined the hospital in the territory of East Zambia Field in the capacity of a medical missionary. She began cooperating with the Shepherd's Rod ministry and by 1995 she had a following at the mission station and from churches within the town of Chipata. In the same year she openly insinuated that the Adventist Church was fallen and subsequently requested to have her name dropped from the Mwami Mission Hospital Church. By then her influence in this regard had spread to up to ten congregations in Chipata.

Efforts to restore the erring members by the mission field administrators proved futile. Furthermore, the said ten congregations' leadership claimed congregational autonomy and defied the authority and guidance of the church leaders both in the Chipata mission district and field. This battle was protracted for a decade. Finally, "on 26th October 2006, [at] the special East Zambia Field session ... six churches in Chipata and four churches in Chadiza were expelled from the sisterhood of churches due to apostasy."⁴ As a result 1,827 church members in these congregations lost their membership. Such has been the effect and consequences of dissentious activities when introduced or manifested among church members in local

³Robert A. Phiri, *A Strategy for Countering Offshoots in the East Zambia Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Reference for Local Church Setting* (Nairobi, Kenya: Adventist University of Africa, 2009), 41.

⁴Phiri, 50.

congregations of the Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Zambia since the early 1990s.

The researcher's particular ministry context under consideration was Lusaka Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This regional church administrative entity was part of the then Zambia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In terms of relative statistics, this Union had one of the largest memberships in the Adventist world as well as one of the most rapid growth rates. It is noteworthy that the Union's membership was said to have grown from 471,095 in 2004⁵ to 801,396 by the end of 2012.⁶ The union conference had church administrative oversight for the whole of Zambia until it was dissolved in September 2015, to pave way for two administrative unions in the country. Lusaka Conference then fell under the Southern Zambia Union Conference. The local conference's membership stood at 120,217 by December of 2012.⁷ Two hundred and forty four churches were spread across this region in clusters of 24 mission districts by the same period.

The researcher served in Lusaka Conference as Ministerial Secretary from December 2012 until September 2015. This aspect of ministry was immediately preceded by the role of being the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries director for six years in Central Zambia Conference. Incidentally, Lusaka Conference had been part of Central Zambia Conference until December 2012.

⁵General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics, *142nd Annual Statistical Report* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2004), 26.

⁶General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics, *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 2013* (SDA Yearbook 2013), accessed 22 September 2013, <http://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

⁷Ibid.

The Conference-level responsibilities of the researcher were preceded by eleven years of ministry in five mission districts and one local church. The location of these mission districts included rural, semi-urban and urban regions. This experience added up to almost 21 years of gospel ministry by the time of the presentation of this dissertation in August, 2016. During this period, the researcher was ordained in 2005.

Statement of the Problem

Some congregations in Lusaka Conference had manifested tendencies where certain members had been expressing and demonstrating decreasing confidence and support concerning clergy leadership, church authority and doctrines. In some cases, this development had been orchestrated by dissident private ministries also referred to as off-shoots. In other cases, however, this had apparently been spontaneous due to factors that needed investigation. Whenever this occurred, the effectiveness of pastors and functions of local churches were adversely affected.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the dissertation was to develop a program that would restore confidence in the church and ministers among church members as well as deal with the threat of off-shoot groups in the local congregations of Lusaka Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The research conducted a pilot project involving three congregations, in the first phase, and two congregations in the final phase. In the later phase, a program implementation and evaluation were done. This was designed to lead to the analytical identification of the underlying problem of dissention against the church and its ministers and the proffering of remedial measures for the problem.

Justification for the Dissertation

Discontent among some church members had become endemic partly due to the inadequacy of approaches toward the issue. The discontent had tended to place pastors and elders in a weak position with regard to standing up to dissenting members, on one hand, and nurturing loyal but skeptical members, on the other. The ensuing harm caused to church administration and fellowship at local and conference levels required effective measures to arrest the developments.

Administering local congregations and even a conference structure was relatively made more difficult whenever loss of confidence was manifested. This was due to the erosion of two crucial factors necessary to the function of leadership in the congregation and the conference at large. Leaders needed effective influences and a functional policy framework. Discontent diminished the former and violated the latter, thus making the congregation or administrative entity dysfunctional.

Further to the foregoing, divergent doctrinal views needed urgent attention or else a congregation would lose its identity and mission. Church leaders, therefore, needed congregants whose attributes reflected doctrinal correctness in profession and practice. Moreover, church members needed guidance in terms of faith and practice so that they could mature spiritually and be safeguarded from distractive teachings. On account of the above reasons, this dissertation sought to address the aforementioned issues.

Delimitation of the Dissertation

This research confined itself to Chitukuko, Brentwood Drive and Chilanga Seventh-day Adventist Churches. The three churches were representative of the congregations in the conference that were susceptible to tendencies of disaffection.

Furthermore, two of the congregations were located in the greater city of Lusaka area and one was in the semi-urban location. Incidentally, they were in close proximity. Unlike the remote rural congregations, the researcher's physical scope afforded an easier implementation and evaluation of the program due to proximity. Moreover, the challenge of disaffection seemed relatively minimal in the rural areas.

This research was also restricted to problems members may cause due to loss of confidence and support for church authority as well as their subscribing to controversial teachings. In this respect, other areas of conflict were not addressed.

Further to the foregoing, the researcher accepted a service call to be transferred to another conference in a new capacity. This implied a relatively longer distance between the new residence and the location of the congregations that were the subject of this research. Consequently, the last phase of the program was implemented in two of the three congregations for logistical reasons.

Methodology and Procedure

This dissertation discussed theological reflections in chapter two. This contained considerations of ecclesiological and dogmatic implications in the body of Christ. In this regard the research focused on the theme of sound ecclesiastical authority and perspectives of confidence in leadership. It sought to identify principles that could be drawn from biblical accounts and be applied to contemporary situations. Furthermore, the nurturing of believers into loyal disciples of Jesus Christ, as a pastoral function, was studied.

Under chapter three the researcher reviewed literature in three categories. These included literature on dissident and supportive independent ministries, various theological streams in the Adventist Church and the nurturing and discipleship of

church members. Various authors were then analyzed, compared and discussed. In some instances, some books which were not recent were cited on account of their apparent timeless relevance. In addition, there seemed to be an insufficient variety of books on the topic among newer publications. A blend of the classical and trending books was thus employed. The researcher was thereby enabled to formulate deductive summations leading to possible solutions to the problem at hand. This approach seemed prudent because dissentious activities by church members seemed to be common in the history of church denominations. The research surmised that lessons were drawn from such occurrences.

As a consequence of the foregoing theological and theoretical research, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to gather and analyze data in chapter four. This was done by way of organizing focus groups of ten members each, from each of the three selected congregations, for orientations and group discussions. The composition of the groups was random except for the prescribed condition that they had to consist of men, women and youth. Subsequently, a designed questionnaire was administered. Copies of this survey instrument were given to the selected focus group members after an initial session of orientations to prepare them for the survey. The responses to the questionnaire were then analyzed and the data interpreted. This led to the formulation and preparation of initiatives for interventions in view of the findings.

In chapter five intervention initiatives were implemented in order to mitigate where problems pertaining to the negative perceptions of the church and leadership existed. This was done in the form of a four-phase program. The first three dealt with approaches toward nurturing the church members. This involved teaching them some selected lessons that were tailored to empower them to withstand tendencies and

teachings inclined toward negative dissension. Thereafter, some activities meant to enhance the members' Christian experience were carried out. These involved the enhancement of fidelity to God's word, fellowship, recreation and prayer in cell groups. In addition, home visitations by church elders and other leaders were considered.

The third activity had to do with owning the Christian faith, on the part of church members. This was accomplished by asking the focus group members pertinent questions concerning one's relationship with Jesus and the Adventist Church. Members were challenged to publicly affirm their confidence in the direction the church was headed.

The fourth phase was a six-step program for handling members with dissentious views and activities. Its key characteristics were the sympathetic and redemptive engagement of the erring, constructive friendly dialogue, timely warning, censure, removal from membership and reclamation.

The above activities were evaluated. The findings lead the researcher to make recommendations toward the resolution of the problem. This places the researcher in a position to avail useful recommendations.

Expectations from the Dissertation

The researcher expected that, on the basis of the completed research and the writing of the dissertation, the implementation of the intervention program would become a permanent feature in the churches. Furthermore, church members of the three congregations and Lusaka Conference would become more educated about the biblical basis of clergy authority, thereby becoming more supportive of their leadership.

The researcher expected that members would have learnt about how to handle differences of opinion with regard to church doctrines using constructive and safe approaches. Furthermore, local pastors and elders would devote more time and resources toward teaching and nurturing their members, thus resulting in spiritual and numerical growth.

The pastors' and elder' functions would become more efficient and effective because the resistance and apathy would be significantly reduced. Furthermore, more church members would be cooperating with their leaders, thus creating a multiplier effect through the ministries of many congregants.

A system of countering organized disaffection would be established. This would result in the protection of vulnerable members and the engaging of the dissidents in dialogue leading to winning over some of them.

Lusaka Conference would be enabled to develop the capacity to identify and monitor members with disaffection tendencies even when they switched congregations. In this way the networking of disaffected individuals across congregations would be curtailed. Subsequently, the researcher would have amassed knowledge about disaffection and also contributed the same to the global pool of knowledge.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The church, having its root and basis in the Scriptures, is expected to be governed as a religious organization whose teachings and policies are under-girded by applied theological principles. In this regard today's religious organization may then be described as being contiguous with the phenomena of the ecclesiastical structure and its dynamics as seen throughout the body of Scriptures. Lessons learnt and principles observed could then be applied to the contemporary situations in respective contexts.

Satan's Discontent: an Epitome of Conflict with an Authentic Establishment

The church on earth may be thought of as a miniature reflection of the reign of God on a cosmic scale. The subversive assault on the authority and order of God's governance, as portrayed in Scripture, should be considered to have bearings on some phenomena of challenges to church governance and doctrines. In this regard, the researcher considers a synoptic review of the rebellion and fall of Lucifer from heaven as forming an insightful preamble to this study.

The rebellion of Lucifer is apparently directly related to the consequence of his discontent against the authority, reign and character of God. Furthermore, the effect of such rebellion is, inevitably, adverse to the domain of God's reign and His purposes. Therefore, the researcher briefly highlights and analyzes certain selected

Bible passages relevant to the issue.

Subversion of Order in Heaven

The research discusses the third chapter of Genesis as an inspired disclosure of the manifestation of the spirit of rebellion when it was extended to the newly created earth. Here, Eve and Adam were seduced into disregarding God's explicit commands, thus leading to a moral fall from grace and an inadvertent alliance with Satan in rebellion. The medium of communicating the seditious message was a serpent. The researcher takes cognizance of literature that surmises that

the whole Scripture makes it abundantly plain that the serpent itself was not responsible for man's fall, but rather Satan (John 8:44; 2 Cor 11:14; Romans 16:20). Nevertheless, Satan is in a figurative sense occasionally called a serpent because he used the serpent as a medium in his attempt to deceive man (Rev 12:9; 20:2).¹

This effective use of a disguise by Satan goes to show the importance of not depending on appearances but, rather, on the knowledge of God's will. In our age this will is revealed in the Bible.

In view of the foregoing summation, the researcher deduces that Satan's question, through the medium of the serpent, could have been meant to erode confidence in what God had earlier said. The conversation that ensued seems to expose the real nature and intension of the voice that addressed Eve. The Bible record states:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Ye, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? The woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall Ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely

¹"More Subtil than any Beast" [Genesis 3:1], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1976-1978), 1:229.

die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:1-5)

It is, therefore, not sheer conjecture for commentators to surmise that “Satan’s purpose was obvious. He wished to sow doubt in the heart of the woman concerning the real phraseology and the exact meaning of the divine commandment, especially concerning the reasonableness of and justice of such a command.”² It thus becomes apparent that the net effect of Satan’s message was to create an opposite order from God’s design and ideal. Eve could have been attracted to the alternative proposition in view of the promise of a better experience. This assumption emanates from the fact that Eve went ahead and ate from the forbidden tree (Gen 3:6). Consequently, God banished the couple of Adam and Eve from the paradise of Eden (Gen 3:8-24).

The essence of the apparent malice in the renegade campaign of Satan in Eden is aptly portrayed by Ellen White. She points out that Satan, “no longer free to stir up rebellion in heaven ... found a new field in plotting the ruin of the human race. ... Moved by envy, he determined to incite them to disobedience, and bring upon them the guilt and penalty of sin.”³ The consequence of compliance to such intimations is duplicity in the same rebellion and the divorcing of affections from God by human beings. When all the above elements in the saga of Eden are distilled, it becomes apparent that rebellion is rooted in the disobedience of God’s commandments and a rejection of His authority.

²“Yea, Hath God Said,” *SDABC*, 1:229,230.

³E. G. White, *Connecting with Jesus: the History of Redemption* (Seoul, Korea: Everlasting Gospel—in conjunction with Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division, Irene, South Africa), 22. The quotation is derived from the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 52, by Ellen White.

Discontent and a Flawed Character

The research observes a correlation between the moral fall of Lucifer is and his rebellion. It could be that an egoistic self-esteem, proud ambition as well as insolence toward the hierarchical order and sovereign authority of God led Lucifer into activities inimical to the government of heaven. This seems to be the profile set forth in Scripture. The account states:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit (Isa 14:12-15).

An exegetic analysis of the passage above indicates some cardinal elements with regard to the character of Lucifer and the nature of his rebellion. The word “fall” (*naphal*, in Hebrew) could be literal or figurative—depending on the context. It means “to fall, in a great variety of applications ... cast (down, self, lots), cease, die.”⁴ In this case it is apparent that this is a figurative—or moral, fall. However, the consequences would lead to a physical casting out from the presence of God and ultimately to such a person’s fatal destruction.

As for the name “Lucifer” (*hele*, in Hebrew), meaning “the morning star,”⁵ Satan was probably given on account of his brilliant glory before the fall. It has been observed that “the name Lucifer comes from the Latin Vulgate, and means ‘light bearer.’ The term, as here used, seems first to have been identified with Satan by Tertullian, Jerome, and other early fathers of the church. ... As applied to Satan, the

⁴James H. Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance: Compact Edition*, (1997), s.v. “Fall.”

⁵Ibid., 22.

various terms ... seem to reflect the thought of the high position he once held in heaven.”⁶ It may be deduced, therefore, that his rebellion could not have emanated from dissatisfaction occasioned by deprivation, but pride on account of his lofty status and glorious beauty. Some commentators have further asserted that “the desire of self-exaltation was the cause of the down fall of Lucifer. ... He took surpassing pride in the honor God had bestowed upon him, but sought still better glory for himself.”⁷ It may be said that Satan mysteriously developed an insatiable appetite for power and glory. There could be no defensible rationale for rebellion. Reasons for discontent would just be a pretext to cover up selfish ambitions.

Discontent in the Old Testament

It may be argued that in order for a religious organization to function, from the Bible perspective, it ought not only to have functional structures but also legitimacy and authority based on Scripture. Coupled with this, such an organization is expected to have an inherent order in terms of organizational rules, leadership, personnel and authority.

The research establishes that discontent among the rank and file in religious organizations is not unusual. The Bible itself has some accounts, in sacred history, when factions at various times manifested discontent and mobilized elements among their communities to either overthrow the established religious order or to circumvent it. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the Christian church has not been spared from such uprisings against the respective ecclesiastical orders and authority systems.

⁶“Lucifer” [Isa 14:12], *SDABC*, 4:170.

⁷*Ibid.*, 171.

In this regard, the researcher can testify that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has also had such situations. This has emanated from certain private ministries. Therefore, biblical principles to address the aforementioned predicaments need to be explored and theological rationales identified that could be applied as solutions.

The Case of Korah's Dissension

The challenge posed to the authority of Moses and Aaron by Korah, Dathan and Abiram deserves to be studied in light of the issue concerning identifying what legitimate religious authority consists of. Conversely, the sixteenth chapter of the biblical book of Numbers is one of the relevant passages of Scripture whose exegesis may yield answers that could be of help to both the leadership and members of the body of believers in today's church.

The status of the dissenters. The motive for the challenge by Korah and his colleagues against the leadership of Moses and Aaron may not be immediately apparent initially. The researcher, therefore, conducted an exegetical analysis of the passage. Beginning with the term; "they rose up before Moses (RSV)," the narrative could be taken to mean; "to be bold [or] insolent."⁸ This interpretation has an inference of a bold affront to the established leadership and religious order. The significance of this is indicated by the fact that Korah belonged to the tribe of Levi while Dathan and Abiram belonged to the tribe of Reuben (Num 16:1), thus bringing their religious and civic status to bear on their endeavor. The research discovered that Korah could claim religious entitlements and privileges. "Dathan and Abiram ... [could claim] for themselves, as descendants of Jacob's first born, the right of civil

⁸Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC), ed. John D. Watts (Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference and Electronic: A Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 180.

leadership in Israel.”⁹ This could explain why they won a relatively large and representative following. Their boldness in this regard could have been preceded by a campaign among the leaders of the tribes of Israel. The reference to them as “leaders of the congregation” (Num 16:2) could refer to “men of the other congregations [who] apparently belonged to other tribes as well as to that of Levi.”¹⁰ The discontent had evidently spread by the time an open challenge was made by the perpetrators.

Legal and religious implications. When the above narrative states that the tribal leaders, led by the trio of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, “assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron” (Num 16:3), the idea in the phrase is similar to what is in the second verse. The significance of this is that it (v. 2) “fulfills much of the same function as the root [for] ‘assemble against’ in verse three. It could have a legal background, denoting the attitude of an adversary in court (Deut 19:15-16; Ps 27:12).”¹¹ In this case it is apparent that this attitude was hostile, rebellious and an affront to the authority of Moses and Aaron. Furthermore, this legal aspect to the meaning of the phrase implies that Israel was operating both as a religious and civic institution. The researcher can thus surmise that the dissenters defied and despised the civil authority that pertained to Moses as well as the religious mandate of Aaron.

The assertions against Moses’ and Aaron’s leadership by Korah and his cohorts implied that the former were running an illegitimate religious model of religious order and authority. To say that the “congregation are holy” (v. 3) could be tantamount to recognizing all members of the congregation as being qualified to

⁹“Sons of Reuben,” [Num 16:1], *SDABC*, 1:875.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Budd, *Numbers*, WBC, 186.

minister as priests. Other scholars actually seem to agree with this premise. The *Word Biblical Commentary* states that “it is the exclusiveness of the system Moses has introduced to which [Korah] ... objects. He affirms the holiness of the congregation as a means of challenging the unique system represented by Moses and Aaron.”¹²

The reference to the religious status of the congregation above could have had allusions to the terms of the covenant enacted at Mount Sinai between God and the Israelites. At that time God had spoken through Moses that the nation of Israel was to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). It should be pointed out, however, that as the religious system became institutionalized during the Exodus in the wilderness, structural and functional adjustments were made by God Himself. God had said to Moses: “you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but if anyone else comes near, he shall be put to death. ... Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every first born that opens the womb among the people of Israel” (Num 3: 10, 11. RSV).

Patriarchal versus levitical orders. In spite of the aforementioned exclusive religious functional roles involving the household of Aaron as well as the tribe of Levi at large, it seems that the pre-conceived ideas and practices concerning heads of families serving as priests swayed the judgment of Korah and his colleagues. This could be the explanation for their insistence that “the LORD... [was] among the people” as they endeavored to revert to the system that entailed that all firstborns (and probably everyone) would function as priests. “This expression may have reference to the fact that before Moses’ time everyone might offer sacrifices in his own family.

¹²Budd, *Numbers*, WBC, 186.

But now this office was confined to one family.”¹³ This scenario could have created confusion in the camp as to which religious order was legitimate, hence the division among the people and the consequent development of a dissenting faction led by Korah. In the ensuing confusion about religious order and authority, Moses had recourse to God’s intervention. The challenge posed by Korah’s group and the allegiance of those who sided with them was, apparently, so significant that God’s direct revelation of his will was sought. This initiative was communicated not only to Korah and the tribal leaders with him, but the crowd of people that lent their support to the dissenting cause. In this regard, it is significant to note the terminology used to address this crowd. The biblical narrative states that “Moses said to Korah and his company” (Num16: 5) that God would reveal which of the ministers were authentic on the following day. The *Word Biblical Commentary* observes that “Korah has created a rival ‘Israel, and, from the [biblical] author’s point of view, a caricature. The offering of incense will determine the validity or otherwise of Korah’s claim.”¹⁴

It can be deduced from the foregoing that when two rival groups exist in a community of believers careful confrontation, coupled with openness to God’s special leading in connection with the events of a particular situation, ought to be followed. Dissenting views should not be discounted in a manner that may be perceived to be arbitrary or partisan and in favor of only the group whose leaders are wielding administrative control.

God’s intervention in the crisis was meant to affirm “who is His, and who is holy” (Num 16:5. RSV). “The men who are His are holy, separated, consecrated

¹³“Congregation Are Holy” [Num 16:3], *SDABC*, 1: 875.

¹⁴Budd, *Numbers*, WBC, 187.

individuals, those eligible for the highest service.”¹⁵ From this premise it may be deduced that Moses’ concept of the “priesthood of all believers” (alluded to in Exod 19:6) does not preclude a specially designated ministry of chosen religious leaders who were to have exclusive rights and privileges.

Some scholars postulate a different viewpoint about Korah’s religious status. They allege that Korah, as a Levite, had “rights of his own, and [was] pressing for the special rights reserved for the sons of Aaron from within the priestly hierarchy, and not from outside.”¹⁶ This assertion, it may be noted, does not seem to take into account the fact that Moses was referring to an already established order of which he himself was an implementer, under the direct revelation of God. This is apparent from Moses’ recounting of the religious order in the face of Korah. He said, “he has brought you near to him, and all your brethren the sons of Levi with you. . . . And would you seek the priesthood also?” (Num 16: 10). This reference could explain why another body of scholars has said that Korah, as a Levite, already had a consecrated ministry in connection with sanctuary services. “The Levites had already been appointed to sacred service. Therefore, for them to seek the priesthood also was a most fragrant violation.”¹⁷ It may thus be deduced that Korah and his colleagues’ deliberately distorted their priestly mandate for ulterior motives.

Implications on judicial functions. The other issue worthy studying and analyzing in the issue concerning the above-mentioned discontent has to do with the authority of Moses over the congregation of Israel. After addressing Korah and the

¹⁵“Who is Holy” [Num 16:5], *SDABC*, 1:876.

¹⁶Budd, “Numbers,” *WBC*, 187.

¹⁷“Near to Him,” *SDABC*, 1:876.

renegade Levites, Moses summed up his protestation by posing the question: “what is Aaron that you murmur against him?” (Num 16: 11), thus throwing back the challenge to those who were interested in the priesthood. He then turned to the tribal leaders from the tribe of the first born of Jacob—Reuben. His summoning of the duo, Dathan and Abiram, seems to be based on his position of authority in Israel. Their refusal, in saying “we will not come up” (Num 16: 12), may be taken to be an act of defiance against Moses, even at face value. In this regard, some scholars have noted that the above-quote phrase “can be used of going up to a superior (cf. Gen 46:31; Deut 25:7; Judg 4:5). ... There is something in favor of the view that in early tradition it referred to a refusal to settle.”¹⁸ This view finds collaboration among Adventist commentators who point out that “these men refused to submit their case to arbitration in court. The expression ‘to come up’ is the Hebrew term for appearing before a court of law. ... They denied the legal authority of Moses.”¹⁹

Having refused to recognize the legitimacy of the leadership and judicial authority of Moses, the duo went on to accuse Moses of deception and ill motives. By telling Moses that he “[had] not brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey” (Num 16: 14) they deliberately ignored the evident presence of God in the cloud through which He led them (Exod 13: 21, 22). Furthermore, Moses’ own personal integrity was discredited. The charge that claimed that Moses intended to “put out the eyes” (Num 16:14) of the people is better understood in its figurative sense. As it has been said, “these words imply that Moses sought to deceive the

¹⁸Budd, “Numbers,” WBC, 187.

¹⁹“We Will Not Come Up,” *SDABC*, 1:876.

people.”²⁰ Other scholars have even attributed more gravity to these allegations. They assert that “the meaning appears to be metaphorical ... in Deuteronomy 16:19 taking a bribe blinds the eyes, and something similar is probably intended here.”²¹ This added insight may be corroborated with Moses’ further protestations when he lamented before God: “I have not taken one ass from them, and I have not harmed one of them” (Num 16:15, RSV).

The fact that Moses protested his integrity and innocence even directly before God may be taken to mean that such virtues are an integral part of religious and civic legitimacy. The aforementioned words in Moses’ protestation seem to have been the conventional way of declaring one’s integrity and innocence. This was also used by people like the prophet Samuel when his leadership was overlooked by the people, in favor of a monarchy (I Sam 8:16; 12:3).

In spite of the existing religious order with evident guidelines and Moses’ defense of his own integrity, the dissenting Levites appeared for a showdown before God at the tabernacle (Num 16: 16-19). Probably this narrative should be used to appreciate the phenomenon of the conviction of being right on the part of those who have dissenting views of religious authority and order.

Mediation as a function of authority. When God’s anger was kindled against the audacity of Korah’s group, the reaction of Moses reveals yet another attribute in Moses, as a leader, and Aaron, as a priest. Even if God had finally indicated that the dissenters were at fault, Numbers 16:22 talks of Moses and Aaron falling down to intercede for them. This was, probably, a demonstration that, as leaders, they were not

²⁰“Put Out the Eyes,” *SDABC*, 1:876.

²¹Budd, “Numbers,” *WBC*, 187.

antagonistic and ill-intentioned. As a result, the followers of Korah were to be spared, on condition that they separated themselves from the rebel leaders. Under God's direct guidance, however, the ringleaders were to be treated differently in spite of the intercession by Moses and Aaron. Korah, Dathan and Abiram as well as the 250 men who offered incense were to be punished. Thus it becomes apparent that the trio, with their followers, rebelled both against the visible and invisible leadership of Israel. This is evident in the biblical rationale within the narrative. Moses said that if the ground opened to swallow the unrelenting dissenters, "then ... [they were to] know that these men ... [had] despised the LORD" (Num 16:30). This is said to have meant that God was "despised, considered unworthy of notice."²²

Korah and company had managed to plant seeds of disaffection which grew into a protracted rebellion that could not be quelled instantly, or with casual engagement. This assertion could be the explanation for the survivor's misplaced apportioning of blame, for the deaths of the rebels, on Moses (Num 16: 41-42). However, the drastic measure to put down this continuing rebellion was still tempered with mercy. Whereas God was going to punish the insolence of the people, He instructed Aaron to intercede with incense even as the fatal plague was falling on the people. "Incense was a symbol of mediation and intercession (Ps 141:2; Rev 8:34)."²³ As a result, although some of the rebellious people died, many were spared.

Leadership in Numbers 17 and 18. The contest by Korah and company had not been about ministry in the outer court of the tabernacle, but in the Holy and Most Holy places. Consequently, it became necessary to affirm the legitimate priestly

²²"Provoked the Lord," *SDABC*, 1: 877.

²³"Take a Censer" [Num 16: 46], *SDABC*, 1: 878, 879.

leaders even if the rebellious leaders had been eliminated. This was going to be done by God's miraculous sign on the rod of the person God had designated as the legitimate priest. "In as much as there was no prince to represent Levi, Moses inscribed the name of Aaron upon the rod of the tribe of Levi."²⁴ This must have been done in anticipation of the fact that God, having already decreed that the dissenters were in error, would re-affirm Aaron and his sons as the individuals with exclusive rights to the priestly ministry.

The whole purpose of the above exercise was "to make to cease from [God] the murmurings of the children of Israel" (Num 17:5). Needless to say, Aaron's rod budded miraculously (Cf. vv 8-11). Apparently, this demonstration meant that any further grumbling against Aaron would be considered to be an act of unjustifiable defiance of God.

Distinction of roles and collaboration. In the calmness of the restored order in the Israelite camp, the distinct roles of priests and Levites were explained again. When God spoke to Aaron, He directed that the Levites "shall be joined" (Num 18:4) to the services of the tabernacle. This entailed a cordial relationship. "The priests were to look upon their brethren, the Levites, as an integral part of the corps of men appointed to serve Jehovah in sacred office, even though in an inferior capacity."²⁵ Under this arrangement, the Levites were to minister outside the tabernacle while the priests were to be responsible for services within it.

The reference to the Levites as "brethren," in relation to the household of Aaron, is an allusion to the three branches of the Levites. These were the Kohathites,

²⁴"Aaron's Name," [Num17:3], *SDABC*, 1:880.

²⁵"Joined Unto Thee" [Num 18:4], *SDABC* 1: 883.

Gershonites and Merarites (Num 3: 1-33). Members of these branches of the Levites “were not to seek the office of the priesthood, as Korah had done, but to assist the priests. ... The priests were not to look down upon them, but always bear in mind that they were to be regarded and treated as ‘brethren.’”²⁶ In this way order and harmony was to be maintained leading to the realization of God’s purpose for the spiritual needs of His people.

Ellen G. White’s Comments on Korah’s Dissension

Discontent and uprisings among the Israelites in the wilderness were, apparently, not uncommon. By comparison, “the former rebellions had been mere popular tumults, arising from the sudden impulse of the excited multitude; but now a deep-laid conspiracy was formed, the result of a determined purpose to overthrow the authority of the leaders appointed by God Himself.”²⁷ This could be understood as a premeditated uprising with malicious intentions.

Korah and his colleagues may have deliberately hidden from the people their real motivation for inciting the people to rise against the leadership. On the surface one may deduce that they were fighting for the rights of all Israelites, but Ellen White points out that

[Korah] had become dissatisfied with his position and aspired to the dignity of the priesthood. ... Close to the tents of Korah and the Kohathites, on the south side of the tabernacle, was the encampment of the tribe of Reuben, the tents of Dathan and Abiram, two princes of this tribe, being near that of Korah. ... Being descendants from the eldest son of Jacob, they claimed that the civil authority belonged to them, and they determined to divide with Korah the honors of the priesthood.”²⁸

²⁶“Joined Unto Thee” [Num 18:4], *SDABC* 1: 883.

²⁷Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 395.

²⁸White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 395.

It is apparent that the trio had aimed at taking over both civic and religious authority arbitrarily. Their strategy toward this end amounted to dissident subversion.

Results of harbored frustrations. Apart from pointing out the selfish desire to ascend to the highest positions, on the part of Korah and company, Ellen White brings to the fore another significant element. The Israelites “were unwilling to submit to the terrible sentence that they must all die in the wilderness, and hence they were ready to seize upon every pretext for believing that it was not God but Moses who was leading them and who had pronounced their doom.”²⁹ Thus, a denial of their status, in view of God’s decree, is another factor that may be said to have led to the discontent that ripened into active rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron.

Delusion. From the foregoing, it seems that the combination of selfish ambitions and the denial of God’s decree on account of their previous misdemeanors led them into delusion. It has been said that “their insinuations were so readily received that they ventured still further, and at last they really believed themselves to be actuated by zeal for God.”³⁰ This goes to show that dissidence is progressive in nature. The perceptions of the people involved apparently become increasingly clouded with regard to their own spiritual condition as well as the proper order of the organization to which they belong. Having come to the state where the rebellion leaders made themselves to believe that God was on their side, it is easier to understand why accusations of ill-motive were leveled against Moses. Ellen White, however, argues that the fabrications against Moses were deliberate falsehoods. In order to sway the allegiance of those who had confidence in Moses, “it was ...

²⁹White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 396.

³⁰Ibid., 396, 397.

necessary to assign some selfish motive for his deep interest for Israel; and the old charge was reiterated, that he had led them out to perish in the wilderness that he might seize upon their possessions.”³¹ Thus a crisis point was reached that made God’s direct intervention necessary.

Punishment as a salvific deterrent. In an act of swift judgment, the households of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were swallowed by the earth. This elimination of the ring leaders was apparently meant to save the less guilty in the rank and file of those that had sided with the rebels. However, even the two hundred and fifty princes later on ended up dying. “Fire flashing from the cloud consumed [them] ... These men, not being the first in rebellion, were not destroyed with the chief conspirators. They were permitted to see their end and to have an opportunity for repentance; but their sympathies were with the rebels, and they shared their fate.”³² From this insight, the researcher deduces that unrepentant leaders of dissent should be punished in order to serve as deterrence to others in rebellion. Furthermore, such leaders should be handled with greater sternness than mere followers because of their greater degree of premeditated malice.

From the foregoing, Ellen White makes mention of another related issue that may not be apparent in the Bible narrative about the rebellion of Korah. She speaks of varying degrees of guilt in rebellion as well as allegiance to and sympathy for the rebel leaders. In this regard, “the entire congregation was sharers in their guilt, for all had, to a greater or less degree, sympathized with them. Yet God in His great mercy made a distinction between the leaders in rebellion and those whom they had led. The

³¹White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 398.

³²Ibid., 401.

people who had permitted themselves to be deceived were still granted space for repentance.”³³ She further asserts that “all through the history of the church God's servants have had the same spirit to meet.”³⁴ She thus implies that anyone who is misled into following dissentious ring leaders is still accountable for their position because of the choice that one makes in the process.

Another issue worth noting is the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the affairs of a religious organization. Ellen White states that whether people will be blessed or damned ultimately depends on how they respond to the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and corporate collaboration. As for the Israelites,

notwithstanding they had had the most convincing evidence of God's displeasure at their course, in the destruction of the men who had deceived them, they dared to attribute His judgments to Satan, declaring that through the power of the evil one, Moses and Aaron had caused the death of good and holy men. It was this act that sealed their doom. They had committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, a sin by which man's heart is effectually hardened against the influence of divine grace.³⁵

It is apparent that the basis for Ellen White's postulation above is from Christ's words in Matthew 12:32 where He said that "whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him." She thus elucidates a fundamental biblical principle.

The “False Prophet Syndrome.” Another, not so apparent, phenomenon that Ellen White identifies as a problem in Korah's rebellion is the latter's claim of having access to divine revelation. This could amount to proclaiming himself to be prophet. Conversely, Moses would be cast as an imposter with the selfish motive to defraud

³³White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 401.

³⁴Ibid., 404.

³⁵Ibid., 406.

them. Korah “claimed that God had opened the matter to him and laid upon him the burden of changing the government of Israel just before it was too late. He stated that the congregation was not at fault.”³⁶ Such an assertion could have opened the way for people to illegitimately clamor for privileges and functions that God had not authorized. The entire civic and religious order would be thrown into jeopardy.

In this whole phenomenon of ill-motivated discontent leading to uprisings against church authority, the ordinary member of a religious body is the most vulnerable in terms of the probability of deception and the consequent spiritual harm. Speaking of dissenters, Ellen White says that they are “self-sent messengers [who] are a curse to the cause. Honest souls put confidence in them, thinking that they are moving in the counsel of God and that they are in union with the church. ... It is much more wearing to the spirits of God's messengers to go into places where those have been who have exerted this wrong influence than to enter new fields.”³⁷ In view of this danger to members, she urges legitimate leaders to be proactive and confront such situations and the perpetrators. She urges “God's servants ... to deal plainly, act openly, and not cover up wrongs; for they are standing between the living and the dead and must render an account of their faithfulness.”³⁸ Moreover, it may also be said that a leader wields influence either for good or woe. Standing for what is right will ensure faithfulness to the trust that has been placed upon leaders by God.

A lesson for our time. In the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram we have a lesson of warning lest we follow their example. Scripture urges us not to “tempt

³⁶Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 3:346.

³⁷Ellen G. White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 99.

³⁸White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White*, 99.

Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor 10:10, 11 - KJV).

Unenlightened zeal. A summary from the uprising of Korah can now be made. Korah and company seemed to be sincere in seeking and proposing reforms to the movement which had, as they surmised, only Moses and Aaron at the head. They imagined that the promise to inherit Canaan had been aborted by Moses. They imputed wrong motives on Moses and planted seeds of rebellion against established authority. In the process, Korah and his associates presented themselves as viable alternatives to Moses and Aaron.

Moses referred to the established order and also appealed to God himself to reveal His will regarding the legitimately designated leadership. It is apparent that mere human logic could have availed nothing under the circumstances. God's intervention had to be appealed to in order for the divinely preferred leadership to be publicly authenticated.

Fairness in discipline. On the day that God vindicated Moses and Aaron, it was also made clear that the ring leaders were to receive divine punishment. In this scenario, it is apparent that God sought to separate the deceived mob that had been attracted to the rebellious trio somewhat blindly, although they bore relative guilt also. Thus they escaped the demise of the three and their families when the earth opened up and swallowed them. However, those who had imbibed of the spirit of rebellion in spite of their privileged positions as Levites perished while audaciously burning incense at the door of the tabernacle for stubbornly harboring the spirit of rebellion.

Another poignant lesson is that if the seeds of dissidence find fertile ground in the hearts of the ill-informed members and are not nipped in time the disaffection can overwhelm human leadership. For example, when some Israelites woke up the following day and charged Moses with killing “the people of the LORD,” the enormity of a ripened dissidence in the congregation was seen. However, even in the midst of such blatant apostasy and blind rebellion God’s grace was at work in the congregation. When the plague began to fall upon the people Moses interceded for the people and the LORD heard his pleas. As a result, through the mediation of Aaron, the High Priest “stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stopped” (verse 48).

When it comes to nurturing God’s people, religious leaders should consider themselves to be responsible over them in three basic ways. Firstly, they are to nourish them spiritually. In the event of spurious leaders trying to win the people’s allegiance, the legitimate leadership should institute measures to protect God’s flock. Furthermore, religious leaders should pray and intercede for the people in the body of believers. Ultimately, it is expected that God will lead the religious organization and intervene, as He deems fit, in order to resolve the challenges the organization and its leadership may face.

A Separatist Rival Religious System: the Case of Jeroboam’s Shrines

Apart from examples of internal religious discontent and rivalry in the Old Testament narrative, there are also instances of separatist rival religious systems in Israel. In this regard, consideration will be given to one case that, for the first time, led to the creation of two separate official religious systems. The rebellion of Jeroboam is a case in point.

The dynamics of politics and religion. When the ten tribes in northern Israel opted to secede from Judah on account of a disagreement with the in-coming king, Rehoboam, the political division seems to have made a religious split attractive. Jeroboam, the renegade ruler in the north may have been desperate to consolidate his power and the people's allegiance to himself. In this regard some scholars place an emphasis on his need for alternative religious authentication. "His concern was also religious, for he needed holy places that the people would accept as authentic Yahweh shrines"³⁹ (1 Kgs 12:25-33).

It may be debated, however, whether Jeroboam's concern was about religious authenticity as it was about political survival. This skepticism may be justified by the other statement by the aforesaid scholars who defend the installation of a molten calf in each of the two shrines that Jeroboam built—at Bethel and Dan. They argue that "much controversy has arisen as to the function of these calves, but the present consensus is that they were not idols but ornaments or pedestals."⁴⁰ They justify their postulation by purporting that "Jeroboam may not have been aware of *baalistic (Sic)* associations respecting the calf, which after all had adorned the throne of Solomon."⁴¹ This argument, however, may not hold considering that the model temple at Jerusalem did not have emblems or statues. Jeroboam could not have been unaware of the fact.

The issue of religious legitimacy. In the above-stated matter the commentators could not account for the fact that the Bible narrative says that "this matter [of calves] became an error" (1 Kgs 12:30). Furthermore, the fact that

³⁹Simon J. Devries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC), 2nd ed., ed. John D. W. Watts (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 162.

⁴⁰Ibid., 162.

⁴¹Ibid., 163.

Jeroboam hand-picked alternative ministers and priests from among the common people is itself an indicator of a disapproval of his religious practices by the established and legitimate levitical order. This, it may be noted, is an apparent circumvention of authentic religious practices, on the part of Jeroboam, and not otherwise. This could explain why the biblical narratives concerning this episode in Israel indicate that the Levites in the north, having been cut off from the religious system that was connected to the temple in Jerusalem, made their way to Judah (2 Chr 11:13-16).The inherent flaws in Jeroboam’s rival religious order seem to be more accurately judged by the scholars who assert that “only people of the lowest moral standard could consent to serve as ‘priests for the high places and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made’ (2 Chr 11:15).”⁴² Thus, a conclusion that Jeroboam had preconceived ulterior motives against the authentic religious system at Jerusalem due to political expediency may not be escaped.

Need for divine authentication. What Jeroboam managed to create was a rival religious system that sacrificed authenticity. As it has been observed, and rightly so, “there was a semblance of holding on to certain forms of the old religion, but in many respects the new religion was a direct opposite of the worship of Jehovah.”⁴³

It is noteworthy that a religious system and leadership that was set up in a spirit of rebellion lacked divine authentication and was characterized by debased morality. Furthermore, the danger that the rivalry posed to the commonwealth of Israel was that the dissident group seemed to offer a genuine religious alternative, thus

⁴²“Of the Lowest” [1 Kings12:31], *SDABC*, 2:793.

⁴³ “Eighth Month” [1 Kings12:31], *SDABC*, 2:793.

hoodwinking people into a form of idolatry. Ultimately, the practice created a religious division in Israel.

Ellen G. White's comments. Writing about the significance of legitimate religious order, Ellen White asserts that “the king's bold defiance of God in thus setting aside divinely appointed institutions was not allowed to pass unrebuked. ... There appeared before him a man of God from the kingdom of Judah, sent to denounce him for presuming to introduce new forms of worship (1 Kgs 13:2, 3, 5).”⁴⁴ Thus she condemns the separatist rival religious system irrespective of the shortcomings of the king of the southern kingdom under whose domain the original religious order was centered.

According to Ellen White, the aforementioned condemnation of the rival religious order had a three-fold purpose. The fact that the essence and practice of Jeroboam's worship system was erroneous was to be made plain. In addition, the consequences of such a course of actions were to be made known. Above all this, it seems God's salvific initiative was the underlying motive for sending His messenger to Bethel's shrine to confront the king and the people. As she says, “at the time of the feast at Bethel the hearts of the Israelites were not fully hardened. The Lord designed that those who were taking rapid steps in apostasy should be checked in their course before it should be too late”⁴⁵ Thus it can be deduced that timely and proactive interventions in a situation of dissention or open rebellion has the potential to win over and save the erring people.

⁴⁴E. G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 101.

⁴⁵White, *Prophets and Kings*, 104, 105.

Religious Order and Legitimacy in the New Testament

In the New Testament, it is explicit that Jesus is the foundation of a new phase of the Hebrew religious system. Since He was the culmination of prophecies and the aspirations of God's people, His teachings and practices are to be considered to be definitive and normative for religious order and practice.

Church Foundation: Matthew 16:13-19

Toward the end of his ministry, Jesus Christ sort to get a response from His disciples concerning what they knew about Him. This entailed them telling Him about what they had heard from people as well as their own opinion of Himself. The answer to this question is significant in terms of the nature and authority of religious order. In this case the nature of the Christian Church is discussed.

Christ: the source of church authority. To the question, “but whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16: 13-16). The title, “the Christ,” was significant. It was the messianic phrase for the prophetic heir to the Davidic throne. “Its use as a messianic title points to an understanding of the prophecies predicting the Davidic descent of the Messiah (2 Sam 7:12, 13; Ps 132: 11).”⁴⁶

Peter's affirmation of the messianic credentials of Jesus was crucial to the future leadership of the Christian church. Since Jesus was going to base the future leadership on His disciples, “unless they believed Him to be the Christ, what hope was there that other men would ever believe this sublime truth? (John 1: 11, 12).”⁴⁷ Furthermore, Peter's affirmation that Jesus was the “Son of God” had to do with

⁴⁶“Son of David” [Matt 1:1], *SDABC*, 5:277.

⁴⁷“Thou Art the Christ” [Matt 16:16], *SDABC*, 5:429, 430.

Christ's divinity (Matt 16:16; cf. Luke 1:35d). At His birth the Holy Spirit affirmed both His divinity and His humanity.⁴⁸ Thus both the humanity and divinity of Christ become essential to the mandate, order and mission of the Christian church.

The basis of the Christian church. The nomenclature of the foundation for Christ's religious order is also significant. The response of Jesus to Peter's Spirit-inspired answer is revealing:

And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matt 16: 17-19).

From this text it becomes apparent that Christ has delegated authority to the church. The instruments for executing such authority are a subject for discussion in this research. This discussion includes the individuals and institutions that Jesus mentions in the above passage.

Assumptions about Peter. There is debate about who Christ was to build His church on. This depends on how the Bible passage is interpreted. Three interpretations are known to have come out: (1) that Peter is this "rock," (2) that Peter's faith in Jesus as the Christ is "this rock," (3) that Christ Himself is "this rock." However, a consistent reading and interpretation of Scripture indicates that Jesus Christ is the "rock." That could explain why some commentators assert that "for his part, Peter, to whom the words were addressed, emphatically disclaims, by his teachings, that the 'rock' of which Jesus spoke refers to him (Acts 4:8-12; 1 Peter 2:4-8)."⁴⁹ This is consistent with earlier biblical accounts where the Hebrews used the term to refer to

⁴⁸"Son of God" [Matt 16:16], *SDABC*, 5: 683.

⁴⁹"Upon this Rock" [Matt 16:18], *SDABC*, 5:430.

God (Deut 32: 4; Ps 18: 2, etc.). Furthermore, Paul, in his writings, affirms that Jesus Christ is the “rock” that went with the Israelites in ancient times (1 Cor 10:4; cf. Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:32; Ps 18: 17).

The other terminology worth taking note of is “church.” A better context for the word study in connection with its usage is found in Matthew 18:17. The word “church” is a transliteration of the Greek word “*ekklesia*.” In terms of word usage, “originally, *ekklesia* referred to an assembly of citizens summoned to consider civic matters. In the LXX, the Greek word ‘*sunagoge*,’ ‘synagogue,’ and ‘*ekklesia*’ are both commonly used with reference to the ‘assembly,’ or ‘congregation,’ of Israel.”⁵⁰ It should also be pointed out that the context of Matthew 18:17 is that of a local body of believers acting in their corporate capacity while Mathew 16:18 refers to the universal church of Christ.

The reference to “gates” needs to be understood as being figurative in relation to what Jesus intended to accomplish for the church. The analogy is to the strategic function of a gate in ancient cities. “The gate was the meeting place of the city fathers and the key place in the defense of the city against an attacking army (See Genesis 19:1; Joshua 8: 29).”⁵¹ It is apparent that the victory of Jesus over death and the assaults of Satan, through His death and resurrection, is a befitting portrayal of the reason why the forces of hell (the abode of the dead) were to fail to prevail over the church.

The mandate of the church. The term “key” is related to authority. Using the words of Christ Himself, and comparing Scripture with Scripture, it becomes apparent

⁵⁰“Church” [Matt 18:17], *SDABC*, 5:448.

⁵¹“Gates” [Matt 16:18], *SDABC*, 5:432.

that “the keys to the kingdom of heaven are the words of Christ (John 1:12; 17:3) ... Christ Himself refers to the ‘key of knowledge’ of how to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 11: 52). The kingdom of God should be understood to begin in the hearts of believers in the church. The usage of the term “kingdom” in various biblical passages attests to this postulation. “The ‘kingdom of heaven’ here refers to divine grace in the hearts of those who become its citizens, here and now (Matt 4:17; 5:2) ... [before] ... the future kingdom of glory (Matt 25:31, 34).”⁵²

It is with the above understanding that the word “bind” has to be interpreted. Since the word is mentioned in connection with the “key” the former cannot be dissociated with the implication of the latter. The “key” has to do with God’s Word and authority. A literal reading of the passage (Matt 16:19) brings the following interpretation to the fore: “whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. The meaning is evidently this; that the church on earth will require only what heaven requires and will prohibit only what heaven prohibits (Matt 7:21-27; Mark 7:6-13).”⁵³

The foregoing biblical portrayal of the church ought to be understood to imply that one should not ignore or despise church authority, even at the local level, let alone at a regional or global level. It has been aptly said that “by refusing the counsel of the church the erring member [would sever] himself from [church] fellowship.”⁵⁴

⁵²“King of Heaven” [Matt 16:19], *SDABC*, 5: 433.

⁵³“Bind” [Matt 16:19], *SDABC*, 5: 433.

⁵⁴“As an Heathen Man and a Publican” [Mat 18:17], *SDABC*, 5:448.

Ellen White on the Authority of the Church

Ellen G. White's versatile roles in her ministry avail a useful resource for getting deeper and broader insights on topical issues in the Bible narratives. These may be termed as commentaries, at least, and prophetic insights at best. Therefore, issues of authority, dissention and factionalism in the New Testament would get easier to clarify when such writings are used as a complement to Scripture.

The rock: an exposition. An exposition, by Ellen White, of the discourse between Christ and His disciples affords the researcher alternative or affirmative insights into the Bible passage above. When Peter uttered a Spirit-guided affirmation of the credentials of Jesus, as the Messiah, the latter declared: "And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). "The word Peter signifies rolling stone. Christ did not refer to Peter as being the rock upon which he would found his church. His expression, 'this rock,' applied to himself as the foundation of the Christian church."⁵⁵ She bases her assertion on a number of biblical citations namely, Isaiah 28:16; Luke 20:17, 18; and Mark 12:10, 11. She concludes by saying that "these texts prove conclusively that Christ is the rock upon which the church is built, and, in his address to Peter, he referred to himself as the rock which is the foundation of the church."⁵⁶

The keys and authority. As for the significance and symbolism of the "keys" in the narrative, Ellen White does not make a direct interpretation in the book *The Spirit of Prophecy: Volume 2*. However, in her polemic against the Roman Catholic interpretation of the symbol, she offers a useful hint at the meaning. She asserts that

⁵⁵Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1969), 2:272.

⁵⁶Ibid.

“the Roman church makes a wrong application of these words of Christ. They claim that he addressed them specially (*Sic*) to Peter.”⁵⁷ She thus associates the “keys” to delegated church authority to all representatives of Christ in all ages.

The “binding” and “loosing” are also connected to the divinely delegated authority as in the case of the symbolism of the “key.” Accordingly, she postulates that “the same power [was] to exist in all the church that is claimed to have been given to Peter alone, upon the authority of the text previously quoted.”⁵⁸

Ellen White’s postulation on the “rock” and the “keys” seem to have been refined in her other book, *The Desire of Ages*. She apparently offers additional information when she states that

Peter had expressed the truth which is the foundation of the church's faith, and Jesus now honored him as the representative of the whole body of believers. ... The keys of the ‘kingdom of heaven’ are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. ... They declare the conditions upon which men are received or rejected.⁵⁹

This is to be understood that Peter’s honor was in the sense that he represented all believers who understood the issue of the church and authority as he did. This is consistent with Ellen White’s postulation that the “keys” are “all the words of Scripture,” and not the opinion or position of one individual.

Dissent in the Early Church: Acts 15

In the days leading up to His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus had declared the nature and mission of the church. He granted His authority to the organization that was to take shape soon after His ascension. The formative and basic functional nature

⁵⁷Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 2:273.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 413.

of this Christian religious organization is to be seen, initially, from the biblical narratives in the book of Acts. The later developments are more evident in Paul's epistles as well as those written by Peter, James, Jude and John.

The Jerusalem council. The controversy that the church leaders in Jerusalem had to handle emanated from Antioch. Some people, who are commonly referred to as "Judaizers," caused a significant dissension within the church on the issue of circumcision in relation to the Gentiles. Some scholars think that "First Thessalonians 2:14-16 shows that Paul recognizes non-believing Jews as the ultimate source of opposition to the mission among the Gentiles."⁶⁰ Other scholars, however, identify the dissenters as insiders. These "emissaries of dissension are not named. They seem to have been Pharisees who had become Christians."⁶¹ It may be argued that the later postulation is more consistent with the narrative in this chapter. Lenard Aencha, in his treatise on the subject of Christian responses to heresy, points a finger at the Jewish Pharisees as the instigators of the rejection of the gospel of Jesus. He points out that "the Jerusalem Council that Luke describes in Acts 15 was a response to the heresy which Paul describes in Galatians 2:11-16 ... the men who came from Judea to Antioch where Pharisees (Acts 15:1) who were zealous for the Law (21:20)."⁶² Thus an intra-church conflict of opinion arose. This scenario sets the stage that should be used as a model for resolving differences among believers, especially leaders.

The nature of the assembly. The above case shows indications of decision-making in the church, at different levels, which included referrals—as is the case

⁶⁰Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 443.

⁶¹"Certain Men" [Acts 1], *SDABC*, 6:305.

⁶²Bruce L. Bauer and Wagner Kuhn, eds, *Biblical Principles for Missiological Issues in Africa* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University), 457.

under consideration. Furthermore, Luke’s “mention of ‘the whole assembly’ ... in verse 12 and ‘the whole church’ (*ekklesia*) in verse 22 shows that other members of the congregation were also present”⁶³ apart from the apostles and elders. This composition could have led some scholars to down-grade the assembly’s status from being a council, in the ecclesiastical sense, because “it [included] more than the apostles and [engaged] the Jerusalem congregation in a major way.”⁶⁴ Other authorities, however, are categorical that “James, the brother of Jesus, presided over the Jerusalem council.”⁶⁵ In this regard, it may be argued that the involvement of the general membership in such an assembly does not negate its status of being a council.

The above assembly had council status, although some think that “the Jerusalem elders ... [exaggerated] their function.”⁶⁶ In this regard it may be argued, and persuasively so, that “the fact that the early church referred the vexing question of circumcision to a council of apostles and elders at Jerusalem is a highly significant precedent for church organization. ... It also illustrates the need of counsel and authority on a wider level than that of a local congregation, when affairs affecting the entire church are in question.”⁶⁷ In this regard, we may consider the assembly at Jerusalem as a logical board of appeal or supreme council whose decisions were to be binding on the entire church.

⁶³Gaebelein, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 444.

⁶⁴Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 486.

⁶⁵Gaebelein, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 446.

⁶⁶Bock, *Acts*, 488.

⁶⁷“Apostles and Elders” [Acts 15:2], *SDABC*, 6:306.

Further to the foregoing, it is observed that the Christian church was not entirely different from the pre-Christian religious order in Israel. During the ministry of Jesus and after Pentecost, many rulers and Pharisees joined the Christian church (John 3:1-9; 12:42; Acts 2:1-47; 15:5). That should explain why “Luke presents Christianity as a natural extension of Judaism because promises given originally to the Jews are now offered in the new community formed by Jesus the Messiah.”⁶⁸

The functionality early church. The Christian church, as the new community of believers, manifested a characteristic worth noting—the uniquely binding ecclesiastical authority. In this case, decisions were arrived at through the convened legitimate body of believers to which even the dissenters were expected to subject themselves. That is why when James, in verse 19, brought the issue to a decisive conclusion by saying “‘my sentence is’... (literally ‘I decide’) [his] words imply that he [spoke] with authority. However, what follows is not a decree, for when finally promulgated it rested upon the authority of the apostles and elders.”⁶⁹

In addition, it should be pointed out that the resolution involved the participation of all stake holders present. This seems to be in line with the narrative that states that “the whole church” was pleased with the resolution that was arrived at and was now to be communicated to the concerned congregation. Thus, it can be concluded that “this shows the important position occupied by members of the church. They concurred in the commissioning of the representatives sent with the letter.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸Bock, *Acts*, 496.

⁶⁹“My Sentence Is” [Acts 15:19], *SDABC*, 6:310.

⁷⁰“The Whole Church” [Acts 15:22], *SDABC*, 5:313.

The written document to the church in Antioch is another milestone in the formative stages of the Christian church. It became the “first of a long series of decrees and canons of councils that appear in the history of the church.”⁷¹ From that time onward, the lower entities in the church structure would logically be expected to use such a written document as a church policy document addressing the specified issues.

The above-stated letter was expected to not only answer the question of circumcision, but it was also to comfort the Gentile believers and establish them in the authentic doctrine of the church regarding salvation as well as general Christian practices. This was in view of the fact that the dissension by the Judaizers had, apparently, adversely affected their faith. “The Judaizers had unsettled the faith of the Gentile converts, for their contentions had struck at the very basis of Christian experience and belief—the fact that salvation is not gained by outward observation.”⁷² In this regard, the fact that the dissenting Judaizers did not raise up any further contentions following the resolution at the council should be taken to indicate how believers’ attitude toward church authority should be.

Ellen White on the Jerusalem Council

The nature of the council. Ellen White assigns “council” status to the church assembly that met in Jerusalem to consider the question of circumcision among the Gentiles. This may be deduced from the composition of the delegates and the nomenclature she uses to describe the meeting. She states that “there [in Jerusalem] they were to meet delegates from the different churches and those who had come to

⁷¹“Wrote Letters” [Acts 15:23], *SDABC*, 5:313, 314.

⁷² “Subverting” [Acts 15:24], *SDABC*, 6: 314.

Jerusalem to attend the approaching festivals. Meanwhile all controversy was to cease until a final decision should be given in general council. This decision was then to be universally accepted by the different churches throughout the country.”⁷³ She thus further highlights what should be considered to be the universal church authority of this council, since its decisions were going to be binding upon all congregations in various regions.

From Ellen White’s perspective, the apostles and elders had more weight and responsibility in the decision-making process than the ordinary members. “The entire body of Christians was not called to vote upon the question. The ‘apostles and elders,’ men of influence and judgment, framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches.”⁷⁴ This could be seen as denoting a subordinate, but complementary, role for the ordinary church members in the decision-making process. In the case above, the general membership gave a form of approval for the council resolutions.

Comments on dissenters. Ellen White points out that although the council resolutions were universally binding, it was not feasible to have total unanimity.

Not all ... were pleased with the decision; there was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren who disagreed with it. These men assumed to engage in the work on their own responsibility. They indulged in much murmuring and faultfinding, proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message.⁷⁵

It is apparent from Ellen White’s exposition that disagreement among church members is to be expected and tolerated until a church resolution is made. She thus

⁷³Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press), 190.

⁷⁴White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 196.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 190.

bemoans the fact that “from the first the church has had such obstacles [of dissenters] to meet and ever will have till the close of time.”⁷⁶ If this be the case, today’s church should be pro-active in anticipating such challenges and putting in place measures that apply the Jerusalem council principles of conflict resolution.

A Call to Alertness: Acts 20: 17-38

Whereas the fifteenth chapter of *Acts* offers us a glimpse of the manner in which the church leadership at the highest level handled church disputes, Acts 20 gives us insights into how the local congregations were expected to deal with the danger posed by perpetrators of errors and factionalism. Furthermore, it is apparent that an environment was created to enable the church to meet the challenge. In this regard, Paul evidently “structured the church and its leadership before departing [from Ephesus] (Acts 11:30; 14:23). These elders would be responsible for shepherding the church and guiding it.”⁷⁷ In this setup it is apparent that not only is authority exercised by the corporate body of believers in a council or committee, but individual church leaders are also vested with authority according to their functions. Furthermore, a hierarchy of leadership can be seen.

The need for Spirit-led leadership. It is also worth noting that the involvement of high-ranking church officials in organizing and structuring church entities is a biblical and Holy Spirit-guided phenomenon. It can, therefore, be justifiably said that “the elders of Ephesus were men appointed, doubtless, under the eye of the apostle Paul (Acts 14:23). But the apostle considered them appointed by the

⁷⁶White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 190.

⁷⁷Bock, *Acts*, 626.

Holy Spirit through the elective, or appointive, process, and Spirit-filled (Acts 6:3).”⁷⁸

These were to carry out their functions faithfully as stipulated by their superiors and in line with the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

So important was the work of elders that they were to maintain a constant vigilance concerning their own moral qualification, as they carried out their duties, and also the spiritual welfare of their church. This is why Paul may have had to use the present imperative when he said “take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock” (Acts 20:28). It has been pointed out that this should be translated as “take constant heed” (Gr. *Prosechete*) of yourselves.⁷⁹

The flock’s need of protection. The danger to the flock posed by prospective subversive elements was significant for Paul to make special mention of in his farewell remarks. Probably, in order to make an appropriate impression upon the leaders at Ephesus, Paul had to use such strong language as “wolves” in his description of the dissenters who were bound to arise from among them. Some commentators think that “it is not clear if the danger comes from the elders or the Ephesian membership, although the latter is more likely, given the scope of the potential threat (Rom 16:17-18; Col 2: 8; 2-3 John).”⁸⁰ The later proposition seems plausible considering that Paul appealed to the elders in their current positions to ensure that the “wolves” do not confuse the church. Apparently the elders were in good standing at the time Paul addressed them.

⁷⁸“The Holy Ghost” [Acts 26:28), *SDABC*, 6:392.

⁷⁹Bock, *Acts*, 629.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 631.

Another school of thought identifies the sources of the “wolves” as being external as well as internal, among the Ephesian believers—including some leaders. “The wolves of the previous verse [i.e., verse 28], which were to attack the flock from without, represent the Judaizing and paganizing influences. . . . Now Paul warns of apostatizing influences coming from within, like Demas (2 Tim 4:10), and Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2: 17), whose words ate ‘as doth a canker,’ and who overthrew ‘the faith of some.’”⁸¹ The nature of the messages from the “wolves” was meant to “pervert” (*diestrommena*) things. This entails twisting something (Acts 13:10; Phil 2:15; Prov 10: 9; 11:20). The implication is that some leaders in future may apostatize, thus joining the ranks of “wolves.” Ultimately, the gist of the address by Paul was that the “perversion” would draw the disciples away from the authentic faith.⁸²

The Honor and Discipline of Elders: 1 Timothy 5:17-20

The above verses have to do with Paul’s guidelines concerning how the church members were to relate with, and handle, church elders’ status and disciplinary matters. The members were admonished to identify “those who [had] exercised leadership with distinction [on the one hand] and, on the other hand, detailing strict guidelines for adjudicating allegations of negligence or explicit sin.”⁸³ These verses may be considered to be unique in terms of biblical counsels pertaining to church leadership etiquette and discipline. It is a double-edged sword that calls for respect for

⁸¹“Of Your Own Selves” [Acts 20:30], *SDABC*, 6:393, 394.

⁸²Bock, *Acts*, 631.

⁸³Philip H. Towner, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 361.

church leaders at the same time as the Bible narrative was calling for the leaders to be held accountable for perceived moral shortcomings.

Rank and respect in the local church. For the purpose of understanding the ministry context that Paul addressed, it could be of benefit to highlight the fact that the “elders” in question were “‘bishops,’ the leaders of the local congregation (Ch. 3:1).”⁸⁴ It is in this context, of a local church, that the mode of leadership is described and prescribed. The elders are portrayed as “ruling” (1 Tim 3:4). The word “rule,” whose “Greek [version] is *proistemi*, [means] ‘to superintend,’ [or] ‘to preside over’.”⁸⁵ What Paul wrote concerning the attitude of church members to church leaders bearing such responsibilities should become normative for the church today.

The apostle Paul emphasized the need for respect and support for the church elders. He, therefore, urged the church members to show “double honor” (Ch. 5: 17) to elders that served diligently. It has been said that this admonition entailed that such elders be given “substantial remunerations ... [This was] salaries double that of a widow’s stipend ... [Furthermore, the other view is that] ... the context explains the kind of ‘double honor’ under consideration as a greater measure of respect, which would be worthy of their office.”⁸⁶ It may be argued that both suppositions could be applicable on the basis of Paul’s reference to an Old Testament principle. In the next verse he points out that “the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward” (Ch. 5:18; Cf. Num 18:21; Luke 10:7).

⁸⁴“Elders” [1 Timothy 5:17], *SDABC*, 7:312.

⁸⁵“Ruleth” [1 Timothy 3:4], *SDABC*, 7:298.

⁸⁶“Double” [1 Timothy 5:17], *SDABC*, 7: 312.

Handling grievances against church leaders. Having outlined the biblical rationale for the honor due to the elders, Paul addressed the issue of integrity and discipline pertaining to the elders. In the event of perceived or actual misdemeanors, caution was to be exercised when handling such reports. In this regard, some commentators argue that “Paul is not urging favoritism of any kind for those in office who do wrong. He simply desires to protect faithful leaders from some who may wish to depreciate their influence by calumny.”⁸⁷ This assertion may be taken to imply that church leaders are prone to be criticized unfairly, hence the caution.

It is apparent from the foregoing that discontent against church leaders, in Paul’s ministry context, was not uncommon or unusual. It is also noteworthy that Paul gave guidelines for handling grievances and disciplinary issues concerning church elders. This could be the rationale for his insisting that a person’s charge against an elder should only be entertained if the accuser could furnish two to three witnesses in support. In explaining this injunction, some have postulated that “the Jewish practice protected the individual from reckless, malicious accusations (Deut 17: 6; 19:15). [Thus] the New Testament church adopted this Jewish custom of protection for the individual (Matt 18:16).”⁸⁸

In an event that acts of wrongdoing, on the part of elders, were established, disciplinary measures of sorts were to be taken against them in an impartial and transparent manner. These are to be understood to be “them that sin” (Ch. 5: 20) in the Bible narrative. There was to be no protection of sin in anyone. This is what the general overseer, Timothy, was urged to ensure.

⁸⁷“Receive Not” [1 Timothy 5:19], *SDABC*, 7:313.

⁸⁸“Witness” [1 timothy 5:19], *SDABC*, 7:313.

Overall, it should be said that church leadership in the Christian church, with administrative oversight, is a biblical concept. Furthermore, respect, deference and material support for leaders from church members are enjoined. On the other hand, the genuine grievances of church members can be entertained and processed in a manner that should not negate or undermine church authority and the respect due to leaders.

**Church Members' Divided Loyalties:
1 Corinthians 3:1-17**

The apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the church at Corinth, highlighted a scenario that could create an environment for subtle dissidence. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-17, Paul addresses an issue that could have led the believers at Corinth into misconceptions of what ministry is. He pointed out that, as a result of jealousy and strife among them, factionalism had crept into the church. In this case, the problem does not seem to have emanated from the spiritual leaders who had served among them at different times. Rather, the members were creating an environment that could be exploited by phony leaders who could have been lurking in the body of believers.

Admonition against factionalism. Paul rebuked the Corinthians. “For when you say, ‘I belong to Paul,’ and another, ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not merely men?” This is, probably, because the believers were not aware that all the spiritual leaders and church workers were actually building the mystical temple of God on the same foundation. Concerning this, Paul informed them: “no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (verse 11).” If the challenge ended here, one could become optimistic of easily resolving such occurrences. Needless to say, it was not to be.

In verses 12 through 15, Paul warned: “now if anyone builds on the foundation [with] gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble—each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which each man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” Thus Paul delineates two types of consequences emanating from the ministries of spiritual leaders. One edifies the body temple of believers, while the other brings dangerous peril to the structure.

The need to screen and regulate leaders. Further to the foregoing, it is apparent from the passage under consideration that the damage to the spiritual edifice may be inflicted by both the malicious imposters and the sincere ministers, who may, nevertheless, be misguided. That could be the rationale for the statement that indicates that such may have their works adjudged detrimental, but they themselves get saved. This scenario begs the question: should any professed worker for Christ be allowed to minister to the saints without scrutiny since the judgment of peoples works will be done during the “Day” [of judgment]? After all, did not Christ caution John against hindering even freelance preachers when he said: “do not forbid him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:39, 40).

A cursory look at related Bible passages concerning the issue above seems to suggest that there is a role that the faithful believers should play in order to safeguard the welfare of the community of believers. They should do so in collaboration, not antagonism, with the rest of the members of the body of Christ—especially the entire leadership structure. This includes compliance with church policies.

Dealing With those Who Depart From the Faith: Jude

Referring to “the faith which was one for all delivered to the saint” Jude urges the saints, in defense, to “contend” for their set of beliefs in view of the “admission” into the body of believers “by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 3, 5). Thus Jude portrays a profile of rebellion and dissent in the characters and conduct of some individuals who find themselves in the fellowship of saints. The scope of this portrayal is broad and spans from heaven, vis-à-vis Lucifer and his fall, to earth—ranging from Cain [through sacred history] to the dissidence in the early Christian Church. The book of Jude will, therefore, serve as a definitive framework for profiling dissidence in the both the Old and New Testaments of the Scriptures.

It is of significance that Jude places the church infiltrators of his day on the same platform as the wantonly deviant characters such as the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, on one hand, and the rebellious Israelites who were overthrown in the wilderness, on the other. Then both categories are related to the spirit manifested in the fallen angels and the latter’s destiny (Jude 5-7).

Verses 8-19 of the book of Jude focuses on the challenges that the early Christian church faced as it grew numerically and acquired a cosmopolitan character. Based in Jerusalem, and closely connected to the apostles, Jude’s general epistle was designed to address the church universally. This seems to be the intent when he talks of “those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ” (Jude 1). Then, as he delineates the most potent threat to the saints, he unequivocally asserts that there were individuals in the body of Christ who had morally sunk to the point

where they began to war against the church with the same spirit manifested by Lucifer and his cohorts in heaven and onward through the dissidence manifested in God's spiritual movement in history.

Certain pertinent character traits are mentioned in the passage above. The tendency to "reject authority," as well as the audacity to "revile the glorious ones" (*Greek – glories*), come out immediately. The latter could allude to the blasphemous claims of self-righteousness and scoffing mind-set in relation to God's chosen instrumentalities. Verse 16 points out that dissidents are typically "grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loud-mouthed boasters, flattering people to gain advantage."

Further to the foregoing, it is noteworthy that Jude identifies the scoffers within the body of believers, rather than out of it. Concerning such, he categorically stated that "it is these who cause divisions." Although they are inside the church he calls them "worldly people, devoid of the Spirit" (vv. 18, 19).

As an antidote to the insidious effect of dissident elements in the body of Christ, Jude admonishes the faithful members to "build [themselves] up on [their] most holy faith [and to] pray in the Holy Spirit" (v. 20). However, the faithful ones were not to entirely insulate themselves from any salvific pro-active outreach to the erring ones. Said he: "convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (vv. 22, 23).

Dealing with Disguised Dissention

The New Testament casts dissidents as imposters who win people's confidence through deception. A classical portrayal is seen in the words of Jesus

Christ himself as recorded in Matthew 7:15-20. Said he: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

The above warning was sounded by Christ in connection with his teachings concerning the principles of his kingdom that are popularly known as the beatitudes. So the implication is that the insidious dissidence that Christ warning the people against would militate against the building of that kingdom in the hearts of believers as well as the experience of the church of God.

Of concern to the believers is the unmistakable fact that the “sheep in sheep’s clothing” would actually manage to become an integral part of the community of believers. Furthermore, their profession and human skills would see them not only sparing for key positions in the church, but that they would manage to win a following and significant standing in the congregations. Because of this ever present threat of infiltration or sheer internal apostasy, Christ himself urged the faithful to screen all the professor of new light by using the criteria of Spirit-born fruits according to the Scriptures. The tests for a true prophet as well as for the signs of a transformed in a professor are an imperative (Deut 18: 20-22; Gal 5:22-25).

Further to the forgoing, it is apparent from the passage under consideration that the damage to the spiritual edifice may be inflicted by both the malicious imposters and the sincere ministers who may be misguided, never the less. That could be the rationale for the statement that indicates that such may have their works adjudged detrimental, but they themselves get saved. This scenario begs the question: should any professed worker for Christ be allowed to minister to the saints without

scrutiny since the judgment of peoples works will be done during the “Day” [of judgment]? After all, did not Christ caution John against hindering even freelance preachers when he said: “do not forbid him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:39, 40).

A cursory look at related Bible passages concerning the issue above seems to suggest that there is a role that the faithful believers should play in order to safeguard the welfare of the community of believers. In Matthew chapter seven, Christ himself warns the church to be wary of “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” In Acts 20: 28, Paul says, “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his blood.” Then in verses 29 through 31, he went on to admonish them to be vigilant. “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.” Thus it may be deduced that guarding the flock against dissidence is a requirement at all times on the basis of the biblical criteria for assessing authenticity of ministry.

Ellen G. White’s Comments

Ellen White encountered a lot of situations concerning dissident activities during her long ministry. As a result, she wrote considerably concerning the subject. The researcher will, therefore, cite some of the counsel that forms part of the Spirit of Prophecy literature.

In sketching the downward path to perdition by some of the believers, Ellen White warned that the starting point of dissidence may not even be related to theological issues.

Satan knows how to make his attack. He works upon the mind to excite jealousy and disaffection toward those at the head of the work. The gifts are next questioned; then of course, they have but little weight, and instruction given through vision is disregarded. Next follows skepticism in regard to vital points of our faith, the pillars of our doctrines, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition.⁸⁹

In terms of what the church's response should be in the face of challenges from affected groups and individuals, Ellen White seemed to suggest varied actions in different situations. During the formative stages of the Adventist denomination, she preferred that the church would avoid entering into a confrontation. The rationale was that such a course of action would distract the church from its focus on the mission and sap its energies. "The last message of mercy is of too much importance for us to leave it and come down to answer such falsehoods, misrepresentations. . . . Satan is in all this to divert our minds from the present truth and the coming Christ."⁹⁰ This counsel followed the first major challenge that the denomination faced from the "Messenger Party."

Almost thirty years after registering the Adventist movement as a denomination, A. W. Stanton and W. F. Coldwell launched another significant onslaught against the church. They were pointing out perceived spiritual shortcomings in the church members. In response, Mrs. White acknowledged the existence of flaws among the believers. However, she asserted that "this will not blot out the church that

⁸⁹Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2010), 93.

⁹⁰Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2010), 1:123.

it will not exist. Let both tares and wheat grow together, until the harvest. Then it is the angels that do the work of separation.”⁹¹ In this instance, she appears to have been on the defensive. How be it, she inferred that shortcomings do not amount to a fall, thus parrying the accusations of the dissenters.

With the passage of time, the activities of dissident groups became more sophisticated and potentially harmful. Incidentally, Ellen White began to change her approach with regard to how such groups were handled. This was especially the case when some individuals and groups began to use her writings in support of their claims. She expressed her dismay, stating that “in compiling this work, they have used my name and writings for the support of that which I disapprove and denounce as error.”⁹² Her “metamorphosis” in terms of the mode of approach to the disaffected was becoming as marked as the debilitating attacks by the enemies of the church and its mission. Accordingly, she wrote: “When anyone is drawing apart from the organized body of God’s commandment-keeping people, when he begins to weigh the church in his human scales, and begins to pronounce judgment against them then you my know that God is not leading him. He is on the wrong track.”⁹³

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ellen White had become resolute in preferring the direct resolution of dissidence, as opposed to her mostly pacifist approach in the formative years of the denomination. Speaking to the leaders of the church, she asserted that false teachers “are to be met and opposed, not because they

⁹¹Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White, 2010), 2:63, 66, 68, 69.

⁹²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2010), 36.

⁹³Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3:18.

are bad men, but because they are teachers of falsehood and are endeavoring to put upon falsehood the stamp of truth.”⁹⁴

It should be observed, however, that Ellen White would not just rush into a confrontation with those who had become disaffected. A case in point is the manner in which she handled the “Kellogg Crisis” of 1903. Church historians rate this episode as the greatest challenge to the denomination up to that time. Doctor Kellogg had risen up against the General Conference with regard to medical facilities and their services, educational institutions and the ministerial workforce. Ellen White took time to join the fray of debaters. Incidentally, she had groomed Doctor Kellogg and it seemed like she was being hindered by her subjectivity toward the erring individual, but she suddenly wrote messages to the General Conference leadership and urged them to confront Doctor Kellogg immediately. What changed?

Ellen White had received a vision in which she urged the church leadership to take the risk of confronting Doctor Kellogg head-on. “After taking your position firmly, wisely, cautiously, make not one concession on any point concerning which God has plainly spoken. Be as calm as summer evening, but as fixed as the everlasting hills. By conceding you would be selling our whole cause into the hand of the enemy”⁹⁵ Thus, by caution and thoughtful engagement, Ellen White was able to guide the church into conflict resolution.

Chapter Summary

The church is a spiritual organization whose teachings are derived from and based on the Bible. A sound biblical theological epistemology is essential for the

⁹⁴White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 55.

⁹⁵Ellen G. White, *Letter 216*, 1903, quoted in *The Early Elmshaven Years*.

church to justify its existence, resolve challenges and carry out its mission. As such, theological reflections on selected relevant Bible narratives have been articulated.

Lucifer's rebellion in heaven has been considered. The researcher considers the elements of such dissention to be fundamental to and a precursor to subsequent dissident views and practices in human history. The ingredients of the rebellion consisted of discontent with the status quo in heaven, pride and the denigration of God's authority and government. Other issues included a campaign of false innuendos against the character of God and the endeavor to usurp God's position.

The above characteristics of rebellion were replayed on earth in the temptation and deception of Adam and Eve. At stake were God's commandment and the proposition of Lucifer. The later was euphemistically referred to as the serpent, a term denoting the insidious and flawed character he had acquired. Subsequently, Adam and Eve experienced a moral fall after they had chosen to side with the Devil. This leads the research to surmise that dissidence against biblically established order and authority is precedent by a moral fall, thus making it a spiritual problem.

Sacred history pertaining to incidents of dissention against religious order and authority manifests phenomena reminiscent of the characteristics of Lucifer's fall as portrayed above. Such was the case in the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram against the authority of Moses and Aaron. The trio became dissatisfied with their positions and demanded to have higher privileges and authority. In the process, the authority and position of Moses and Aaron were undermined. The dissenters' self-centered ambitions meant that they would stop at nothing until the reigning leaders were overthrown. In this undertaking, the trio hoodwinked a sizeable following. God's wrath was provoked. Had it not been for intervention measures, more people would have perished than what actually happened. Therefore, the researcher deduced

that timely redemptive, fair and punitive intervention measures, on the part of religious leaders, are an imperative.

Other forms of rebellion against authentic religious order and authority have taken place in history for political expedience. A case in point is the establishment of rival worship centers in the northern kingdom of Israel by Jeroboam. For fear that his subjects would get influenced to cast off loyalty to him if they went to Jerusalem, Jeroboam established two alternative worship centers near the southern and northern borders of the northern kingdom of Israel. Furthermore, when the legitimate Levitical and priestly ministers could not honor the rebellious substitutes, Jeroboam appointed a cadre of priests from unqualified and unauthorized individuals. This departure from the authentic religious order led to a spiritual syncretism. This development would lead to the apostasy of the ten tribes and the removal of God's favor.

The researcher took cognizance of the fact that even a dire situation such as the above was not left to retrogress without redemptive interventions. God sent a prophet to warn Jeroboam and his people. It is, therefore, evident that no situation of dissent should be left to play itself to ruin without redemptive interventions, even if it means rebuking or punishing the erring.

The Old Testament theme regarding the authority and order of God's religious and spiritual organization is continued in the New Testament. As such, Jesus stated that He is the foundation of the Christian church organization. Furthermore, He recognized a ministry to whom He delegated ecclesiastical authority on the premise of His word as revealed in Scripture. Such a system and authority can only be defied or undermined at one's own peril.

The above religious order of the New Testament was refined further as the new church dispensation developed. New challenges faced by the new church meant

that more characteristics of the order and authority of the church came to the fore. The Jerusalem Council during the early Christian church, as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Acts, is a case in point. The nature, source and handling of problematic issues in the council reveal that ultimate authority was deposited in the authenticated corporate church entity. The eminence and legitimacy of such a decision-making body negates the claim to autonomous authority that individuals or independent splinter factions may claim.

In the above case, individual opinions had to be given up at that stage of corporate decision-making by the church. It is such a body which, in turn, bequeathed credence and responsibilities to church officials in representative capacities. The church's decisions made through the council at the highest level became universally binding for all believers.

Further to the foregoing, the apostle Paul disclosed an aspect of authority in connection with church organizational hierarchy. Bishops were to rule over the congregations, while deacons served the physical and spiritual interests of the believers in a supporting role to the elders. By virtue of their position, the apostles and bishops deserved honor and respect. In this regard, grievances against church leaders had to be handled through a procedure that engendered continued respect and confidence.

Conclusive Remarks

From the above theological reflections, the researcher concludes that there has been and continues to be an authentic and God-ordained religious order, functional structures and authoritative ministers in various capacities. God, through Jesus Christ,

is the author and head of the church organization. This organization is the agency for demonstrating God's redemptive grace.

The redemptive activities of God's spiritual organization have to contend with the fall-out from the conflict between Lucifer and God. This conflict began in heaven and was rooted in the discontent against established order and authority. This conflict has been extended to earth and is periodically played out in the form of dissidence against church order and authority. The devil has always been the instigator of the spirit of discontent. Incidentally, a significant number of those who side with dissentious elements do not fully understand the issues at stake. As such, church leaders should be proactive in putting in place redemptive measures to both protect church members and also redeem the erring ones.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The authority and order of the Adventist Church have, at times, been questioned or disrupted due to discontent among members. Such incidences could pertain to the perception some church members may have of certain religious leaders or corporate systems. Conversely, the discontented individuals or groups may harbor ambitions that may be misguided. They may win a following among fellow church members; never the less this “achievement” usually comes at the expense of the confidence and authority vested in the church leadership and its structures.

A study of literature concerning discontent in the Adventist Church coupled with studies of similar phenomena in selected denominations could help to shed light on the issue in a manner that may lead to practical solutions. Furthermore, the cumulative experience of the church leaders and the structures in which they operate are expected to contribute to the purpose of this research. This scope and width is expected to add objectivity to the study. It is, therefore, anticipated that relevant mitigation strategies will be devised for the benefit of churches in Lusaka Conference and beyond.

Adventism and Dissention Resolution

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a denomination, has had to contend with dissention and conflict resolution among its members. This can be traced from its formative years up to the present period. This implies that even the nature of

discontent within the rank and file of the denomination's membership ought to be evaluated in terms of the periods of organizational structural changes and the post-maturation years of the organization.

George Knight asserts that the Seventh-day Adventist Church structure, as we know it today, had matured by the time of Ellen White's death. "By the beginning of the Twentieth Century the pattern of Adventism had been fixed."¹ This point of reference could be considered as a milestone because Ellen White is considered to be one of the founders of the denomination. However, her death could not be said to be the definitive point of total maturation of the denomination. The denomination has, evidently, continued to evolve both structurally and doctrinally. As late as the year 2009, scholars like angel Manuel Rodriguez and others were still belaboring to underscore their perceived need of a better delineated theology of the remnant in the Adventist Church. He argues that "the lack of unity prevalent in the Christian world should be interpreted as the presence of Babylonian elements within it. This condition needs to be addressed in an Adventist ecclesiology that by nature is expected to emphasize the universal unity of the church (John 17)."² What may be lacking, however, is a feasible organizational set-up in which the application of the Adventist ecclesiology is not hampered by dissident elements.

¹George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nded. (Review and Herald, 2004), 108.

²Angel Manuel Rodriguez, *Concluding Essay: God's End-time Remnant and the Christian Church*; Angel Manuel Rodriguez, ed., *Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2009), 217.

Adventist Church Reforms

Significant governance changes were undertaken during the period 1901-1909. Subsequently, there were varied reactions within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. George Knight says that reactions revolved around the issue of “congregationalism versus centralization.”³ This is said to have emanated from the debate involving two factions that were pitted against each other during the General Conference board sessions of those years. A. T. Jones, Waggoner and Kellogg, on one hand, and A. G. Daniells and William W. Prescott, on the other, were the factional proponents. The former leaned toward congregationalism, while the later were inclined toward the centralization of denominational control.⁴

The aforementioned debate may be considered to be a major milestone in the historical formulation of the characteristic structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Jones and his associates opposed strong central leadership, or “any leadership outside of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Daniells leaned toward the other extreme.”⁵ The latter’s position entailed having structures with boards and committees overseen by presidents or chairmen.

George Knight aptly notes that Daniells was mostly right concerning the nature of the church structure and authority although he needed moderation to avoid tipping over to the extreme. He thus points out that Daniells, though deemed to be the right track, required balance in his theological perception and application. Ellen White feared that he might push it too far. On the closing day of the 1903 General

³George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 118.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

Conference meetings, she wrote to him that ‘God would not have [him] suppose that [he] can exercise kingly power over [his] brethren (EGW to AGD and his fellow workers, April 12, 1903).’⁶ It is apparent, from these observations, that even the preferred denominational structural model needed refining and moderation.

The numerical and institutional growth of the Adventist Church created the necessity of structural changes to the model that had been in place from the formative period. This could be a case of institutional structures that were tailored to meet situational needs while a relatively mature theology under-girded the church policies. Thus George Knight argues that the denomination “had outgrown its 1863 organization. ... It was no longer functional for an increasingly complex denomination.”⁷ Confidence in, and cooperation with leaders was more needed.

The Battle of Jones and Kellogg

In 1906 Jones advocated for “liberty.” He asserted that “no man ... is ever answerable to any man or set of men for his belief on any question whatever.”⁸ He defined liberty as being exempted from the domination of others or mere restrictions. This viewpoint was, evidently, against church organization in favor of radical individualism.⁹

Jones went ahead to put his ideas in a sixty-page book. The response of the General Conference is insightful as to how the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been dealing with divergent viewpoints emanating from discontent. It issued a “96-

⁶Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 118.

⁷Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed., 108.

⁸Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 119.

⁹ Ibid.

page book entitled ‘A Statement Refuting Charges Made by A. T. Jones against the Spirit of Prophecy and the Plan of Organization of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.’”¹⁰ This reaction seems to have yielded positive results. The influence of Jones and Kellogg on the clergy and general membership apparently waned significantly. “As a result, by the end of the year Jones had moved from the center of controversy to the periphery. The same happened to Kellogg, who lost his church membership in 1907.”¹¹ It should be pointed out though, that the chronic backsliding of Jones and Kellogg could be an indictment against the church’s failure to win over dissenters in some cases.

Influence of Jones and Kellogg

Disaffection, in the form of movements toward congregationalism, has been plaguing the Adventist Church in its history. George Knight cites an example involving an Adventist dentist called W. L. Winner who wrote a book entitled *Gospel Simplicity: the Need of the Hour*, in 1906. He was supported by Alonzo Jones in his endeavor, which the Seventh-day Adventist Church considered to be an attempt at disorganizing the denomination. This may be seen from some quotations which Daniells highlighted from the former’s book. W. L. Winner asserted that

‘every church [should] be supreme in its field, and the sole custodian of its interests and the administrator of its funds.’ It was an obvious repudiation of all conference organization. Winner, Daniells reported, had taken Jones’ doctrine and made it more dangerous because Winner’s tract was much better written than Jones’ work on the topic. (AGD to H. W. Cottrel, Jan. 20, 1907)¹²

¹⁰Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 119.

¹¹Ibid., 119, 120.

¹²Ibid., 120.

This assertion seems to indicate Jones' influence in the denomination, albeit in favor of the dissenters.

The perception that Alonzo Jones had managed to exert a negative influence can be seen even in the assessment by Ellen White concerning Winner's book. She bemoaned the situation and pointed out "how Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings and to refute claims not endorsed by the Word of God."¹³ She further gave indications that the debate hinged on biblical fundamentals concerning the church and its organization. She asserted that "some [had] advanced the thought that as we near the close of the time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there are no such thing as every man's being independent."¹⁴ The researcher deduces, therefore, that congregationalism could not have been the preferred organizational model by the key founders of the Adventist denomination.

It is worth noting that Ellen White made the above remarks during the then on-going church denomination's re-organization and subsequent controversies during the period 1901-1909 which led to the break-away of some congregations. George Knight observes that, following the publication of the aforementioned book by Winner, it did not take long before "Jones helped both Sheafe in Washington, DC, and Franke in New Wark, New Jersey, [to] take their congregations out of the denomination."¹⁵ This

¹³White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 489.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 121.

trend, however, did not seem to have been sustained.

Church Developments

The reforms of the Adventist denomination at the turn of the Nineteenth Century appear to have been meant to consolidate organization, as opposed to congregationalism. Accordingly, structures had to be made where “every board must have a chairman or president that [would] be the recognized head.”¹⁶ This sparked a revolt from some quarters of the church. It was in this situation that Ellen White expressed her defense of the denominational organization and its authority. It is apparent that she had herself previously opposed some aspects of the church’s decision-making process, though. She, therefore, was eager to allay all possible notions that she did not support the authority of the church that is vested in its general conference. Subsequently,

she referred to those times when she did not consider the rulings of the General Conference officers as the voice of God, since it was only the voice of a ‘few men.’ But then she went on to note that ‘when, in General Conference [session], the judgment of all brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence, and private judgment, must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered.’¹⁷

The gist of Ellen White’s argument for church authority seems to be that the entire church body of believers is a repository of the said authority. However, for practical purposes, such authority is vested in representative delegates from all regions in Adventist circles. The resolutions of such delegates become authoritative.

Thus, in the development of the Adventist Church organizational structure, Ellen White sided with A. G. Daniells in favor of a representative centralized

¹⁶Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 118.

¹⁷Ibid., 124 (Cf. 9T 259-211).

system that wielded authority in the world-wide mission field. This model was to be replicated in the lower levels of the organization.

The Tension between Policy and Dissent

The debate concerning denominational reforms, in terms of church structure and doctrinal formulation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is apparently not unusual. In this matter some individuals and groups may have been deemed to be dissident in their views and positions while others won the perception of being the defenders of the faith. A clear delineation of views postulated is, therefore, necessary so as to establish a sound basis for church policies in given ministerial contexts.

In the debate aforementioned it is cardinal to ascertain the authentic beliefs and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the light of scripture. In this regard, analogies between contemporary proponents on either side of the divide should be made with Bible characters. Since the Bible profiles both the apostates and true messengers of God, it may be essential to use such examples as models to apply to the denomination in order to place individuals and groups in their relevant categories. This is because, as Ellen White points out, “the work of God will go forward where there are now and ever will be those who work directly against the prayer of Christ.”¹⁸

Schisms in the Movement. It is apparent that both the early leaders and scholars of the Adventist Church identified the issue of discontent in the rank and file of the denomination as an ever-present reality. Their responses, and the debates that ensued, are insightful to the challenges concerning divergent views in present-day

¹⁸Phillip W. Dunham and Maylan Schurch, *Blinded by the Light: The Anatomy of Apostasy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001) 37, 38 (Quotation made from *Selected Messages*, 2:79).

ministerial contexts. Phillip Dunham and others are examples of the observers of these trends—as will be seen below.

Dunham points out that Ellen White said that the above scenario “will constantly be rising to cause disunion, to draw away from the truth. . . . Such work [had been] carried on in the past by persons claiming to have wonderful light, when they were deep in sin.”¹⁹ Such movements are portrayed as being deliberately deceptive and divisive. In contrast, Martin Webber seems to see a degree of justification for the agitators of structural reforms of the Adventist Church. He charges that Adventist members “proclaim a ‘once-saved, always-saved’ for our organizational structure.”²⁰ It is, however, apparent that the structure of the church cannot be dismissed offhandedly without imperiling the sustainability of the church and its mission.

In view of the foregoing, an identification of what constitutes apostasy is crucial at this stage. Dunham poses the question: “what is apostasy?” He then goes on to describe and define it.

Apostasy comes from the Greek word ‘apostasies.’ . . . This one is a combination of two smaller words: ‘apo’ (from), and ‘stasis’ (Stand). If a person stands steady for a while and then falls from that position, then he or she is an apostate. In classical Greek, *apostasies* signifies revolt from a military commander.²¹

He then goes on to make an allusion to the forsaking of one’s religion, political party or principles.

¹⁹Dunham, 79.

²⁰Martin Webber, *Adventist Hot Potatoes: Celebration Churches, Sabbath no-nos, Rings ‘n things and more* . . . (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1991), 114.

²¹Dunham, 79.

The North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church had faced similar challenges to church authority and doctrines. Incidentally the church administration did not hesitate to call opponents of the church as dissidents. The Division pointed out that “several specific issues may be pointed out concerning these dissident groups.”²² The groups alluded to were said to accuse the church of, ironically, apostasy from the historic faith because the church did not accept their interpretations of certain theological thoughts. In the publication that was issued by the Division, the focus was on two closely allied groups. These were the “Hope International” and the “Heartland Institute.”²³

Individuals like Robert Brinsmead and groups like the “Hope International” and the “Heartland Institute,” though labeled as dissidents by the church, consider themselves to be reformers. They hold different views of what apostasy is and who is in apostasy. Some, like Felix Lorenz, advocate a variant postulation of what the perceived problem in the church is. Lorenz insinuates that the Adventist Church is in a “Laodicean” state and, as such, can only thrive once it heeds the appeal to acknowledge its “diseased” spiritual condition and accept Christ’s righteousness. He uses Ellen Whites writings that were meant to denounce spiritual indolence and makes them applicable to the denomination apart from his own private ministry. He implies that the official church is what Ellen White portrays as being in apostasy. What the two classes of critiques above may not have adequately expounded is the fact that a lukewarm “laodecean” spiritual condition is not an equivalent of apostasy.

²²North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists Officers and Union Presidents, *Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries* (Silver Spring, MD: North American division of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 7.

²³Ibid., 7, 8.

Furthermore, Scripture does not reveal an alternative to Laodecea in the seven-church dispensation of end-time prophecy.

The above divergent views notwithstanding, it is still apparent that the official church has set for itself structures and doctrines on the premise of Scripture and support from Ellen White, the co-founder of the denomination who is considered to have been inspired. The short-comings that may be perceived in the denomination are realities that are within the latitude of an accepted Bible model of a religious organization as envisaged by its founders. Such shortcomings, which even the denomination acknowledges, cannot be said to negate its authenticity. On the other hand, independent individuals and groups are denounced by the same Ellen White (whose books they quote to support their discontent) and the entire church establishment. This is because the net effect of their ministry is divisive and theologically skewed.

The Case of the Davidian Shepherd's Rod

Victor T. Houteff, a native of Bulgaria, founded the Davidian Shepherd's Rod organization. After migrating to the United States of America, he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and got baptized in 1919.²⁴ He later became critical of the way the Adventist Church was administering its institutions. Subsequently, He began to refer to church leaders as "poor, blind, naked and dogs."²⁵ He used this caricature to develop his critical commentary on the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its leadership.

²⁴Hazel Hendricks, *The True Witness Speaks* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1996), 6.

²⁵W. P. Jeffrey, *No Longer a Shepherd's Rod: How I Escaped the Doctrine that Doomed Those at Waco, Texas* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 2008), 20.

Houteff claimed divine illumination. Furthermore, he purported to have the support of Ellen Whites writings, contrary to the state of the church's spiritual leaders. However, he wrote down his own set of doctrines. The preface to the document claims that "in addition to these fundamental tenets of faith held in common with the SDA Church, the Davidian Church holds"²⁶ more. The added beliefs concerning the eschatological Second Coming, the Davidic kingdom, apocalyptic and classical prophecies and the "sealing" are all interpreted centrally to the Adventist positions. He then lists the fifteen additional beliefs. He had essentially formed a church within a church.

The arguments for dissent. A fresher dimension into dissenting views within the Adventist denomination may be obtained through the analysis of recently published divergent views. These fall into two general categories. Firstly, some prefer to cite some statements in the writings of Ellen White. Secondly, the next category opts to articulate theological expositions.

The significance of the published dissenting views is that they may lure a following from among the church members, to the detriment of the unity of the body of believers. Furthermore, it may be argued that the public image of the denomination may be tainted if such a diversity of viewpoints is perceived to be acrimonious. These views, therefore, ought to be discussed in perspective of what constitutes legitimate diversity of views, on one hand, and shear dissidence, on the other.

The book *The Only Hope* is a case in point with regard to arguments against the Adventist Church that are based on the writings of Ellen White. Felix Lorenz published his book with an objective apparently meant to portray the denomination as

²⁶Victor Houteff, "Do You Know?" *The Symbolic Code*, July-December 1941, vol. 7, nos. 7-12, 5.

being in a “laodicean” state, a cliché negatively used to indicate spiritual declension or apostasy on a corporate level. He seems to take it upon himself to call the church to “repentance” and “reformation” from the purported spiritual lethargy. The Ellen White quotations employed in this endeavor are referred to as the “straight testimony.”

Lorenz says that the “straight testimony” produces three reactions from church members, leading to the formation of three categories.

The first is of a group praying with such intensity as the world has probably never seen except in the garden of Gethsemane. ... The second scene ... presents a tragic picture [of those who] did not participate in this work of agonizing and pleading ... the darkness around them ... shut them in like a thick cloud. Next the vision presented a third group. ... They are the ones who hear the Laodicean message but ... refuse to receive it.²⁷

Although this message seemed to be futuristic from the perspective of Ellen White, Lorenz makes it applicable to the denomination at every stage of its existence.

Even though the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists instituted reforms to its structure and policies in 1901, Lorenz argues that, according to Ellen White, the personal Christian experiences of individual members left much to be desired.²⁸ He thus quotes Ellen White who said that “the situation must be corrected; and the correction involves, first of all, personal conversions, and second, a re-organization.”²⁹ Furthermore, Lorenz quotes a passage from Ellen White’s writings which the then president of the General Conference (O. A. Olsen) had used to bemoan the spiritual declension of the time. She had said: “if, in the place of formal professors and unconverted ministers, we were indeed followers of Christ, we would present the

²⁷Felix A. Lorenz, *The Only Hope* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1976), 65, 66.

²⁸Lorenz, 92.

²⁹Lorenz, *The Only Hope*, 40. Reference is made to Spalding’s *Christ’s Last Legion*.

truth with such meekness and fervor, and would so exemplify it in our lives, that the world would not be continually questioning whether we believe what we profess.”³⁰

The implication of the foregoing statements could be assumed to be that some ministers and lay activists were spiritually fallen. Lorenz apparently extrapolates statements from that original context and uses them to make a wholesale justification of his argument that the church is “fallen.”³¹

Other discontented members take an ecclesiastical approach to state their case. They focus on what are deemed to be new trends that have affected structures and practices in the Adventist Church. For example, Damsteegt expresses misgivings toward several aspects of church practices. Of particularly relevant interest to this research is his viewpoint regarding changes that have been taking place in the denomination. Damsteegt asks a cynical question: “have you ever wondered how major changes seem to occur overnight in a church? How has it been possible that worship styles, music and congregationalism have affected so many churches so quickly?” He then posits that “one of the major reasons for the recent changes in local congregations is due to significant changes that occurred in the leadership structure of the local church during the Twentieth Century.”³² However, Damsteegt seems not to appreciate what George Knight alludes to. The major changes in the Twentieth Century took place between 1901 and 1909.³³ Ellen White was still alive and actively involved in the shaping of the church. Damsteegt’s charge above may amount to

³⁰White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:160.

³¹Lorenz, *The Only Hope*, 65, 66.

³²Damsteegt, “Section 6: New Changes in Local Church Leadershi,” in *Shall We Be Silent: Evaluating New Trends in the Church*, ed. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2005), 643.

³³Knight R., *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 118.

casting aspersions on Ellen White as well as the church in committees and sessions.

In the above postulation, Damsteegt focuses on the leadership structure in the local church. He argues that the Jerusalem council was to be the model for future churches. He points out that “the apostles divided the leadership responsibilities in the local church into two major areas. Seven men were chosen to ‘serve tables’ while the apostles confined themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2, 4).”³⁴ The two-fold division of labor that Damsteegt referred to may be classified as service by spiritual leaders, on one hand, and specialized lines of ministry and the handling of finances, on the other. However, the researcher is cognizant of the fact that the above argument may not prove that such ministries are not part of the Adventist Church activities presently.

Damsteegt argues that spiritual leadership in local churches of the early church was actually provided by elders appointed by apostles (Cf. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). As a support for this position, Ellen White’s writing is quoted. This is where she says that “the organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel.”³⁵ In this model, the relationship between apostles and elders is delineated by the authors in a manner that has significant implications on the church structure and ecclesiastical authority in the present-day Adventist Church.

Other authors have shared similar viewpoints. Bjørn, in the book *Exploring the Frontiers of Faith*, shares views that are relevant to the issues of authority and church in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His contribution is significant because it

³⁴Knight R., *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 644.

³⁵Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 291.

is part of the anthology that is dedicated to the honor of Jan Paulsen—the Adventist General Conference president from 1998 to 2010. In his treatise he seems to relegate leadership to the ministries that are related to the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit. He bases his arguments on First Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11-13. Otteson points out that “it can be noted that the five gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher (APEPT) are all leadership gifts which have a part in ‘preparing God’s people for works of service. ‘This indicates that local church leadership consists of more than one person because it is rare that all gifts are present in one person.’”³⁶ In his exposition he locates leadership, not in one office, but in a cluster that needed to work together as a leadership team. This may be said to debunk the notion that a minister should leave local church leadership to an elder and only labor as an itinerant minister, contrary to Damsteegt postulation. The biblical normative must then be located in a variant paradigm.

Otteson further posits an additional element regarding his view of leadership. This has to do with the leading of the Holy Spirit through several individuals, as opposed to centralized authority in one individual. In fact he seems to prefer the term “office of leadership.” He argues that “in the New Testament church there was more focus on the function of leadership than on the office of leadership. . . . Christ sees to it that certain functions are available—rather than putting any particular person in an office of leadership and authority.”³⁷ Vesting strong leadership in one person is, evidently, discounted in this viewpoint. Instead, people are expected to lead as the

³⁶Bjørn Otteson, “Leadership under the Headship of Jesus,” in *Exploring the Frontiers of Faith: Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Jan Paulsen*, Congratulatory edition (Lueneburg, Germany: Advent-Verlag, 2009), 304, 305.

³⁷Otteson, “Leadership under the Headship of Jesus,” in *Exploring the Frontiers of Faith: Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Jan Paulsen*, Congratulatory edition, 304, 305.

Holy Spirit directs. However, Otteson seems to be oblivious to the apparent hierarchy in the biblical organizational and authority set-ups.

Otteson, in line with his postulation, goes on to dispel the authenticity of an exclusively clergy ministry. He asserts that “Paul did not labor under any misconception of [an] ordained ministry that is so much of Christendom’s assumptions of ‘the ministry.’ There are no clergy and no laity in the New Testament—all are ministers.”³⁸ What Otteson omits, however, is the concept of organizational hierarchy and the corresponding relative authority. This is a biblical reality. As such, clergy authority cannot be discounted on account of the priesthood of all believers. The terminology may be misapplied, but the organizational office and its functions should not be discredited. It is with this perspective that Otteson’s “team leadership” concept may be a viable epistemology.

Unlike Otteson, Damsteegt recognizes an ecclesiastical hierarchy, but promotes an unconventional viewpoint regarding the location of the functions of ministers and local church elders. The apostles are portrayed as itinerant evangelists meant to be involved in out-reach missions for the purpose of planting churches in regions without an established church presence. The elders, by contrast, are expected to provide spiritual leadership to the churches, albeit confined to their respective local congregations. The two categories of leaders are said to have worked closely under this model. The model, however, is said to have been abandoned in the Second Century (A.D). It is precisely this model that Damsteegt and others claim was adopted by the Adventist pioneers. “During this time the ministers were employed by the various conferences as administrators and evangelist, raising up churches, and visiting

³⁸Ibid., Otteson, “Leadership under the Headship of Jesus,” in *Exploring the Frontiers of Faith: Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Jan Paulsen*, Congratulatory edition, 168.

established churches that need counsel. No conference-employed minister functioned as a resident or settled pastor of a local church, as was the practice in most protestant churches.”³⁹ Damsteegt’s postulation does not, however, seem to take into account the dynamics of a new denomination in its formative phases. Taking such a templet and placing it on a denomination that, in some respects, has become institutionalized may be a misnomer.

James White, one of the founders of the Adventist Church, is quoted in support of the assertion above. He had said that “it does not appear to have been the design of Christ that his ministers should become stationed, salaried preachers.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, an allusion is made to the firstly proposed church manual of 1883. “The manual listed the officers in the New Testament as 1. Apostles; 2. Prophets; 3. Evangelists; 4. Pastors; 5. Teachers; 6. Helps; 7. Elders; 8. Deacons; 9. Deaconesses.”⁴¹ In the proposed church manual, the officers were divided into two categories. The first class was called the “general officers.” Their authority was considered to be universal. It was “to be recognized by the church everywhere. ... The second class was called ‘local officers.’ They were made up of elders (bishops or presbyter), deacons, and deaconesses, as well as church clerks and treasurers. These officers were usually elected by a local church.” This church manual, however, does not seem to make reference to ministers as being exclusively itinerant. Neither does it overly dissociate the minister from the regular activities of a local church. Granted,

³⁹Damsteegt, 653, 654.

⁴⁰Damsteegt, 653, 654, quoted in J. White, “*Go Ye into the World and Preach the Gospel* (Review and Herald, April 15, 1862).

⁴¹Ibid., 655, quoted in W.H. Littlejohn, *The S.D.A. Church Manual* (Review and Herald, June 5, 1883), 361.

the universality of the minister's ecclesiastical credentials is what may correspond to the office of the apostles and evangelists as seen in the Bible.

It is noteworthy that, in spite of the acclaimed "universal authority" of the "general church officers" (like the apostles and evangelists) Damsteegt asserts that "the manual considered the duties of an elder 'greater than those of any other officer in a local church. ... The elder functioned as a pastor.'"⁴² This viewpoint may be deemed to diminish the role of the clergy in the local church in today's ministry context. Some may even interpret such a view as a justification for supporting individuals and groups that may be considered by a local conference to be insubordinate to church authority.

A correlation of clauses in the aforementioned church manual actually shows a church structure and the apportioning of authority in ways that are not fundamentally different from today's denominational set-up. Much as the church manual of 1883 conferred upon the local church elder pastoral duties, it also enjoined his or her deference to the gospel minister. The manual stated that "in the absence of the minister, he should administer baptism and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and feet washing, in his own church; but it would never be proper for him to administer either of these in any other church than his own."⁴³ The basic structure of the current Adventist establishment should not, therefore, be discounted. Rather, it may be refined and re-aligned.

Although the proponents for diminished clergy roles in the local church admit that the 1883 proposed church manual "suggested the possibility that conferences

⁴²Damsteegt, 657.

⁴³Damsteegt, 657. Cf. W.H. Littlejohn, *The S.D.A. Church Manual* (Review and Herald, June 5, 1883), 361.

might employ ministers who were not able to do evangelistic work but who confined their ministry to existing churches,” they assert that the “concept [was] previously rejected by the Adventist pioneers.”⁴⁴ Reference is made to a resolution of a ten-man committee of the General Conference of 1883 which unanimously rejected the proposed church manual. Since Ellen White and her son W. C. White were present during the above deliberations, and the later had participated in the resolution of the aforementioned committee, Damsteegt concludes that “[since] the committee decision was unanimous, he must have disapproved of the manual.”⁴⁵ By extension, this assumption implicates Ellen White in the position taken by her son.

The present-day role of the minister in the local church and the usage of the church manual in the Adventist Church are both rejected by Damsteegt and cohorts on the basis of what they perceive to be Ellen White’s position at the turn of the Nineteenth Century. This is in spite of the fact that “[the] movement toward ‘settled’ pastors continued”⁴⁶ beyond 1900, even while Ellen White was still alive. Subsequently, he accuses the denomination of taking advantage of Ellen White’s death to introduce policy changes that are not grounded on Scripture. He charges that the “Seventh-day Adventists replaced the leadership of the local elders with a minister—or pastor-centered leadership structure in which elders functioned as his assistants.”⁴⁷ This conclusion, it may be argued, neglects one of the crucial tenets of

⁴⁴Damsteegt, 659.

⁴⁵Ibid. NB: W. C. White is said to have written: “She (Mrs White) attended the committee meeting on the Church Manual and spoke well.” *Letter, W.C.W. to May Lacey*, November 13, 1883. See also Gil Valentine’s *The Stop-start Journey on the Road to a Church Manual*, Ministry, April 1999.

⁴⁶Damsteegt, 663.

⁴⁷Ibid., 670.

the Adventist Church's ecclesiology. The resolutions to enact church manuals have been done through general conferences in session. To disparage such resolutions is to contradict the fundamental belief that recognizes the general conference's mandate to enact policies. The aforementioned quotation may also precipitate dissidence toward church order and authority.

The first denominational *Church Manual*, which was published in 1932, is criticized and rejected mostly on the basis of the perceived usurpation of the local elders' authority by ministers. It is said that "the manual gave its blessings on the position of the 'settled pastor,' a position concept so strongly opposed by Ellen White. ... Now the minister ... took over the elder's authority and became the pastor and leader of the local church."⁴⁸ Furthermore, subsequent revisions of the *Church Manual* are said to "show an increase of the minister's authority in the local church in comparison to the 1932 manual."⁴⁹ The 2000 edition of the Church Manual is cited as a case in point in this regard. In this and later editions, the purported increase in authority is said to be in such areas as the church board, nominating committee and elder's board.

The foregoing criticisms have a potential to erode the confidence that church members ought to repose in the clergy. Damsteegt seems to insinuate that local church elders are biblically the more authentic functionaries at that level than pastors in terms of overseeing local churches. Damsteegt further asserts that "the present leadership model described in the Church Manual is so deeply entrenched in the minds of

⁴⁸Damsteegt, 672.

⁴⁹Ibid., 674.

believers that it would not be easy to return to the biblical model.”⁵⁰ At this stage, the researcher deduced that the above arguments seem to be a campaign against the formulation of the church manual. The researcher further surmises that a manual or handbook is synonymous with order and organization. An exposition that militates against such is a subversion of the essence of organization and a circumvention of authority.

Damsteegt’s ironical claims above are further accentuated by the blame he apportions to both the laity, in general, and the local church elders, in particular. He begins by pointing out at “flaws” in the membership’s attitude toward the clergy. He laments that “each church wants its own minister and doesn’t really want to share with other churches. . . . Many members also look forward to having a minister who regularly pays them personal visits.”⁵¹ As for the local church elders, it is surmised that “they are so used to ministers doing so much for the church [that] elders have frequently developed a lifestyle that is so involved with their own jobs, projects and plans that there is hardly any time left for church work. . . . The other factor may be a general lack of interest in church proceedings.”⁵² He does not provide evidence to corroborate the above charge, though.

Damsteegt does not, however, address the issue of remuneration. Instead he addresses the issue of the perceived ministers’ conception of the mission field. He charges that “many ministers enjoy being in charge of just one church. They do not relish being responsible for several churches.”⁵³ The research notes, though, that the

⁵⁰Damsteegt, 675, 676.

⁵¹Ibid., 677.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

major determining factor for the placement of ministers is the availability of funds in the budget. Moreover, it is the local conference that is responsible for such placements.

The tenure of a minister's stay in one location is also cited as a mark of departure from both the biblical model of church administration and the trend during the early Adventist denominational years. He points out that

in the past, ministers stayed in their churches only a few years. The rationale given for moving pastors more frequently was that each had strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it was thought, moving pastors every few years would be good for the church. The next minister would bring different strengths to the church than the previous minister, which would contribute to a more balanced church development.⁵⁴

The current, relatively longer tenures, which he criticizes, are said to range from ten to twenty years. This argument, it may be argued, is not a negation of the need for pastoral presence and authority in the local church. Ironically, it could even be a formula for strengthening the aggregate pastoral impact across a regional body of believers like a conference.

Damsteegt's major criticism, in regard to the way local churches are administered, is directed at local conferences. He alleges that "the current leadership model of 'settled pastors' has advantages for conference leaders, one of the most significant advantages being that the conference has more direct influence over the local church because the minister answers to the local conference, not to the church."⁵⁵ Apart from the issue of the administrative control of local congregations, Damsteegt adds the issue concerning the control of properties belonging to local churches. He points out the fact that "since the 1863 organization of the Seventh-day

⁵⁴Damsteegt, 678.

⁵⁵Ibid.

Adventist Church, the local church properties have belonged to the conference.” Then he puts a twist on this historic fact by posing the question: “which conference would be willing to give up this control?”⁵⁶ In response to this question, it is worth noting that Damsteegt’s reference to the Adventist denomination’s pioneers as a basis for his criticism of current church leaders poses a contradiction in terms of the rationale for church organization. The resolve to own property at both conference and local church level was part of the reasons for denominational church organization and the pioneers supported the idea. These included Ellen White.

The contradictory assertions notwithstanding, Damsteegt calls for the implementation of the “biblical model” through the “re-education” of the conference leadership, ministers and church membership with a view to vest the authority in the local church in the hands of elders.⁵⁷ He, however, makes a significant omission in terms of denominational stake holders. There is no mention of church structures at the level of “unions” and the general conference. Since the proposed “re-education” would lead to the envisaged reforms, one wonders why the structure consisting of the church hierarchy in policy formulation is left out in spite of it being a recognized body even by the pioneers. It is apparent that implementing the changes as suggested above would not only make a radical change to the denomination as we know it, but also as the pioneers knew it. This is because it may lead to congregationalism. Congregationalism may not be tenable or feasible for Adventism.

The itinerancy that was typical of the ministers during the formative years of the denomination may not be replicated in all aspects in the current period due to the

⁵⁶Damsteegt, 678.

⁵⁷Damsteegt, 684.

fact that the church, as an organization, has evolved and become institutionalized in regions where it has been established for a long time. A detachment of believers in established churches from ministers on account of the latter's involvement in frontier evangelism and church planting would leave such churches vulnerable due to lack of professional nurturing. Furthermore, it should be noted here that parishioners need sustained rather than incidental professional pastoral care. The most practical structural changes to the denominational policies governing the handling of local churches is, therefore, to assign the minister the role of overseer over a specified number of congregations with elders serving as associates. This kind of team ministry and collaboration would enable each category of church officers at that level to perform their biblical functions in the local church without negating each other's role. Furthermore, relieving the minister of part of the load involving pastoral work would free the minister to become periodically involved in evangelism and church planting. This mode of function, it may be argued, may be imitated by the elders in a less extensive manner.

Diversity, Dissention and the Way Forward

The divergence of viewpoints from the perspective of theology may generate debate and acrimony mostly among the scholars in academic circles. The general membership may get confused, as a consequence. The creation of independent bodies with unilateral ecclesiastical authority would inevitably undermine the official church organization and lead to schisms in the denomination. Both of the above scenarios—the varied theological positions and the actual creation of independent ministries, have been playing out in the Adventist Church. Therefore, the impact on the organization has to be analyzed and feasible options pursued in the minister's professional context.

Issues on Doctrines

The formation and development of doctrines for a denomination should be crucial in terms of its identity, functionality and mission. When either new doctrines are formed or old ones revised, the impact that this creates may be measured by examining the reactions of the stakeholders among the adherents to the concerned belief systems. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has had such experiences before.

A case in point concerning the above-stated issue is the publication of a book called *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. The book came into being in 1957 “because interest concerning Seventh-day Adventist belief and work [had] increased as the movement [had] grown.”⁵⁸ Researchers from one denomination in the United States of America wanted to write an objective analysis of the Adventist Church. They made “a number of trips to the General Conference covering a period of almost two years. ... There were a large number of interviews. The enquiries growing out of this investigation were ultimately couched in a series of searching questions to which comprehensive answers were requested.”⁵⁹

The book’s authors hasten to point out that “the goal was to set forth [the denomination’s] basic beliefs in terminology [then] currently in use in theological circles. This was not to be a new statement of faith, but rather an answer to specific questions concerning our faith.”⁶⁰ However, reactions to the book have tended to be divisive in spite of the denomination’s effort at allaying fears about possible suspicions of a ploy to adulterate the church’s doctrines. For example, M. L.

⁵⁸George R. Knight, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: Annotated Edition* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 1.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

Anderson said that “what [he was] concerned about [was] the section on the Atonement which [was] utterly unacceptable. [He demanded that it be] recalled.”⁶¹ Anderson was, apparently, content with the previous doctrinal status quo of the church.

On the opposite spectrum, in terms of perception and analysis, was M.R. DeHaan. He stated that his “disappointment ... was great, when [he] found that there had been no essential change in the historic stand of Adventists. ... The volume [was] not a repudiation by the SDAS of any of their previous views, but rather a restatement of them.”⁶² He thus gives an indication that he expected doctrinal changes on grounds of being dissatisfied with the previous doctrinal articulation.

Notwithstanding the above notion, George Knight points out that there was a significant change in theology. He posits that *Questions on Doctrine*

did set forth one problematic change in Adventist theology; a change done in such a way that it alienated various factions of the church theologically. The publication of *Questions on Doctrine* did more than any other event to create what appear to be permanently warring factions within the denomination.⁶³

Probably, a typical case in point in this regard is the publication’s position on what constitutes both the “remnant” and “Babylon.”

The Adventist Church had stated that “the prophecy of Revelation 12:17 points to the experience and work of the Seventh-day Adventist, but [it] did not believe that [it] alone constitute[s] the true children of God ... on earth. [It] believe[s] that God has multitudes of earnest, faithful, sincere followers in all Christian

⁶¹Knight, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: Annotated Edition*, 1. The viewpoint was quoted in a paper M. L. Anderson wrote entitled “The Atonement,” November 4, 1957.

⁶²Ibid., *Preface/viewpoint*.

⁶³Ibid.

communions.”⁶⁴ The church justified its position by citing Ellen White’s rhetorical question. She had asked: “in what religious bodies are the greater parts of the followers of Christ now to be found?” She then answered her own question: “Without doubt in the various churches professing the Protestant faith.”⁶⁵

An issue that is conversely related to the concept of the “remnant” is that of “Babylon.” The Adventist Church had to clarify its position as to what constituted “Babylon.” Having taken cognizance of the fact that, for over 1000 years, various religious leaders and movements had identified the papacy as “Babylon” and that for the past 300 years various figures have identified certain other denominations holding erroneous doctrines as “daughters of Babylon,” the church made its position. It said that “‘Great Babylon’ ... according to verse 5 [of Rev 17] is mentioned as a ‘mother.’ So the term ‘Babylon’ rightly belongs to others also. ... Wherever there are individuals or groups of individuals, that hold to and advocate the unchristian doctrines, practices and procedures of the papal church, such may justifiably be denominated ‘Babylon.’”⁶⁶

For William Johnsson, the publication of “*Issues on Doctrine*” in 1957 is a theological milestone in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Furthermore, he posits that the position expressed by the denomination in the book has become one of the crucial factors that may lead to its fragmentation. He points out that the publication was “the fruitage of extended dialogue between Adventist leaders and Evangelicals

⁶⁴Knight, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: Annotated Edition*, 159.

⁶⁵Ibid., 159.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 170.

Donald Barnhouse and Walter Martin, rolled off the press.”⁶⁷ In spite of this acknowledgement, Johnsson asserts that a deeper theological controversy plagued the church at an earlier period in its history.

Johnsson argues that, “although Adventists today still split over “*Questions on Doctrine*” the real divide goes much further. Not 1957 but 1888 marks the beginning of two distinct theological streams that run side by side within the church to this day.”⁶⁸ During the General Conference session of 1888 Wagoner presented a series of studies on the book of Galatians “in which he argued that ‘the law’ that Paul speaks of as our school master was not just the ceremonial law but the moral law as well. And that brought the house down.”⁶⁹ The apparent shock that this message may have created is what could have led to the rejection of Wagoner’s postulation. Incidentally, it is said that Ellen White supported his views and got isolated too. This involvement of the highest decision-making body in opposing a position that Ellen White (who is considered to have been inspired) supported is used by some groups to justify their divergent views and the formation of independent groups. Independent groups that become off-shoots have this issue at their core. The rationale is that the Adventist Church, even at the highest level, could make a doctrinal or ecclesiastical blunder. They purport that the events of the 1888 debate at the General Conference are a case in point.

⁶⁷William G. Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 97. NB: Johnsson adds: “Those who criticize the book contend that the Adventists, eager for the denomination to be more widely accepted, gave too much away in the discussion. Particularly, with regard to the human nature of Jesus (The book argues that he took Adam’s Unfallen Nature) and the atonement (Questions upholds Calvary as a complete atoning sacrifice).

⁶⁸Ibid., 97, 98.

⁶⁹Ibid., 99.

Johnsson points out that Ellen White had to resort to writing such books as *Steps to Christ*, *Desire of Ages* and *Christ's Object Lessons* as a way of correcting notions about how one become righteous. Furthermore, Johnsson asserts that some pioneers and church leaders “had a gospel that added human works to Christ’s all-sufficiency. . . . Our salvation comes in cooperation with God. Because of this balance of God and humanity, it is easy to distort the gospel, to make it over into a false gospel.”⁷⁰

The debate at the General Conference of 1888 is said to have produced two theological streams. “One stream gives priority to the divine, the other to the human. Today one emphasizes grace, the other victory.”⁷¹ The theological stream that promotes more of the divine is said to emphasize God’s grace and His activity on behalf of humanity. This school of thought is, however, accused of being soft on sin. On the other hand, the proponents of victorious living are said to place emphasis on the human response to God’s intimations. The human role is said to be emphasized. Subsequently, the proponents of this school of thought are accused of legalism.

In the foregoing debate between the two theological streams, it is crucial to clearly delineate a balanced perspective. One may ask: “which aspect of our salvation needs prioritization and more emphasis?” Johnsson is apt and precise when he posits: “victory, yes, but not first—grace first, and out of the life overwhelmed with divine favor and overflowing with love and gratitude, the victory.”⁷² The research found the above postulation by Johnsson to be plausible.

⁷⁰Johnsson, 101.

⁷¹Ibid., 103.

⁷²Johnsson, 103.

Divisive Gurus and Independent Ministries

Philip Dunham and others draw attention to eminent individual leaders and scholars who are considered to be “stars” in the denomination, but end up apostatizing. He makes analogies between certain Bible characters and the apostates of his own contemporary period in time. Using Ellen White as his motivation, Dunham quotes her warning to the church when she said that some individuals will be “rising to cause disunion, to draw away from the truth. . . . Such work has been carried on in the past by persons claiming to have wonderful light, when they were deep in sin.”⁷³ This insight places the issue of disaffection against church order and authority into perspective.

The prospect of denominational fragmentation is not only triggered by certain church leaders and scholars, it is compounded by the attitude and expressions of some church members. A case in point is the scenario that obtained in the church at Corinth which had degenerated into factions for leaders like Paul, Peter and Apollos. Johnsson likens the factionalism that had ensued to today’s apparent “idolization” of luminaries in the Adventist Church. He thus posits that “instead of Peter, Apollos, Paul and Christ, today we have Venden, Spear, Wieland and Sequeira . . . and who knows how many others have been accorded guru status by someone.”⁷⁴ The gist of Johnsson’s critical appraisal of divergent theological viewpoints seems to be that he perceives a fragmentation in the denomination which is being caused, to a significant extent, by scholars. Furthermore, he sees an institutionalization of the differences in theological

⁷³Dunham, 13. NB: the reference is quoted in *Selected Messages*, 2:79.

⁷⁴Johnsson, 90.

and ecclesiastical viewpoints.⁷⁵ Such developments can only cause harm to the church and its mission.

The foregoing portrayal of the denomination's schisms notwithstanding, Johnsson asserts that the diversity of opinions and research should not be opposed. He argues that "the fact of theological ferment among us in itself is a highly positive thing. It indicates that for us, and in contrast to most other denominations, doctrine still counts for something."⁷⁶ Although he acknowledges that divergences in opinions tend to breed undesirable effects on the church, he asserts that the effects have more positives than negatives as long as people realize the importance of unity and the indispensableness of all parties to the wellbeing of the denomination.⁷⁷ This postulation, it may be argued, is a risky premise to rely upon in as far as the sustainability of the denominational identity is concerned. This is because the organization would have to rely on the presumed charity of the protagonists in the theological battles. Without policy safeguards and proactive measures, the church would be perpetually vulnerable to the whims of the various factions whose interests may only be attained at the expense of the organization's survival.

In contrast to Johnsson, Philip Dunham's assessment of the phenomenon of divergent viewpoints and discontent in the Adventist Church goes beyond scholarly considerations. He identifies certain forms of divergence as amounting to apostasy. He personalizes such cases and makes analogies between Bible characters and individuals who are considered as dissidents in our day. In these assessments and

⁷⁵Johnsson, 91.

⁷⁶Ibid., 93.

⁷⁷Ibid., 95.

analogies, he makes extensive use of the writings of Ellen White in support of his assertions.

Australian born Robert Brinsmead, for example, is classified as an apostate. It is said that “he refused to work in harmony with the church organization and instead took it upon himself to reform the church.”⁷⁸ Dunham, however, urges loyal ministers and church members to handle such individuals with patience and love. For this counsel, he cites Jesus’ example in the manner He handled Judas Iscariot. His diagnosis of the dissidents’ perceived flaws in the foregoing scenario is, however drawn from Ellen White’s comment on the parable of the ten virgins. Concerning such Ellen White said that “the class presented by the foolish virgins is not hypocrites ... but they have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up.”⁷⁹ It may be deduced here that spiritual and character flaws are at the root of dissidence and unsound doctrines, both devotionally and professionally.

Dunham also addresses the perceived pitfalls of the issue of divergent viewpoints concerning “justification by faith” and “sanctification.” He cites the example of Dick and Sherry, for whom “righteousness by faith—the most beautiful topic in the Bible—became a license to live and believe in ways foreign to normative Adventist understanding.”⁸⁰ He identifies challenges around both issues, though. This is apparent in his choice of some quotations by Ellen White. For example, Ellen White is cited where she bemoaned manifestations of “false sanctification. There are those who claim to be holy, and yet are breaking God’s commandments. Another

⁷⁸Dunham, 37, 38.

⁷⁹Ibid., 411.

⁸⁰Dunham, 83, 84.

doctrine ... is that all that we have to do is believe in Christ. ... It is impossible for us to sin. This is a snare of Satan,”⁸¹ she warned. This was in apparent reference to proponents of justification by faith—a faith that negates sanctification by faith.

As for people who advocate for living the church on account of differences evolving around the two concepts above, Ellen White’s counsel reveals her concept of apostasy. She had written that “we cannot now step off the foundation that God has established. We cannot now enter a new organization, for this would mean apostasy from the truth.”⁸² From this viewpoint, apostasy is not merely a lifestyle that is contrary to the teachings and standards of the church, but also leaving the church and urging others to do the same.

Divergences on theological viewpoints and discontent by some individuals and groups have apparently been some of the reasons for the phenomena of independent ministries. By their nature, they can either contribute to the building up or fragmentation of the denomination. The North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a case in point concerning the existence of the two types of independent ministries. The policy document and guidelines that the church developed concerning the operations of certain independent ministries is insightful on the issue.

With regard to dissident independent ministries, certain characteristics were identified as being typical of such groups. They do not only accuse the church of being in apostasy on account of not accepting their interpretations of certain theological positions, but demand that the denomination discards some teachings they

⁸¹Dunham, 83, 84, 87.

⁸²Ibid., 89.

find unacceptable. Furthermore, they accuse the church of introducing worldly practices. This leads them to justify their endeavor to establish a church within a church with the purpose of creating an entity that will be insulated from the purported corruption of the mainstream church. Consequently, their methods result in loyal Adventists being lured to send tithe to them rather than to the church.⁸³

The North American Division's publication, "Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries," is published in response to private ministries that had assumed what was perceived to be a dissident tone. The book focuses on two closely allied groups—the Hope International and the Heartland Institute. The former was led by Ron Spears while Dr. Collin Standish led the later.

Hope International's conflicts with Adventist Churches began with congregations in Washington and spread to other parts of the world field. It is said that "the issues generally revolve around control of church boards and what will be presented from the pulpit and in Sabbath School classes."⁸⁴ The publication states, however, that "the major impact of Hope International ... comes through a monthly journal, 'Our Firm Foundation,'—which is sent in large numbers to church workers and church members."⁸⁵ On the other hand, the Heartland Institute operates as a self-supporting Adventist College in Virginia.⁸⁶

The North American Division was forced into action in order to counter the inroads of dissident groups like the aforementioned. A directive was issued to "bar the

⁸³North American Division Officers and Union Presidents, 7. Note that this is a compilation done and published by the North America Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Individual contributors are not credited.

⁸⁴North American Division Officers and Union Presidents, 8.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

Hope International and Heartland Institute speakers from denominational pulpits, restricted Hope International followers from control of local congregations, and warn members of the negative influence of Our Firm Foundation.”⁸⁷ For such a position, the Division needed some explanation rooted in both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White.

Ellen White’s sketching of the downward path to perdition was cited and related to the activities of dissident independent ministries. She wrote:

Satan knows how to make his attacks. He works upon minds to excite jealousy and dissatisfaction toward those at the head of the work. The gifts are next questioned; then of course, they have but little weight, and instruction given through vision is disregarded. . . . Next follows skepticism in regard to vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition.⁸⁸

From this profile, it is apparent that the beginning of such a downfall may not be related to theology.

Ellen White’s response to dissident groups during her days of ministry reveals two marked characteristics. In the formative stages of the denomination, disengagement from confrontation was urged. However, this was to change under different times and circumstances. For example, the “Messenger Party,” and later, the “Marion Party,” constituted the first organizational challenge to what was to become the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In reaction, she advised the church: “the great work of the last message of mercy is of too much importance for us to leave it and come down and answer such falsehoods, misrepresentations, and slander as the ‘Messenger Party’ have fed upon and scattered abroad.”⁸⁹ The gist of this advice

⁸⁷North American Division Officers and Union Presidents, 18, 19.

⁸⁸Ibid., 53.

⁸⁹North American Division Officers and Union Presidents, 55.

could be that the energies and resources of the church should not be expended on dissidents. Their course of action will be their own undoing. So, the church should not allow itself to be distracted.

Ellen White's manner of handling dissidents in the church changed significantly during the later years of the denomination. She even bemoaned the fact that some dissident groups quoted her writings in support of their positions. She pointed out that "in compiling this work, they [had] used [her] name and writings for the support of that which [she] disapprove[d] and denounce[d] as error."⁹⁰ She apparently had to make this public denunciation because of the effect of the claims by some dissident groups that she supported their positions. She thus asserted that false teachers "are to be met and opposed, not because they are bad men, but because they are teachers of falsehood and are endeavoring to put upon falsehood the stamp of truth."⁹¹

The adjusted stance toward dissidence became more pronounced during the "Kellogg crisis" of 1903. This was the greatest threat to the integrity of the Adventist message and mission during the life of Ellen White. There was a controversy between the General Conference and Doctor John Harvey Kellogg. The controversy was multifaceted. It involved the medical, educational and ministerial aspects of the Adventist Church. Ellen White urged the General Conference to take a confrontational path.

The timing of the confrontation was significant. It took the vision of the "iceberg and ship" for Ellen White and the leadership of the General Conference to

⁹⁰North American Division Officers and Union Presidents, 59.

⁹¹White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 55.

confront the aforementioned crisis head-on. She had sent letters to the General Conference. One of them read:

after taking your position firmly, make not one concession on any point concerning which God has plainly spoken. Be as calm as [a] summer evening, but as fixed as ... the everlasting hills. By conceding you would be selling our whole cause into the hands of the enemy. ... We must take hold of these matters decidedly.⁹²

The significance of this advice is that Ellen White is considered to have possessed the prophetic gift. The admonitions to the General Conference to take a confrontational stand against dissident groups and individuals who were peddling obvious errors can, therefore, be considered to be God's guidance to the church.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that when a faction rises within a congregation or region and insists on holding to divergent viewpoint, the protracted attrition will create a war atmosphere among the believers and church leaders. For example, Dunham describes a typical scenario of a church that had been infiltrated by an offshoot independent group. The church pastor had reported to his local conference about the issue. Pastor Bill said "to his conference president: 'a lot of my church members won't even shake my hand when they see me in the halls on Sabbath. When I step up to my pulpit about 25 people get on their feet and walk out. And, as you know, some of our board members want us to separate from the denomination.'⁹³ Upon receiving the report, the conference is said to have suggested mitigation measures. These included home visitations for all members and the conducting of revival meetings. If this measure yielded no positive results, the pastor was to convene a church board in order to confront the dissidents. However, "a short time

⁹²North American Division Officers and Union Presidents, 61, quoted in A. L. White, *The Early Elmshaven Years* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 298.

⁹³Dunham, 98.

later the disaffected members split from the church and formed their own group. And since then ... the split itself has split and has continued to diminish in numbers and influence.”⁹⁴

Due to such occurrences as the illustration above, Dunham advocates for a distinction between the freedom to explore and express an opinion, on one hand, and the stubborn rejection of church authority, on the other. He urges church members to do a self-test. “Find out what you believe. Believe what you believe. If you have questions about what you believe, settle them quickly. Then, in the spirit of Christ, defend what you believe. Be faithful, strong, and immovable, like a rock,”⁹⁵ he concludes. It may be argued, though, that this formula could be a double-edged sword if it is not coupled with other guidelines. The dissidents could also be emboldened in their erroneous beliefs. Adding lessons on how to interpret both the Bible and writings of Ellen White, in relation to the Adventist Church positions, structures and doctrines, could be more effective.

In spite of the negative acrimony created by some dissident supporting ministries, Dunham argues that the majority of the more than 800 of them are fine. He points out “that they are called ‘independent’ because they have chosen to serve the Lord outside the regular church structure channels.”⁹⁶ Some of the “good” independent ministries that are referred to are the *Advent Frontier Missions*, *Maranatha Volunteers*, *Project PATCH*, the *Quiet Hour*, *Three Angels Broadcasting Network*, *Weimer Institute*, and *Amazing Facts*. The “goodness” of these groups,

⁹⁴Dunham, 100.

⁹⁵Ibid., 101.

⁹⁶Dunham, 102.

however, needs to be qualified. Why, for example, would individuals who have been church members opt to operate outside the ecclesiastical framework in a bid to accomplish the very mission of the church whose administrative control they are not going to fall under? Granted that such ministries are doing “a good job,” could they not have done the same in the ministries that are under the auspices of the church? It seems the Adventist Church needed to create a department to oversee loyal lay teams that aspire to do both community and missionary work so that such endeavors are not carried out independent of the General Conference or its lower entities. In this way, the missionary pretext that dissident ministries use as a springboard would be significantly weakened.

It is apparent that various independent ministries may be placed on a broad spectrum with regard to how their activities and teachings relate to the mission and doctrines of the Adventist Church. As Johnsson aptly points out, “the radical independents among us—those who, by appropriating tithe, ordaining clergy, publishing their own literature, and running counter camp meetings, [and] are close to becoming off-shoots”⁹⁷—should be deemed to be destructive to the welfare and mission of the denomination. This conclusive observation makes the identification of such groups, through their characteristics, an imperative.

Since it clear that some independent ministries are relatively loyal to the Adventist Church while others tend to manifest dissident activities and teachings, Dunham came up with criteria to make a distinction between them. Basing his guidelines on the writings of Ellen White and a critical analysis of the teachings and

⁹⁷Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism*, 104.

practices of the dissident ministries, he outlined the tale-tale signs that show the inclination toward disloyalty and acrimony. He puts this in question form:

1. Criticism. *Does this independent group criticize leadership?* Ellen White is quoted as she points out that “it is hardly possible for men to offer a greater insult to God, than to despise and reject the instrumentalities that He has appointed to lead them.”⁹⁸

2. Extremism. *Does an independent group show signs of extremism, imbalance, fanaticism, and majoring in minors?* This includes claims such as: “the King James version of the Bible is the only authentic one.”⁹⁹ Others are conspiracy theories that allege that the Adventist ministry has been compromised by external religious elements. They may also claim that prayer should always be offered whilst in the kneeling posture.

3. Legalism. *Do members of this group show a pharisaical, legalistic, myopic focus on self, self-works, performance and behavior?* This is an allusion to a legalistic self-righteousness that looks down on others with a holier-than-thou attitude.

4. A Flawed Gospel. *Do they have teachings that show a marked absence of the gospel assurance and righteousness by faith?* In this regard, Dunham charges that “in their desire to put distance between themselves and other denominations some earnest groups ignore such topics.”¹⁰⁰

5. Rejection of Church Authority. *Do they reject the church’s spiritual authority?* Ellen White is quoted:

⁹⁸White, *Testimonies*, 3:355.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism*, 106.

“God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God ... [Furthermore, Dunham laments:] “again and again as I have dealt with such dysfunctional groups I have seen this very mentality – anti-leadership, anti-conference, anti-church governance, anti-authority, and anti-church manual.”¹⁰¹

6. Separation from Church Activities. *Do members of an independent ministry separate themselves from church services, church functions, or church outreach?* In this case the separatists consider the rest of the members as “tares.” Accordingly, they invite their own speakers for their clandestine meetings. Furthermore, they start their own publications, source their own literature, establish their own bank accounts and build their own facilities and headquarters.¹⁰²

7. Calls to Come Out of the Church. *Do they sound an increasingly clear call to separate from the fellowship and membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?* Here, it is noted that Ellen White had said that “the message to pronounce the Seventh-day Adventist Church ‘Babylon’ and [to] call the people of God out of her, does not come from any heavenly messenger, or any human agent inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.”¹⁰³ Dunham also uses the rationale of the need for the chaff to be taken out, rather than the wheat, in relation to the proverbial end-time harvest. Subsequently, he answers the usually misapplied question: “‘Didn’t the Protestant reformers eventually leave the Catholic Church?’ someone must ask, ‘And once they were out, didn’t they call others out of that ‘fallen’ church?’”¹⁰⁴ He argues that “the issue is different according to our interpretation of prophecy. The Roman Catholic

¹⁰¹Dunham, 164.

¹⁰²Ibid., 110.

¹⁰³White, *Selected Messages*, 3:18.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 3:112.

Church has been labeled by Scripture itself as ‘Babylon,’ the Anti-Christ power. But the Adventist Church is a chosen movement...prophetically called ‘remnant.’ ... This movement will last until the Lord comes.”¹⁰⁵

8. Dividing the Church. *Do they divide, destroy and tear down the church?* In this case, the dissidents attempt to destroy the church that they left.

9. Hard Sincerity. *Do they cherish an attitude of hard, humorless sincerity?* This amounts to being “sincerely wrong.” A quotation from Ellen White is related to this aspect. She said: “I may be perfectly sincere in following a wrong, but that will not make it the right road, or bring me to the place I wish to reach.”¹⁰⁶

10. Causing Public Reproach. *Do their words and actions bring public reproach on the church?* David Koresh and the Branch Davidians are referred to as a case in point. This includes such activities as the outlandish, extreme, fanatical attack advertisements, anti-Catholic billboards.

11. Neglect of Public Witnessing. *Do they neglect public witnessing?* This attitude is characteristic of off-shoot dissident groups. They lose all desire to share with the general public the great truths that brought the Adventist Church into being. Instead, they turn inward and target vulnerable Adventists.

12. Withdraw of Financial Support. *Do they withdraw financial support from the church—or even accept or solicit tithes for their own cause?* They are said to re-define the term “store house.” Dunham asserts: “If any such groups refuses to accept

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Cf. Matthew 13:30.

¹⁰⁶White, *Selected Messages*, 2:56.

its financial records for public scrutiny and will not issue an audited financial report, that's a certain sign it is a renegade movement.”¹⁰⁷

13. Misuse of Ellen White's Writings. *Do they misuse the Bible and writings of Ellen White?* Ellen White herself is quoted as having protested against such abuse. She said: “You have also taken from their connection portions of the testimonies which the Lord has given for the benefit of His people, and have misapplied them to the support of your erroneous theories—borrowing or stealing the light of heaven to that which the testimonies have no harmony with, and have never condemned. Thus you place both Scripture and testimony in the framework of error. All who are in error do as you have done.”¹⁰⁸

14. Claim of Sinless Perfection. *Do they speak loudly of attaining sinless perfection so that they may live through the time of trouble without a mediator?* It is pointed out that many dissidents are actually legalists who do not have an assurance of salvation. They do not understand or want to accept the gift of righteousness by faith.

15. Ordaining Own Ministry. *Do they baptize their own members, ordain their own ministers or establish separate systems of financial accountability and authority?* In this regard, and being consistent with the dissidents' own stance, such individuals should not be considered to be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

16. Placing Spirit of Prophecy above Bible. *Finally, do they use the writings of the Spirit of prophecy in a manner that places them above the Bible?* This is unbiblical and runs counter to the position that Ellen White herself had taken.

¹⁰⁷Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism*, 114.

¹⁰⁸White, *Selected Messages*, 2:83.

An Objective Critique of Adventists

Scholarly analysts of Seventh-day Adventists have endeavored to come up with balanced viewpoints of the denomination, as this research shows below. Of these, authors like Martin Weber can be termed an epitome of this category. In his book entitled *Adventist Hot Potatoes* Webber addresses controversial issues within the denomination—such as celebration churches, Sabbath observance, wearing of rings, etc. The book entitled *More Adventist Hot Potatoes*, on the other hand, focuses on the flaws of dissident independent ministries.

Of critical consideration with regard to the issues above is the correlation between the “Laodicea” and “Remnant” motifs in terms of the significance and application of the biblical terminologies. Weber seems to wonder whether the “Laodicean” experience is an inevitable experience for the true church of God—the “Remnant,” albeit still leading to its glorification. He alleges that “many Adventists have no assurance of salvation—they don’t even believe in it—yet they proclaim once-saved, always-saved for our organizational structure.”¹⁰⁹ He then casts aspersions on Adventists’ connotative definition of the term “church.” Drawing his argument from Adventists’ applications of the metaphors of the church as “ship” or “boat,” he asks as to being in the ship entails. He answers his own question by pointing out that the mere fact that one has ones name on the church register is not good enough.

Weber seems to see some deficiencies in both the membership and the structure of the Adventist Church. He is critical of Adventists who are perceived to be “caught up in blind denominational patriotism [and] have forgotten the principle of

¹⁰⁹Weber, 114.

conditional prophecy.”¹¹⁰ In apparent defense of his critical appraisal of the membership, he makes an analogy with ancient Israel. He rhetorically asks: “do we imagine ourselves to be immune from the rejection suffered by the Jewish nation—God’s chosen people—when they rejected the gospel?”¹¹¹ This deduction, it may be argued, seems to resonate with arguments that dissident groups advance as they erode church members’ confidence in the church and its teachings.

In spite of the foregoing postulations, Weber falls short of calling the church “Babylon.” In fact he is critical of individuals or groups that apply the terminology to the denomination—although he does not rule out a possible future application. He bemoans the fact that “some are going so far as to call the church Babylon. That has definitely not happened. . . . Our church right now is in a state of real need. . . . Such is the spiritual state of North American Adventism.”¹¹²

As to how the perceived deficiencies in the Adventist Church will be remedied, Weber’s exegesis leads him to a conclusion at variance with the denomination’s conventional commentators. Whereas other commentators point to Ellen White’s statements that imply that the “straight” message is what will purify Zion by shaking out sinners, Weber implies that it is the “Babylonian” persecution that will purify the church through punishment. He thus draws attention to “the similarity between Old Testament times and the crisis happening today. . . . Just as God’s people back then had backslidden spiritually, so the church today has become lukewarm Laodicea. We have been expecting an attack from Babylon. . . . Will God

¹¹⁰Weber, 115.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., 116.

use persecution from the archenemy of truth for the shaking and sifting of His people?”¹¹³

Whereas the fact that deficiencies exist among Adventists and within the denomination’s structure is acknowledged by even religious authorities with divergent viewpoint, some of Weber’s theological positions may have more weaknesses than strengths. For example, the argument that states that the Sunday law-related persecution will be the means of purifying the church pre-supposes that the Devil and his agents hold the initiative to the need for the purification of Adventists. It is more logical to relate the persecution to the testimony and ministry of the empowered and transformed church. In this case the persecution should be considered to be a reaction to the ministry of a transformed church rather than the means to achieve the mission of the church.

Weber’s second book, *More Adventist Hot Potatoes*, posits a damning portrayal of dissident independent ministries. Conversely, the treatise ends up being a strong defense of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His philosophy seems to be that “a self-supporting organization worth of being called a ministry will not cloister itself from the church. Although financially independent, it is interdependent with the goals and purposes of the Adventist Church. It fosters denominational unity.”¹¹⁴ This deduction is considered plausible in light of what the church stands for.

Weber’s opinion of dissident independent ministries puts him entirely at odds with their nature and activities. Weber bemoans the fact that “it would be difficult to

¹¹³Weber, 117. It is worth noting that Weber makes reference to Le Roy Froom’s book *Movement of Destiny* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1971), p. 255. The quotation states that “if the church should go into darkness the Lord would raise up others to finish the work—that He had agents that He could call into action at any moment.”

¹¹⁴Martin Weber, *More Adventist Hot Potatoes* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), 28.

exaggerate the damage done by certain independent ministries which are actually hotbeds of fundamentalist terrorism. These parasite groups siphon off funds that should go into conference projects, and a few brazenly solicit the sacred tithes.”¹¹⁵

The inescapable profile of dissident independent ministries is that they are renegade groups bent on undermining the church and its mission. Weber is apt and precise when he charges that “many of the destructive independents lack any significant accountability process. . . . They may profess to be loyal to the church body, yet they refuse to receive counsel and guidance from it.”¹¹⁶

The concept of inviting loyal supporting ministries to align themselves with relevant church structures is mentioned by Weber also. This is why he advocates for financial, material and moral support for genuine independent ministries. He cites those working under the umbrella of the Adventist Laymen’s Services and Industries are being among the authentic ministries worthy of support and collaboration from the Adventist Church. This is, arguably, the appropriate set-up in order to let the church thrive as an organization with functional ecclesiastical authority. The church, in turn, will retain its biblical ecclesiastical authority. In this way, church members will be equipped and empowered to be more effectively involved in the mission of the church.

A Case for Positive Confrontation

Conflicts in some churches concerning church authority and doctrinal positions should not be left to fester without being given appropriate treatment. When such issues are confronted, the issues of ecclesiastical authority, on the part of the

¹¹⁵Weber, *More Adventist Hot Potatoes*, 28.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 28, 29.

clergy, and vested interests, on the part of the laity, are to be tackled. The relationships between the two parties ought to be handled with care because they can be the means of the desired transformation within the churches.

The above proposition can only be feasible on the premise that organization and hierarchical leadership are authentic and biblical. Ironically, this is what may spark controversies and discontent among some members and religious leaders. Engaging in a defense of this position inevitably leads to some form of confrontation with those holding divergent views. A satisfactory approach to the issue has to be devised.

Robert Linthicum, for example, develops a polemic against those that are opposed to the possession and use of power in the church. He points out that

to most of us Christians, power is a dirty word. That is because we have experienced power as domineering, controlling, and unilateral. But the great biblical leaders such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Jeremiah . . . [all] discovered and used an entirely different kind of power—a power that was liberating, transforming, relational, and even redemptive.¹¹⁷

It may, therefore, be deduced that both challenges of mere divergence of viewpoints, on one hand, and discontent which is sheer dissidence, on the other, should be tackled authoritatively instead of being authoritarian. This entails using pastoral and administrative instruments—and using them with redemptive appropriateness.

Conversely, Linthicum argues that the confrontation that leads to a positive resolution of a dispute may also be initiated by group members who are not in positions of power. He calls this the “confrontation of the system.” He urges members in the rank and file who feel aggrieved to engage in a “confrontation of the system at

¹¹⁷Robert C. Linthicum, *Building a People of Power: Equipping Churches to Transform their Communities* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), ix.

substantive levels ... [This entails] taking on the powers at the very heart of the systems and motivating them to change the very way they go about doing business.”¹¹⁸ He, however, is quick to qualify and clarify his point. To avoid being misunderstood, Linthicum gives a practical definition of the term “confrontation.” He points out that “violence ... is the exercise of physical force to gain ones way. Whereas confrontation is normally verbal, violence is normally physical. ... Good and effective confrontation ... should instead lead to [a] resolution of the issue.”¹¹⁹

Linthicum argues on the premise that the problem, with regard to divergences in opinion, is not confrontation. Rather, the denial of confrontation and its subsequent cover-up is said to be the real danger. He then warns that “when confrontation is unacknowledged it goes underground ... and consequently much more vicious.”¹²⁰ He thus concludes that this explains why most of the activities in Jesus’ ministry were confrontational—especially as they related to the power-wielding religious establishment. He states that the rationale for this was rooted in the fact that he had often appealed to them to embrace the full jubilee. This entailed redistributing wealth so as to eliminate poverty and proclaim both spiritual and physical liberty in the land. However, they are said to have refused. It may be pointed out, however, that some aspects of Linthicum’s rationale for Christ’s confrontation are extrapolated rather than exegetically accurate. Whereas Jesus did not necessarily imply that he intended to establish a literal messianic reign, He certainly bemoaned the fact that the Jews were overly incomplicant with the spiritual principles of God’s kingdom of grace.

¹¹⁸Linthicum, 209.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 223, 224.

¹²⁰Ibid., 224.

Perhaps Linthicum's more appropriate analogies of confrontation are references to Paul's letters. In this case, the person in a position of power is said to use a confrontational approach to resolve issues in some congregations. He argues that "Paul's letters are full of confrontation. He not only regularly confronted heretics and those who would [stand] in the way of a strong church—his enemies. He even confronted his friends."¹²¹ Linthicum's exposition on how Paul achieved this is insightful. He states that Paul used "arguments, influence, authority, and logic."¹²² In this regard, the analogy also portrays the key players in a congregation when a need arises to confront an issue or people. These are Jesus Christ, the minister and church members.

It is noteworthy that other scholars add a third dimension to confrontation. The apostle Paul is known to have used confrontation to resolve issues with his fellow leaders. Lenard Aencha observes that when Peter and Barnabas sided with the pharisaical Jews concerning issues that were undermining the essence of the gospel, Paul confronted them publicly. "This courageous confrontation must have borne fruit because by the time they reached the Jerusalem Council, Peter and Barnabas had corrected their faulty understanding of the gospel."¹²³

Linthicum proposes a practical way to allow for the initiation of, and engagement in, confrontation. The organization should incorporate deliberate policies that empower and enable ordinary members to effectively engage their organization and its leader. He asserts that this can be achieved through negotiations. "Negotiation

¹²¹Linthicum, 227. Galatians 2:11-14 is cited as a case in point.

¹²²Ibid., 228.

¹²³Bruce L. Bauer and Wagner Kun, eds., *Biblical Principles for Missiological Issues in Africa*, 457.

is an essential part of the ‘tool kit’ of any Christian executive or leader.”¹²⁴ His rationale for deliberately empowering the common members is that “negotiation can only be used effectively when the other party perceives you as powerful enough that he must take you seriously and, therefore, must negotiate in good faith.”¹²⁵ It should be added here that such provisions would work well if they are enshrined in a manual or policy document.

Linthicum addresses the irony of ordinary members, without positions in the organization, engaging in a negotiation with church leaders when they do not occupy power-giving positions. He aptly notes that “church members don’t hold equal power with bishops. Only when they organize their power around their relationships of trust with each other and demonstrate that power by acting collectively will the people be taken seriously by the apparent holders of power at the table.”¹²⁶ This may be understood to refer to mobilization and lobbying of members to rally around a particular cause and forcing the hand of the leadership to accede to such demands and pressure.

It is hereby observed that Linthicum’s advocacy for the empowerment of ordinary members, on one hand, and the appropriate use of power by the church leadership, on the other, is plausible. However, some aspects of his postulation may be deficient in practical terms. The promotion of lobbying to enable members to bargain from a position of strength can breed church politics and also lead to a tyranny of [human] numbers. The professionals in the organization may be overridden

¹²⁴Linthicum, 239.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Linthicum, 239.

through mob psychology rather than sound theological and ecclesiastical considerations. Furthermore, the proposed model may not be sufficiently relevant to denominations like the Seventh-day Adventist Church which operates on the basis of a representative form of church government.

The Need for Effective Conflict Resolution

The dynamics of church congregations are such that differences of opinion and practice may lead to conflict. As such, there is need to resort to effective conflict resolution approaches. Rather than avoiding conflict or merely accommodating the other party, one should seek to engage in a process to resolve the pertinent issues. Akali asserts that conflict, when confronted positively, affords one the opportunity to explore for opportunities for growth. It entails focusing on the problem, rather than the person. Furthermore, all parties involved in the conflict need to work together toward resolution.¹²⁷ This presupposes the avoidance of malice or ulterior motives.

Further to the foregoing, the research notes that dissentious elements in a congregation may cause disunity. Handling of differences in perceptions and belief viewpoints can affect church unity. Arrais, citing an anonymous author, points out that “unity is a vital and even existential characteristic of the church. All who foment disunity are involved in a questionable activity.”¹²⁸ He thus urges for care when members sit down to resolve a conflict. The participants in the conflict resolution

¹²⁷Jacob Achewa Akali, *A strategy for Resolving Church Conflict: A case study of Dandora, Terminus S.D.A. Church*, Central Kenya Conference (Nairobi: Adventist University of Africa, 2015), 74, 76.

¹²⁸Jonas Arrais, *A Positive Church in a Negative World: Learning and improving Leadership in Every Experience of the Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association Resource Center, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2007), 79.

process should only say what is positively necessary and also avoid being hasty in drawing conclusions or passing judgments.¹²⁹

Chapter Summary

The order and authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church sometimes gets challenged by church members in various ways. The motives for this may range from unhealthy views of ministers to skepticism toward the authenticity of the teachings and practice of the church. This above global phenomenon has been apparent in Lusaka Conference of Seventh-day Adventists as well. Thus the literature review of this research seeks to place the challenges by the conference and the proffered solutions in their proper perspective.

The above quest leads to the comparative and analytical review of relevant literature on the aforementioned problem. In this regard, a number of Christian denominations are discussed. Among these is the Anglican Church. For this denomination, power is characteristically vested in the clergy. This set-up entails that the latitude for the Anglican laity to cause significant challenges to the order and authority of their church is greatly diminished. The lay members' differences are mostly on the premise of divergent cultural clashes when they mingle among themselves during parish church services. The challenges to Anglican order and authority emanate from the clergy as they debate on issues pertaining to theology, policy and leadership authority which they seem to consider as being too centralized.

Protestantism affords reviews in the domain closer to the church polity that obtains in the Adventist Church. The Reformation that was spawned by Protestant leaders was rooted in the belief that an individual is endowed with the freedom to

¹²⁹Arrais, 82.

accept only what he or she considers right and truthful in light of scripture. Ironically, this principle apparently led to the splintering of the Protestant movement into various denominations since the Sixteenth Century. This forms part of what the researcher refers to as a redemptive approach toward those who may entertain dissentious opinions.

The main variants of Protestant denominational forms of church government that subsequently emerged over time are *Episcopal*, *Presbyterian*, and *congregational*. Apparently, the forms of government that centralize authority afford little or no participation by the laity in the affairs of the church experience minimal challenges to authority. Such is the *Episcopal* system. In this regard, the *Congregational* system is on the opposite side of the spectrum.

As for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the organizational maturity is said to have been attained during the latter part of Ellen White. Mrs. White is widely accepted among Adventists as having possessed the prophetic gift. As such, the form the church assumed may be considered normative for the members. However, there have been challenges to the denomination's legitimacy as an agency for articulating the gospel and nurturing believers. These challenges have mostly come due to dissident individuals and private ministries.

Over time, challenges to Adventist Church order and authority have mostly hinged on the supposedly correct interpretation of Scripture as it relates to specified teachings. The additional rationale for dissidence is the loss of confidence in the ministry by some church members. Those who endeavor to circumvent the authority of the church and ministers purport to possess insight from the Bible and the inspired writings of Ellen White to justify themselves. In this regard, the Adventist Church has

come up with ways of identifying detrimental dissenters as well as providing guidelines on how to handle such individuals and groups.

Concluding Remarks

Dissent in the church is a common occurrence in history. As to what form it takes seems to be dependent on respective forms of church organization. These forms could be either *Episcopal*, *Presbyterian*, or *Congregational*. The Seventh-day Adventist Church apparently elected to adopt the representative form of church governance. It is probable that the founding leaders sought to avoid the apparent extremes of either an authoritarian or permissively liberal system of church governance.

The fact that the Adventist organizational structure only reached relative maturation during the latter part of Ellen White's life is significant. It is apparent that the tenets of the structure of the church had to be convincingly scriptural. Since the interpretation of Scripture is considered subjective, consensus is not easily arrived at.

The fact that Ellen white was widely accepted as having been inspired could have helped to stave off destructive dissidence on the basis of Scriptural interpretation. Furthermore, Ellen White's ministry could also have helped to easily expose unauthentic Christian experiences like fanaticism and extremism—some of the major causes of dissidence attitudes and activities. This fact entails that the researcher's contemporary period does not have the benefit of the guidance of a living prophet.

The times of this research are characterized by relativistic notions. A religious structural system such as that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is vulnerable due to the abuse of its values and practice of democracy. As such, proactive measures

ought to be in place to handle to the inevitable presence of members with dissentious attitudes and activities. This should be in the form of constructive engagement of church members. The objective should be to institute preventive, redemptive, and reclamation measures.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE

Lusaka Conference is one of the entities within Zambia Union Conference in the republic of Zambia. The region is relatively highly urbanized and cosmopolitan in social and cultural terms. Furthermore, the conference presents a breadth of socio-economic diversity within a comparatively small geographical area. The congregations that are in urban areas are, physically, not too distant from those that are either on the fringes of towns or in rural areas. In fact, the interaction of church members among such congregations is fairly frequent. A study of a congregation in each of the three aforementioned zones of Lusaka Conference was, therefore, expected to yield a representative reflection of the thinking of the church members with regard to the issue of members' attitudes toward the Adventist Church and its ministers.

The members' attitudes are apparently linked to factors that could range from the influence of offshoot groups to the members' own perspectives. The researcher's own experience and preliminary investigations show evidence of inroads by the Davidian Shepherd's Rod private ministry. Their campaign tends to shake the allegiance of some members from the church. As earlier alluded to in the introduction to this research, the significance of their machinations can be seen from the fact that local conferences in Zambia Union Conference had had to remove some congregations from the sisterhood of Adventist Churches. However, it is not in all

cases that the manifestation of disaffection toward the church and leadership could be linked to off-shoot groups. This necessitates an investigation to determine the full causes of the phenomenon in order to design appropriate intervention programs.

Realities of Ministry on the Ground

Three focus groups were selected for the purpose conducting a survey, analyzing data and preparing an intervention program. The three selected congregations – Brentwood Drive, Chitukuko, and Chilanga Seventh-day Adventist Churches, are located in the high cost, medium cost and semi-urban areas, respectively. The three congregations have memberships of 342, 612 and 570 baptized individuals, respectively. The survey of these congregations was expected to yield sufficient data for analysis and results leading up to solutions for apparent ecclesiastical and theological challenges in the entire conference and other entities beyond. In this regard, the assumption was that a sufficiently representative sampling of the congregations would bring the researcher into contact with some church members who are either having divergent views and practices with regard to church order and authority or at least know people with such opinions. The expectation was born from past experience with some congregations. In this regard, Chilanga Seventh-day Adventist Church is a case in point. A portrayal of what transpired there forms part of the rationale for this study.

The Case of Chilanga Church

Chilanga Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the largest and oldest Adventist Churches just on the outskirts of the city of Lusaka. It had been held in high esteem by the local conference administration until international evangelist Lonny

Melashenko visited the conference. He had travelled with a team of evangelists from America in order to conduct a series of evangelistic campaigns.

While the main speaker's sermons were to be telecast live via satellite to the global audience, several smaller campaign sites were established at different locations in the city of Lusaka. Speakers from Meleshenko's team were, accordingly, assigned to speak at those sights. Incidentally, some of these speakers were women. One of these women was assigned to speak at a campaign site under Chilanga Church. This arrangement sparked a reaction in Chilanga Church. It revealed the inimical underlying spirit in some members within the congregation.

A renegade clique within Chilanga Church made it known that they would not obey instructions from the local conference concerning the strategy to evangelize the city of Lusaka using a specified multi-pronged approach. The conference recognized the gifts of all the volunteers who had come from abroad irrespective of gender. However, the renegade group opposed this overture. Their rationale was that the conference had purportedly lost the confidence that the members had in it for insisting on practices synonymous with what they considered to be apostate leadership because women were allowed to preach. Furthermore, it became apparent that the truant members had managed to win a following within the congregation. Consequently, the efforts of the local district pastor and some of the church elders to guide the local church in line with the conference program proved futile.

The contention among the dissidents revolved on their interpretation of prophecies, their understanding of the doctrine of the church as well as their adoption of some conspiracy theories. The conspiracy theories were applied to the leadership at the local conference and the Adventist Church in general. They put a twist on the prophecy of Daniel chapter two by asserting that the stone that crushed the statue in

the vision symbolized the rise of their group within Adventism. They claimed that they had a mandate to correct the “heresies” in the church and purify church members. Accordingly, they presumed themselves to be the guardians of the purity of the Adventist heritage.

Further to the foregoing assertions, the dissidents misinterpreted the words of Christ as recorded in Matthew 24:15-16. This is where Christ said: “therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” They arbitrarily stated that the “abomination of desolation” refers to church members of the female gender who usurp the authority of men by standing in the “holy pulpit” to preach. They claimed that the proponents of the New Age had deliberately circumvented God’s order at creation by championing the rights of women. This unconventional empowerment of women through preaching and the holding of church positions was seen as “proof” that the church leadership has been compromised by the agents of the metaphorical Babylon. They began to openly say that the Jesuits had infiltrated the church and that it was their divinely assigned duty for them to “defend” the church.

As the stand-off continued between the dissidents in Chilanga Church, on the one hand, and the conference administration, on the other, more issues came to the surface. The church administration learnt that the dissidents had a core cell of adherents within the local church and that they had been holding secret meetings in members’ homes for a long time. This cell group belonged to a network of several other such groups spread out within the conference and beyond. In fact the stork and roots of the network could be traced all the way to North America.

The conference seemed to be at a loss as to how to handle the crisis at Chilanga Church. This was because a significant number of the serving church elders and church board members were either openly or covertly in league with the dissidents. As a result the majority of the church members were either sympathetic to or intimidated by the militant clique. In the meantime, the dissenters were professing to be supportive of the mission of the church although they sabotaged the outreach program and had no evangelistic strategies in their parallel programs.

After the above episode the local pastor, tried to teach about the order of the church as stipulated in the *Church Manual*, but with little desirable effects. That was thirteen years before this research. At the time of the research the uproar generated from that confrontation had subsided, but it was suspected that attitudes had changed little.

The Rationale for a Survey

A strategy to realize the objective of the research was devised. This rested on the premise of the theological basis for the subject in this research. It involved the formulation of a questionnaire as well as the scheming of a roadmap to allow for the orientation of the congregations involved in the exercise and group discussions with selected members.

The survey instruments, in the form of questionnaires and the scheme of questions, were designed to accomplish the purpose of provoking honest and frank expressions of opinions on the part of the participants in the exercises. All the questions and statements to which the members were expected to respond to were correlated with issues that undergird the rationale behind the apparent dissidence among some of the church members and dissident independent ministries. It was

expected that the phenomenon of dissidence in the church would be sufficiently diagnosed so that contentious issues can be clearly delineated as a prerequisite toward proffering solutions. The remedial propositions arising from the study would then serve as a means of resolving problems that may already exist. In addition, such recommendations would be used as a means to conduct a prognosis of any freshly rising challenges. In this way respective church leaders will be able to identify potentially polarizing scenarios as well as project the nature of their implications for the future.

As regards the above objective and rationale for the research, the fact that dissident activities do occur had been observed from experience in the researcher's ministry context as well as from the theological reflections and literature review. These manifestations fall under various thematic categories. They include the selective acceptance or rejection of some official church doctrines, the rejection of the *Church Manual* and other policies, fanaticism and extremism as well as legalism. Other categories include the uplifting of the writings of Ellen White above the Bible, rejection of clergy authority, the creation of puritan independent ministries, assuming the entitlement to appropriate tithes and offering and the creation of parallel ministries. In addition, the flawed epistemology of the experience of salvation is the other tale-tale categorical sign of dissidence relative to the topic under research.

In order to diminish the prospects of gathering inaccurate information due to fear of exposure by the respondents, the questionnaires had no provision for name entries. The anonymity was also meant to indicate that the exercise was being done in a spirit of mutual respect and trust. Furthermore, only the district pastors, the administrative elders and church clerks were to be involved in the distribution and

collection of survey instruments. This was meant to maintain the confidence in the exercise with regard to trust and anonymity.

The responses via the questionnaires needed to be tested for veracity. So another approach to tap into the mind sets of the members in the respective congregations had to be employed. The writer arranged to interact with a randomly-selected focus group of ten members in each of the three congregations. The only condition set was that each group should consist of men, women, and the youth. The researcher engaged in the process of familiarizing with the selected pilot groups by interactive dialogues and orientations. In this approach only the researcher was to directly coordinate the deliberations. This was in order to maintain the assurance of the respondents' confidentiality. In addition, group members were probed, leading to the benefit of possessing a comprehensive understanding of the members in order to employ the research instruments appropriately.

The preliminary sessions of dialogue with the congregations' selected members were meant to capture relevant data that may not, otherwise, be obtained. Such interactions required the comprehensive involvement of the researcher for long periods of time in order to sufficiently engage a representative number of individuals. Subsequently, only a relatively small number of people could be oriented in each particular congregation in the limited time available for the research. The pace and scope of information gathering, when the research is preceded by such preliminaries, is faster and wider than when a questionnaire is employed out rightly without preliminaries.

Further to the foregoing, the feedback from the survey approaches would be of little value if there was no purposeful endeavor to redress the adverse issues that may be identified in the research. Prescriptions for such challenges may not be empirically

viable without a deliberate scheme to test the efficacy of their applications. Subsequently, the researcher devised a program to deploy the quantitative survey methodology of dealing with groups constituted at random from the respective congregations.

Conducting the Survey

After studying various scenarios concerning dissidence among God's people, the researcher garnered principles that could be related to the churches in Lusaka Conference. A case study concerning Chilanga Church was considered and analyzed above in light of the foregoing research. The scenario above is considered symptomatic, to a lesser or greater degree, of the challenge that several congregations in the conference could have been experiencing for years. Therefore, it became necessary to employ survey instruments in order to gather data for analysis. A questionnaire was administered as a sequel to the interactions and orientations the researcher had in the three congregations (Appendix A).

Chronology of the Survey

Having requested for, and obtained, permission to conduct a survey in three congregations of Lusaka Conference, the researcher proceeded with this phase of the research. Subsequently, the district pastors and elders in charge of Brentwood Drive, Chilanga and Chitukuko local churches were asked to help in facilitating the process of the researcher.

During the period of September and October in 2015, the researcher visited the three congregations on Sabbaths. The respective church members were given general orientations concerning the survey that was to be conducted in each congregation. Then a ten-member focus group of volunteers was constituted in each

of the three respective local churches. The suggested criterion for being in the groups was that church members had to volunteer to join. The churches were, however, asked to ensure that men, women and youths were represented in the groups.

The focus group members were again given an orientation so that each one of them knew their role in the committee well enough to help generate useful data. The groups were met separately and at different times at their respective congregations. During these initial meetings the researcher asked the group members to discuss their feelings and perceptions concerning the church, ecclesiastical authority, ministers, doctrines and church policies. The group members were allowed to discuss with minimal interruption. In the meantime, the researcher was taking note of their deliberations and keeping a recorder through a cell phone recorder. This data was later analyzed. This assessment helped the researcher to design questionnaire statements that evolved around six major issues. Consequently, a total of 85 statements were put on the questionnaire. The statements were replicated in different dimensions so as to verify the veracity of the possible responses.

Evaluation of Responses

The aforementioned questionnaire was administered in the three congregations between September and October of the year 2015. Prior orientations had been done for the randomly-selected church members. Because of the comprehensiveness and broad range of statements and direct questions, the respondents were given up to a whole week to finish making their responses. This was meant to avoid rushed and inaccurate responses.

The 85 statements that constituted the questionnaire were designed to produce indications in six categories. What this means is that the questionnaire had six basic

questions. In order to avoid inaccurate indications because of the group members who may not get the gist at the first attempt, related statements that addressed similar issues were written in the questionnaire. Tables below were used to integrate the data from the questionnaire responses. This was done on the form dubbed as “keys to analyzing the responses to the questionnaire.”

Table 1 below shows indicators of what are deemed to be very positive possible answers to the statements in the questionnaire. It is the key to the analysis of integrated responses in all three congregations. Each congregation had a focus group of ten participants chosen at random except for the guidance that a mix of men, women and youths should be reflected.

Table 1. Responses Indicator Key

1 a	6e	11 e	16 a	21 a	26 e	31 e	36 e	41 a	46 a	51 a	56 a	61 a	66 e	71 e	76 a	81 a
2 e	7a	12 e	17 a	22 e	27 e	32 e	37 e	42 a	47 a	52 a	57 a	62 a	67 e	72 e	77 a	82 a
3 e	8a	13 e	18 a	23 e	28 e	33 e	38 e	43 a	48 a	53 a	58 a	63 e	68 a	73 e	78 a	83 a
4 a	9e	14 a	19 a	24 e	29 e	34 e	39 a	44 a	49 a	54 a	59 a	64 e	69 a	74 a	79 a	84 a
5 e	10 e	15 a	20 a	25 e	30 e	35 e	40 a	45 a	50 a	55 a	60 a	65 e	70 e	75 a	80 a	85 a

Chilanga Seventh-day Adventist Church. An analysis of the ten responses from questionnaires returned from Chilanga Church is derived from the tables below.

The information on the said tables and figures explains the function of each.

The first table above constitutes the keys to the analyses for all the three congregations surveyed. It is a tabulation of the positive indications from the questionnaire responses. This tabulation is then compared with the individual responses. These are later integrated in order to show an overall reflection of the members' attitudes. The 85 statements are all related to the six major areas of concern in the research. The six issues are on Table 2. The members' responses are, therefore, replicated responses to the six issues.

Clusters of questions and statements with similar implications on particular aspects of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's authority and order are computed into frequency/opinion patterns. Below are the aforementioned tables:

Table 2. Distribution of Responses Chilanga SDA Church

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUES	NUMBERS WITH RELATED STATEMENTS	FREQUENCY OF CHOICES AND INTENSITY OF OPINION AND PERCEPTION RANGING FROM POSITIVE TO NEGATIVE				
		Strongly positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Strongly negative
(a) Attitude toward organizational order and the Church Manual	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	18	22	3	2	5
	Percentages	36%	44%	6%	4%	10%
(b) Attitude toward the church, its authority and programs	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 41, 70, 71, 72	53	107	13	15	10
	Percentages	27%	54%	6.5%	7.5%	5%
(c) Attitude toward the ministry/ministers	14, 15, 16, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34	24	40	8	5	3
	Percentages	30%	50%	10%	6.25%	3,75
(d) Attitude concerning church stance on dissident groups	17, 18, 19, 26, 29, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 52, 53, 58, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82	94	103	2	17	10
	Percentages	37.6%	41.2%	10.4%	6.8%	4%
(e) Attitude toward the official church position on tithes and offerings	35, 36, 37, 38, 75	18	23	3	7	Nil
	Percentages	36%	46%	6%	12%	N/A

(f)	Response to church teachings against extremism and fanaticism	42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 83, 84, 85	87	95	25	40	12
		Percentages	33.3%	45.2%	8%	9%	4.5%
	Mean		33.3%	45.1	8%	9%	4.6%
	Mean of three main categories		78.4%		8%		13.6%

In Figure 1 below, the mean tally of “positives” and “very positive” as well as the “negative” and “very negative” percentages are added. The neutral column percentage total is maintained alone, thus creating three bars of “positive,” “neutral and “negative.”

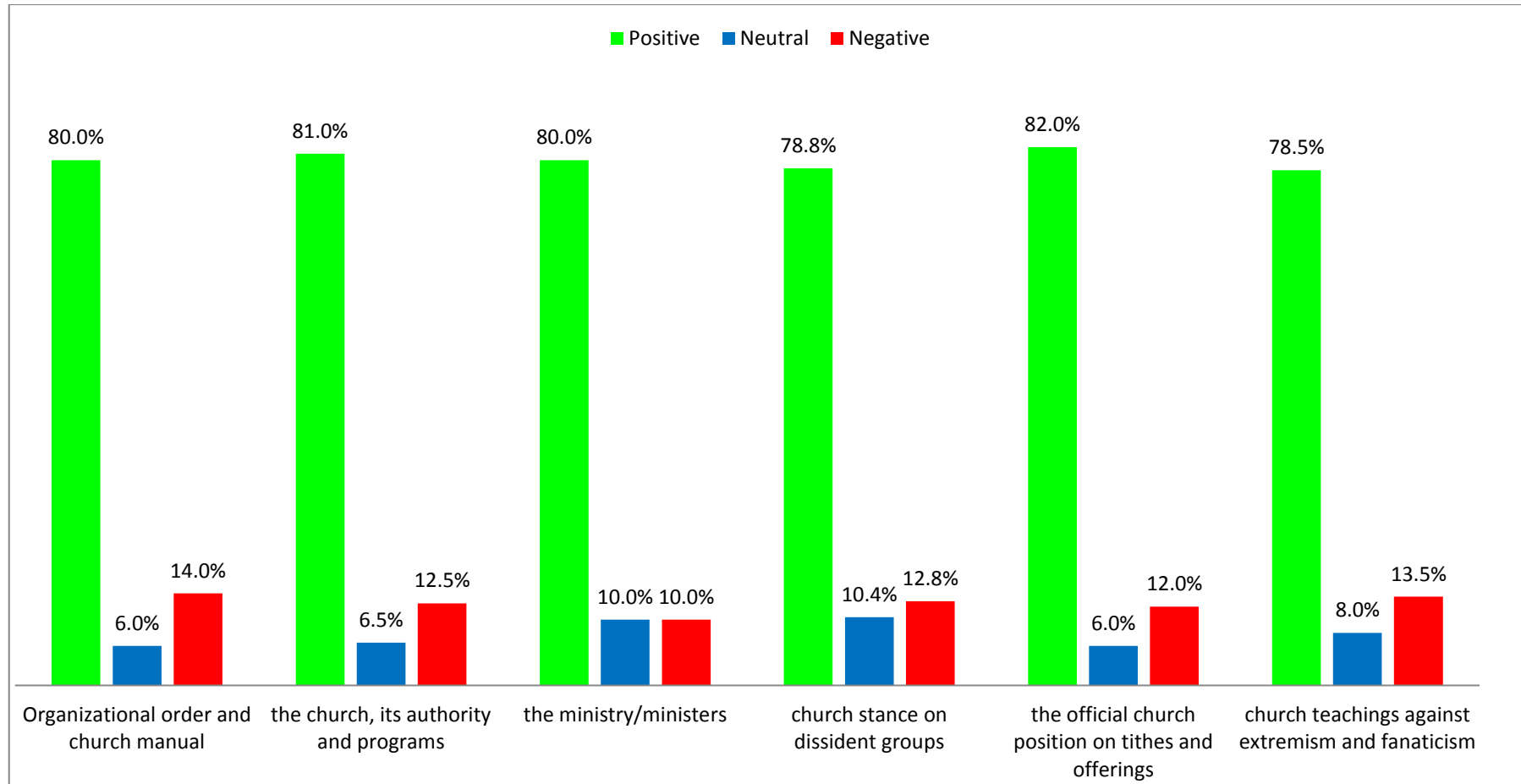


Figure 1. Summary of Responses from Chilanga SDA Church, with bars arranged in the order specified in the legend.

Analysis of responses from Chilanga. Almost four in five of the responses (78.4%) from Chilanga Seventh-day Adventist Church indicated positive, to strongly positive, opinions of the church's policies, teachings and ministry. Less than ten percent (8%) of the responses showed indecision while almost 14 percent showed negative to strongly negative opinion ratings of the issues alluded to above.

The members' attitude toward the church's teachings and position concerning tithes and offerings received the highest favorable rating. The attitude also shows one of the two least undecided responses (6%). Even the negative responses on the issue, although high (14%) were relatively in the moderate category. On the other hand, the greatest opposition to what the church teaches and stands for was with regard to the official teachings and policies against extremism and fanaticism (20%). This could be interpreted as being indicative of the members' sensitivities when called upon to account for their religious practices and assumptions in relation to the actual teachings of the church. The ratio in this category represents two in ten of the respondents. It may also be deduced that elements of legalism are engrained within the fabric of the body of believers. This challenge is also an invitation to ministers and church elders, in conjunction with the local conference, to give enhanced pastoral care and indoctrination to the members in this category. It is a spiritual malady that requires concerted interventions. This should be the case concerning the overall picture.

The fact that only 33 percent are strongly positively disposed toward the church's teachings, policies and ministry, compared to the forty five who are mildly positive, should be cause for concern. This is because they can easily drift into a sense of skepticism that the dissident elements may exploit. Intentional pastoral care and a fellowship among the laity that engenders nurture needs to be cultivated. The circle of

the loyal members should be widened and their positivity intensified. In this way, the undecided members will be won over to the side of those that are positively disposed toward the church. This conclusion can be corroborated by the fact Chilanga Church does not manifest the greatest degrees of disaffection among the three congregations surveyed. This is in spite of the fact that it had demonstrated some of the highest levels of dissidence about a decade ago. The marginal gains of loyalty can be attributed to the sporadic efforts of ministers and lay leaders over the years. So, church members' attitudes can change. The table below illustrates this.

Chitukuko Seventh-day Adventist Church. Clusters of questions and statements with similar implications on particular aspects of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's authority and order computed into frequency/opinion patterns

Table 3. Distribution of Responses Chitukuko SDA Church

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUES	NUMBERS WITH RELATED STATEMENTS	FREQUENCY OF CHOICES AND INTENSITY OF OPINION AND PERCEPTION RANGING FROM POSITIVE TO NEGATIVE				
		Strongly positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Strongly negative
(a) Attitude toward organizational order and the Church Manual	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Percentages	20 40%	20 40%	1 4%	6 12%	2 4%
(b) Attitude toward the church, its authority and programs	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 41, 70, 71, 72 Percentage	78 39%	78 39%	11 9.5%	15 7.5%	10 5%
(c) Attitude toward the ministry/ministers	14, 15, 16, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34 Percentage	31 38.75%	29 36.25%	3 5%	13 16.25%	3 3.75%
(d) Attitude concerning church stance on dissident groups	17, 18, 19, 26, 29, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 52, 53, 58, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82 Percentage	51 23.5%	81 40.1%	29 13.35%	36 16.60%	14 6.45%
(e) Attitude toward the official church position on tithes and offerings	35, 36, 37, 38, 75 Percentage	27 56%	17 34%	3 6%	2 4%	0 Nil

(f)	Response to church teachings against extremism and fanaticism	42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 83, 84, 85	56	83	19	59	41
		Percentage	21.5%	31.9%	8.1%	22.7%	15.8%
	Mean		36.46%	36.88%	7.68%	13.18%	5.8%
	Mean of three main Categories	Percentage	73.34%	7.68%	18.98%		

In Figure 2 below, the mean tally of “positives” and “very positive” as well as the “negative” and “very negative” percentages are added. The neutral column percentage total is maintained alone, thus creating three bars of ‘positive,’ “neutral and “negative.”

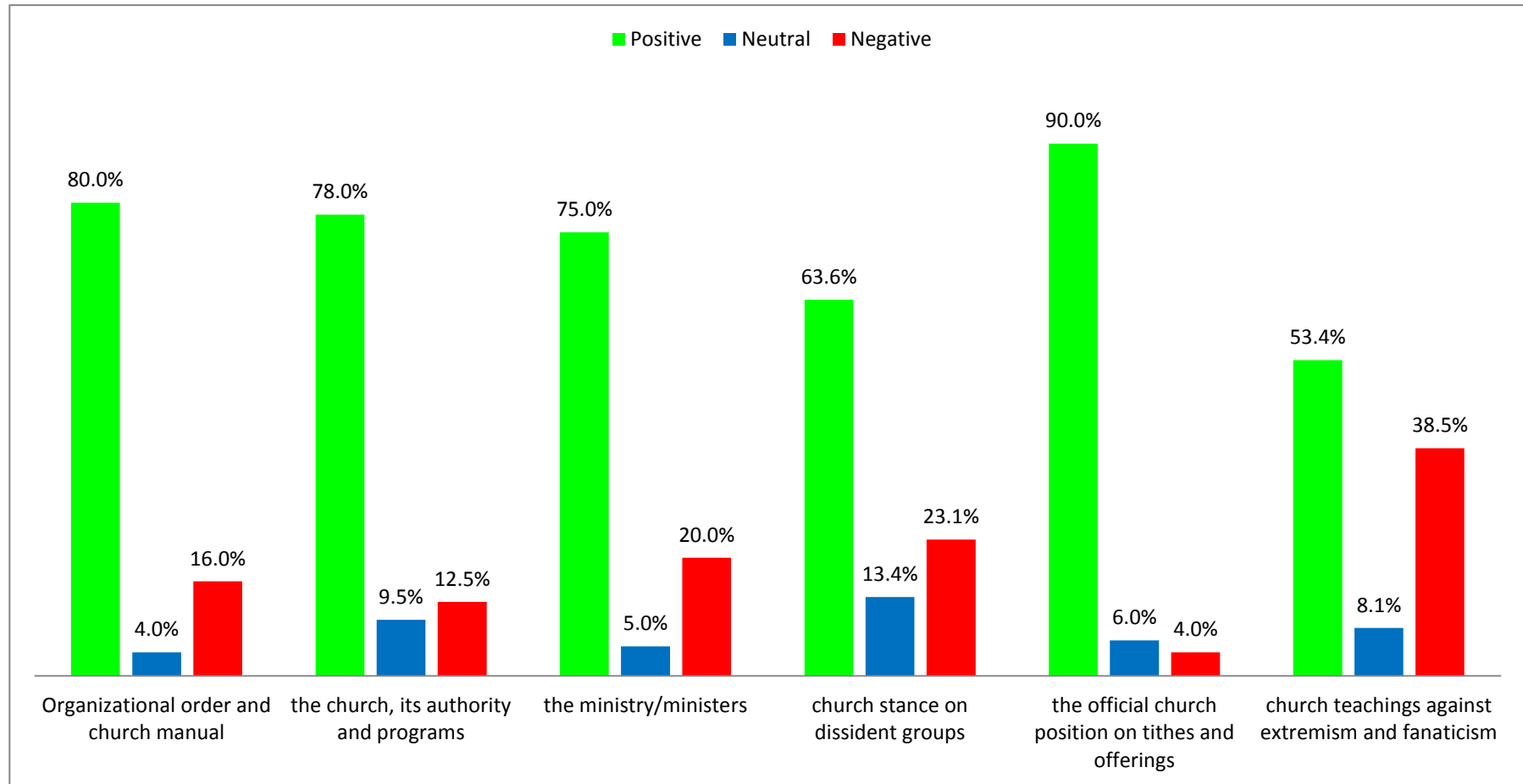


Figure 2. Summary of Responses from Chitukuko, with bars arranged in the order specified in the legend

Analysis of responses from Chitukuko Church. Chitukuko Church's responses indicated the direst general picture with regard to the presence of members with some negative attitudes to church order and authority. However, the respondents' indicators concerning the church's teachings and policies on tithes and offerings amounted to the most positive of the three congregations surveyed (At 90% of the responses being positive). Overall, about 19 percent of the respondents indicated a negative to very negative opinion of the church with regard to authority, the teachings and its ministry. It was surprising that 90 percent indicated a positive to very positive opinion of the church with regard to the position and teachings on tithes and offerings. This should be treated as an indication that dissension in the churches is not prompted by disaffections concerning the church's theology on tithes and offerings or its subsequent financial policies. The root causes should be looked for elsewhere.

Chitukuko Church's most adverse reaction to the questionnaire had to do with the church's teachings against extremism and fanaticism. About 38 percent returned a negative to very negative opinion of what the church stands for. Such a big ratio of the total number of respondents is an apparent indication that dissention is related to legalistic extremism and fanaticism. The researcher further surmises that such a legalistic world view makes church members vulnerable to the exploitation by dissident groups. Either way, the phenomenon has a damaging impact. On this score, the congregation showed an almost equal ratio of negative and positive opinions toward the church teachings and policies. Such negativity is second only by the group's relatively high disdain of the church teachings against dissident groups (23%).

Chitukuko Church members showed that they are rigidly fixed both in their positive and negative opinions toward the church. This can be attested to by the fact

that the percentage of the undecided respondents (7.7%) was the lowest among the three congregations surveyed. The majority were decidedly sure of their responses. Furthermore, the 19 percent of the members that indicated negative to very negative responses were consistent in returning their negative responses. The offering of spiritual nurture and deliberate indoctrination should, therefore, be prioritized in the congregation. A program with such an objective is an imperative.

Brentwood Drive Seventh-day Adventist Church. Clusters of questions and statements with similar implications on particular aspects of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's authority and order computed into frequency/opinion patterns.

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Table 4. Distribution of Responses Brentwood SDA Church

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUES	NUMBERS WITH RELATED STATEMENTS	FREQUENCY OF CHOICES AND INTENSITY OF OPINION AND PERCEPTION RANGING FROM POSITIVE TO NEGATIVE				
		Strongly positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Strongly negative
(a) Attitude toward organizational order and the Church Manual	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	17	18	8	1	6
	Percentage of responses	34%	36%	16%	2%	12%
(b) Attitude toward the church, its authority and programs	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 41, 70, 71, 72	107	69	15	3	4
	Percentage of responses	53.5%	34.5%	8.5%	1.5%	2%
(c) Attitude toward the ministry/ministers	14, 15, 16, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34	32	28	11	1	5
	Percentage of responses	40%	35%	17.5%	1.25%	6.25%
(d) Attitude concerning church stance on dissident groups	17, 18, 19, 26, 29, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 52, 53, 58, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82	92	75	40	25	11
	Percentage of responses	36.8%	30%	18.8%	10%	4.4%
(e) Attitude toward the official church position on tithes and offerings	35, 36, 37, 38, 75	25	17	5	2	1
	Percentage of responses	50%	34%	10%	4%	2%

(f)	Response to church teachings against extremism and fanaticism	42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 83, 84, 85	89	75	39	32	18
		Percentage of responses	34.23 %	28.85 %	17.7%	12.30%	6.92%
	Mean	89	41.42 %	36.06 %	13.04 %	5.18%	4.30%
	Mean of three main Categories		77.48%		13.04 %	9.48%	

In figure 3 below, the mean tally of “positives” and “very positive” as well as the “negative” and “very negative” percentages are added. The neutral column percentage total is maintained alone, thus creating three bars of ‘positive,’ ‘neutral and ‘negative.’”

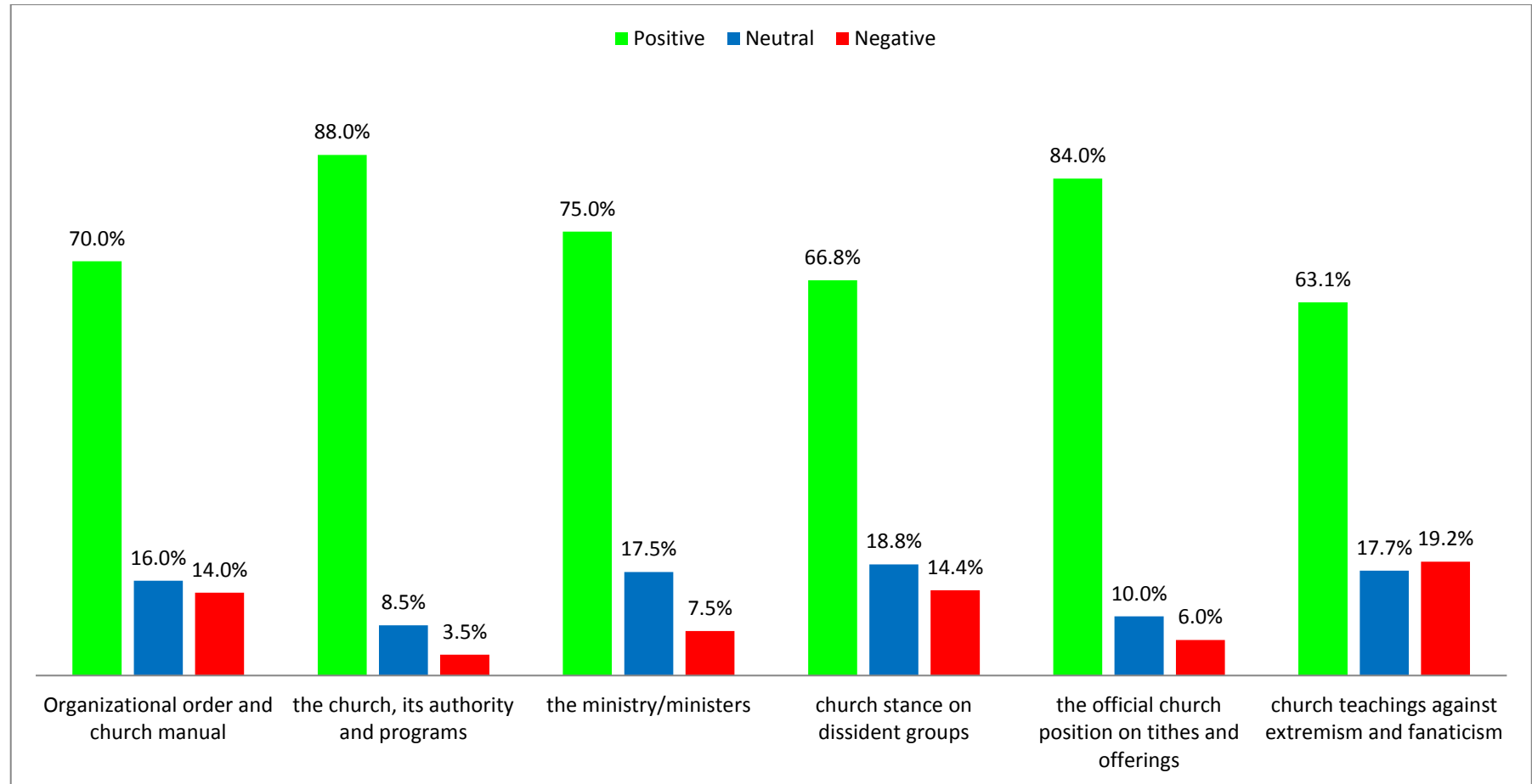


Figure 3. Summary of Responses from Brentwood SDA Church, with bars arranged in the order specified in the legend.

Analysis of responses from Brentwood Drive. Brentwood Drive Seventh-day Adventist Church respondents returned indications that showed the largest percentage of undecided participants. At an average of 13 percent, this ratio showed a weakness that could serve both as an opportunity for nurturing and teaching, on the part of pastors and elders. However, this indecision could be exploited by dissident elements within the church. Furthermore, the undecided members are likely to slide into the legalistic pitfall of extremism and fanaticism. This can be deduced from the fact that about 19 percent of responses were negative or very negative toward the church's teachings against extremism and fanaticism. That ratio amounted to almost twice the average percentage of negative responses on other issues.

In addition to the observation above, the respondents who were undecided on the issue of extremism and fanaticism represented, at fifteen percent, the second highest ratio of indecision. The indecision here was only exceeded by the responses concerning the members' attitude toward the church's stance on dissident groups (16 percent). In this regard, it was not surprising to see a return of negative or strongly negative responses of up to a ratio of almost fifteen percent in relation to the members' attitude toward the official stance on dissident groups. A similar ratio, at 17 percent, was indicative of negative views toward the church's position against tendencies toward extremism and fanaticism. Such statistics are indicative of tendencies toward legalism. This can be seen in the significant ration of members who are negative to the teachings of the church that are meant to safeguard members against extremism and fanaticism. That significant ratio could be a crucial factor leading to the relatively high sympathy levels for dissident groups in spite of the church guidelines on the matter.

On a positive note, Brentwood Drive Church manifested the highest levels of positivity toward the church, its authority and programs. At the ratio of 88 percent positive or strongly positive responses, it became apparent that the local congregation was overly loyal to the church. This is in spite of the irony of their being critical of the church's position against dissident independent ministries that pose as an option to what the official church does. However, the congregation is overly positive in its view of the Adventist Church. This positivity is corroborated in the fairly high positive opinion concerning the church position on tithe and offerings. The 84 percent favorable opinion is indicative of a possibility that even the dissident groups may not have a convincing alternative to the church's teachings and policies on tithes and offerings.

The relatively high percentages of respondents who did not know how to rate the church's organizational order and ministers should be cause for concern. The uncertainty that gave indicators of 16 and 14 percent, respectively, is what dissident elements can use to destabilize the church. This is because statements hinge on the question of whether the authority and authenticity of the church and its ministers are acceptable.

Comparison of the congregations. As alluded to earlier in the research, the three congregations that were surveyed constituted what the researcher considered to be a microcosm of what the Lusaka Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church is. This is by way of the classification into the "upper," "middle," and "lower" socio-economic strata. In the context of the conference under consideration, this corresponds to such connotative descriptions as "white collar," "blue collar" and the "underprivileged" members of society.

The implications of the above descriptions can be described in terms of literacy, education standards, skills and exposure to information and trends around the world. The vulnerability of the members traced to their belonging to given social-economic strata which, in turn, affects their capacity and ability to read, research and comprehend their church adequately enough to appreciate the church's viewpoints and policies. A case in point in this regard is Brentwood Drive Church where the levels of negativity were most minimal. Here the higher percentage of indecision could be indicative of the critical skepticism of people who are relatively privileged with higher levels of education and professional grooming.

In line with the above deductions, it became evident that Chilanga Church reflected certain tendencies that are typical of the "blue collar" medium bracket. Although the church had a history of having been a bastion of off-shoot elements about a decade ago, it is apparent that the seeds of dissidence have not taken deep root over time. The initial set-back may have been militated against by the transient nature of people who are mostly in the "blue collar" occupational category. New members could have joined the congregation and tipped the scale more toward loyalty to the church than before.

The most adverse feedback was obtained from Chitukuko Church. This is the congregation located in the part of Lusaka where the majority of the citizens are in the lower strata of the social-economic classification. Just as the general populace in this category seem to be clamoring for alternative political and economic paradigms, the members also seem to reflect a similar affinity for alternative voices and practices as a panacea for perceived short-comings in the status quo of the church. Conversely, the researcher suspected that there was an effort made at justifying their status quo so as

not to be blamed for what they do not possess. This made a significant number to be defensive of their legalistic tendencies toward extremism and fanaticism. There is, therefore, need for an equalizer that would place church members more on the same level. Such a non-discriminatory classification should engender a similar quality of membership character irrespective of the secular classification of people. This necessitated the researcher's formulation of the interventions initiatives and the relevant program for the implementation of the same.

Program Development

In view of the researcher's interactions with the three congregations above as well as the analyses of the questionnaires that had been administered, a need for interventions was seen. Since the problems discovered hinged on beliefs, attitudes and conditions of spirituality, this research embarked on developing a program designed to resolve the identified areas of concern.

Due to the focused objectives of the researcher in this paper, the module for assessing the presence of dissident elements in the congregation was also designed to reflect patterns of both loyalty and disloyalty. This was meant to prepare the way for the program development leading to the resolution of the maladies. In view of this, the logical framework matrix below was designed as a precursor to the ensuing intervention program of this research.

Features of the Program

In order to achieve the desired outcomes, the program is designed for execution over a period of six months. This is done in consideration of the fact that the focus group members may not easily meet during the week days apart from the

time of either the mid-week prayers or Friday sundown vespers. The most opportune time is, therefore, the Sabbaths and Sundays. Furthermore, the researcher carries the responsibilities of fulltime ministry. This is compounded also by the researcher's change of the profession ministry context. The researcher began to deal with the focus groups while serving as the ministerial secretary in Lusaka Conference, but later relocated to another administrative entity in order to serve as a conference president. This was just after receiving responses from the questionnaire, although the actual shifting took place later. As a result, the contacts with the focus groups had to be spread out for logistical reasons and also to allow the members to assimilate information and new behavior patterns.

Enrolling of focus group. A group whose participation can be sustained throughout the program needs to be selected. In this case it is recommended that those who had received prior orientations during the admittance of the questionnaire be engaged again. This is because they would already be familiar with the objectives of the research. The group should comprise both genders as well as the youth. In this way, the group is likely to be sufficiently representative. Ten of these members are likely to reflect the mind of each congregation.

Selected lessons. A syllabus of lessons and exercises should be taught to the group members. The objective is to tackle the identified problems among church members and lead to the restoration of full confidence in the authority and order of the church. These should be in the areas concerning doctrines, polemical lessons, guidelines for healthy Christian lives and a requirement for participants to affirm their commitment and loyalty to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Preventive grounding in relevant teachings.¹ Fundamental beliefs from *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*² have to be summarized and taught. One summarized doctrine has to be tackled each week. The group members have to be provided with copies of the book for them to read in detail privately at home.

In order for the group members to have a comprehensive understanding of the Adventist denomination, selected church history lessons will be taught monthly. The resource of choice is the book *Light Bearers to the Remnant*.³ From this resource material the researcher should compile targeted topics that can help group members to identify individuals and groups that are dissident in attitude and practice.

Furthermore, the research should draw from the literature review of this research lessons to augment the above objective (Appendix B). Other objectives to be achieved relate to giving the members the capacity to avoid deceptions that may come in the form of purported “new light.”

Enhancing the Christian experience. This module entails leading group members into practices that enhance the values of the Adventist faith. It involves the disciplines of daily Bible study and the commitment to practice the principles learnt. This virtue has to be promoted to the group and members encouraged to be giving testimonies in subsequent meetings. Cell group fellowship and recreation are to be promoted and encouraged. In addition, members are to be taught the value of participating in prayer meetings in small groups. Finally, group coordinators have to

¹See Appendix C.

²Ministerial Association, *Seventh-Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*. 2nd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005).

³Richard W. Schwarz, ed. *Light Bearers to the Remnant: Denominational History Text Book for Seventh-day Adventist College Classes* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979).

be appointed and assigned to coordinate home visitation programs involving all the group members. The above activities have to take place weekly for during the six-month duration.

How to deal with disaffected members. Three months after the commencement of the program, members should be taught how to deal with disaffected members. They can even simulate a scenario that involves applying the guidelines that are stipulated below. Later on, the guidelines may be applicable to congregations that may adopt the recommendations after appropriate evaluations. The table below portrays the process of these activities.

Table 5. Action Steps for Disaffected Members

ACTION STEPS IN DEALING WITH DISAFFECTED MEMBERS		
#	ACTION	BIBLE BASIS
1	Show empathy and endeavor to help to restore the erring. The repentant need forgiveness and reconciliation.	Galatians 6:1; James 5:19, 20
2	Warn the adamant at least twice before the next course of action	Titus 3:10,11
3	Show the errors of the unrepentant openly to the whole congregation using the Bible, Spirit of Prophecy and Church Manual	Titus 1:10,11
4	Place those who persist in error on censure without association from the body of believers except members of the Dialogue Committee. This is meant to protect vulnerable members from being enticed.	Romans 16:17,18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7; I Timothy 6:3-5
5	The church board should recommend the removal from membership those who do not relent from dissident activities and teachings.	Matthew 18:15-19; 1 Corinthians 5:12, 13.
6	The local church, through the Dialogue Committee, should institute a reclamation program for the expelled individuals. Again ordinary members are to avoid contact with the dissidents for their own safety.	Galatians 6:1; Acts 20:28-31.

Chapter Summary

Lusaka conference is located in one of the most urbanized regions of Zambia. Even settlements that are in the semi-urban or rural areas are not too far from the city of Lusaka. The phenomenon of disaffection and the possibilities of contagion in the conference are, therefore, expected to easily reach most of the congregations.

Three congregations—Brentwood Drive, Chitukuko and Chilanga—were selected for the survey tailored to acquire data whose analysis would help in development solutions to dissidence in churches. The congregations' location and social-economical compositions mirrored the secular societies' strata's, which may be considered as "high-cost," "medium-cost" and "semi-urban." Accordingly, focus groups consisting of ten members each were chosen with the expectation that they would be representative of their respective congregations.

In the focus groups selection process, discussions and orientations were done as way of the researcher's familiarization with the trends on the ground. Subsequently a questionnaire was devised. It was meant to provoke candid responses without inhibiting attitudes and notions for fear of retribution or vilification by church authorities. As such, the questionnaire was anonymous. Furthermore, the survey instruments sort to probe the respondents in six main aspects of contention with regard to church members' opinions of ecclesiastical order and authority. Each of the six aspects was replicated several times so as to serve as a means of verification on the issues in question. The questionnaire statements amount to a total of 85.

Of the three congregations surveyed, Chilanga Church had a history of having had an open rejection of precise church programs from the local conference. There was a clique of members with dissentious views that influenced the rest to resist

guidelines that they deemed to be contrary to an acceptable church order. That occurrence makes Chilanga Church's case a trigger of this research, although not exclusively for the aforementioned congregation.

The responses from the three congregations were analyzed. Chilanga Church returned responses whose aggregate tally translated into 79 percent (eight people) positive to very positive opinion toward church authority. Eight percent of responses represented indecision while about thirteen percent of the responses were negative to very negative toward church order and authority. In another focus group, Brentwood Drive Church returned responses that showed a 77 percent (eight people) positive to very positive opinion toward church authority. Thirteen percent were undecided while about ten percent of responses (one person) were negative to very negative toward church order and authority.

Further to the foregoing, Chitukuko Church returned 73 percent positive to very positive responses. Seven percent were undecided and nineteen percent were negative to very negative toward church order and authority. This rating placed Chitukuko Church in a relatively more dissentious state among the three congregations surveyed.

Concluding Remarks

The pattern of responses to the six issues of the questionnaire was similar among the three congregations. They are all overly very supportive of the doctrines of the church. This includes the church's teachings on tithes and offerings. The ratings here average at around 86 percent (representing eight people) positive to very positive. However the respondents from the three congregations returned the highest negative ratings with regard to the church's position and teachings concerning

dissident groups and the manifestations of fanaticism and extremism in the church. The responses averaged around 25 percent (three people) negative to very negative. This is noteworthy considering that the mean score for all six categories is fourteen percent.

In view of the foregoing, the research deduces that sympathy with dissident groups on account of social bonds that church members have with the faction members could have led to a subjective assessment of the church's stance. This could have skewed the opinions relatively more in support of dissidence. In addition, the relative hostility to the church teachings against fanaticism and extremism could be indicative of legalistic tendencies among some members. It could have been a reflex in self-defense of cherished views and practices.

On a different note, the research took cognizance of the data's indicators that suggest that dissenters do not have an alternative to the doctrines of the church. This explains why the fundamental teachings retained the highest favorable rating. It follows, therefore, that the ministers' role and authority of the church need to be associated more with the doctrines of the church than its policies. This may revamp an affirmation of church order and authority.

Chitukuko Church had some relatively more extreme indicators. These ranged from the highest favorable opinion for the church teachings concerning tithes (at 90 percentage) to the strongest opposition to the teachings of the church against fanaticism and extremism (at 38 percent). The relevant intervention measures need to be more intentionally applied in Chitukuko Church.

Overall, the majority of the church members are supportive of the church order and authority. However, those whose opinion is negative—at an average of

fifteen percent, need to be contained and nurtured toward the perspective of the church. Failure in this regard would perpetuate the churches' vulnerability to contagion from the critical, but significant minority. In view of the above situation, redemptive intervention initiatives for the churches are an imperative.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE OF INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION

The fact that elements of dissidence are present among relatively small factions in the Seventh-day Adventist communities is periodically evident as was narrated in the example of Chilanga Church that was earlier alluded to. It is also not in dispute that various spontaneous and designed approaches toward resolving the challenges posed by dissident members had been tried, although without a traceable empirical coherence. In addition the researcher is aware, from experience and known records, that empirical methods of getting to the root of the challenge had not been developed.

In view of the need to portray the spectrum of viewpoints and practices of members of the Adventist Church in Lusaka Conference as well as to stipulate remedial solutions, a comprehensive survey has been done with consequent analyses and proposed interventions. This entailed going through the process of engaging the local conference administration, district pastors, church elders of the respective congregations and their church members.

The Chronological Implementation

Since the research is relevant to the order and authority of the church in Lusaka Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the etiquette, protocols and procedures had to be followed in order to foster the objective of the research and enlist maximum cooperation. Furthermore, such a procedure ensured that the necessary interest was

generated in the entity since it was meant to benefit from the findings of the research. At the initial stage, it would be counterproductive if prejudice, on the part of church members, or lack of cooperation, on the part of the conference administration and pastors, had been experienced during the research.

The researcher also takes cognizance of the fact that, as an employee of Lusaka Conference, care was to be taken in order to be compliant with both ethics and conditions of service. Due to the fact that the process of the research involved delving into ecclesiastical and administrative issues that were outside the researcher's employment, special authorization and cooperation had to be sought at each relevant level of the conference structure. These processes constitute part of the chronology of the initiative implementation. The chart of the project plan below offers a snick preview of the chronological narrative of program implementation:

Table 6. Chart of the Project Plan and Intervention Initiatives

		July 2013	July 2015	2016							
		-	Sept 2015	Oc	No	De	Ja	Fe	Ma	Apri	Jul
				t	v	c	n	b	r	l	y
OUTPUT 1	Coursework										
Activities	Receiving lectures										
	Getting evaluated through assignments and exams										
OUTPUT 2	Dissertation planning and research										
Activities	Dissertation topic										
	Theological reflections										
	Literature review										
	Description of initiatives										
OUTPUT 3	Survey										
Activities	Obtaining permission from Lusaka Conference and three local churches										
	Church member orientation and formulation of three 10-member focus groups for survey										
	Questionnaire preparation and distribution										
(Continued)											

	Analysis of responses from questionnaire		
OUTPUT 4	Intervention initiatives and program implementation		
Activities	One focus group oriented and used as pilot project		
	Dealing with indicators: a Nurture program		
	Nurturing: a Five-point Indoctrination on selected subjects		
	Nurturing: Five-point Steps to Christian experience		
	Nurturing: Four-point steps to owning the Adventist faith		
	Nurturing: Six-point steps to dealing with disaffected members.		
	Evaluation of outcomes		
OUTPUT 5	Conclusion and recommendations		
	Conclusion and Five-point recommendations		

NB: the shaded areas indicate periods of activity

Engagement of Church Entities

Upon the selection of the research topic in 2013, it became necessary to inform the Lusaka Conference administration of my intention to conduct the research in the territory. Accordingly, authority was sought from the Lusaka Conference administration. Subsequently, the selected congregations were also asked to have the research done among their members. In all instances, authority and permission were granted.

The conference was chosen for the research because of the prior knowledge and experience the researcher had gained there as an employee. Having worked in the conference as a district pastor, church pastor and a departmental director, the researcher was conversant with the challenges of dissident elements among the church members first hand. This foreknowledge was essential in the topic selection, description of the ministry context, proffering the statement of the problem and the purpose of the research. Furthermore, a justification of the dissertation was easier to find and the research was made practical since the parameter was delimited. The expectations, however, were a matter of suspense as the research was yet to yield hitherto unknown data.

Following the clearance obtained from the conference administration for the research, the researcher proceeded to write notices of the intention to conduct the program to the district pastors of Chilanga and Lusaka East mission districts (for Chilanga and Chitukuko Churches, respectively) as well as the church pastor for Brentwood Drive Church. The cooperation of the spiritual leaders was sought and granted. The pastors themselves, however, were not the primary targets of the intended enquiries as they represented the church establishment whose order and

authority was sometimes challenged and imperiled. In view of this, the pastors' role was to be that of facilitators for the research among their flocks. Thereafter the next lower levels of leadership were to be more directly involved together with the general membership. Consequently, the local church elders and church clerks of the three local congregations were engaged more intensely whilst interacting with their fellow church members.

The role of the local church elders and other officers was crucial in that the selection of group members that were to constitute the pilot discussion groups was to be done through them. These groups were later to serve as pilot dialogue and reconciliation sub-committees for their respective congregations. Initially the selected group members participated in the exercise of responding to the statements in the questionnaire that is depicted in chapter four of this dissertation.

Having participated in the questionnaire exercise, the group members were better attuned to participate in the program implementation stage. Their prior orientation and familiarity with the issues raised in this research made them the most eligible candidates to participate in the program. As such, they were again reconstituted so that they could form the nucleus of the church relative to the evaluation of the church's appreciation of the intervention program.

Orientations for selected groups. In September 2015, having written the dissertation up to the literature review stage, the way was clear for field research and the formulation of the initiatives to be implemented. However, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the researcher had to put measures in place to allay fears and suspicions among the selected church members. Furthermore, the comprehensive nature of the questionnaire that was to be administered required that the group

members be assessed and oriented on the nature of the research and what was expected of them.

The orientations with selected groups in the three congregations were also meant to serve as pilot groups that could mirror the envisaged conflict resolution committees. Subsequently, the researcher worked on the assumption that some of the group members participating in the exercise may be harboring dissident notions or even be actually involved in active dissensions. The prospect of this factional phenomenon would, if proven, present a reliable representation of the congregations in terms of evaluating the outcomes of the initiative implementation later.

Terms of engagement were clearly spelt out to the groups. Assurances had to be made about the protection of confidentiality of the participants by the researcher. Furthermore, group members were admonished to exhibit respect toward each other's viewpoints and also to demonstrate a spirit of love and fellowship. In this way the initiatives arising from the research findings would become feasible options toward resolving challenges of dissidence in the respective congregations and the conference at large.

Dealing with indicators from the questionnaire. The responses to the questionnaire were analyzed and proactive measures put in place, accordingly. The approach had remedies for the manifested spirit of disaffection as well as preventive measures for the loyal members. In this regard, safety could only be derived from biblical principles and the norms articulated by authors who have reflected the thinking of the church.

The local churches were each asked to form a sub-committee called "Dialogue and Reconciliation Committee." Its goal was to engage the erring brothers and sisters

so as to give them a platform to be heard, on one hand, and to enable the church to reason with [and possibly win] the dissidents over, on the other hand. Furthermore, the renegade members appearing before a committee were not personally stigmatized. In this way a conducive environment for fruitful dialogue was created. In order to realize the above objective, a program had been devised. The fundamental principles underlying the proposed activities and action steps were born from the preceding research works.

The Dialogue and Reconciliation Sub-committee was intended to serve as a buffer between possible factions of dissident members and the general body of believers. In this regard the sub-committee would play the role of an intermediary, thus diffusion potentially acrimonious conflicts and divisions in the churches. Furthermore, the committee was designed to taper off destructive emotions between the church and the disaffected factions, on one hand, while expediting the fare and redemptive treatment of cases, on the other.

The other characteristic of the pilot Dialogue and Reconciliation Sub-committee was that it was meant to be a supplementary mechanism under the local church board. It would help to handle grievances, on the part of the disaffected members, as well as preliminary phases of disciplinary considerations against dissidents, on the part of the church leadership. In order for the program to become a reality, the local church board and business meeting had to adopt the initiative by enacting resolution to that effect.

To avoid confusion within the congregations, the sub-committee was to be used exclusively for handling cases of dissentious disputes and activities. This specialization was designed to make the entity serve as a fast track and user-friendly

platform for resolving viewpoint conflicts. In this way the toxic potency of dissentious tendencies in a given congregation would not be allowed to linger long enough to cause damage.

The intervention measures had to be implemented systematically. This is because of the relative correlation of the suggested activities and lessons. These were meant to be both remedial and preventive. Consequently, the theological and spiritual considerations had to be taken into account.

Listed below are the action steps for the sub-committees and, ultimately, the church boards to follow when dealing with the spiritual welfare of the members in relation to church order and authority. Their purpose was two-fold. They were meant to fortify church members with the knowledge and doctrines necessary for them to identify and counter dissentious teachings and the allurements of dissident groups. Furthermore, the action steps included programs designed to tackle existing elements of dissensions among church members.

Whereas the nurturing and safeguarding of the church should be an ongoing practice in the life of any congregation, it is necessary to have a short-term and sufficient intensive pilot program. In the case of this research, the initial trial period was six months. Once the appropriateness and effectiveness of such a program is tested, components that are useful may be adopted into the ministry practice of the churches while the less effective can be modified or replaced. The revised program should then be made an integral part of pastoral and general ministry work. This is the pattern that the program below followed.

Nurturing Program for Members

Much as the strategic engagement of members of dissident groups may mitigate the damage inflicted on the church, preventive measures ought to be given priority. Members should be taught the rudiments of the Adventist faith and be nurtured to grow in grace. In this way their vulnerability in terms of misunderstanding the Bible and church policies, as well as the fact that off-shoot groups target them, will be addressed. The following schedule of studies was, therefore, implemented in the local churches:

Preventive grounding in relevant teachings. The following clusters of doctrines and lessons were lined up:

1. The teaching of fundamental beliefs
2. Lessons on the Adventist Church history
3. How to identify dissident groups and their followers
4. How to avoid deceptions
5. How to deal with “new light.”

Lesson materials were identified for use, initially, by the group under study. The rest of the congregation was to participate as the program progressed. The materials were in the form of books and compilations by the researcher.

On the teaching of the Adventist Church’s fundamental beliefs, copies of the book *Seventh-day Adventist Believe*¹ had been made available to the group members. The members took time to study the various doctrines of the church personally as

¹Ministerial Association, *Seventh-Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*. 2nd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005).

copies were availed to them from the stock at the Lusaka Conference office. This exercise was meant to both affirm and enhance the members' doctrinal grounding.

As regards the need for the group members to understand and appreciate the Adventist Church's denominational history, the researcher shared selected insights with the members from the book *Light Bearers to the Remnant*.² The members were then urged to study the extracts. The focus was placed on aspects of church history where the leadership had to contend with fanaticism, heresies as well as dissident individuals and groups. The periods covered were especially those that spanned Ellen White's life time. Such perspectives on church history helped the group to put into proper perspective what they have come to know and hear about the contemporary dissenting voices.

Furthermore to the foregoing, Ellen White's recorded statements in favor of the official church during the formative years of the Adventist Church were useful.³ Apparently, this was so because her ministry is accepted by all parties to have been inspired. Her contributions lend credence to what the church stands for even today. Therefore, her written condemnation of dissident movements served to awaken the group members to the fact that dissenters of our time are effectively presumptuous when they quote Ellen White's writings and claim that she supports their courses.

The researcher also shared with the group members the compilations on the subjects that had to do with learning how to identify dissident groups and their

²Richard W. Schwarz, ed. *Light Bearers to the Remnant: Denominational History Text Book for Seventh-day Adventist College Classes* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979).

³Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 395-410.

followers (Appendix B). This was deemed needful because the researcher had learned from experience that the people who are involved in dissident activities usually masquerade as genuine church members.

Another related topic was about how to avoid deception. This lesson was about how to detect false teachings even from trusted acquaintances. This approach was designed to protect the members in view of their vulnerability to individuals with whom they enjoy cordial social and spiritual bonds. Coupled with this training, the researcher also shared a lesson on how to deal with new teachings. This phenomenon is euphemistically referred to as “new light.” Since members get excited by strange teachings; this lesson was designed to fortify them against deception that may be disseminated under the guise of newly discovered truth.

Enhancing the Christian experience. Whereas the above measures were meant to indoctrinate the members and engender reformation, the measures below were designed to initiate revival. The programmed church life activities were recommended in order to enhance the principles of fidelity, fellowship, evangelism and church growth along the basic model of the early apostolic church as seen in Acts 2:41-47. In this way, there was to be all-member inclusiveness in Christian service, thus enhancing the mission of the church more effectively. These aspects of activities were meant to be enacted more by the pastors and local church leaders. However, for practical purposes, the pilot group members were initially to be the ones to be led into the experience of church life described below. Leaders were identified from the group so as to coordinate the process of helping the group members to experience the envisaged form of Christian life and church communion. These forms of Christian experiences were outlined as follows:

1. Fidelity to the teachings of the Bible
2. Fellowship
3. Recreation
4. Prayer meetings at church and in cell groups
5. Home visitations.

The researcher appreciated the fact that a mechanism already existed for the accomplishment of the above objectives. The designed activities of the Sabbath school class units at church and the cell groups in residential areas afforded the best settings. The researcher encouraged the group members to participate in the activities of the groups both at church and in their residential areas and to later report to the Dialogue and Reconciliation Sub-committee on their experiences.

The above model was designed in a manner that the researcher understood to be reflective of the principles of the early Christian church as seen in the second and third chapters of the book of Acts. The spiritual renewal and dynamism portrayed in Scripture gave the believers the advantage of strength in unity of purpose and faith as well as fellowship and recreation. That made the Christian church formidable against covert and overt dangers. This was the desired outcome for the church members in the three congregations and beyond.

The above exercise turned out to be popular among the group members. Furthermore, in the event that some group members failed to live up to expectations on some days, they usually blamed themselves, except on the issue of home visitations. It was mostly expected that the later activity should be done by pastors and elders. Although this assumption was mostly correct, the members were taught that fellowship visitations are part of the Christian church life to be engaged in by all.

Owning the faith. The members were to be nurtured to a point where they are able to stand on their own when faced with the insinuations of dissident members. In this regard they were given information so that they could own the answers to the following questions:

1. Am I in a saving relationship with Jesus?
2. Why am I a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
3. Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church really the Bible Remnant?
4. Is God leading this movement?

Dealing with disaffected members. The fact that there is a constant presence of church members who harbor negative views of the church is a sufficient ground for putting in place pro-active measures to mitigate the harm to the church and individual members. Furthermore, the program was meant to create a buffer between disaffected and loyal members in order to avoid the contagion of apostate teachings and practices in entire congregations.

The premature discipline of erring church members may be avoided since the respective church boards would have to await the recommendations from their Dialogue and Reconciliation Sub-committees, on one hand. On the other hand, the program enhanced reconciliation and reclamation capacities of the churches.

Evaluation of the Interventions

The survey instruments that had been described in the previous chapters revealed a lot concerning the mindset of the church members in the three congregations. The negative perceptions of the church and its authority that represented a ratio in the range of eleven to 20 percent were a wake-up call to devise and put in place the above intervention measures. Subsequently, the appropriateness

of the measures had to be evaluated so that a model program could be prescribed for the whole conference. The evaluation was delimited due to the relocation of the researcher to another conference. This constrained the time that could be spent on supervising and evaluating the project on sight, when need arose. Due to this constraint (time and distance), it became necessary to focus on two of the initially three congregations that had been surveyed initially. The congregations that the researcher preferred for both the interventions and evaluations were Chitukuko and Brentwood Drive Churches. This was because the analysis of the survey instruments had manifested the highest frequency and intensity of negative attitudes toward church order and authority in the former while the later manifested the lowest percentages of similar sentiments. Examining the two extremes would afford a more balanced evaluation of the phenomenon of dissidence.

Evaluation of Chitukuko and Brentwood Drive Churches

For practical purposes, it was arranged that the initial participants in the survey exercise, by way of the questionnaire, should be the ones to help the researcher with the exercise concerning the proposed interventions. This is because the anticipated dissidents could have chosen to keep away from activism during the six-month period in which the intervention program was in progress. Subsequently it was agreed that the members be placed in an environment that was not threatening to their standing and personal concerns even if they had dissenting views. So, instead of forming a separate dialogue and reconciliation sub-committee, the initial participants in the survey became members of these committees. Each comprised ten church members. Having learnt from the questionnaire that between thirteen and 20 percent

(about one to two people) of the responses had negative opinions toward the church, the researcher was satisfied that the voice of dissidence would not miss out. In this way, the objectives of dialoguing and resolving conflicts would be achieved.

It was agreed in the above groups that members would critique each other as well as the church for the purpose of finding solutions and getting answers on issues they could not understand. In this regard, the following was my evaluation of the group members' sentiments in response to the guidelines of the program implementation:

The nurture of church members. The research discovered that opinions and activities of dissidence come about primarily because of fanaticism and extremism among believers, on one hand, and the inroads of organized external dissident independent groups, on the other. Consequently, an intervention program designed to either prevent destructive dissention or implement redemptive measures was deemed necessary.

In the foregoing issue, the arena of the battle was recognized as each individual believer's mind as well as the corporate consciences of the various congregations. It was, therefore, imperative to include an intervention program that included a schedule for grounding the believers in the rudiments of the faith and also raise their levels of spiritual maturity. Lessons on the nature of dissident groups had to be part of the program.

Evaluation of indoctrination. The five selected topics under the above intervention program were well received (Appendix C). The researcher discovered that, apart from the church doctrines, other aspects of church interest are rarely taught to church members. Some of the crucial neglected subject matters include the

“Seventh-day Adventist Church history,” “How to identify dissident groups,” and “How to avoid deceptions.” A related one has to do with “How to deal with strange teachings” that are dubbed as “new light.”

Emphasis has been placed on the above topics because of the appreciation drawn from group members in the research. It was evident that many a time there is a gap in the resources availed to church members by way of lessons, seminars, books and sermons. The church needs to be assertive and proactive in mounting an effective defense of not only its doctrines but its hermeneutics, historical heritage, the role of Ellen White to the church, church policies and practices.

In addition to the above evaluation, the researcher surmises that the church needs to be deliberate and preemptive when dealing with the specter of dissention against church authority and order. This is because the elements of dissidence in the churches are always present, even in the absence of organized independent organizations. The relevant polemical strategies and resources should constitute a regular regimen of supplies for churches. Such a policy will ensure that individual members as well as congregations are greatly shielded from the menace of dissidence. The church and its ministers, as well as other leaders, will then be afforded a more conducive platform to steer the church more effectively toward its mission with minimal traction occasioned by the sporadic disregard of church order and authority.

Program to enhance Christianity. The group members had to be made accountable for their standing in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This entailed asking them to justify their belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In this induced self-introspection, the believers passed verdicts on themselves and became party to the assessments that others would carry out concerning themselves. The

questions were as follows:

Am I in a saving relationship with Jesus? When the question was put up to the group, the responses were varied. Some were quick to respond in the affirmative. Their rationale was that they are believers who are baptized. Others, though, expressed caution. They argued that the assurance of salvation for each individual called for humility since only God knows those that are truly saved.

The mixed feelings notwithstanding, the groups engaged in a discussion that culminated in the conclusion that all believers should rely entirely on the merits of Jesus. In this way, all believers should have an assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ. Subsequently, the researcher deduced that believers need pastoral guidance into the biblical basis for a balanced Bible-based view of assurance of salvation. In this way pitfalls of extremes of legalistic fanaticism and permissiveness would be firmly avoided.

Why am I a Seventh-day Adventists? The conviction that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the spiritual movement of Bible prophecy that teaches the truth was unanimously expressed by the group members. The researcher deduced, therefore, that the members do not really have objections to the fundamental teachings of the church. This could be proven from the fact that even the negatively critical 13 to twenty percent could not register any divergence on this score. The rationale for the sporadic dissensions required the examination of the possible causative factors from another aspect.

The fact that the church doctrines are generally acceptable to all members across the spectrum of divergent opinions should encourage church leaders to maintain and reinforce their teaching. However, this cannot be expected to provide the

required safeguards against militating influences that lure members into dissention. This entails ensuring that the proper and effective application of the principles of the doctrines into the practical lives of believers is taught, regulated and monitored. In this way, fanatical and permissive extremes could be avoided. Furthermore, members could also be taught the theological rationales that undergird the formulation of church policies such as what are enshrined in the Church Manual.

Due to the relatively short period of time in which the intervention program was applied by the researcher, the induction of the group members into a comprehensive understanding of the formulation of the *Church Manual* and its clauses was left to be done by the local pastor. This was proposed with the understanding that the doctrines themselves needed to be interpreted relative to the policies. The significance of the matter emanates from the fact that dissidents usually raise contentions with regard to policies and the implementers of what they stipulate. This includes the authority of the church and its ministers. In this way, the members' justification that the Adventist Church is the remnant of Bible prophecy will be fully meaningful. For now, the members' profession is acceptable on grounds of sincerity.

Is God leading this movement? This question brought out mixed reactions—even among members that had expressed staunch loyalty and confidence in the church and its authority. This was because there was a thinly veiled suspicion that, whereas God was leading the church, some of the church leaders were not moving in tandem with their Master, Jesus Christ. At that point, it became necessary to address the issue of alternative voices in the form of dissident independent ministries whose leaders dissuade church members from trusting the official ministers.

The researcher had learnt that when some members expressed doubt in their

pastoral leaders and the church establishment the underlying cause was the subversive teaching of dissident groups. Consequently, the group activities had to include a discussion on the dubious nature of dissident groups that are opposed to the credibility of the official church. This approach had the desired effect of beginning the build-up of more confidence in the church and its leadership. Furthermore, the research revealed the need for sustained and enhanced education in this regard, on a permanent basis.

Evaluating Action Steps Dealing With Disaffected Members

Having focused on the Dialogue and Reconciliation Sub-committee members for implementing the intervention program, the researcher oriented them to conduct themselves as a miniature church. Since the group members represented the spectrum of varied opinions, on the part of the general membership, they afforded a manageable platform to implement the program initiatives of the research. This entailed identifying the group members holding conflicting views of the church and the ministry. The rest of the members were to serve as the “brother’s keepers.”

Since there were no cases of active dissidence at the time of the exercise, the researcher adjusted the degree of dissention that may warrant a case to be subject to intervention procedures as earlier alluded to diagrammatically. This meant that the mere expression of negative dissention that hinged on the authority of the church and its ministers would enlist the constructive engagement by the group members. The prospects of dealing with divisive dissention or open rebellion were still discussed. The discussion was done through extrapolating hypothetical scenarios of active dissidence. The known group members were then made to account for such a

scenario. In this way, the research became feasible in the limited time of six months. Below are the experiences and further findings when the program initiatives were implemented.

Need for empathy for the erring. The research revealed that some of the group members had either seen their friends, relatives or some other members patronize clandestine and open meetings of dissident groups. In some instances some, among the group members, had frequented the meetings of the renegade members. Because of the above scenario, some of the group members seemed to be connected to the dissidents with strong social bonds. In fact, most of the group members said that they had no animosity toward the erring. It is the local church leaders who seemed to have a tendency of taking a hard-line stance against those with a record of errant behavior with regard to the order and authority that this research has described before.

Due to the foregoing scenario, the group members found it easy to relate with those espousing negative views about the church. From this sympathetic relationship it was easy for the group members to commit themselves to the redemptive posture of demonstrating empathy should any member's negative views lead them into active dissidence. That would prove to be essential in the redemptive exercise.

Warning the adamant. Whereas the majority of the respondents to the questionnaire expressed loyalty to the church, the group members expressed the view that the warnings are better tackled by ministers and elders. Although no case warranting such an action had arisen during the implementation period, the group members stated that they could only express disagreement against the dissentious views without the element of warning. They actually did this against fellow group members who had expressed negative views against the church. This goes to show

that the church members, in general, had not fully owned the process of correcting the erring. Instead, they would rather watch passively than be involved in confrontations with the erring, unless they were in leadership positions. This revelation calls for vigilance and pro-activity on the part of ministers and elders to engage the erring with love and firmness on behalf of their church members.

The elders present in the dialogue committee committed themselves to admonish the erring in future. In this regard, it was noted that the group considered the negative views that constituted up to a fifth of the responses to questionnaires to have been too mild to warrant a formal warning. Furthermore, they considered the task of warning to be the preserve of those who have been elected to some form of church administrative position. It was gratifying, therefore, that the elders recognized this expectation as falling within the ambit of their job description. This should be even more pronounced for pastors.

Exposing the erring members to the congregation. There was a notion that individuals who propagate dissident views are more studious and knowledgeable than the ordinary members. Some seem to have even believed that advocates of the dissident supporting ministries were more spiritual than the gospel ministers in the official church. As a result of this perception, the group members seemed to have overly resigned themselves to the notion that the sophistication of the renegade members was beyond them. So, when these members were met with a view to obtain a feedback concerning the program implementation, they argued that it was the duty of pastors and church elders to use the above approach.

Since the exposure of truant dissidents requires the competent use of Scripture, the *Spirit of Prophecy* and the *Church Manual*, the group members submitted that

local church and conference-based pastors should take on the rogue elements. Interestingly, the group members did not think that it was the duty of local elders to engage in such a task. To compound the matter, the elders who were in the dialogue committee felt like their supporting role to the pastors may not be absolutely sufficient to stem the tide of dissidence in the absence of their pastor. Thus they also tended to think that the suggested exposure of the renegades needed to be done in conjunction with the pastors. Incidentally, the churches never got to handle a case that called for such an intervention during the six months period. Instead, the group members relegated themselves to the exercise of identifying the dissenters within the group and trying to convince them to change their mindset toward the church.

The researcher surmises that the upgrading of the function to expose the dissident members to the local pastors and the conference officials only is an alternative practice that would place remedial measures too far for timely intervention. This is because the pastor-member ratio in the conference is 1:3,000. This makes it practically impossible for a district pastor to provide pastoral care frequently enough. This is the more reason why the researcher strongly recommended locally grown solutions within the congregation's dialogue and conflict resolution committee. Subsequently, the elders' board and church board of each respective church would take up recommendations from the sub-committee. This recommended measure became a matter for long term future application as and when incidents of open dissidence would manifest themselves.

Due to the above misgivings on the part of the dialogue committee members, the researcher delimited the matter of resolving incidences of dissidence to the group members. This was because some among these had expressed a negative attitude to

the church and its authority although they may not have been actively carrying out their opinions. By allowing them to expressly state their positions during group discussions, the researcher was able to decipher their stance using the evaluation instruments discussed earlier. Thus the group served as a pilot project for the whole church and, by extension, the conference.

In spite of the above adjustment to the implementation and evaluation procedure, useful data and insight were obtained. Allowing church members with divergences in opinions with regard to their attitude toward church authority created an atmosphere and opportunity in which the laity critiqued or entreated each other. The net effect of the application of the intervention measures was that dissident views were brought out, identified and frowned upon by the loyal members. The only possible drawback is that the pilot dialogue committee members had not been screened to determine whether their standing in the faith would be imperiled by the exposure to some openly negative opinions regarding church order and authority. The long-term arrangement in the respective local churches should take care of that potentially weak point in the chain.

Placing on censure those who persist in error. In the six months of the program implementation, from October, 2015 to April, 2016, there was no occurrence of a case that warranted the censuring of a member in the event that a given believer persisted in a dissident life style. However, of interest were the testimonies and questions by the group members about some known individuals elsewhere who had openly joined off-shoot dissident groups. When discussing such cases the group members tended to build a consensus that something should be done to correct the concerned individuals and safeguard the church. But, just like in the case where

intervention guidelines prescribed the public exposure of the persistently truant, the group members seemed to mostly expect the pastors to address the situation.

The notion that the pastor should tackle the difficult members alone was an indicator that, apart from the suggested intervention programs, church members needed to be taught the rudiments of the church manual. This form of empowerment would enable the lay members, particularly the church elders, deacons and deaconesses, to practice elements of the concept of the “priesthood of all believers” without impeding the ecclesiastical authority of the ministers. The ministers, on their part could optimize their influence and leadership over their church jurisdiction by formulating leadership teams. Certain responsibilities could then be delegated to the laity, thus creating a multiplier effect. This arrangement, in turn, could help stem the sporadic manifestations of dissidence in the churches.

Removal from membership for the adamant. The reaction to this recommendation was similar to the preceding procedure. Furthermore, there had not arisen a case warranting this ultimate step in the process of church discipline. There was, however, a revelation in the process of the implementation of the suggested procedures for handling members involved in dissidence. The group members seemed overly reluctant to have church members “hastily” dropped from the church membership roll. This was in spite of the intervention’s provision for biblical topical studies.

The researcher deduced that the dialogue committee members would rather distinguish professional dissidents who ran independent ministries from church members in their congregations. Whereas they would not mind the fate of the professional dissidents who, as outsiders, had no close social bonds with them, the recommendation to defrock their kith and kin seemed hard to accommodate. It was

apparent that sentimental attachments, rather than objective theological convictions, were what affected their judgments. This situation calls for intentional pastoral care and patience.

The proposals hereafter prescribed for grounding church members in sound biblical perspectives on the nature of the church and its authority should be systematically taught and implemented. The realization of the objective to have members empowered through biblical teachings and spiritual mentoring should be an ever-present feature. When members continue to grow in Christ they will not flinch from carrying out necessary duties in the interest of the church. The menace of dissidence would, thereby, be greatly diminished.

Reclamation of those dropped from membership. Since the church is a redemptive agency, initiatives toward reclamation and reconciliation should be an integral part of the mission of the church. God, who is the owner of mission, activated the plan of redemption and reclamation through Jesus Christ. Christ's agency for mission, the church, can only carry out His gracious mandate.

Of interest was the researcher's discovery that, although there were no cases warranting reclamation from dissidence, the sentiments expressed by the group members favored the proposal unanimously. By extension, the group members who had expressed views that inclined toward dissidence were made to feel reassured of fellowship by the majority who are loyal. The researcher surmised that eagerness to reclaim the estranged members is partly connected with the prior sentimental attachments. The group members were committed to be involved in the reclamation process, unlike other proposed assignments. The tendency to assign difficult tasks to pastors did not manifest itself with regard to facilitating reconciliation and reclamation. This, however, should be treated as a positive stepping stone toward a

more conscientious and objective rationale for the ministry of grace for the erring members.

In the guidelines proposed under the section that describes interventions meant to nurture the membership in general, a component of the measures has to do with spiritual lessons that engender reclamation and reconciliation. These were adopted as long term measure for the congregations surveyed. The initial results attest to the prospect of broader success in the churches within Lusaka Conference and beyond. This can be attested to by the fact that both Chitukuko and Brentwood Drive Churches went beyond the pilot projects conducted in the focus groups. They adopted the model and recommendations in their respective business meetings, thus incorporating them as permanent long-term programs for their church members and resident guest (Appendix D).

Chapter Summary

The research discovered that dissentious attitudes, though relatively in smaller percentages, are not uncommon among believers in the Adventist Churches of Lusaka Conference. However, empirical approaches toward the resolution of such challenges appear not to be documented for the conference. This led to the research that culminated in the intervention measures outlined in this research.

The administration and leadership and both the conference and local church level were engaged to facilitate authorization and cooperation. The researcher also relied on the experience of being an employee of the same conference for a justifiable delineation of the problem in the churches that necessitated the research.

Three congregations were engaged in the research. The process entailed

orientations for the local church leaders and congregations, selecting focus groups and the admittance of a questionnaire. The analysis of the survey instruments led to the intervention initiatives chronicled in this chapter.

The focus group that had been asked to indicate responses to the questionnaire were reconstituted into “Dialogue and Reconciliation Committee” entities. In this phase of implementing the intervention initiatives, the committees served as pilot projects over a period of six months. The expectation was that they would mirror the mind-set of their respective congregations.

One aspect of the intervention measures involved a nurturing program. This incorporated lessons meant to forestall church members’ vulnerability to teachings of dissident private ministries. The other measure was designed to foster and enhance the believers’ Christian experience in activities ranging from fellowship to prayer meetings. Furthermore, the group members had to be challenged to demonstrate that they owned the Adventist faith, individually. Lastly, a six-point action step program of dealing with those known to be disaffected was taught and implemented within the focus groups as a trial run. Later on, two of the three congregations surveyed adopted the intervention program and recommendations through their respective business meetings as permanent local church programs.

For logistical reasons, only two of the three congregations that responded to the questionnaire were engaged in the intervention initiative implementation. Subsequently, an evaluation of the exercise was done.

Concluding Remarks

The research discovered that extremism and fanaticism were the main factors leading to dissidence among church members. The church doctrines were actually

generally accepted except that in some cases the teachings were misinterpreted or misapplied. This situation calls for efforts on the part of pastors and elders to be intentional in emphasizing the doctrine that are relevant to the prevention of dissention.

Further to the foregoing, the researcher discovered that the members Christian experience of salvation and service was not always as it should be. The assurance of salvation and confidence in the authenticity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant church of Bible prophecy needs to be strengthened sustainably by the spiritual leaders as signs of wavering were sometimes evident.

As to the action steps for dealing with erring or dissentious members, the mixed feelings drawn from the focus group members suggest a deep-seated culture, by some, of cherishing social and family bonds to the detriment of church loyalty. Group members were generally unwilling to confront dissenters even when they disagreed with their views. This could stem from the premium they place on preserving social and family bonds. Consequently, the members expect pastors and elders to handle the most difficult aspects of nurturing and disciplining church members. This should be a wake-up call to the church leaders to change this paradigm so as to enhance the congregations' capacities to handle dissentions more promptly and extensively. In this way the churches are likely to stem the evident elements of dissention and possible apostasies.

The good news is that, overall, the focus group members were amenable to affirm greater loyalty and cooperation based on the lessons learnt from the intervention measures. The above measures need to be incorporated as a permanent feature in the ministry cycle of churches in Lusaka Conference. The fact that the

members expect to lead out in the mundane as well as the innovative activities of the church goes to show that an informed and reformed congregation will work in tandem with the authority and order of the church.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Lusaka Conference of Seventh-day Adventists afforded an ideal situation for the research concerning the insidious attitudes and practices by some church members. The church entity's location at the center of Zambia in terms of geography, on one hand, and the dynamics of Adventist Church activities and character, on the other, mean that both its problems and challenges would have a ripple effect beyond its territory.

The research sought to profile the problem of dissenting tendencies and carry out analyses of survey responses from selected church members so as to conduct significant evaluations toward solutions. This was necessary because there had been significant instances of eroded confidence in the church and its leadership. This general deduction was based on the researcher's eye witness view and research.

A biblical rationale for proffering solutions had to be found. This was coupled with affirmations of the biblical principles by other authors who have addressed related issues. The research traced the phenomena of dissension against the church both in the theological reflection and literature review.

For practical purposes, this research was delimited to three local congregations: Brentwood Drive, Chilanga, and Chitukuko Churches in the baseline survey. Brentwood and Chitukuko were later involved in the program implantation

also. The confinement was meant to make the survey, analyses of responses and the evaluation of intervention programs sufficiently feasible.

Theological Reflections

The fundamental example of dissent in scripture is that of Lucifer. This epitomizes dissidence toward authentic authority. The researcher surmised that since the church of God on earth is a miniature reflection of the reign of God, a study of the rebellion of Satan was a relevant starting point. This allusion is relevant since Satan's campaign in heaven was based on selfish ambitions aimed at usurping God's authority and position.

The Adventist Church has not been spared the ravages of spiritually debilitating dissensions. In this regard, independent private ministries such as Hope International, the Heartland Institute, Our Firm Foundation and the Davidian Shepherd's Rod should be considered as propagating teachings and practices inimical of the authority, order, teachings and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As such, the approaches to such challenges should be based on the models that are seen in scripture.

The uprising of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and the way Moses handled it presents one of the relevant models regarding dissidence toward church order and authority. The trio claimed religious entitlements and privileges while denigrating the legitimacy of the order of the priesthood and the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The trio also disseminated their dissentious ideas, won a significant following and fanned them into active rebellion. It is in this commotion that the researcher gleaned further insights.

In the above rebellion against authentic leadership, another issue is noteworthy. The ringleaders received a different treatment from the ordinary people who merely followed them. This is seen from the fact that although Korah, Dathan and Abiram finally died as a direct consequence of God's wrath on their rebellion, the majority of their followers were spared because Aaron burnt incense and stood amidst the people. These could be considered to have survived, not because they were guiltless, but because the lesser degree of their malice warranted that they be given extended probation. This gesture was certainly courtesy of divine grace in connection with the intercession by Moses and Aaron.

Further to the foregoing, Scripture reveals other factors at play in instances of religious dissension. In the case on King Jeroboam's apostasy it is apparent that political expediency was the main consideration. After the ten tribes broke off from the Davidic royal jurisdiction, Jeroboam sought to forestall prospects of his subjects turning their affections back to the kings based in Jerusalem. Accordingly, he set up rival worship centers at Dan and Beersheba.

The above situation was not left to pass without an evaluation being done. Accordingly, God sent a prophet to king Jeroboam with a message of denunciation against the spurious religious order and a warning of impending retribution. In this way a distinction was made between the authentic religious order in Jerusalem and the illegitimate rival religious system in the northern kingdom.

The New Testament Scripture introduces a fresh dispensation with regard to religious order and leadership. Jesus was the founder of the new order. He also made it plain that in as much as the Christian church was founded on Him, He had delegated His authority to it. The authority's effectiveness was conditional on

compliance with God's revealed will in Scripture.

The above religious order of the New Testament was refined further as the new church dispensation developed. As it met new challenges, more characteristics of the order and authority of the church came to the fore. The Jerusalem Council during the early Christian church, as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Acts, reveals that ultimate authority was deposited in the authenticated corporate church entity of believers in a council rather than in individuals or independent splinter factions. Individual opinions had to be given up at that stage of corporate decision-making by the church.

The apostle Paul disclosed an aspect of authority in connection with church organizational hierarchy. Bishops were to rule over the congregations, while deacons served the physical and spiritual interests of the believers in a supporting role to the elders. By virtue of their position, the apostles and bishops deserved honor and respect.

Literature Review

Other than the insights and principles from Scripture concerning church order and authority, the research also reviewed literature whose scope ranged from relevant Adventist denominational history to the various views of certain Christian denominations. The research examined also the perspectives on dissent with regard to Protestantism. The literature evaluated showed that the sixteenth century reformers within the Roman Catholic Church had to lead their followers out of the mother church because its administrative hierarchy reportedly took a rigid, non-accommodating posture toward the dissenters.

As for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the literature studied seems to indicate that the forms of discontent against its church authority varied depending on the period of history studied. In its formative years, the church faced challenges to its authority and order due to undeveloped church structures. Renegade ministers and dissident lay persons commandeered certain institutions and operations toward their personal agendas. However, the denomination is said to have structurally matured by the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the ensuing years after the nineteenth century, the contentions seemed more to do with theological questions. The researcher observed that individuals and independent groups have, over the years, tended to cast aspersions on the character of church leaders at all levels who did not agree with their theological positions. In the case of Zambia, and Lusaka Conference in particular, the Davidian Shepherd's Rod is the most pronounced external factor to stir dissent in some churches.

Description of the Initiative

After the researcher had sort permission from the conference, the local church leaders were engaged with a view to commence the administering of the survey instrument in the form of a questionnaire. The questions and statements presented were meant to provoke honest and sincere responses from the participants. This culminated in the administering of questionnaires to the selected groups and the analyses of responses to them. This, in turn, led to the formulation of an intervention plan.

Once the questionnaires were returned by the respondents, the researcher counted the responses per individual questionnaire and then transferred the data to an analysis form that is called "keys to analyzing the responses to the questionnaires."

This form put the responses to the eighty five statements into six categories. These were the basic areas in which the respondents were actually being tested. The collation of the responses revealed that Chilanga Church returned about seventy-eight percent positive, eight percent neutral and fifteen percent negative responses. Chitukuko Church returned about seventy one percent positive, five percent neutral and twenty percent negative responses. Brentwood Drive Church returned about seventy-seven percent positive, thirteen percent neutral and ten percent negative responses.

An analytical comparison of the three congregations surveyed revealed some distinct characteristics. Brentwood Drive Church was composed of members that are relatively in the higher education and income category. Occupationally, it had the highest frequency of white collar workers. Chilanga Church, by comparison, consisted of mostly middle-income and blue collar workers. On the extreme end of the spectrum was Chituko Church. Most members were in the lower strata of the social-economical scales. The researcher observed that in the same manner that people in the secular society clamored for alternative political and economic alternatives, such members tended to be restless with the status quo in the church. That could be the reason for the more adverse responses against the church establishment.

Narrative of Program Implementation

As a consequence of the aforementioned analyses, a program development was devised with the purpose of implementing interventions to the problems highlighted in the responses to questionnaires. Two of the groups that had been dealt with at the stage of administering the questionnaires were engaged again with the

view to conduct the program implementation. These were in Chitukuko and Brentwood Drive Churches. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, they had already received an orientation. Secondly, there was need to have groups to serve as a pilot projects since some of the issues that the program was meant to resolve could only occur in the long term.

In addition, the above groups afforded the researcher a chance to create a scenario of miniature churches that mirrored whole congregations. The mode of resolving the problems could later be juxtaposed on each congregation both in the short and long term. In order to create a significant impact, the program was implemented over a period of six months. It consisted of four practical modules.

The research has revealed that dissidence tendencies develop among members due to legalistic extremism among believers and also the influence of dissident independent groups. Furthermore, there had been a gap, in terms of knowledge, with regard to the teachings that the believers had been exposed to. It was, therefore, necessary to put in place measures to hedge members from such pitfalls through the teaching of doctrines, Adventist Church history and sensitizing them on the nature of dissident individuals and groups. This gesture was appreciated by the group members. It is, therefore, deduced that the church should be both proactive and preemptive when dealing with the specter of dissensions by church members.

Conclusion

It was the expectation of this research that church members in Lusaka Conference of Seventh-day Adventists would become more enlightened about the biblical basis of clergy roles and the function of the church. They would also have

learnt how to handle differences of opinion using constructive and safe approaches with regard to the church teachings and practices.

The discontent of Lucifer in heaven against God's order and government is an epitome of dissentious attitudes and activities on earth, especially in terms of sacred history as enunciated both in the Old and New testaments. The original dissidence, as well as subsequent ones on earth, was as a result of a flawed moral character on the part of the antagonist. Since this involves a moral fall, it is imperative that redemptive measures are incorporated in any intervention measures that may be put in place.

The application of the above principle to the churches in Lusaka Conference and beyond entails that the erring members be treated with empathy, fairness and gracious forbearance as the preliminary process of discipline. These measures, however, should not negate the expression of the ultimate displeasure against those persisting in dissentious apostasy by way of removing them from the membership of the church. In this way the measure would serve as deterrence to others and a means of protecting the loyal membership from the contagion of negative influences.

Church leaders at all levels of the church need to demonstrate fidelity to the Bible as well as the interpretation and application of Scriptures when teaching the members or administering the affairs of the church. This is because the authority that Jesus delegated to the church is made effectual and authentic through the right interpretation and application of Scriptures—the keys of the kingdom, or church. Furthermore, the more authentic practice of that authority should be in a corporate manner. Examples are committees, boards, councils or sessions. Ministers and other church leaders act with the mandate of the corporate church body at various levels of its hierarchy. As such, compliance with scriptural requirements in such forums would

diminish the pretext for dissident activities and also ensure that God's wrath, as well as the displeasure of the church, would be justifiably expressed against the erring members when it became inevitable.

The foregoing narration revealed the fact that incidences of dissensions are actually a constant reality in all denominations. As for the Adventist Church, such dissensions have taken different forms depending on the period of church history. This pattern of adaptive dissidence requires that the church adopts proactive and preemptive intervention programs that take into account the contemporary factors in the ministry context of the church and ministers.

Lusaka Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the Republic of Zambia, was the researcher's ministry context. Chilanga, Chitukuko and Brentwood Drive Churches were selected as pilot projects for the research. After the analysis of responses from a questionnaire, focus was placed on Chitukuko and Brentwood Drive Churches for the implementation of an intervention program and evaluation of findings. The congregations were preferred because the returns from the questionnaires showed them to be in the relatively direr and more loyal conditions, respectively. This was adduced from the degree and frequency of negative and positive opinions with regard to church order and authority. Furthermore, the researcher's ministry context had changed, thus making logistics of handling more than two groups difficult. The researcher also surmised that the congregations would be microcosms of the state of dissidence in the entire conference.

The intervention programs in Chitukuko and Brentwood Churches were implemented and observed over a period of six months. The exercise was made feasible by selecting representative groups to constitute pilot projects. Four modules

were created as intervention measures to be implemented among the group members. These were in the areas of nurture through relevant teachings, the enhancement of the Christian experience through weekly programs, asking members to own the faith that had been taught to them, and action steps for dealing with known dissident church members. The above measures got appreciated positively by church members. It is apparent that church members need these approaches in ministry

The discovery of dissident elements in the churches and the profiling of its nature led also to the discovery of underlying causes. Extremism and fanaticism among members, as well as the influence of disgruntled independent ministries, seem to be the basic causative factors of dissidence. Redemptive intervention measures need to be implemented without negating the stern discipline of dropping from membership those who persistently rebel against established order and authority. This measure in turn should be coupled with endeavors to reclaim the erring ones.

All in all, the researcher learnt that there are always elements of dissidence even among loyal church members. A certain percentage would usually have a predisposition toward dissentious thoughts and practices. This phenomenon varies in degree from non-committal and mild to very negative and active dissidence. As such, the members need proactive pastoral and administrative attention appropriate to the point at which they may be on the spectrum on various opinions toward church order and authority.

Recommendations

In view of the above discoveries through the research, it is hereby recommended that further actions be taken as follows:

1. The conference needs to establish a directorate at the office to be handling issues of dissidence proactively.
2. The Dialogue and Reconciliation Committees could be made a permanent feature in the structure of a local church.
3. Pastors and church elders to be oriented in the modalities of redemptive conflict resolution.
4. A research needs to be conducted into the nature and mode of operation of supportive independent ministries with a view to help turn around the dissident independent ministries in the conference.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Kindly express your opinion concerning church authority, the authority of pastors and elders, church doctrines and the nature of organizational order in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in general, and your local church in particular. Do not write your name on the questionnaire. Once you finish indicating your opinion, you are requested to hand back the questionnaire to the coordinator for the exercise.

We are interested in your responses to the above issue by way of you placing indicators below on the characters that represent your opinion. The result of this survey will be used to create a better understanding of the subject in relation to the nature of the church and the related functions of pastors, elders and church members in general.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ❖ Please respond to each statement on the scale provided below by circling a letter where:
 - a = Strongly disagree
 - b = Disagree
 - c = Not sure (Neutral)
 - d = Agree
 - e = Strongly agree

#	ISSUE	a	b	c	d	e
1	The Church Manual obscures the Bible; therefore it should be done away with. Do you agree?					
2	The principles behind the formulation of the Church Manual are Bible-based; therefore it should be maintained. Do you agree?					
3	The Church Manual expresses the church's authority to set up standards of membership and rules or regulations for church members. Do you agree?					

4	The S.D.A Church upholds the Church Manual above the Bible. Do you agree?	a	b	c	d	e
5	The Church Manual is an expression of the General Conference in session – the highest authoritative voice, under God, in the church. Do you agree? (P.T.O)	a	b	c	d	e
6	The S.D.A Church is the Remnant of Bible prophecy. Do you agree?	a	b	c	d	e
7	The true Remnant church cannot be defective or make mistakes. Do you agree?	a	b	c	d	e
8	The church’s organization and policies resemble those of the churches of Babylon. Do you agree?	a	b	c	d	e
9	Do you agree that church organization is important	b		c	d	e
10	The outline of the S.D.A Church organizational structure consists of: i) Local Church; ii) Local Conference; iii) Union of Churches; iv) Union Conference/mission; v) General Conference and Divisions. Do you agree with it?	a	b	c	d	e
11	God, the only source of authority for the church, delegated His authority to the early church through the prophets, apostles and bishops/elders. Do you agree?	a	b	c	d	e
12	God, the only source of authority for the church, has delegated His authority to the S.D.A Church in its mission through its representative executive committees and church officers. Do you agree?	a	b	c	d	e
13	In the S.D.A Church today, the General Conference session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between sessions, is the highest ecclesiastical authority in the administration of the church. Do you agree with this set-up?	a	b	c	d	e
14	The church does not need full-time paid-up pastors. Do you agree?	a	b	c	d	e

- 15 The church/district pastor assumes too much power and control in the local church and/or district. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 16 Local church elders suppress the religious freedoms and rights of church members. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 17 Church members should be free to organize groups and ministries independent of local church or conference authority and regulation. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 18 The interpretation of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine is not the prerogative the General Conference alone. Even individual members or independent groups can formulate and teach new doctrines. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 19 The real Remnant consists of reformers within the S.D.A Church. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 20 The fundamental beliefs of the S.D.A Church are erroneous. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 21 The creation of departments, from the local church to the General Conference is unbiblical. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 22 A local church is only organized by an ordained pastor on the recommendation of the local Conference executive committee. Do you agree with this arrangement? a b c d e
- 23 A local church may be dissolved or expelled from the sisterhood of churches as a disciplinary measure for apostasy, refusal to operate in harmony with the church manual or rebellion against the Conference. Do you agree with this policy? a b c d e
- 24 Membership in the S.D.A Church is possible only in churches included in the sisterhood of churches recognized by the local conference. Do you agree? a b c d e

- 25 Baptismal candidates and those being received in the fellowship by profession of faith shall affirm their acceptance of the fundamental beliefs in the presence of the local congregation or other properly appointed body. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 26 No individual member or group should start a movement or form an organization or seek to encourage a following for the attainment of any objective or for the teaching of any doctrine or message not in harmony with the teachings and policy of the church. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 27 Pastors and church officers need respect not only because of their character, but also because of their work. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 28 Local church elders should serve as assistants to the church/district pastor. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 29 Those undermining the unity of the church and refusing to cooperate with it and fellow members should not hold church positions. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 30 The business meeting should be the governing body of the local church. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 31 The chief concerns of the local church board are the spiritual nurture of the church and the work of planning and fostering evangelism. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 32 The local conference president, in some cases, may serve as the chairperson of the business meeting. Do you agree with this arrangement? a b c d e
- 33 The conference-appointed pastor, or an elder arranged by the pastor, should serve as the chairperson of the business meeting. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 34 The chairperson of the church board should be the conference-appointed pastor, or an elder arranged by the pastor. Do you agree? a b c d e

- 35 Tithes and offerings should be returned, through the local church, to the local conference, except for the designated local funds. In this case the local conference is the “store house.” Do you agree with this arrangement? a b c d e
- 36 Tithe is held sacred only for the work of ministry, for Bible teachers (Employees) and for the support of conference administration in the care of the churches and of field outreach endeavors. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 37 In addition to the tithe, Scripture emphasizes our obligation to bring offerings to the Lord. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 38 Those who are not faithful in returning tithes and offerings are not fit to hold church office. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 39 A prayer should be offered only in a kneeling posture. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 40 The King James Version of the Bible is the only genuine translation of Scripture. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 41 The S.D.A Church has been compromised by other Christian denominations. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 42 Cooking should never be done on Sabbath. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 43 Baths should never be done on Sabbath. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 44 Vegetarianism is one of the practices necessary for the experience of sanctification leading to translation at the Second Coming of Jesus. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 45 True Adventists should start leaving towns and settle in the rural areas. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 46 Having unnatural hair is a sign of being unconverted. Do you agree? a b c d e

- 47 Adventists should be using only natural remedies and herbs to cure diseases and avoid conventional medicines to avoid side effects. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 48 Believers should never eat between meals. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 49 We should never have dealing with the religious leaders of other organizations. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 50 Uncommitted church members should be dropped from membership records. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 51 An individual does not need to attend church services in order to be a good Christian. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 52 The S.D.A Church has become Babylon. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 53 You do not need a Sabbath School Bible Study Guide. The Bible and writings of Ellen White are enough. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 54 Education is not necessary. Christ is about to come. The Holy Spirit will give us knowledge. Do you agree? (P.T.O) a b c d e
- 55 We need to gain the victory over sin in order to qualify to be genuine church members. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 56 True believers should reach a state of sinlessness. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 57 We need to complement the grace of God with earnest efforts in order to be justified in the sight of God. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 58 There is a remnant within a remnant in the S.D.A Church. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 59 God's faithful people are only in the S.D.A Church. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 60 We need to keep the law in order to be righteous. Do you agree? a b c d e

- 61 Christian maturity involves the transformation of our spiritual and physical being so that we can experience holiness in both the spirit and the flesh. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 62 Rejoicing during worship is inappropriate? Do you agree? a b c d e
- 63 If Jesus came today, do you have the assurance, by God's grace, that you will receive Him in peace? Do you agree? a b c d e
- 64 Salvation is by grace alone, through faith. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 65 Love is the essence of the law of God. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 66 The Law is not an end in itself. The Law leads us to Christ. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 67 God's grace is manifested to an individual even before he or she has stopped being a sinner. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 68 A person's action in response to God's plan of redemption is what brings salvation. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 69 We attain sanctification permanently from the point we become converted. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 70 A genuine Adventist should participate in the church activities of his or her local church and conference under the respective church leaders. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 71 Attendance at church services, Sabbath School and mid-week prayer meetings is expected from all committed church members. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 72 One of the signs of a person's zeal for Christ and the S.D.A Church is his or her participation in soul-winning and the personal support of the outreach programs of the church. Do you agree? a b c d e

- 73 Organizing clandestine meetings parallel to, or independent of, the official church and its programs at the local church or higher organizations is a sign of a spirit of dissidence. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 74 Do you agree that the S.D.A church has become Babylon and that the sanctified believers should leave the church and form new associations of fellowship? a b c d e
- 75 Do you agree that tithes and offerings should be given to independent groups and individuals who have left the S.D.A Church but say that they are preaching the Three Angels' Message? a b c d e
- 76 Because of the presence of many sinners in the church, there is need to seek and join a fellowship of sincere believers in the Three Angels' Message. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 77 Independent ministries do have a divine mandate to cleanse and reform the S.D.A Church. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 78 Lay persons who have received the Holy Spirit can lead churches independent of the local conference or union. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 79 Books printed and published from the official S.D.A publishing houses are not reliable. Independent ministries publish genuine books. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 80 Church members should be having their Sabbath worship services, Sabbath School, Bible Studies as well as mid-week prayer meetings in selected believers' homes. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 81 Do you agree that Ellen G. White said that the S.D.A church would become Babylon? a b c d e
- 82 Do you agree that the writings of Ellen G. White support the objectives of independent ministries? a b c d e

- 83 Since Ellen G. White was a prophetess, her writings constitute another Bible. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 84 If you possess the writings of Ellen White you do not need the Bible. Do you agree? a b c d e
- 85 The writings of Ellen White should never be subjected to interpretations; they should always be taken as they read. Do you agree? a b c d e

APPENDIX B

Tell-tale Signs that Show the Inclination toward Disloyalty and Acrimony

1. Criticism. *Does this independent group criticize leadership?* Ellen White is quoted as she pointed out that “it is hardly possible for men to offer a greater insult to God, than to despise and reject the instrumentalities that He has appointed to lead them.”¹

2. Extremism. *Does an independent group show signs of extremism, imbalance, fanaticism, and majoring in minors?* This includes claims such as: “the King James version of the Bible is the only authentic one.”² Others are conspiracy theories that allege that the Adventist ministry has been compromised by external religious elements. They may also claim that prayer should always be offered whilst in the kneeling posture.

3. Legalism. *Do members of this group show a pharisaical, legalistic, myopic focus on self, self-works, performance and behavior?* This is an allusion to a legalistic self-righteousness that looks down on others with a holier-than-thou attitude.

4. A Flawed Gospel. *Do they have teachings that show a marked absence of the gospel assurance and righteousness by faith?* In this regard, Dunham charges that

¹White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:355.

²Ibid.

“in their desire to put distance between themselves and other denominations some earnest groups ignore such topics.”³

5. Rejection of Church Authority. *Do they reject the church’s spiritual authority?* Ellen White is quoted:

“God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God ... [Furthermore, Dunham laments:] “again and again as I have dealt with such dysfunctional groups I have seen this very mentality – anti-leadership, anti-conference, anti-church governance, anti-authority, and anti-church manual.”⁴”

6. Separation from Church Activities. *Do members of an independent ministry separate themselves from church services, church functions, or church outreach?* In this case the separatists consider the rest of the members as “tares.” Accordingly, they invite their own speakers for their clandestine meetings. Furthermore, they start their own publications, source their own literature, establish their own bank accounts and build their own facilities and headquarters.⁵

6. Calls to Come Out of the Church. *Do they sound an increasingly clear call to separate from the fellowship and membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?* Here it is noted that Ellen White had said that “the message to pronounce the Seventh-day Adventist Church ‘Babylon’ and [to] call the people of God out of her, does not come from any heavenly messenger, or any human agent inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.”⁶ Dunham also uses the rationale of the need for the chaff to be taken out, rather than the wheat, in relation to the proverbial end-time harvest.

³White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:355

⁴Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940.), 164.

⁵Ibid.,10

⁶White, *Selected Messages*, 3:18.

Subsequently, he answers the usually misapplied question: “‘didn’t the Protestant reformers eventually leave the Catholic church?’ someone must ask, ‘and once they were out, didn’t they call others of that ‘fallen’ church?’”⁷ He argues that “the issue is different according to our interpretation of prophecy. The Roman Catholic Church has been labeled by Scripture itself as ‘Babylon,’ the Anti-Christ power. But the Adventist Church is a chosen movement...prophetically called ‘remnant’...This movement will last until the Lord comes.”⁸

8. Dividing the Church. *Do they divide, destroy and tear down the church?* In this case, the dissidents attempt to destroy the church that they left.

9. Hard Sincerity. *Do they cherish an attitude of hard, humorless sincerity?* This amounts to being “sincerely wrong.” A quotation from Ellen White is related to this aspect. She said: “I may be perfectly sincere in following a wrong, but that will not make it the right road, or bring me to the place I wish to reach.”⁹

10. Causing Public Reproach. *Do their words and actions bring public reproach on the church?* David Koresh and the Branch Davidians are referred to as a case in point. This includes such activities as the outlandish, extreme, fanatical attack advertisements and anti-Catholic billboards.

11. Neglect of Public Witnessing. *Do they neglect public witnessing?* This attitude is characteristic of off-shoot dissident groups. They lose all desire to share with the general public the great truths that brought the Adventist Church into being. Instead, they turn inward and target vulnerable Adventists.

⁷Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism*, 112.

⁸Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism*, 112. Cf. Matthew 13:30.

⁹White, *Selected Messages*, 2:56.

12. Withdraw of Financial Support. *Do they withdraw financial support from the church—or even accept or solicit tithes for their own cause?* They are said to re-define the term “store house.” Dunham asserts: “if any such groups refuses to accept its financial records for public scrutiny and will not issue an audited financial report, that’s a certain sign it is a renegade movement.”¹⁰

13. Misuse of Ellen White’s Writings. *Do they misuse the Bible and writings of Ellen White?* Ellen White herself is quoted as having protested against such abuse. She said: “You have also taken from their connection portions of the testimonies which the Lord has given for the benefit of His people, and have misapplied them to the support of your erroneous theories—borrowing or stealing the light of heaven to that which the testimonies have no harmony with, and have never condemned. Thus you place both Scripture and testimony in the framework of error. All who are in error do as you have done.”¹¹

14. Claim of Sinless Perfection. *Do they speak loudly of attaining sinless perfection so that they may live through the time of trouble without a mediator?* It is pointed out that many dissidents are actually legalists who do not have an assurance of salvation. They do not understand or want to accept the gift of righteousness by faith.

15. Ordaining Own Ministry. *Do they baptize their own members, ordain their own ministers or establish separate systems of financial accountability and authority?*

¹⁰Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism*, 114.

¹¹White, *Selected Messages*, 2:82, 83. NB: Dissident groups ignore such statements from Ellen White as this: “The Lord has a people and He is leading them. Though there are certainly things existing in the church which are not right, Jesus has not placed you at the helm to guide the church (*Selected Messages*, 2:83).

In this regard, and being consistent with the dissidents' own stance, such individuals should not be considered to be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

16. Placing Spirit of Prophecy above Bible. *Finally, do they use the writings of the Spirit of prophecy in a manner that places them above the Bible?* This is unbiblical and runs counter to the position that Ellen White herself had taken.

APPENDIX C

Preventive Grounding in Relevant Teachings

The following clusters of doctrines and lessons were lined up:

1. The teaching of fundamental beliefs.
2. Lessons on the Adventist Church history.
3. How to identify dissident groups and their followers.
4. How to avoid deceptions.
5. How to deal with “new light”.

Enhancing of the Christian Experience

1. Fidelity to the teachings of the Bible.
2. Fellowship
3. Recreation.
4. Prayer meetings at church and in cell groups.
5. Home visitations.

Questions meant to enlist a sense of ownership of the Adventist faith

- a. Am I in a saving relationship with Jesus?
- b. Why am I a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
- c. Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church really the Bible Remnant?
- d. Is God leading this movement?

APPENDIX D

Minutes from Chitukuko Church



CHITUKUKO SDA CHURCH

LUSAKA EAST MISSION DISTRICT

LUSAKA CONFERENCE

P.O. BOX UNZA33, LUSAKA

All correspondence should be addressed to the Church Clerk

Business meeting held on 30th July, 2016.

The meeting was called to order at 12:35 hrs with a prayer from Elder Mtomba.

AGENDA

Analysis of responses from Chitukuko SDA Church on Pastor Silas Chabala's questionnaire.

After discovery that the Church's most negative reaction to Pastor Silas Chabala's questionnaire had to do with the church's teachings against extremism and fanaticism, as thirty eight percent returned a negative to a very negative opinion to what the church stands for. The Church Leadership took steps to address this matter since the church manual should be followed and adhered to by every church member.

In view of the above the duly called church business meeting held on 30/07/2016 resolved to adopt the proactive measures as recommended by Pastor Silas Chabala in his analysis of responses from Chitukuko Church contained in his paper. The dialogue and reconciliation Committee of seven experienced church members was constituted to handle cases of dissentious or rebellious disputes.

Its composition is as follows:

1. ELDER .C. SIBALWA - CHAIRMAN
2. BR. JIMMY SAKALA - SECRETARY



CHITUKUKO SDA CHURCH

LUSAKA EAST MISSION DISTRICT

LUSAKA CONFERENCE

P.O. BOX UNZA33, LUSAKA

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3. SR. RUTH MUSONDA
4. SR. CHAMUKA MUTAKWA.
5. ELDER DAVIES MWALULA.
6. ELDER EDWARD HAAWITAWON
7. DEACON VICENT MUKATA

The Committee was to follow the action steps in dealing with disaffected members outlined in Pastor Silas Chabalau's paper. The process was to begin by teaching and educating members who participated in the questionnaire on Seventh Day Church's Authority and order since about 38 percent of them showed a negative response towards this issue.

The list of all the members who attended the business meeting is attached.

The Chairperson thanked the members present and declared the meeting closed at 13:20hrs with a prayer from Deacon Clement Njumbi.


SECRETARY

Nahonge p.v.

db.
0977430021

ADIM ELDER

MUTAKWA Shepherd


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Note: Appropriate permissions to publish this content were obtained by the researcher.

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