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ABSTRACT

TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONSCIOUS SPIRIT
DEPENDENCE IN THE DECISION-MAKING
PROCESSES OF THE CHURCH

by

Stephen Gene Chinn

Chairman: George Rice

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Report

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONSCIOUS SPIRIT
DEPENDENCE IN THE DECISION-MAKING
PROCESSES OF THE CHURCH

Name of researcher: Stephen Gene Chinn

Name and degree of faculty advisor: George Rice, Ph.D.

Date completed: August, 1984

The church is a divinely called, divinely directed, and divinely destined institution. Yet the church is composed of human beings who are accustomed to human institutions. These humans tend to lead the church as any other institution, unless reminded frequently of the divine aspects of the church. To emphasize these divine aspects involves focusing attention on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit links Christ, the Head, with the church body. Certain factors facilitate the Spirit's ability to

communicate the desires of the Head to the church body. Foremost among these is a conscious dependence of human decision makers upon the Spirit for direction and motive.

This project undertakes the development of that conscious dependence in the lives of the members of a nominating committee, two church boards, and a conference executive committee. The primary method involved an initial survey to determine attitudes and understandings regarding the nature of the church and of the Spirit's work with it. This was followed by study, discussion, and experimentation with various suggestions for greater Spirit dependence. The study concluded with an evaluation of the project by the participants.

The rationale for the project involves a study of the nature of the church and of the Spirit's relationship to the church. This study is done from three perspectives: that of Biblical writers, of Ellen White, and of theological and/or ecclesiastical writers.

The experience of the writer, along with that of the church decision makers involved in this project, seems to confirm the thesis of this project:

Leading a church into a study of current organizational and decision-making techniques, along with a study of the Holy Spirit's leadership of the church in the past, can help in creating a climate of Spirit dependence in the decision-making bodies of that church.

¹Thesis as given in Project Proposal.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONSCIOUS SPIRIT
DEPENDENCE IN THE DECISION-MAKING
PROCESSES OF THE CHURCH

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Stephen Gene Chinr

July 1984

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Stephen Chinn

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi

PART I. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

Chapter

I. THE CHURCH AS DIVINE-HUMAN INSTITUTION

Introduction.....	1
The Church as Divine-Human Institution from a Biblical Perspective.....	3
Implications from "Ekklesia".....	3
Divine Facets of the Church.....	7
The church as the body of Christ.....	9
Human Facets of the Church.....	15
The Church as Divine-Human Institution from the Perspective of Ellen White.....	19
Divine Facets of the Church.....	20
Human Facets of the Church.....	24
The Church as Divine-Human Institution from the Perspective of Selected Theologians...	27
Divine Facets of the Church.....	27
The church as the body of Christ.....	29
Human Facets of the Church.....	32
Divine-Human Synergisms.....	42
Summary on the Nature of the Church.....	44

II. THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH..... 50

Overview.....	50
The Spirit and the Church from a Biblical Perspective.....	51
The Spirit-Church Relationship.....	51
The Spirit and Decision Making.....	57
Goals of the Spirit in church decision making.....	63
Methods of the Spirit in church decision making.....	65
The Spirit and the Church from the Perspective of Ellen White.....	70
Personal preparation.....	70
Climate of a Spirit-led meeting.....	76

Conducting a Spirit-led meeting.....	79
The decision-making process.....	83
The Spirit and the Church from the Perspective of Selected Churchmen.....	88
The Spirit and Church Decision Making.....	95
Decision-making dynamics.....	100
Attitudes of decision makers.....	104
Conduct of meetings.....	106
PART II. DEVELOPING SPIRIT DEPENDENCE	
III. A PROPOSED PROJECT FOR DEVELOPING CONSCIOUS SPIRIT DEPENDENCE.....	112
In the Church Nominating Committee.....	112
Past Approaches.....	112
New Insights.....	113
Present Approach.....	114
In the Church Board.....	116
Description of Approach.....	116
Church Board Survey.....	118
In the Conference Executive Committee.....	124
Summary.....	130
IV. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT.....	132
Effect on Church Nominating Committee.....	132
Problems with Past Approach.....	132
Evaluation of Present Approach.....	133
Effect on Church Boards.....	135
Initial Responses.....	135
Developments during the Project.....	136
Project Evaluation by the Church Boards...	137
Effect on the Conference Executive Committee.....	141
Responses to the Project.....	141
Project Evaluation by the Conference Committee.....	142
Effect on the Pastor.....	146
V. IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY WITHIN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.....	150
The Sense of the Divine.....	150
The Study of the Early Church.....	151
The Role of Prayer.....	151
The Choice of Decision Makers.....	152
The Decision-Planning Process.....	153
Suggested Areas for Further Study.....	155

APPENDIX.....	157
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	161
VITA.....	169

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Summarization of Responses by Board Members to Question 2.....	120
2.	Evaluation of Importance of Factors in Spirit-led Decisions--as Perceived by Board Members.....	123
3.	Summarization of Responses by Conference Committee Members to Question 2.....	126
4.	Evaluation of Importance of Factors in Spirit-led Decisions--as Perceived by Conference Committee Members.....	129

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Finally, the Person whose support most needs to be acknowledged is the One about whom this paper is written-- the Paraclete, the One called along side to help.

PART I

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE
OF THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

CHAPTER I

THE CHURCH AS DIVINE-HUMAN INSTITUTION

Introduction

The early church did not hesitate to identify its decisions as being those of the Holy Spirit, and vice versa, e.g., "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church . . . it seemed good to us, having become of one mind . . . for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:22,25,28).¹ Even in as controversial a matter as the circumcising of Gentiles, Luke claims that the decision reached at the Jerusalem Council seemed good to all and to the Holy Spirit.

One of the many amazing characteristics of the early Christian community was their sense of the divine presence in their midst. They appear to have possessed a continual awareness, not only of their divine derivation and their divine destiny, but of an ongoing divine direction in their individual and corporate Christian life.

What has happened to that sense of God's presence in the church? Does it still exist today? The same divine derivation does exist today. Current Christians

¹ All Scriptural quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

claim the same roots as did those New Testament believers. Both also claim the same divine destiny. But to claim these is not necessarily to experience them. And lack of the experiential shows itself in the frequent lack of that sense of divine direction in the individual and corporate lives of today's Christians.

A concern over the experience of the church today brings us to the purpose of the first chapter of this paper. Since Christians presently are separated from that first generation of post-Pentecostal Christians by two millenia, it is hard for them to identify readily with the experience of those who participated in the Spirit's initial, dramatic appearance. Yet it is that same Spirit who wants to fill and direct Christians to an even greater extent today. Since this experiential "generation gap" exists, it should prove helpful to our generation to identify, as fully as possible, the divine reasons for our existence as a Christian church.

It is anticipated that by this sensing of our divine roots, we should sense also a concomitant calling to a divine destiny, as did the early Christians. Then in order to accomplish that divine destiny, we should further sense a need of divine direction in the individual and corporate decisions we make as Christian believers. If we sense our destiny, hopefully we can understand also the absolute necessity of dependence on Him who calls us

to that destiny. In that way, might we too become so "Spirit-ually" bold as to say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us?"

This chapter explores the divine derivation of the Christian Church by viewing the church as divine and human, as organism and organization. These facets of the church are to be examined from several different perspectives, and it is from the standpoint of these various perspectives that the material is divided.

The Church as Divine-Human Institution
From a Biblical Perspective

Implications from "Ekklesia"

The common usage of the NT term for the church, ekklesia, provides little help in seeking a divine derivation for the Christian Church. The reason is that ekklesia was a common, secular word in the Greek-speaking world. It was the term used for a called assembly.

Throughout the Greek world and right down to New Testament times (cf. Acts 19:39), ekklesia was the designation of the regular assembly of the whole body of citizens in a free city-state, 'called out' (Gr. ek, 'out,' and kalein, 'to call') by the herald, for the discussion and decision of public business.¹

It is suggested by some that ekklesia was chosen to represent the church because its root meaning refers

¹J.C. Lambert, "Church," The Internaional Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1939 ed., 1:651.

to those who are "called out." Thus, they argue, Christians have been "called out" of darkness into the light of God's kingdom. It would be nice if ekklesia automatically pointed to the divine "calling out" of the Christian Church whenever the term was used in NT times. The use of the term would then indicate a belief in their divine derivation. However, the more likely response of first-century citizens to the word would be closer to that described by Hans Kung:

When Greek citizens read inscriptions about the ekklesia, the meaning was immediately clear: the citizens are the ek-kletoi, those called out and summoned together by the herald; the ek-klesia is therefore 'those who have been called out,' the gathering of 'those who have been summoned together': a meeting of the people. For all its religious undertones, ekklesia refers to a political meeting, not to a cultic or sacred meeting. And ekklesia only refers to the actual congregation, each particular 'session'; there is no ekklesia in the intervals between them. The difference between this ekklesia and ekklesia meaning Church is evident. It is therefore impossible to relate New Testament usage of the word directly to its secular Greek usage.

If ekklesia, as it was commonly used in the first-century, Greek-speaking world, did not convey any particular divine significance, then did it have any special significance at all? That apparently depended on who was using it. As Kung goes on to explain, those using the Septuagint would find that ekklesia is used about a hundred times as a translation of the Hebrew word kahal. Kahal is also a basically secular term referring to a

¹ The Church (London: Burns and Oates, 1967), p. 82.

meeting of people called together. However, when kahal is qualified by the phrase "of the Lord," it takes on special meaning, for then it suggests not just any gathering, but God calling out His people into the "true eschatological community of God."¹ Thus, ekklesia would have divine significance to any first-century reader of the Septuagint who was acquainted with the "kahal of the Lord." Twice the NT writers use ekklesia in this very OT setting (cf. Acts 7:38; Heb 2:12).

J.C. Lambert suggests some interesting possible implications resulting from the combination of these two terms for "church."

The word thus came into Christian history with associations alike for the Greek and the Jew. To the Greek it would be a self-governing democratic society; to the Jew a theocratic society whose members were the subjects of the Heavenly King. The pre-Christian history of the word had a direct bearing upon its Christian meaning, for the ekklesia of the New Testament is a 'theocratic democracy.'²

It has already been noted that NT writers use ekklesia to refer to the children of Israel in the OT. Another use of the term includes a general assembly of people. The dominant usage, however, is in reference to a body of Christians. Of the 115 times ekklesia appears in the NT, 110 refer to the Christian community.³

¹Ibid., pp. 82-83.

²Ibid., p. 651.

³Gene Getz, The Measure of a Church (Glendale: G/L Publications, 1975), p. 12.

In these allusions to the young church, however, there are a number of different shades of meaning, e.g., (1) a church meeting (cf. 1 Cor 11:18; 14:18,19,28,35); (2) the totality of Christians living in one place (cf. 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 4:15); (3) house churches (cf. Rom 16:5); and (4) the church universal (cf. 1 Cor 6:4; 12:29; Eph 1:22; 3:10,21).¹ In the first three uses of ekklesia, a local body of believers is envisioned. In contrast to this is the church universal composed of the total body of Christians, whatever their locale.

Schmidt brings out another aspect of the ekklesia in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. He states: "every true early Christian congregation was just as good a representation of the whole body as the primitive congregation at Jerusalem."² Kung expands on this feature of the early church by explaining that each local congregation had the same divine connection. Each was the church of God.

The Church is not a limited company or organization of individual communities; the ekklesia is not made by adding together the local Churches nor can it be broken down into them. Rather, the ekklesia of God exists in each place. There is not a Corinthian ekklesia . . . but: 'the ekklesia of God which is at

¹M.J. Joseph, "Church: Its Dimensions in the Bible," Indian Journal of Theology 28 (July-Dec., 1979): 150.

²K.L. Schmidt, "Ecclesia," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 535.

Corinth' (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1). Each ekklesia, each congregation . . . however small, however poor, however insignificant, is a full and perfect¹ manifestation of the ekklesia, . . . the Church of God.

Having seen that the term ekklesia has both common, human aspects to it, as well as definite, divine implications within the context of the Christian community, we next examine some of the Biblical indices of the divine facets of the ekklesia.

Divine Facets of the Church

The Christian Church can claim to have divine facets for at least two reasons. The first is divine ownership. The other is divine origin.

Looking first at divine ownership, we find several examples. (1) The church is called the church of Christ; i.e., Christ's church, the church belonging to and owned by Christ (cf. Rom 16:16). (2) Jesus claims the ekklesia as His. He told Peter, "I will build My church."² (3) Repeatedly the expression "the church of God" is found in the NT (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; Gal 1:13).

Paul explains that Christians belong to God because they belong to "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Again, Paul reminds the Corinthian church, "You are not your own. . . . You have

¹Kung, p. 86.

²Matt 16:18.

been bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19,20).

To say that God owns something, however, does not guarantee that it is divine. God owns the world, yet much of what is in the world is far more diabolical than divine! So what God owns is not necessarily divine, but He can choose to invest it with divine qualities. This is the case with the church.

Paul claims that members of Christ's church are likened to members of His body (Eph 5:30). Christ, the Head, is divine; thus, church members are closely connected to the divine Head. The human church body is also a spiritual body. The church which God owns has divine facets, because it is the body of a divine Christ.

Before looking further into the implications of being part of the body of Christ, we need to examine the second basis on which the church can claim divine aspects. Not only can the church claim to be a spiritual body because of divine ownership; it can also claim a divine origin.

It was stated earlier that the basic first-century understanding of ekklesia was that of a duly called assembly for a community or political cause. The nature of the "calling together" could often be determined by who was doing the calling. So it is with the Christian ekklesia: "The nature of this community is . . . continually qualified by the One who summons or gathers it. . . . The

ecclesia belongs to God because He has called it into being, dwells within it, rules over it, and realizes His purpose through it."¹

This study is focusing primarily on the nature of the church as revealed in NT times, and yet the origin of this divine calling must be traced back to that Divine Caller who called out a man from Ur and later a people from Egypt. As Paul puts it, the church called out in his day was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). The church has divine facets due to a divine origin, a divine calling out by its divine Owner.

The Church as the Body of Christ

The divine origin, ownership, and hence divine control over the church is illustrated by Paul in his frequent analogies comparing the church to a body, with Christ as its head. In Eph 1:22,23 Paul indicates that God "put all things in subjection under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body." While all things in heaven and earth have been put under Christ's subjection, not all recognize Christ as head. The church is that body which openly acknowledges Christ's headship, and because of this acknowledgment, it is Christ's body. Paul further ampli-

¹P.S. Minear, "Church, Idea of," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:608.

fies Christ's headship over the body as part of a discussion of the marital relationship in Eph 5:23-32. In vs. 23 Paul explains that Christ is not only Head of the church body, He is also its Savior. "The fact that Christ as the head commands obedience to the body, His church, is not the whole truth about their relationship. The missing truth is that the Church derives her whole life and vitality from the head."¹ God owns the church body because He created it. He created it by calling out from the body of sin and death² those who would choose life as part of this living body, with Christ as its Savior-Head.

It is often debated whether the head or the heart best represents the source of life. Does life cease when the heart stops beating or when the mind ceases to function? In Paul's body analogy of the church, the Head is the source of life for the church. "As the life that sustains the vine flows to the branches and becomes the source of their life (John 15:1-8), so the believer gathers all his spiritual life and graces from Christ. He can do nothing of himself, and he would perish spiritually--and eventually physically--if separated from his Lord."³

¹C.L. Mitton, Ephesians, New Century Bible series (London: Oliphants, 1976), p. 200.

²Cf. Rom 7:23,24.

³"Eph 5:30", Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, ed. F.D. Nichol (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953-1957), 6:1038.

Paul further explains how this spiritual body is to function in 1 Cor 12. Again, he emphasizes the divine headship of this body. "God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired (vs. 18). Each member is "placed in the body" for a specific purpose. That purpose is to serve "the common good" of the body (vs. 7). Since the church is a spiritual body, there is a definite direction in the functions of its members.

In His wisdom God has appointed to the various parts of the body their different functions. Man has no control over this arrangement; it is entirely ordered by God. In a similar way He appointed different individuals in Corinth to do various kinds of work. . . . The gifts were distributed by God; man had no part in apportioning them. . . . In complaining and objecting to his place . . . in the church, a member may find himself rebelling against God.

The Corinthian body was malfunctioning because various members of that body had temporarily lost sight of the headship of Christ.

The openly acknowledged headship of Christ is vital to a healthy body, but so is the functioning of each body member. "A human body needs all of its organs. . . . The whole body is weakened if any part is lost. . . . The same is true of the church and its various members."² Not only is it important that each member function individually, but it is essential to the functioning of the body

¹ Ibid., p. 773.

² George A. Buttrick, ed., Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 10:160.

corporately that each individual member does his share. A body does not function, at least not well, without the functioning of each individual part.

There is one body. Christ is the head and the church is the body. No brain can work through a body which is split into fragments. Unless there is a coordinated oneness in the body, the designs of the head are frustrated. The oneness of the church is essential for the work of Christ.

Paul points out that as each performs his individual part, a unity of function results for the benefit of the corporate body. Thus, there is unity in diversity. Christ's body can function in a unified manner thanks to the diverse contributions of the various members. These members find their unity in the direction given by Christ, the Head. Christ finds unity of action for His body through the diverse operations of the individual members. William Barclay illustrates this unity in diversity:

Plato had pointed out that we do not say, "My finger has a pain," we say, "I have a pain." There is an I, a personality, which gives unity to the many and varying parts of the body. What the I is to the body, Christ is to the Church. It is in him that all the diverse parts find their unity. Paul goes on to look at this in another way. "You," he says, "are the body of Christ". . . . Christ is no longer in this world in the body; therefore if he wants a task done within the world he has to find a man to do it. . . . Literally, we have to be the body of Christ.²

¹William Barclay, The Letters to the Galatians and the Ephesians (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 141.

²William Barclay, The Letters to the Corinthians (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 113-114.

Since Jesus is now "sitting at the right hand of power" in heaven (Matt 26:64), and thus is not bodily present on earth, His "bodily presence" continues to be made effective, according to Barclay, via the church, His body on earth. F.F. Bruce apparently concurs with Barclay in his understanding of Paul's "body language." "Paul, moreover, thought of believers in Christ as sharing his risen life; they were 'in Christ' as Christ lived in them. He could thus the more readily think of them as members of 'Christ corporate.'" ¹

This whole matter of corporateness--"Christ corporate," even the church corporate--is a difficult concept for the western mind to grasp.

Modern thought has so long accustomed us to think of personality in terms of individualism that it is difficult to recapture the sense of personality when applied to a corporate fact like a people or a family or a church. Contemporary history, however, is re-educating us so that we again take a corporate personality seriously. ²

One of the primary purposes of this study is to explore ways in which the Holy Spirit works with corporate groups (cf. chapter II). Perhaps one of the reasons it has been difficult to understand the Spirit's workings with a church or a group is that we have trouble thinking

¹ F.F. Bruce, First and Second Corinthians, New Century Bible series (London: Oliphants, 1976), p. 120.

² Buttrick, p. 684.

in corporate terms. And yet every minister who has pastored more than one congregation has surely observed that congregations have corporate personalities, even as the individual members have their own personalities.

We have trouble comprehending God's dealings with the church on a corporate basis, yet the NT contains many examples of the early church being thought of as a corporate body. For instance, when Saul was struck to the ground by Christ's glory, thus stopping his work of persecuting the Christian Church, Christ did not ask him, "Why are you persecuting the church?" Instead He asked, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Might this be why Paul later wrote of the church, "You are Christ's body." (1 Cor 12: 27)?¹ Christ here identified Himself with the church.

Gene Getz points out that, "When Paul greeted the believers in Rome, Ephesus, Colosse, and Thessalonica--he thanked God for their faith, that is, their faith as a body! (See Rom 1:8; Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:3)." ²

So, the church is a spiritual body with Christ as its head. God relates to that body both corporately and individually, with the body as a whole and with the individual members. It is in and through that body that

¹Cf. David O. Bannerman, The Scripture Doctrine of the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 435.

²Getz, p. 112.

Christ makes His "bodily presence" felt on earth today.

Human Facets of the Church

If the church is to be compared to Christ's body, then there must be human facets as well, for Christ was the God-man, human as well as divine. To say that the church is human is to say the obvious (the far too obvious most of the time). And yet to admit that the church is human ought not to detract from its effectiveness as Christ's body. After all, it was when Christ became human that He became salvifically effective for us.

The Bible writers see the humanity of the church as part of God's plan, not as a deterrent. The intentionally close relationship between the divine and the human is presented in many of the images of the church. The image just dealt with is one of them, i.e., Christ as the divine Head, and His close relationship to the body of believers. A second Biblical image linking the human and the divine is that of a divine kingdom with human citizens. Thirdly, God is presented as our divine Father. We are His earthly children.¹

We have examined the church as a divinely created and controlled organism. When viewing the church from the human side, however, it becomes necessary to view the church as an organization. The apostle Paul obviously

¹Cf. L.R. Wilson, The New Testament Church (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1970), pp. 28-29.

felt that Christ intended that churches be organized in his day. Was it Christ's original intent that organized churches be set up and continued, or did He have in mind purely a mystical, spiritual kingdom?

In the minds of Christ's contemporaries, He was probably viewed as the enemy of the organized church. He appeared to be constantly disobeying or disparaging the rules of the organized church. Kung points out some other factors which would imply that Christ was not concerned with establishing a church organization, not, at least, prior to the resurrection. Christ's only statement about a total church was made in private (Matt 16:18), not in public, and was directed toward the future, not the present. However, Kung does insist that the things Christ did during His public ministry definitely laid the groundwork for a post-resurrection church.¹

Christ laid the foundation for the church by His statements about the kingdom, the selecting of a group of future leaders, His references to the conduct of those who wanted to carry out the principles of love within a church setting (e.g., Matt 18:15-20), and instituting the Lord's Supper, including instructions for the continuation of the rite.²

¹Kung, pp. 72-75.

²Cf. Alfred E. Birch, "A Pragmatic and Theological Evaluation of Management by Objectives in S.D.A. Conference Administration" (D. Min. dissertation, Andrews University, 1980), p. 160.

Organizational structure came into the infant church almost as an afterthought rather than a premeditated plan. It started as an afterthought when the apostles felt the need to replace Judas. After the need arose, a plan was formulated to meet the need. Next came the needs of the Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1-6). Again, a plan was formulated to meet the need.

"But there was not planned organizing or conscious management in the modern sense."¹ As different needs requiring organizational structure arose, the apostles frequently turned to the form of church structure with which they were the most familiar: the Jewish synagogue.²

As the Christian Church dramatically increased in size during the first century, its organizational complexity also increased, but it never became what one would call "highly structured." A major reason for this is due to its small group orientation. D.A. McGavran and Winfield Arn explain the nature of this:

As archeologists dig back into these early cities, they find no church foundations before A.D. 160. That means for the first 120 years Christians met exclusively in houses, and this was a great advantage to the church. . . . A 'Church' was not a congregation of 500, 2000, or even 200. A church was an assemblage of fifteen or twenty people or, at the most, thirty people. Everybody knew everybody else; they cared for

¹Richard G. Hutcheson, Wheel within the Wheel (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 35.

²For further similarities between the synagogue and the early church, see Bannerman, pp. 160-162.

everybody else. It was a household.¹

Richards gives the implications of this by explaining, "This picture of the first 120 years of the church explains why we have so little about 'organization' in the New Testament. The church gathered and lived together as family."²

The church is definitely human as well as spiritual, and as a human entity it requires certain organizational structures in order to function. Because these structures are necessary does not imply that they are "a necessary evil." God Himself is a God of order. He is not a God of confusion (1 Cor 14:33). His Spirit led in the ordering efforts of that fledging first century community. Yet He kept that organization simple, no bigger than their immediate needs demanded. A look at later church history would intimate that bigger did not mean better in terms of church organization. Perhaps in the simple structure of the NT Church, there can be seen two warnings about organization. First, it is in this area where the humanity of the church is apt to lose sight of the need for divine direction of the church. And secondly, the NT would teach us that while organization is essential, it

¹D.A. McGavran, Jr., and Winfield C. Arn, How to Grow a Church (Glendale: Regal, 1973) pp. 34-35.

²L.C. Richards, A Theology of Church Leadership (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980) p. 283.

remains essential only as long as it does not exceed the demands of the need that called it into existence.

The Church as Divine-Human Institution
from the Perspective of
Ellen White

To define the nature of the church from Ellen White's perspective is similar to defining the nature of the NT Church from the book of Acts. Acts concentrates on what the church does, not what it is. Theological reflections on the nature of the church are found primarily in Paul's letters of counsel to young churches, helping them to sort out who they really are.

Ellen White was so caught up in instructing the church regarding what they had done, what they were doing, and what they should do, that she spent little time writing about the divine/human nature of the church per se. She was caught up in the "Great Advent Movement". Her thinking and her reflections on the church are in terms of movement and activity. And perhaps this is best. Perhaps the church could be described best in terms of its activity rather than its esse (being). On the other hand, any person (or organization) that does not know who he is, is also not apt to know much about his purpose for being.

Ellen White had a concept of the nature of the church, but that concept was tied to the advancement of "The Movement". She saw the church in a functional sense as the vehicle for the spreading of the three angels'

messages of Rev 14:6-12. Thus, her statements regarding the esse of the church are nearly always tied to the church's evangelistic function. The form (essence) of the church was always secondary to her concern for the functioning of the church.

Divine Facets of the Church

In the section above dealing with the Biblical perspective on the divinity of the church, it was stated that one Biblical basis for the divine aspects of the church was God's ownership. Ellen White concurs with this viewpoint in one of her best known statements on the nature of the church:

The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency.

In this reference she indicates that the church belongs to God. It is His appointed agency. But she immediately moves into a definition of the church in terms of its evangelistic function.

Following the example of the Biblical authors, she frequently uses various images to describe the church. In the following she uses the images of a city and a theater to bring forth some divine facets of the church:

¹Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 9.

During ages of spiritual darkness, the church of God has been as a city set on a hill. From age to age, through successive generations, the pure doctrines of heaven have been unfolding within its borders. Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts.

The church here, though admittedly human, also displays divine facets in being the "unfolder" of divine truths, the recipient of divine regard² and the theater of divine grace.

A concept which is not dealt with extensively in the Bible, yet is found several times in Ellen White's writings, is that of the spiritual nature of the earthly church due to its union with the heavenly church.

The church of God below is one with the church of God above. Believers on the earth and the beings in heaven who have never fallen constitute one church. . . . In the inner court of heaven they listen to the testimonies of the witnesses for Christ in the outer court on earth.³

By combining forces of the earthly church with the church in heaven, the divine combination becomes an invincible one. "The church on earth, united with the church in heaven, can accomplish all things."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 12.

²Cf. E.G. White, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 6:42.

³Ibid., 6:366; cf. Acts of the Apostles, p. 11.

⁴White, Testimonies, 7:31.

In concurrence with Paul, Ellen White frequently uses the analogy of the body and its head to depict the relationship between Christ and the members of the church. Though she does not deal to any extent with the implications of this analogy for the divine facets of the church, she does explain from Eph 5 that "Christ is the head of the church and the Saviour of the mystical body."¹

Her usage of the body concept is in conjunction with her exhorting the church as a prophet. Typical is the following bit of advice to one of the more unbending brethren:

All minds are not molded alike, and it is well that it is so, for if they were exactly similar, there would be less harmony and natural adaptability to each other than now. But we are all represented as being members of the body, united in Christ. . . . You have certain deficiencies of character and natural biases that render it profitable for you to be brought in contact with a mind differently organized, in order to properly balance your own.²

The Pauline theme of unity in diversity appears in the preceding quote. This is also a favorite theme of Ellen White, especially when straightening out unbending brethren.

A closely related concept to unity of the body in diversity is that of harmony among the various members of the body. This is an oft-repeated theme in Ellen White,

¹ E.G. White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1956), p. 64.

² White, Testimonies, 4:128.

and she credits Paul for it, commenting that "the apostle aptly illustrated the close and harmonious relationship that should exist among all the members of the church of Christ."¹

White offers no detailed explanation of the corporate nature of the church. However, she frequently refers to the church in a corporate sense. I have already referred to her statements about the church on earth and the church in heaven. This is one example of Ellen White's awareness of the corporate nature of Christ's church. She also uses the analogy of a temple to show that the historical church includes the saints of all time:

The Waldenses, John Wycliffe, Huss and Jerome, Martin Luther . . . and a host of others brought to the foundation material that will endure throughout eternity. . . . Through the ages that have passed since the days of the apostles, the building of God's temple has never ceased.²

In other examples White speaks of the church, not just individuals, as putting on the robe of Christ's righteousness.³ She speaks corporately when describing church members leaving "the pale" of the church's "influence."⁴

She uses Paul to illustrate the balance between

¹White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 317.

²Ibid., p. 598.

³Ibid., p. 601.

⁴White, Testimonies, 4:18.

individual responsibility and corporate church authority:

Notwithstanding the fact that Paul was personally taught by God, he had no strained ideas of individual responsibility. While looking to God for direct guidance, he was ever ready to recognize the authority vested in the body of believers united in church fellowship.

Ellen White recognized and frequently referred to the corporate aspect of the church body, even though she apparently never attempted, at least in her writings, to address the subject specifically.

Human Facets of the Church

While maintaining the divine facets of the church, Ellen White spent the majority of her time dealing with the humanity of the church. This was necessitated by her role as prophetess-counselor to the young Adventist community. She spent countless hours writing letters to those having very human problems in the development and management of a growing denomination.

If any one is ever fully aware of a church's humanity, it is its leaders and its prophets. And Ellen White was both. In one quotation already cited (Acts of the Apostles, p. 9), she readily admits that the church is enfeebled and defective. She also uses the Biblical illustration of the chaff and the wheat (Matt 3:12) to describe the church's humanity:

¹White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 200.

I say the Lord hath not spoken by any messenger who calls the only church in the world that keeps the commandments of God, Babylon. True, there is chaff with the wheat; but first gather the chaff and bind it into bundles to burn it, but gather the wheat into the garner. I know that the Lord loves His church.¹

Here, as in similar quotations depicting the weaknesses of humanity in the church, she admits its humanity, but promptly links the church to its divine Source. This is typical of her statements on this issue. She consistently tries to balance the human with the divine.

To look at the human facets of the church includes dealing with it as an organization. Ellen White became intimately involved in the organizational structuring and re-structuring of the Adventist Church. She and her husband James were the foremost proponents of the first organizational attempts for a religious movement that was very suspicious of any type of official organizational structure.²

Her reasoning for a strong organizational structure, expressed in several areas of her writings, is summed up in the following brief statement: "Everything connected with heaven is in perfect order; subjection and

¹White, Letter 16, 1893, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²For her description of early organizational efforts, see: White, Testimonies to Ministers (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1962), pp. 24-62.

thorough discipline mark the movements of the angelic hosts. Success can only attend order and harmonious action."¹

In terms of structured authority in the church, she advocated that while the individual was to seek God's direct guidance, he was to nevertheless recognize the authority vested in the body of believers, i.e., the will of the corporate church. "It is the voice of God in His united people in church capacity which is to be respected."²

Despite her pleas for finely tuned organizational structures and her strong support of the decisions of the corporate church, she was not blind to the dangers of institutionalism, particularly in terms of ecclesiastical abuse of authority. She wrote numerous counsels to those in positions of authority, warning them of the abuse or selfish use of their authority in the church. Her counsels about organization consistently reflect an organization that is responsive to a genuine need, not an organization for the sake of organization.

¹White, Patriarchs and Prophets (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 376.

²White, Testimonies, 3:451.

The Church as Divine-Human Institution
from the Perspective of
Selected Theologians

As one might expect, various theologians present a spectrum of concepts concerning the church's divine-human aspects. The one end of the spectrum presents a high view of the church with the church appearing as a very sacred, visible institution wielding tremendous authority. The other extreme sees the church primarily as a vehicle of evangelism with the church defined in functional terms as the means to "The End".

The theologians studied would all concur that the church is both human and divine, that it needs to be considered on an individual and corporate basis, that it has elements of organism and organization. The differences arise in terms of what emphasis is placed where.

Divine Facets of the Church

"Is it possible for the church to be Christian?" asks Robert Worley.¹ His answer to his own question suggests that it is not only possible for the church to be Christian, it is even possible for it to have divine aspects. "The essence of the church is not found in its language, but in its being the people among whom God reigns."² It was stated above that the claim of the

¹ Robert Worley, A Gathering of Strangers (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 11-12.

² Ibid.

church to be a spiritual body rests on divine ownership and origin. The Bible is the history book depicting God's reign in which He calls out a people who respond and then claim divine origin and ownership.

The Church does not originate simply in a common will or a common spirit among its members. The existence and the nature of the Church is determined in advance by the will of God, and unlike other human foundations where the founder retires after a time, it remains completely dependent on him. So the Church is not just an 'institution'; it is 'God's institution.'

The divine origination of the church and the necessity of continued divine dependence for its existence is emphasized even more strongly by Karl Barth. He states that while the church is human, it is "primarily a 'divine inauguration, control and support' of human action."² He describes the church as an event, then describes the divine nature of this event: "If the Church takes place it is always by the act or event of God's special grace."³ Indeed, the very life of the church is dependent upon Christ's life. "He does not live because and as it lives. But it lives, and may and can live, only because and as He lives."⁴ It seems that for Barth, the church is divine

¹ Kung, p. 128.

² Colm O'Grady, The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968), p. 286.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 260.

because Christ acts and lives through it. The church's ministry is Christ's ministry.

The church and Christ are involved in a reciprocal relationship.

The Church cannot exist without Christ; Christ cannot be present without his Church. The Messianic people cannot exist without the Messiah; the Messiah cannot be a Messiah without a people. Thus they are mutually connected one¹ with the other, and this reciprocity is essential.

The church can claim divine origin because it was divinely originated by God's call. And the church can continue to claim a relationship with divinity only because it continues to claim God's calling, God's forgiveness, and God's presence.²

The Church as the Body of Christ

Barth's concept of the church having life only as Christ lives through it, and Anders Nygren's reminder of the reciprocal relationship existing between Christ and the church reminds us again of the image of the church as a body with Christ as its head. The body and the head are in a vital reciprocal relationship in which each must exist in order for the two of them to function in a way profitable to both.

¹ Anders Nygren, Christ and His Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 31.

² Cf. Claude Welch, The Reality of the Church (New York: Scribner, 1958), p. 71.

The Church is much more than its organization. There is also the vital energy that keeps it alive. The Church is a living, growing thing, and it is that because the life of Christ is in it. Consequently, when St. Paul speaks of the relation between Christ and believers, he does not suggest that they are parts of a piece of machinery, just cogs in a wheel, but he says they are limbs, the members of a live body.

To say that the body is alive is to imply that it is more than the sum of all its parts. The body is more than the total number of organs and systems within it. One's "aliveness," his personality, his character would be very difficult to break down into constituent parts. So it is with the church. The "Church is more than the sum of the individuals which compose it."²

The church--the community of Christians and fellowship of believers--is more than a collection of individuals Congregations are not mere collections of individuals. They have character, climate, purpose, forms of power, and relationships to the environment which have consequences for all members.³

To look at the church, then, as a corporate body is to see it as more than a collection of individual believers. Welch points out that the Scriptures bear this out by using images that depict a sense of community. "Christian existence is designated as membership in a family, a household, a colony, a flock, a race, and a body. It is membership in Israel . . . in the light of the Old Testament

¹J.W.C. Wand, The Church: Its Nature, Structure, and Form (London: Religious Book Club, 1950), pp. 14-15.

²Kung, p. 128.

³Worley, pp. 93-94.

conception of the solidarity of Israel."¹

This sense of corporate community has largely been overlooked in the theology of the Western world with its emphasis on the individual. According to Robert Worley, this was one of the concerns of theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer challenges the traditional doctrines about the Christian faith which have, he claims, been interpreted individualistically. Theology and the doctrines that summarize theology were ideas traditionally constructed for individual belief, and for the guidance of individual behavior. Individuals believed, and made their own individual responses. Bonhoeffer argues that . . . instead of seeking in them intent and meaning for individuals, their social intent and meaning for groups and institutions should be discovered.²

Worley concludes that the leaders of the church today need to learn to think in community terms, acquainting themselves with the dynamics of group and organizational processes. He points out that we tend to solve every problem by looking for the individual responsible for the problem when it may be an institutional, not an individual problem.³

Another side effect of not paying sufficient attention to the church as community, according to Robert Starkey, is that when the man on the street looks for fellowship, he goes not to the church but to the tavern,

¹Welch, p. 49.

²Worley, p. 91.

³Ibid., pp. 20, 65.

union hall, or lodge. Starkey attributes at least some of this to the individualistic revivalism approach that has been characteristic of American evangelism.¹

To view the church as a body composed of various members implies a corporate, cooperative community. It is this community aspect of the church which, in the eyes of several theologians, has been neglected, and which offers worthwhile potential for study by the church in the future.

Human Facets of the Church

If the church as the body of Christ is honest, it must not only rightly claim that it has Christ for its head, but it must also rightly admit that the body itself is human. Karl Rahner points out that the church likes "to conceal from herself her real concrete reality by hiding it behind" a divine nature, "in other words behind that which she should be."²

What is the substance of this nature from which the church often hides itself? What are the characteristics of the church's human nature? One of those who has made a notable attempt to get at the real church, the visibly human aspects as well as the divine, is Claude Welch in his

¹Cf. "Conflict Management and Decision-Making in the Church" (D. Min. thesis, Drew University, 1979), pp. 26-27.

²Karl Rahner, Ecclesiology (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 218.

book, The Reality of the Church.¹ He notes that one major way that ekklesia is used in the NT is in a very "casual and neutral sense" as it refers to the churches in various cities. Though often ignored, these passages are important, claims Welch, "because they express what is taken for granted throughout the New Testament, that the Church is patently and indisputably . . . a human community responding. This belongs," he adds, "to the essence, the ontology, of the church."²

So, the first characteristic of the human nature of the church is that it is indeed human and thus subject to all the "baggage" that humanity carries with it. The second characteristic might be classified as some of the inevitable "baggage" that accompanies being part of any human community. It is political baggage. James Gustafson, in his look on the church from the standpoint of social theory, reminds us that "the Church shares in common with other communities a natural and political character."³

A closely related characteristic to the political character of the church is what Worley describes as "the

¹ Welch, p. 46.

² Ibid.

³ James M. Gustafson, Treasure in Earthen Vessels (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 113.

sociobiological, historical category." He describes this category as follows:

The church is the location where sociology (persons in groups and organizational arrangements) and biology (instincts, genes, organic drives and needs) meet. The church consists of real persons who exist at a given place and time. We have sometimes acted as though the church were 'ahistorical,' standing outside history reflecting in some pure form the intent and meaning of the good news.

The church is a "natural community." This means that it performs functions similar to other natural communities such as the family, the nation, and the social class. Within these social classes and within the church, social interaction takes place. "Various needs of the human personality are met."²

To acknowledge that the church is part of natural human processes, rather than strictly supernatural processes, might be less than inspiring. However, there are counterbalancing factors. "Because it is a human community, the church can make Christ present to men. Its social adaptiveness is a strength rather than a weakness."³ God chooses to use these human social processes for His glory.

God uses human needs . . . as a medium through which he gathers his people together, and through which his divine ministry becomes a ministry among men. Thus the commonplace, e.g., the American rural Protestant

¹Worley, p. 19.

²Gustafson, pp. 14-19.

³Ibid., p. 111.

church supper, can be a human gathering and occasion through which God can act and speak. The patterns of political life in the churches can be the awesomely human social instruments through which God orders the common life of his people.¹

God graciously elects to work with a human community and if a human community, then also a sinful community. Thus, unfortunately, the sinfulness of the church must be included as a characteristic of the human nature of the church.

The life of the church cannot be understood simply as analogous to the life of Christ; it reflects also the life of Peter, and even of Judas. . . . The being of the church is not something apart from the fellowship of sinners; it is the community of sinful men in which Christ exercises his Lordship. . . . The attempt to abstract the church from the ambiguity of the life of its members, by affirming that the sins of the members does not touch its true and incorruptible being, implies either the effective removal of the church from the scene of human history . . . or it makes nonsense of any talk about personal existence in community.²

Welch goes on to point out that not only do individuals in churches fail, but the church must also admit of corporate failures as well. He cites John the Revelator's reproofs of the seven churches as examples of church failures.³ Kung agrees with Welch that it is unrealistic to try to separate the failings of the members from the basic nature of the church, if one is going to deal with the church as it really is. However, Kung

¹ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

² Welch, p. 126.

³ Ibid., p. 129.

prefers to refer to these evil aspects of the church as being "unnatural" to the real nature of the church. "They represent the illegitimate as opposed to the legitimate side of the Church," he claims.¹

Yet, despite the many similarities of these human facets of the church to the humanity in which it lives, the church is still unique, not only in a spiritual sense but in a human-social sense as well.

Although American church organizations are Christian institutions, they are not . . . simply voluntary associations (in contrast to country clubs and philanthropic organizations); nor are they simply socializing organizations (in contrast United States public school systems); nor are they simply therapeutic organizations (in contrast to mental health institutions); nor are they simply political organizations (in contrast to political parties). When viewed confessionally (from inside the perspective of Christian faith), church organizations are Christian institutions of theological purpose which, however voluntary, religious, educational, philanthropic, therapeutic, or political may be certain aspects and consequences of their social existence, are not be completely understood . . . only in light of organizational theories about non-church social institutions.²

As Hugh F. Halverstadt aptly describes it, the church is a unique human organization. Thus, at this point, let us examine some of the theologians' perspectives on the church, not only in its humanity, but specifically, as a human organization.

¹ Kung, pp. 28-29; cf. pp. 322-323.

² Hugh F. Halverstadt, "The Church as Organization: A Theoretical Argument," (Thesis, Northwestern University, 1973), pp. 3,4.

As discussed earlier, organization of the church in the NT era grew only as fast as the needs demanded it. Even then, that which developed was simple, functional, and addressed definite situational needs. From his standpoint as a management specialist, Richard Hutcheson feels that compared with organization and management as it is understood today, the NT Church could be described as having organization only in a germinal sense.¹ Gradually the complexity of the church's organization grew until it became what some would call the "early Catholic position."²

Interestingly, the history of church organization within many of the modern denominations began similarly. Organization only developed as their needs demanded it. Often times these organizational steps were only taken with great pain. Reference has already been made to the fact that this was the case in early Adventism. Early Methodists and Disciples of Christ experienced the same organizational growing pains.³

Since the organizational growth process was apparently a slow, painful process for many churches of more

¹ Hutcheson, p. 21.

² J.J. Weddeburn, "A New Testament Church Today?" Scottish Journal of Theology, 31 (1978):525-526.

³ Cf. Dow Kirkpatrick, ed., The Doctrine of the Church (New York: Abingdon, 1964), p. 12 and Ronald E. Osborne, "Theological Issues in the Restructure of the Christian Church," Mid-Stream 19 (July, 1980):287-288, describe these developments.

recent times, one can conclude--especially among groups such as the Adventists, Methodists, and Disciples of a century ago--that whoever was leading out in organizational attempts had better have strong Scriptural support for his ideas. The usual model for Christian groups has been the NT Church. The question arises, however, is a two-thousand-year-old model viable for today?

One recent student of church revitalization and church growth suggested that

because there is no attempt in the New Testament to lay down a formal administrative model for the church, the people of God, informed by relational principles gleaned from Scripture and the science of organizational development, are left free to arrange the various structures of administration.

Eoin B. Giller states that the NT does not lay down a "formal administrative model" for church organization. Several theological scholars would support him in this. Alexander Fraser claims that at the end of the first century "in different provinces of the Roman Empire, different systems of church governments" existed. Then he quotes Canon Streeter, "During the first one hundred years of Christianity, the church was an organism alive and growing--changing its organization to meet changing

¹Eoin B. Giller, "Building Up the Body of Christ: A Study in Church Revitalization Leading to Church Growth," (D. Min. project, Andrews University, 1977), p. 18.

needs."¹

Weddeburn brings out the same emphasis on the church changing its organization to meet changing needs:

It is plain that when the early church moved out from its Palestinian birthplace into the wider world of Greco-Roman civilization it underwent a considerable change, not only in terminology and ideas, but in its whole way of life. The New Testament itself contains evidence of the church adapting its order, its structure, its very way of life, to meet the demands of changed circumstances.²

Is, therefore, the NT a viable model for church organization today? Weddeburn cautions that we can push the argument too far that the NT Church is not a final, definitive model, and end up denying "what the New Testament says on such practical matters as church order."³ Kung suggests the following in terms of finding a balance in the use of the early church as an organizational model:

To reflect on the New Testament . . . does not mean that we should try unhistorically to return to the church's origins or try to imitate the New Testament community, as the Jewish Christians of the second century or the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century tried to do. The New Testament Church is not a model which we can follow slavishly without any regard to the lapse of time and our constantly changing situation On the other hand, reflection upon the Church of the New Testament will lead us to conclude that not

¹Canon Streeter in Alexander Fraser, The Guidance of the Apostolic Church by the Holy Spirit (Pittsburgh: Evangelical Fellowship, 1942), p. 83-85.

²Weddeburn, pp. 518, 519.

³Ibid.

all the subsequent developments in the Church can be authorized by its origins;. . . . The New Testament . . . is the essential norm against¹ which the Church of every age has to measure itself.

In thinking of the early church as a possible model, there exist two schools of thought on what should be the primary focus of that model. Some would insist that the apostolic church was an organism; others stress the importance of understanding it as an organization. The strongest current proponent of the church as organism is Lawrence Richards. He sees a vast difference between an organism and an organization:

If we are a body and Jesus is our head, then organizational structures and leadership functions should vary significantly from forms and functions appropriate to any other kind of organization--even those institutions ordained by God for His Old Testament people. . . . In the New Testament the people of God are organically related to Jesus as a body is to its head. Principles from the Old Testament, in which the people of God were associated with one another in a national institution or in tribal institutions,² hold no normative parallels for our understanding!

Bernard Ramm suggests that this matter of organism or organization should not be approached from an "either/or" but from a "both/and" perspective. "From the human visible aspect, the church is . . . an organization," he suggests. But from "the divine side it is the body of Christ" (organism). "From the human side it is governed by officers, but from the divine side it is governed by

¹Kung, pp. 23, 24.

²Richards, p. 17.

the risen Lord."¹

Richards particularly objects to the organizational approach to church management because of the hierarchical structure it produces which gives some members control over others. He feels that the only One who has a right to that kind of control in the church is the Head of the organism, Christ Himself.² In contrast to this one finds statements by such people as Bannerman, a Catholic scholar writing in the 1950s, who stresses that there were officers and definite "rulers" in the early church.³ Also, there are those who would disagree with Richards from a sociological point of view, such as Welch, who writes:

Any attempt to divorce 'community' from 'institution,' except for purposes of analysis, is futile. There is no historical community which does not order its common life in some kind of explicit pattern, through which it seeks to express its ultimate faith and norms and to provide for their maintenance and transmission. With reference to the Christian community, this means . . . church 'order.'⁴

At the other end of the spectrum from Richard's view of the church living as organism would be such ideas as those proposed by Gustafson and Worley. Worley advocates coming to terms with organizational forms of power.

¹ Bernard Ramm, Rapping about the Spirit (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974), p. 54.

² Cf. Richards, pp. 295-296, 298.

³ Cf. Bannerman, pp. 528-529.

⁴ Welch, p. 60.

within the church, then learning to think and act organizationally.¹ Gustafson insists on the importance of politics within the church. He does not believe that "a pure fellowship of persons, or of Spirit," can "long exist without the development of definite political structures." Rather than becoming alarmed over these political structures, he recommends that one should see them as "a sociological necessity and not a sign of the moral degeneration of the holy community."²

Such are the problems of a church, as viewed by the theologians cited, that has divine as well as human aspects. A church that aims for existence as a spiritually dynamic organism inevitably resembles, at least in many respects, its mundane organizational neighbors.

Divine-Human Synergisms

Theologians seem to delight in dealing with concepts that are diametrical and paradoxical. They apparently enjoy seeking to relate the apparently unrelatable and harmonize the inharmonious. And since the church has both human and divine facets, theologians have offered many possibilities for relating the two. So before concluding our discussion of the theologians' perspectives on the nature of the church, perhaps we should give them

¹Worley, p. 66.

²Gustafson, pp. 30-31, 41-42.

opportunity to relate the human to the divine in the setting of the church. These synergisms of the divine and human in the church could be described as viewing the church geographically, sociologically, and summarily.

Geographically, the church's dual nature is described by some theologians as the view from below and the view from above. Charles Van Engen suggests these two views. In the view from below he sees the church from from the standpoint of sociology, anthropology, and missiology, "the visible qualities of the Church as it actually exists." The view from above, of course, is that concerning the divine facets of the church. But even these must be balanced with the view from below. For instance, "we know that the Church is not what she is: she is holy but sinful, one but divided, universal but particular, apostolic but steeped in the thought structures of her own time."¹ Even Gustafson, who advocates looking at the church in terms of social theory, offers a view from above as the counterbalance of each social dynamism which he explores.²

Secondly, the synergistic nature of the church can be explored sociologically. Here are two contrasting, yet unified groups. On the one hand are the people of God; on

¹Charles Van Engen, The Growth of the True Church (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1981), pp. 39, 62.

²Gustafson, pp. 103-105.

the other, the human community; the convocatio and the congregatio.¹

And summarily, despite many other possible synergistic suggestions by various theologians, there is this statement by Robert N. Flew:

What is the Church? It is the sphere of God's salvation in the present, and it is prophetic of His ultimate triumph in the Kingdom of God. It is constituted by the revelation of His grace in Jesus Christ. Its message is the gospel of redemptive love. It is marked by the presence of His Holy Spirit with all of its evidence of divine power. It is the people who have given allegiance to God in response to His gracious call. It is a body witnessing to His rule by their trust and obedience. This Church is set in the midst of a world where God's will is not yet done. The forms of organization exist to maintain its life and proclaim the message to the needs of men down the ages. They are simply earthen vessels which help to protect the heavenly treasure in the midst of its earthly task.²

Summary on the Nature of the Church

To summarize our look at these divine-human facets of the church from the perspectives of the Bible writers, Ellen White, and various scholars, it has been discovered that, (1) from the Biblical perspective ekklesia, the NT term for "church," has no particular etymological roots that necessarily give it theological significance. However, if it is tied in with the phrase "of the Lord," then it harks back to the OT people of God, a concept having a rich ecclesiastical background. Though ekklesia

¹Welch, pp. 64-65.

²Flew, p. 253.

etymologically did not in the first century automatically refer to a called out people, the "ekklesia of the Lord" definitely had been a called-out group, so in this sense the NT ekklesia could claim the same experience.

The divine aspects of the church are (1) its divine origination, (2) its divine calling out, and (3) its divine ownership. The church's divine ownership is pointed out by Christ with the possessive term, "My church" (Matt 16:18). Elsewhere, the frequent description of the ekklesia is the "church of God" or the "church of the Lord." The primary NT symbol for the divine origin and ownership of the church is that of the body, with Christ as its head. This image depicts Christ as the source of the direction and life of the church. The various body members function for the good of the whole body and carry out the designs of the Head. Each member plays a vital part in this, and because each carries out his own diverse function for the common good, there is unity in diversity, and diversity in unity.

This church-body needs to be recognized in its corporate function as well as in the operations of the individual members. It is through this body that Christ makes His "bodily presence" felt in this world today.

The body image encompasses the human as well as the divine. In looking at the humanness of the church body, one is exposed not only to its weaknesses but also

its potential for relating to its neighbors. Dealing with the humanity of the church also involves looking at the church as a very human organization trying to accomplish the divine will. The NT saints progressively developed a simple system of organization as their various situational needs demanded it. Their organizational structure resembled in many respects the Jewish synagogue structure, and it likely varied to some extent based on the needs of the local situation.

Turning to Ellen White's perspective on the nature of the church, one finds that she does not deal extensively with this topic. She is far more involved in the "doing" of the church than the "being" of the church. She sees the church in a functional sense as the facilitator of the Advent Movement.

She definitely sees the church as spiritual on the bases of its divine origin and ownership. She repeatedly points to God's jealous love for His church. The church on earth is spiritual also because it is one with the church in heaven, and that combination can accomplish all things. She too sees the church as a body with Christ at its head. She particularly uses this analogy for harmony and coordination of function among the members. While not dealing separately with the concept of the corporateness of the church body, she frequently refers to the church in a corporate sense and addresses corporate as well as indi-

vidual problems within the church. She stresses the responsibility of members to the corporate divine authority of the church.

Ellen White is keenly aware of the church's humanity and its consequent liabilities. However, when she speaks of the church's enfeebled, defective humanity, she invariably ties that back into the Lord's love for His all-too-human church. In terms of the humanity of the church as it relates to organizational structure, she strongly supports carrying out the work of the church in an organized manner, citing the orderliness of heaven itself as the basis of this belief.

The various theological writers studied share a wide spectrum of views on the nature of the church. However, they all agree that the church has human and divine facets, and that it has both individual and corporate aspects which need consideration.

They see the church as spiritual because it is the community where God reigns. The church lives and exists only because God lives and exists. It only continues to live as He lives through it. The church and the Lord are involved in a reciprocal relationship beneficial to the ends of both. The body is an analogy of this reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship, and the church body needs to be considered in a corporate as well as individual sense to fully appreciate the potential for divine-human reciprocity. In terms of the church's corporateness, the

various scholars indicate that the church is more than the sum of its individual members. It exists as community, as institution, and thus, church leaders need to learn to think on an organizational as well as an individual basis.

This kind of thinking, of course, involves looking at the human side of the church, a side which theologians have often been tempted to hide. Since the church is human, it inevitably participates in the nature of other human social institutions. There are political, sociobiological, historical, social, and even sinful factors which must be taken into account in trying to understand the church's humanity. Not the least of these aspects is the nature of organization itself. While there are some who object to referring to the church as an organization, most of the theological writers feel that organization is an inescapable aspect of being a human social structure, and thus the nature of organization needs to be studied and used to the church's advantage. None of the authors researched, except possibly Richards, feels that the NT Church can be used as a final, definitive model for organization. However, it is the standard to which modern models must conform in terms of underlying principles.

The theologians see the divine and human aspects of the church as existing in a complementary relationship to one another. To see the church from above and from below, to see it as set apart from the world, yet not cut off from the world, to see it as a human community and as

the divinely called people of God is essential to understand the true nature of the church and to accomplish God's will for this world.

This study of the nature of the church has attempted to demonstrate that not only is the church human; it is also divine in its derivation and its destiny. In order to accomplish that divine destiny, it must sense its essential need of divine direction, especially if it is to proceed as did the early church with the confidence that its plans and actions were those of the divine Spirit. But how does that divine Spirit direct the church? This brings us to the subject of chapter II, the Spirit and the church.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

Overview

In the first chapter we dealt with the divine-human nature of the church, i.e., its divine derivation, due to divine origination and ownership. The church exists not only because it has been "called out" but because of what it is "called to" in the future. The church has not only a divine derivation, but also a divine destiny. In order to arrive at that divine destiny, however, there must be divine direction. That divine direction is the focus of this chapter. Specifically, it focuses on the divine Director, the Holy Spirit, who, as the representative of the Godhead, moves the church toward its divine destiny.

As in the first chapter, the work of the Spirit is presented from three perspectives, that of (1) the Biblical writers, (2) Ellen White, and (3) selected theological or ecclesiastical scholars. From the Biblical perspective, the Holy Spirit's relationship to the church in the NT and His influence on church decision-making are examined in a general overview. Then, relevant passages are studied.

Ellen White's perspective on the Spirit and the church is confined to her references relating to church

decision-making meetings. The relationship between the Spirit and the church in this context is described in terms of personal preparations and attitudes among members, the climate of meetings and the way business is conducted. Also included are things that might hinder the Spirit, and how He works in the decision-making process itself.

In the section dealing with the perspectives of theological and ecclesiastical authors, views on both the Holy Spirit's over-all relationship to the church and His specific role in decision making are studied. Opinions on the dynamics of the decision-making process are examined to learn how the Holy Spirit can direct such activities. This section also includes specific suggestions for conducting meetings in such a way that both the church and its divine Director may move in unison.

The Spirit and the Church from a Biblical Perspective

The Spirit-Church Relationship

What was the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the early church? Paul poses the question this way, "What is the relationship of the head to the body?" He says that Christ is the head of the church (Eph 5:23), and then says to the church, "You are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27). Christ explained to His disciples that once He had returned to heaven, He (the Head) would direct His body (the church) via His Spirit.

It is obvious, as one reads the book of Acts, that the disciples understood this.

The real Leader of the early church, according to the book of Acts, is not Peter, or Paul, or James. It is the Holy Spirit.

In all the book of Acts the one and only leader of the church is the Holy Spirit. He is mentioned there seventy times. And His leadership was more than just in an advisory or morale-building capacity. The Holy Spirit took direct and sometimes physical control of the church and its work.

The Holy Spirit was the real leader of the NT Church because He was the representative of Christ, the Head of the church body. Only the Spirit could be trusted as the true Leader of the fragile young church, because only the Spirit could know the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:11), and thus carry out the desires of the Head for the body.

In our previous discussion of Paul's analogy of the head and the body, it was pointed out that Christ, as the Head of the body, is its source of life. This can also be said of the Spirit, for the Spirit is the living link between the body and its Head. The Holy Spirit is also the source of the life of the church in that He extends the call to those who enter the Christian community (John 16: 8-11). Paul also uses the analogy of a temple to illustrate how the Holy Spirit unites the individual members into a living body.

¹Raymond H. Woolsey, The Spirit and His Church (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970), p. 43.

The Spirit . . . is the link between the ascended Christ in heaven and his people on earth. . . . Christ dwells in the believer and in the community. . . . The individual who is united to Christ . . . "becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:17). His physical body is therefore sacred, as a temple of the Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).

Similarly, the community as a whole is a temple in which God's Spirit dwells . . . and the church collectively is a structure into which its various members are built together as a "dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:22).

Thus, the Holy Spirit not only links the individual member to Christ, as the Indweller of individual body temples, but also links the corporate church to Christ as the Indweller of the corporate body temple. In addition to linking members individually and corporately to Christ, He links members to each other, as is evidenced by Paul's reference to "unity of the Spirit" (Eph 4:3).

Perhaps it is because of this function of the Spirit which links members to one another that the gift of the Spirit in the NT is so often associated with entrance into the Christian Church.

Whenever Luke describes a manifestation of the Spirit in the first five chapters of Acts, he always describes it in terms of the community of believers, as if to say that this is the result of the Spirit's presence."²

In conjunction with this function of unity, the Holy Spirit linked the various local communities with each

¹G.W.H. Lampe, "Holy Spirit," Interpreter's Dictionary, 2:636-637.

²Kilian McDonnell, ed., The Holy Spirit and Power (New York; Doubleday, 1975), pp. 40-41. Cf. Richard E. Gaffin, Perspectives on Pentecost (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 21-29.

other, so that all could sense they were part of one church. They were all one body thanks to one Spirit, by whom they were called to one hope in one Lord (cf. Eph 4: 3-6).

The Holy Spirit's relationship, therefore, to the early church was that of a Leader and a Link. The church looked to the Holy Spirit for leadership, since He was the representative of Christ. The Lord had said of the Spirit, "He will not speak on His own initiative" (John 16:13) and "He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you" (John 16:14).

Since the Spirit is Christ's representative, He seeks only the glorification of Christ, not of Himself, as He links Christ to the church on earth. The Spirit is a servant-leader like Christ, and the Spirit trains the members of the body to become such servant-leaders themselves. He inspires them to become the kind of leaders whose greatest joy is the same as His--the joy of linking others to Jesus. Thus, the Spirit's leadership within the church is one in which its members are given various gifts for service or ministry within the body, a body that in turn serves the world. The leaders of the early church were servants of the body, not rulers over it.

The charisms of leadership in the Pauline Churches did not at all events produce a "ruling class", an aristocracy of those endowed with the Spirit who separated themselves from the community and rose above it in order to rule over it. The entire NT carefully avoids using secular terms of office to describe functions in

the community . . . because all of them express a relationship of rulers and ruled. Instead,¹ and by direct contrast the NT speaks of "service".

Having seen that the Spirit's relationship to the church was one of leading it by linking it to Christ, as well as by linking individual members to each other in service, one can see a progression in the NT Church as the result of the Holy Spirit's presence. If two phases were used to divide the progression, they could be described as the launching phase and the leadership phase.

The launching phase could be described as that time when God, through His Spirit, endowed certain men, particularly the apostles, with the outstanding gifts of preaching and teaching in a general ministry that launched the church on its mission. The apostles covered large areas and specialized in starting and fostering churches in new localities. During the first phase, very little mention of elders, bishops, and deacons is made, but considerable reference is made to charismata and pneumatika. As the early church grew, and the consequent need for organization increased, local church leadership becomes more apparent with more frequent mention of church officers.²

Despite this progression into more defined leader-

¹Kung, p. 187.

²Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 179-180, and Giller, p. 27.

ship roles and consequent admonitions by the apostolic writers to respect those in these positions, these roles could be better described as "functions" rather than "offices". The leaders are portrayed as shepherds, not as overlords (1 Pet 5:2-4).

As we look in greater detail at the "working policy" between the church and its Spirit-Leader, we refer to the reciprocal relationship between Christ and the church discussed above. The One facilitating this relationship is the Holy Spirit. However, in addition to this reciprocal relationship between Christ and the church, there is another relationship facilitated by the Spirit--the reciprocal relationship between members of the church body.

As the Link, the Holy Spirit facilitates and coordinates the relationship between the members of the body as well as between the members and Christ, their Head. For example, "Through the gift of the Spirit, God's love is outpoured in the hearts of Christians" (Rom 5:5).¹ But the Spirit sees to it that God's love does not stop once it reaches the Christian's heart. The love endowed by the Spirit "is the source of the love which binds the Christian body together" (Rom 15:30; Col 1:8).² So, the Holy Spirit not only fosters the vertical relationship of love between

¹ Lampe, pp. 637-638.

² Ibid.

God and the Christian, He also fosters love on the horizontal level, so that the whole body benefits from it.

The same type of "working policy" exists for prayer. The only difference is that the process starts at the other end. As the Holy Spirit facilitates love between the members, the members together seek God's help through intercessory prayer. Getz cites the following passages as examples of prayer in a context of interpersonal relationships: Rom 12:1-13; 1 Thess 5:14-18; Jas 5:13-16; 1 Pet 4:7-10. Then he describes his understanding of a NT prayer meeting:

Evidently, NT "prayer meetings" did not usually involve "periods of prayer" or a "time" or an "evening" or a "day" set aside for prayer, though on occasion this was done. Rather, the normal process involved prayer, interwoven into a variety of experiences, as believers met together to be edified. And most significantly, prayer at the vertical level was frequently prompted by needs at the horizontal level. Prayer was oriented around human relationships and needs, which gave it meaning and vitality at the divine level.

Might this suggest that the first thing the early church did when confronted with a problem was to pray? Today, we seem prone to think now, pray later. The NT believers would likely reverse that order.

The Spirit and Decision Making

This brings us to the particular problem we need to address here: How did the Holy Spirit work with the

¹Getz, pp. 148-9.

church in helping to solve problems and make decisions in harmony with God's will? What is the pattern, if there is one, of God revealing His will to His people in Biblical times?

Raymond Woolsey points out that in the OT, God revealed His will through the prophets or through cataclysmic events. In Christ's day God's will and ways were made known by Christ Himself. After Christ's ascension, God's will is revealed by the Holy Spirit.¹ Eduard Schweizer says that Luke emphasizes that the "work of the Spirit is insight into the will of God which is otherwise concealed, the more so when this yields immediate directions for concrete action."²

So, the Holy Spirit revealed God's will to the church, but to whom did He reveal it? Was it to various individuals who would then convey the message about God's will to the church? This seems to be one possible understanding of the role of a prophet as described in 1 Cor 14. For example, there are instances where the prophet Agabus revealed God's will and intended activity (cf. Acts 11:28; 21:10).

The disclosure of God's will, however, was not limited to privately given revelations for the benefit of

¹Woolsey, p. 41.

²"Pneuma," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, p. 408. Cf. Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2,4; 16:6; 20:22.

the church. Especially when major problems arose, the determination of God's will was approached in a corporate manner. Samuel Jackson describes this:

Decisions on important questions lay with the ecclesia (cf. Acts xv. . . .) The records do not show whether there was a regular meeting of this body; what was the exact position of the apostles in it, or how their functions as members were differentiated from those of the "elders". . . . The ordinary method of procedure was that the Apostles and elders proposed measures and the community either accepted or rejected them (Acts iv.32, vi.2,5, xv.12,30, xxi.22).

Jackson goes on to suggest that these convocations should not be considered "a union of communistic Quakers."² There was apparently far more structure and discussion involved than in the Quaker model.

It is difficult to understand the exact relationships of those involved in these decision-making processes described in the NT. Edward F. Murphy suggests that they used a "unique body-team working together under the guidance of the team leader."³

Having looked at some general patterns in which the Holy Spirit appears to have worked with decision making in the NT Church, let us turn to some of the particular passages where these events are described to seek further

¹ Samuel M. Jackson, "Church," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1909), 8:260.

² Ibid.

³ Church Growth Perspectives from the Book of Acts (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1982), pp. 361-363.

insights.

An inescapable conclusion one reaches as he studies the life of the NT saints is that corporately they were Spirit-led because they were individually led by the Spirit. Their decisions as a church body were influenced by their daily, individual experience resulting from the Spirit's leadership.

Working our way through the book of Acts, we note a few examples of these saints being led individually by the Spirit. In Acts 6-7 is the story of Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5). He was faithful to the Spirit's leading though it brought an untimely death. In Acts 8 Philip was led by the Spirit to the Ethiopian eunuch. Peter and Cornelius are brought together by the Spirit in Acts 10. Acts 16:6-10 shows the Spirit leading Paul by shutting doors instead of opening them. Paul tried to go into western Asia Minor, then into Bithynia, but both attempts were forbidden by the Holy Spirit. Finally, Paul is given a vision of a man from Macedonia inviting him to come there, and he concluded that this is where God had called him next.

Luke tells us how Paul knew where he was supposed to go, but how did he know where he was not supposed to go? In what sense did the Holy Spirit forbid him to go into Asia or Bithynia?

Paul may have had visions or dreams (cf. verse 9, 23:11), or inward prompting. Silas, a prophet (15:32),

may have been moved to utter words of warning, or they may have had to change their plans by force of circumstances (e.g. Jewish opposition), which they afterward recognized as the overruling intervention of Providence.

These suggestions as to how Paul was prevented from going certain places by the Holy Spirit offer several possibilities for the ways the Spirit may have led in the lives of individual Christians in the NT Church.

One more instance of individual guidance by the Spirit in Acts must be addressed before moving on to the Spirit's guidance of the church corporately. The Spirit's direction of Paul and other believers as evidenced during Paul's last journey to Jerusalem contains some interesting implications for decision making in the church. In Acts 20: 22,23 Paul indicates to the Ephesian elders that this is probably the last time he will see them because he is bound in spirit (or bound in the Spirit) to go to Jerusalem. He indicates that he does not know what will happen to him there except that "the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me . . . that bonds and afflictions await me." So, apparently, Paul has been warned by the Spirit that trials await him in Jerusalem, yet he feels bound to go there anyway.

As he proceeds on his journey, disciples in Tyre "kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in

¹William Neil, Acts, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1976) 14:179. Cf. J. Munk, Acts, Anchor Bible Garden, City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1967) 31:157.

Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4). Apparently these Spirit-filled Christians felt the Holy Spirit was saying Paul ought not to go to Jerusalem. But Paul went on. Arriving in Caesarea, he is greeted after a few days by the prophet Agabus who had come from Judea with a message from the Holy Spirit that the Jews in Jerusalem would bind him and deliver him to the Gentiles. At this news those present wept and begged Paul not to go on, yet when Paul insisted, they "fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done'" (Acts 21:14).

This situation involves a Spirit-led individual disagreeing with the majority opinion of his fellow church members concerning God's will for him. The implied majority opinion of both the church at Tyre and at Caesarea was that it surely must not be God's will for Paul to go on to Jerusalem. Yet, despite this church decision, Paul felt led to go there anyway.

What was the will of the Lord in this situation? Was it God's will that Paul not go to Jerusalem or was it that he not go there unwarned? Paul's friends, at first anyway, felt it was the former; Paul felt it was the latter. From this experience of individual Spirit-guidance, an implication for church decision making might be that though there may be repeated indications of danger and risk in pursuing a certain course of action, that does not guarantee that it is not God's will to go ahead and pursue it. He may

want us to go, but not to go unwarned. To go unwarned is to go unarmed. Our tendency in church decisions is (and usually for good reasons) that if a venture looks risky, we avoid it. That may be valid, but it also may be that we need, like Paul, to put aside personal, selfish considerations and listen more carefully to the Spirit before concluding what the Lord's will is.

Goals of the Spirit in Church Decision Making

These implications from Paul's experience bring us to a consideration of the Spirit's working in NT Church decision making. We will first look at the goals which the Holy Spirit tried to achieve within the church as He guided its corporate decisions. One goal of the Spirit is the unity described by Paul in Eph 4. With the introductory phrase "unity of the Spirit" (vs. 3), he explains what constitutes this unity among the members of Christ's body. It is being part of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God (Eph 4:4-6).

Within the context of a decision-making body, the Spirit would promote a sense of unity among the members of that body. Paul also states in vs. 13 that this unity includes a unity "of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." In Phil 2:1,2 Paul describes this unity, or "fellowship of the Spirit," as "being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one

purpose." And in the next two vss. he suggests the attitude one must have in order for the Spirit to bring about this kind of unity, "With humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (vss. 3,4).

In addition to promoting unity in the body, a second goal of the Spirit is "the equipping of the saints for the work of service" (Eph 4:12). Perhaps the significance of this would be better understood if service were translated "serving" or "servanthood". The Holy Spirit prepares the members of the body to be servants of the body, to serve the body's needs. A particular need is the "building up of the body" (vs. 12). Again, thinking of these texts in the setting of decision making within the church, we see the Holy Spirit engendering an attitude of service in the minds and motives of the decision makers, so that they are not self-serving but servants of the body of Christ. They are prompted by the Spirit not to build up themselves, but to build up the body. Their priorities are such that, as they continue to let the Spirit lead, they are more concerned about the common good (1 Cor 12:7) than their own good. The result of this divine-human cooperation is that, (1) those involved achieve unity, and (2) they mature as Christians, "to the measure of the stature which belongs to . . . Christ" (Eph 4:13).

Thus, the purpose of the Spirit of Christ in decision making is to produce Christlike decision makers. As they learn to become servants of the body instead of self-servers, seeking the common good over their own interests, they mature into Christlike leaders. Love, the prime motivating force for the growth of Christlike leaders, is also supplied by the Spirit. With the love supplied by Christ, the Head, the Spirit "causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (vs. 16).

Methods of the Spirit in Church Decision Making

What methods does the Holy Spirit use to accomplish the goals of building loving, Christlike decision makers? What did He use in the NT Church? Was that church such a superchurch because the Spirit chose only to fill "superstars," or did they all become "superstars" once He filled them? Apparently, the Spirit used neither of these methods. Spirit filling does not equal spiritual stardom, at least not on this earth. Paul indicates that, while God's Spirit decides who gets what spiritual gift(s), some people apparently get more spectacular gifts than others. The important thing is, every gift is essential to the proper functioning of the body. Some parts of our physical bodies get far more attention than do others, but there is none we would want to be without (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-27). So, the Holy Spirit's method is to use a variety of people in various

functions for the good of the body as it makes decisions.

Not only does the Holy Spirit choose to work through a variety of very ordinary people, He apparently can operate through a variety of procedures. He even worked through the casting of a lot for Judas' successor (though there is no record of this method being used after that).¹ The more usual and, undoubtedly, preferred method for finding church leaders after Judas' replacement was either the selection of men by the congregation (Acts 6:3) or appointment by the apostles (Acts 14:23). The significant thing about each of these occasions, however, was that these actions were only take after fasting and prayer.² Consequently, Paul could tell the elders at Ephesus that it was the Holy Spirit, not he himself, who had appointed them (Acts 20:28).

The elders of Ephesus were men appointed, doubtless, under the eye of the apostle Paul. . . . But the apostle considered them selected by the Holy Spirit through the elective, or appointive, process, and Spirit filled.³

Acts 14:23 supports the idea of an election. The Greek cheirotoneo ("appointed") means "to extend the hand," and originally referred to electing Greek officials

¹ Cf. Acts 1:15-26.

² Cf. Acts 13:1-4; 14:23.

³ Nichol, 6:392.

by a show of hands, and "it is probably true that some system of election was practiced in the apostolic church."¹ However, it seems that there was no particular method for decision making specifically approved by the Holy Spirit. The essential thing was an attitude of prayerful dependence upon the Spirit.

Paul indicates in Rom 8:26-28 what would happen as long as this Spirit-dependent attitude was maintained. First, even though "we do not know how to pray as we should, . . . the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (vs. 26). Furthermore, that intercession is "according to the will of God" (vs. 27). So when the church must make decisions, if it will lay its affairs before God, the Spirit will intercede, and in return make God's will known.

How did this work in the early church? The most complete example of such a process is in the account of the Jerusalem Council. However, a few brief insights can be gleaned from two other decision-making situations in Acts 6 and 1 Cor 6. In the matter of the neglect of the Hellenistic widows (Acts 6), the apostles called together "the multitude" of the disciples. A widespread problem seemed to necessitate a wide base of support for its resolution. This apparently became a principle of operation

¹Ibid., p. 301. Cf. Interpreter's Bible, 9:193.

in the early church. The more widespread the problem the greater the representation called in to solve it (cf. Acts 15:2,6,12,22).

In 1 Cor 6:1-11 Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for going to court instead of settling disagreements between members within the church. He uses several arguments to convince them that they are more qualified to judge these matters than those outside the church. His concluding argument is, "You were washed, . . . sanctified, . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (vs. 11). In other words, one is enabled to make wise decisions in the church on the basis of spiritual preparation. Anyone who is washed, justified and sanctified by the Spirit, argues Paul, ought to be able to make wise decisions regarding the church. One is primarily qualified to make wise decisions for a spiritual body on the basis that he is a spiritual person. Other qualifications should be secondary to the spiritual ones.

Acts 15 presents a detailed account of a major church decision. The problem was with sincere men having a disagreement concerning God's will for the Gentile believers. A decision had to be made. Once the debate arose, two things became apparent. (1) The need for wider counsel was felt, so representatives from Antioch, as well as the Jerusalem "church and the apostles and the elders"

came together (vs. 4). (2) There was the realization that a higher court of appeal was essential, hence the involvement of the apostles. All of these groups became involved in the decision that was made (cf. vs. 22).

As one follows the proceedings of the council, he can see there was (1) considerable debate (vs. 7), (2) reference to precedence by Peter (vss. 7-9), (3) respect for the opinions of their leaders (vss. 12-22), (4) the citing of Scriptural guidelines and authority (vss. 16-18), the free expression of personal judgment (vss. 5,11,12,19), and (6) a united consensus of opinion (vss. 22,25,28). Most significantly, the Holy Spirit was involved in the final consensus, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (vs. 28).

The decision may have resulted from a vote, since the phrase "it seemed good", (vs. 22) is the Greek word edoxe, the word regularly used for making a decision in assembly.¹

Thus, it would appear from these Biblical examples that the Spirit can lead in the typical decision-making process where a representative group is facing a controversial subject and personal opinions are freely expressed, where reference is made to precedent and Scripture for support, where debate (or discussion) is free and frequent,

¹Ibid., p. 203.

where those in authority are present and participating in the discussion, and where a vote is taken. The Spirit can lead, however, only as this process, and those involved in it, remain surrendered to God's Spirit and, hence, to God's will.

The Spirit and the Church from the
Perspective of Ellen White

Since so many of Ellen White's comments on the Spirit and church decision making have to do with conducting church meetings, it is important to study some of her statements on such meetings. These statements are subdivided under four headings: (1) personal preparation of the church member for a meeting, (2) the climate that should prevail at the meeting, (3) how the meeting should be conducted, and (4) how the decision-making process itself should proceed.

Personal Preparation

Making decisions for the church that are in accord with God's will requires each member to seek God's will personally through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Decision makers tend to rely upon past experience and pooled personal judgments to determine what they should do. Neither of these is as reliable as a personal seeking of God's will on the part of those making the decision.

We are not one of us safe, even with past experience in the work, and certainly are not safe if we have not had that experience, unless we live as seeing

Him who is invisible. . . . He who would have moral and intellectual power must draw from the divine Source. At every point and decision inquire, Is this the way of the Lord?

While White does recommend pooled opinions, she warns against heavy reliance upon these opinions, especially by weak-willed individuals.

Many are changed by every current. They wait to hear what someone else thinks, and his opinion is accepted as altogether true. If they would lean wholly upon God, they would grow strong in His strength; but they do not say to the Lord, 'I cannot make any decision until I know Thy will.' Their natural inclination is to allow another to be conscience for them and think for them, and they speak after he has spoken, saying what he says and acting as he acts.²

God's opinion must be sought ahead of past or present opinions of human decision makers. But what advice does White give on seeking and finding God's opinion? Sound spiritual judgment generally accompanies a sound spiritual relationship. The following describes how spiritual discernment develops:

The entrance of God's Word is the application of divine truth to the heart, purifying the soul through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The faculties devoted unreservedly to God, under the guidance of the divine Spirit, develop steadily and harmoniously. Devotion and piety establish so close a relation between Jesus and His disciples that the Christian becomes like Him. Through the power of God, his weak, vacillating character becomes changed to one of strength and steadfastness. He becomes a person of sound principle, clear perception, and reliable, well-balanced judgment.

¹White, Medical Ministry (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1932), p. 99.

²White, Manuscript 121, 1898, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

Having a connection with God, the source of light and understanding, his views, unbiased by his own preconceived opinions, become broader, his discernment more penetrative and farseeing. The knowledge of God, the understanding of His revealed will, as far as human minds can grasp it, will, when received into the character, make efficient men.

Knowledge is power, but it is a power for good only when united with true piety. It must be vitalized by the Spirit of God in order to serve the noblest purposes.

White implies here that God gives the gift of wisdom to those who have shown themselves wise enough to let God guide their individual lives. The kind of men and women to whom God can entrust the knowledge of His will for the corporate believers are those willing to follow His will as individual believers. If they do what He asks of them individually, He can depend on them to do what He desires for the corporate church body.

These Spirit-led decision makers should continue making choices largely in harmony with God's will as long as they do not resist the Holy Spirit's direction of their individual and corporate Christian life. If resistance occurs when they are convicted by the Spirit, God is dishonored by subsequent decisions.

The influence of the Spirit upon the human mind will regulate it after the divine order. But the Spirit does not work in a manner and power beyond the human agent's power of resistance. A man may refuse to hear the counsels and admonitions of God. He may choose to take the regulating of his conduct into his

¹White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), pp. 37-38.

own hands; but when he does this, he is not made a vessel unto honor.

For a church leader to choose to follow his own will instead of God's may place the church in a very precarious position. The reason for this danger, according to White, is that "Satan takes the control of every mind that is not decidedly under the control of the Spirit of God."² She made this statement within the historical context of Adventist resistance to the Holy Spirit's leading "both before and after the Minneapolis" General Conference in 1888.³ She indicated further that the individual and corporate resistance of the delegates to the Spirit's guidance resulted in poor discernment in their decision making.

The Spirit of God has been present in power among His people, but it could not be bestowed upon them, because they did not open their hearts to receive it.

. . . The influence that grew out of the resistance of light and truth at Minneapolis tended to make of no effect the light God has given to His people through the Testimonies. . . . Some of those who occupy responsible positions were leavened with the spirit that prevailed at Minneapolis, a spirit⁴ that clouded the discernment of the people of God.

¹White, Letter 10, 1897, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²White, Testimonies to Ministers, p. 79.

³Ibid.

⁴White, General Conference Bulletin, February 28, 1893, p. 1.

Ellen White repeatedly stated between the 1888 meeting and the reorganizing of the church structure at the 1901 General Conference session that resistance against the Spirit and His message was adversely affecting the quality of decisions being made within the administrative circles of the church.

Aside from spiritual preparation by church decision makers, White indicates the need for a balanced use of an open Bible, sanctified reason, and an awakened intellect.¹ So, while White would stress the priority of spiritual preparation, she would also encourage the thorough intellectual preparation of decision makers. They should study the various issues at hand, and by the use of "sanctified reason," come to a meeting as well prepared as possible.

Faithful study of the issues and "sanctified reason" is to be combined with an attitude of expectant prayer.

"Let every decision be made after prayer and faithful study."² The decision maker should cultivate an attitude of prayer in which he fully expects the Lord's leadership.

Those who are bearing responsibilities in our institutions and in various branches of the Lord's work . . . must understand and know that the Lord is at the head of the work, although we do not always discern His overruling power. At all times it is our privilege to know that He is there, and to have the assurance that He will work with us if we will work with Him.³

¹White, Medical Ministry, p. 99.

²White, Loma Linda Messages, No. 991, pp. 599-600.

³Ibid.

In addition to an attitude of prayerful expectancy is the need for a conscious effort to be unbiased and unselfish. White warned one group of decision makers that there were

so many important decisions to be made; yet in your councils the preconceived opinions, the selfish ideas and plans, the wrong traits of character received by birth, are lugged in and allowed to have an influence.

. . . Many of your councils do not bear the stamp of heaven. You do not come to them as men who have merciful compassion, but as men having a firm purpose to carry out your own plans and to settle questions according to your minds.

Those with this attitude at times argue that because they have the right of private judgment, they do not need to subordinate themselves to those in positions of administrative authority. White uses the Thessalonian church as an example of the harm caused by this kind of attitude.² On the other hand, she advises that each person "has an individuality of his own, which he is not to sink in that of any other man. Yet each is to work in harmony with his brethren."³

The final factor in the personal preparation of a church decision maker is physical. Because of the close relationship between the mind and the body, one's body needs to be a fit temple for the Holy Spirit if that Spirit is to

¹White, Testimonies, 5:419.

²Cf. White, Acts of the Apostles, pp. 261-262.

³Ibid., pp. 275-276.

guide his mind (cf. 1 Cor 6:19).

Every day men in positions of trust have decisions to make upon which depend results of great importance. Often they have to think rapidly, and this can be done successfully by those only who practice strict temperance. . . .

Here is a suggestion for all whose work is sedentary or chiefly mental. . . . At each meal take only two or three kinds of simple food, and eat no more than is required to satisfy hunger. Take active exercise every day, and see if you do not receive benefit.

Climate of a Spirit-led Meeting

If church decision makers prepare their bodies, minds, and spirits for God's direction of a meeting, what characterizes the climate of that meeting? The most significant thing about such a meeting is that a strong sense of the need for and reality of God's presence pervades it. The creation of this climate involves more than the perfunctory performance of an opening prayer. White condemns councils that start with "a few words of formal prayer" while those present need instead to approach God with "earnest, importunate prayer, offered in living faith, in a humble and contrite spirit."² She indicates that in the early days of their work, Adventist pioneers "sought the Lord from three to five times a day"³ to give them heavenly wisdom.

¹White, Gospel Workers (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), p. 229.

²White, Testimonies, 5:559-560.

³Ibid., p. 561.

The realization of God's presence, as claimed by the earnest prayer of faith, brings remarkable results to a meeting. "It will quell tumultuous actions and charm away the unhallowed effects of that worldliness which makes men sharp, critical, overbearing, and ready to accuse."¹ Without God's presence and wisdom, their own spirit and the spirit of Satan leads them to commit "acts of injustice . . . done because God is not presiding."²

Further, "Christ's presence means advance." People do not feel hesitant "about introducing new plans of action, as the Holy Spirit may move . . . them." White illustrates this point by stating that the Holy Spirit can convert those "who stand with a stone in their hand, waiting to place it before the wheel." Instead, they "place the stone behind the wheel, so that it will not roll back."³ The realization that "Jesus is in our midst" would change the "desire to hold to our own opinions upon unimportant points, which so often retard the progress of the meeting and the work."⁴

Church decision makers frequently take themselves

¹ Ibid., p. 559.

² Ibid.

³ White, Letter 65, 1900, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

⁴ White, Gospel Workers, pp. 446-448.

and their opinions too seriously. At the other extreme,

levity is not appropriate in meetings where the solemn work and Word of God are under consideration. The prayer has been offered that Christ shall preside in the assembly. . . . Is it consistent to take a course that will be grievous to His Spirit and contrary to His work?

This sensing of Christ's presence through His Spirit fosters an attitude of openness and caring. White calls for Christian decision makers to respect each other and each others' opinions.

When you respect each other, you will respect Jesus Christ. . . . He says, 'I call you not servants; but I have called you friends'. . . . This is the confidence that the Lord would have you cherish in each other. . . . As the Lord's workmen, you are to open your plans to one another. These plans must be carefully and prayerfully considered.²

She further describes this climate as one of "intellectual freedom" exercised in "an atmosphere of goodness, confidence, and love . . . for this is the assurance of the presence of the Holy Spirit."³ Apparently, then, one indication that the Holy Spirit is leading in a meeting is that His fruit (cf. Gal 5:22,23) becomes evident in the dynamics of the meeting as well as in the personal lives of its members.

One final factor evident in the climate of a Spirit-led meeting is faith. Though the following comment occurs

¹ Ibid.

² White, Letter 49, 1897, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

³ White, Letter 53, 1894, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

in a letter addressed to an individual, the same principle applies to church decision making:

When you have sought to know His will, your part in the operation with God is to believe that you will be led and guided and blessed in the doing of His will. We may mistrust ourselves lest we misinterpret His teachings, but make even this a subject of prayer, and trust Him, still trust Him to the uttermost, that His Holy Spirit will lead you to interpret aright His plans and the working of His providence.

Conducting a Spirit-led Meeting

White offers several suggestions for conducting meetings in such a way that the climate described above can be fostered and preserved. If the climate is to be such that the reality of God's presence is sensed, then prayer must become an integral part of the meeting's agenda. Ellen White advocates the combination of sharp discriminating powers and much prayer:

There must be much prayer in every move made. . . . Plead with God. Importune Him for light, for wisdom, and for counsel, that every move may be made in God. If this is so, less haphazard work will be done. . . . We do not pray in humble dependence one half as much as we should.

White repeatedly warned against the dangerous "tendency to look to human wisdom and to depend on human guid-

34 The Appraisable

¹White, Letter 35, 1893, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²White, Manuscript Release No. 668, Letter 9, 1884, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

ance."¹ She apparently recognized the tendency to ask the Lord's guidance at the beginning of a meeting, then not to consider for the rest of the meeting what the Lord would want done until the end when prayer is offered that "the Lord will bless what we have done." She cites an example of how prayer can become a more integral part of a meeting:

If one of your number decides that he cannot cooperate with his brethren and has no desire to work because of differences of opinion, the course to be pursued is without a question. Humble yourselves before God and resort to prayer, for you cannot and must not attempt to work at variance.²

Rather than typically resorting to pressure, politics, precedent, or policy when problems arise, her suggestion is that the first resort is to be prayer.

The preceding quotation also needs to be examined for what it does not say. It does not say there should be no differences of opinion. Rather, it addresses what needs to be done if differences lead to serious division so that those involved cannot continue working cooperatively. She advises that meetings should be conducted in such a way that independent thinking be encouraged.

She cites several reasons for encouraging a climate of openness--for conducting meetings in such a way that a

¹White, Loma Linda Messages, No. 496, p. 281, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²White, Letter 4, 1890, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

variety of opinions is generated. This type of meeting encourages more careful study because the issue is looked at from numerous viewpoints. She advises that in such a discussion, "no enterprise will be so likely to be entered upon which will bring confusion and perplexity and defeat to the work."¹ She further advocates that there is safety in numbers:

Satan may move through one man's mind to warp things out of their proper channel. He may succeed with two who view things in a similar light, but with several minds enlisted there is greater safety against his wiles.²

To say that meetings are to be conducted in such a way that independent thinking is encouraged does not imply independent action, i.e., action independent of and adverse to the intent of the church body.

Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work³ there is no such thing as every man's being independent.

As we near the final crisis, instead of feeling that there is less need of order and harmony of action, we should be more systematic than heretofore. All our work⁴ should be conducted according to well-defined plans.

¹White, Manuscript 3, 1880, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²Ibid.

³White, Testimonies, 9:258.

⁴White, Letter 27a, 1892, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

Consequently, meetings should be conducted in such a way that independent thinking and free interchange of ideas is encouraged, and harmonious, well-organized action on the part of those involved in making and carrying out the group's decisions is the result. The meetings themselves should be conducted with order, system, thoroughness, and exactness.¹ To conduct meetings in a disorganized fashion can actually inhibit the effectiveness of the Spirit's working, for heaven's agencies are thoroughly organized.

The more closely we imitate the harmony and order of the angelic host, the more successful will be the efforts of these heavenly agents in our behalf. If we see no necessity for harmonious action, and are disorderly, undisciplined, and disorganized in our course of action, angels, who are thoroughly organized and move in perfect order, cannot work for us successfully. They turn away in grief, for they are not authorized to bless confusion, distraction, and disorganization.²

White suggests several other things in addition to disorganization which inhibit the Spirit's ability to work effectively in a meeting. She claims that some characteristics of the meetings held after the 1888 General Conference were: "the loud voice of dispute, the hot spirit, the harsh words." She says that the atmosphere more closely resembled a "political meeting . . . than a place where

¹Cf. White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 96.

²White, Letter to O.A. Olsen, May 31, 1896, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

Christians were met for prayer and counsel."¹ Those conducting and those participating in church councils must guard themselves constantly lest their spirit in a meeting drives the Holy Spirit out of the meeting.

The Decision-Making Process

The personal preparation of the decision maker, the climate of the meeting, and the way it is conducted largely determines whether the Holy Spirit can become involved in the decision-making process. Thus, the suggested attitudes and practices already discussed constitute primary factors involved in a Spirit-led decision-making process. Recapping these, the church leader has personally prepared himself for individual and corporate Spirit-guidance if he has developed (1) a personal walk with God, (2) good study habits and a willingness to study the issues at hand, (3) an attitude of openness and acceptance towards others and their ideas, and (4) a healthy body to support a healthy mind and spirit. Spirit-led decisions can be made in a climate of awareness of and openness to God's presence, as well as to the thoughts and needs of the members present. The Spirit can lead into decisions harmonious with God's will when the meeting is conducted in an organized, prayer-filled manner. Open discussion is to be encouraged, yet harmony of spirit and action should be each member's goal.

Aside from these factors which lay the foundation

for Spirit-guided decisions, there are three more specific areas of decision making which Ellen White addresses.

These deal with (1) how the Holy Spirit reveals God's will to the mind and the conscience; (2) how members need to relate, not only to each other, but to the church as a whole; and (3) the need for a balance between too much and too little time spent in reaching decisions.

In the first area, White indicates that God definitely intends that His will be known, and suggests one means of discovering it.

It is as much the privilege of every individual member of the church to know from the Word God's will in regard to his course of action as it is for the president of the conference or for any other men in office of trust. The Lord would be sought unto by all God is ready to commune with His people.

Here she speaks of God's willingness to communicate His will to church leaders and laymen alike. But from what source comes the knowledge of that will? It is from the Word. The primary source for understanding how God wants to lead both individual members and the corporate church is His record of how He led His followers individually and corporately in the past.

White further suggests that the reason Christians frequently do not hear God's will from God's Spirit is that they are not really listening closely. "The Holy Spirit will work upon minds if we will hearken to its faintest

¹White, Manuscript 15, 1897, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

whispers."¹ But how does one hear that faint whisper? Why is it so often unheard? Her answer is that it is unheard because it is unheeded.

The doubt that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to faith. Faith rests upon evidence, not demonstration. The Lord requires us to obey the voice of duty, when there are other voices all around us urging us to pursue an opposite course. It requires earnest attention from us to distinguish the voice which speaks from God. We must . . . obey the voice of conscience without parleying or compromise, lest its promptings cease, and will and impulse control.

The word of the Lord comes to us all who have not resisted His Spirit by determining not to hear and obey.²

Thus, (1) the study of God's Word, (2) the heeding of the Spirit-prompted conscience resulting from that study, and (3) the deliberate listening for God's voice through the conscience combine to enable a church decision maker to understand and follow God's will. This individual process can be utilized by the Holy Spirit to lead to corporate decisions in harmony with God's will as the group members are open to the Holy Spirit and to each other.

The matter of openness to one another has already been examined. However, White admonishes an openness not only between fellow members, but between those members and the church as a whole. She expresses this principle, and the Spirit's relation to it, in the following way:

¹White, Letter 4, 1896, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²White, Selected Messages, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 28.

"God has placed in the church, as His appointed helpers, men of varied talents, that through the combined wisdom of many, the mind of the Spirit may be met."¹ Thus, "a few persons may be as blind as the one in error, but the majority of the church is a power which should control its individual members."² Church decision makers need to recognize the principle that the Spirit is not likely to lead them individually, or as a small group, in a direction opposite to that in which He is leading the vast majority of the church.

The third area in which Ellen White gives counsel for making decision regards the quality and quantity of time spent. Despite the common Old Testament practice of deciding matters by use of lots, she discourages such practices as the flipping of a coin to make a decision.³

In terms of the time and effort expended on decisions, White recommends the following:

It is not the will of God that any of His servants should move hastily and take shortsighted views. He would have them wait patiently, and manifest due consideration. Every movement should be made with judicious thoughtfulness, and after much prayer. . . .

If we will but wait patiently and prayerfully upon God, and not follow ⁴our own impetuous plans, He will guide our decisions.

¹White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 279.

²White, Testimonies, 5:107.

³Cf. White, Selected Messages, 2:325-328.

⁴White, Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 210, 211.

Despite this counsel, she also advises that indecision can be wrong. "The cause of God demands men who can see quickly and act instantaneously. . . . If you wait to measure every difficulty . . . you will do but little."¹ What kind of situation requires quick action rather than judicious patience and thoughtfulness?

Sometimes various ways and purposes, different modes of operation in connection with the work of God, are about evenly balanced in the mind; and it is at this very point that the nicest discrimination is necessary. . . . The slightest inclination of the weight in the balance should be seen, and should determine the matter at once. Long delays tire the angels. It is even more excuseable to make a wrong decision sometimes than to be continually in a wavering position. .

Caution, up to a certain point, is required; but hesitancy and policy on particular occasions have been more disastrous than would have been a failure through rashness.²

Sufficient time, therefore, should be taken to examine issues from all feasible viewpoints. However, if a situation develops in which equally advantageous alternatives develop, the one that may seem only slightly more reasonable should be taken rather than wasting further time in indecision.

¹ White, Gospel Workers, pp. 133-135.

² Ibid.

The Spirit and the Church from
the Perspective of
Selected Churchmen

The Relationship of the Spirit to the Church

Since the Holy Spirit's direction of the church in making decisions is only one facet of the Spirit's overall relationship to the church, that broader relationship deserves attention first. The views of various writers on this over-all Spirit-church relationship can then serve as a background for their comments on how the Spirit directs in church decision making.

The church writers examined for this study consistently convey the thought that the Christian church would not have appeared without (1) the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and (2) human dependence on that leadership.

We are quite inclined to view the entire NT record from our present day standpoint . . . as of a church new born which appeared full-formed from the hand of God. Instead of that the NT Church was conscious only of a new and wonderful experience--the actual and continually manifested presence of the Holy Spirit. They gave little thought to a statement of doctrine or to the organization of a continuing Church. These things were being formed under their hand, but they knew it not. . . . They were simply absorbed by an overwhelming experience of God. The Holy Spirit Himself had to intervene by many thought-provoking and sometimes chastening providences in order to get them to think beyond the present hour, to survey the Church's great task and to get about it.

As Fraser indicates, there is little NT evidence that the early Christians, either individually or collect-

¹Fraser, pp. 82-83.

tively, deliberately organized any long-range plans for a developed church structure. They probably felt that such plans, even if they were laid, would be shortly interrupted by the return of their Lord. Their focus, consequently, was not on the organizing of a church but on following the leadership of the Spirit. Out of that relationship the church grew, thanks to the Spirit's leading and the willingness of early Christians to follow. The thing that excited these early believers was not the organization of a new church; it was, rather, that they were the "eschatological community of salvation, in whom the prophecy of Joel about . . . the Spirit has been fulfilled."¹

Comparing that church with the church today, several theologians raise the issue of how the present church views its relationship to the Spirit. In apostolic times, the believers were sure of the Spirit's presence, and out of that assurance grew the church. Today, the church's presence is certain, but what about the Spirit's? Instead of the church growing out of the Spirit's presence, is it assumed that a relationship with the Spirit will grow due to the church's presence?

Hutcheson expresses the problem by asking, "Can the Holy Spirit work through a bureaucracy? This is an important question in view of the fact that denominations

¹Kung, p. 165.

today are largely run by bureaucrats."¹ Bernard Ramm asks how the church can live while being at the same time a church of the Spirit and a church of the officers.² Lawrence Richards takes the position that "the Acts' picture of the church living in simple response to the voice of the Spirit is a foreign and amazing thing" to the twentieth century saints who "have assumed that the church of Christ can function only in a highly organized form" with chief operating officers, boards, and committees making all the decisions.³ Richards goes so far as to assert that in the days of the apostles "local congregations or leaders were not charged with 'making decisions' but with seeking the will of God by listening for the voice of the Spirit."⁴

It is true that the early church apparently did seek God's will quite consistently by listening to the Spirit; however, to say that they were not charged with making decisions seems somewhat unrealistic. That they used group discussion, weighing pro's and con's of various issues, then attempted to make decisions in harmony with God's will, seems obvious from such instances as the

¹Hutcheson, pp. 106-107.

²Ramm, p. 60.

³Lawrence Richards, A Theology of Personal Ministry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), pp. 96-97.

⁴Ibid.

Jerusalem Council.

How then does the Spirit work today with a church which has an established, decision-making bureaucracy? Hutcheson, himself a denominational bureaucrat, suggests that "the natural habitat of the Spirit is the congregation--not the General Assembly."¹ Hence, the bureaucrats had better stay well attuned to the input received from local congregations. Ramm, on the other hand, does not divide the Spirit's realm of effective operation between the congregation and the church administration. He suggests a division is needed in perceived priorities.

The church as the abode of the Spirit is prior to the church as the organized community of God's people. . . . One can have a true church of Christ with much Spirit and little organization; one cannot have a true church of Christ that is all organization and no Spirit. . . .

We must do our best to keep the church a church of the living Spirit and not of ecclesiastical lumber.²

The problem with the Spirit's ability to work with a church bureaucracy is not one of inherent bureaucratic insensitivity to the Spirit. The church bureaucrat is just as human as the other folk he worships with every week. Since His work is centered in the human heart, the Spirit should be able to work among sincere hearts in a General Assembly as much as in a prayer group. At whatever level of church activity, the Spirit should be able to lead if

¹Hutcheson, p. 28.

²Ramm, pp. 60-61.

there is an openness to His direction. If that openness is present, it can be recognized that, in a church board meeting, for instance, "there in that stubborn Christian community of bored, bald-headed businessmen God is present and at work in the Holy Spirit."¹

Whether a group of Christian business men or church bureaucrats, their activities can be Spirit directed if they studiously avoid what John Taylor calls the "it-all-depends-on-me attitude."

That is precisely what Jesus forbade at the start of it all. They must not go it alone. They must not think that the mission is their responsibility. . . .

While we piously repeat the traditional assertion that without the Holy Spirit we can get nowhere in the Christian mission, we seem to press on notwithstanding with our man-made programmes. I have not heard recently of committee business adjourned because those present were still awaiting the arrival of the Spirit of God. I have known projects abandoned for lack of funds, but not for the lack of the gifts of the Spirit. Provided the human resources are adequate we take the spiritual for granted.²

Richards warns that church leaders are so prone toward man-made programs that they even attempt to program the Spirit and His gifts. He says that instead of trying to foster a relationship between the Spirit and the church by a program for the discovery of spiritual gifts, the focus of the church should be "on understanding the nature of the body as a loving community within which each one of

¹ Starkey, p. 12. Cf. Welch, pp. 78-80.

² John V. Taylor, The Go-Between God (London: S.C.M. Press, 1972), pp. 3-5.

us ministers to build up his brothers and sisters in the Lord."¹ If the primary concern were to build up each other and the church body in unity and love, then, claims Richards, the Spirit's gifts would appear naturally.² Thus, the Spirit can work today in church bureaucracies as long as there exists an openness (1) to the need of the Spirit's guidance and (2) to the needs of the body and its individual members.

Related to how the Spirit can work within a bureaucratic church is the issue of whether He works in an individualized or corporate manner, or both. If both, how is His work with the individual and with the corporate body related?

The apostle Paul explains that the Holy Spirit distributes His gifts individually (1 Cor 12:11). However, while the gifts are distributed individually, they are not given primarily for the individual's good, but for the common good (cf. vs. 7). Thus, the Holy Spirit works in individual lives, yet that individual work is for the common good of the corporate church. It could be said that the Holy Spirit is given individually, yet not privately.

The Spirit is never regarded as a private possession. From the beginning the new experience is shared. The Spirit is given to the community. This fact differentiates the NT belief from that of Israel and later

¹ Richards, Personal Ministry, pp. 122-123.

² Ibid., pp. 111-112.

Judaism where the Spirit is only bestowed on certain individuals, where there is a hope of a general outpouring in the last days.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is one that is too good to keep. This Gift is designed to be shared with the church and through the church shared with the world.

When a man is united to Christ, he becomes a member of Christ's Body. He has an individual life. But he has also a corporate life, as a member of the Body. . . . And so the Spirit was given to the Church, but only that through the Church He might be given to the world.²

Hutcheson uses the example of the divine calling to illustrate how the Holy Spirit works simultaneously with the individual and with the corporate body. He explains that the individual senses a divine calling to a particular ministry. At the same time, that calling, if valid, is also recognized by the corporate church, as it is led by the Spirit to confirm and validate the call. Thus, divine calling involves both an individual and a corporate experience as both the member and the church body are led by the Spirit.³

One implication of the fact that the Holy Spirit leads the individual member and the corporate body for the mutual good of both is pointed out by Hutcheson:

Trusting the Holy Spirit does not mean neglecting

¹Flew, p. 109.

²F. Gardiner, The Power of the Spirit, the Need of the Church (Edinburgh: Clark, 1920), pp. 71-72.

³Hutcheson, p. 175.

management and maintenance. Trusting the Spirit means, among other things, counting on the Spirit to provide good managers, to redeem organizational techniques, to work through Christian people in bureaucracies--even through their manipulations, their politics, their organizational tinkering. But it always means to recognize that God is the ultimate manager.

This Ultimate Manager directs bureaucratic church bodies via His Spirit. The Spirit directs the individual members of each body to work for that body's common good. The Spirit also works to direct those activities for the common good which are performed by any group of members or by the body as a whole.

The Spirit and Church Decision Making

Having sampled a representative group of Christian writers, we see an agreement that the Holy Spirit still works today to direct the church individually and corporately. Now we need to ascertain how they view the involvement of the Holy Spirit in specific decision-making situations. The church writers considered in this study would concur that the Holy Spirit wants and needs to be involved in church decision making. The limitations to His involvement come from the human end of the process, not the Spirit's. The Spirit is willing to communicate. The problem lies with the humans who struggle to understand how He communicates and how much communication they can realistically expect. Schaller expresses the dilemma:

¹Hutcheson. p. 244.

The most significant way in which man can improve the quality of decision-making is by allowing the power of the Holy Spirit to be at work in it, in both the structures and the processes. This is easier to write than it is to accomplish, since on many occasions equally dedicated and committed Christians will differ on the best method of insuring that the power of the Holy Spirit can guide the decision-making process.

Schaller goes on to point out that, unfortunately, indecision regarding the Spirit has led to ignoring the Spirit. In a survey of over thirteen hundred congregational leaders from thirty-six churches, Schaller indicates that in only one of the thirty-six did the Holy Spirit's influence on decision making score higher than 10 percent when compared with such other influences as the minister, tradition, the governing board, and financial limitations.² What a contrast this presents to those early church decision makers who declared concerning a controversial, hard fought decision, "The Holy Spirit and we have decided!"

How does the church relate itself to the Holy Spirit today as compared to the way it did in those early days? Do we have the same sense of divine guidance or are we more ready to lean on the arm of man?

. . . There is certainly nothing wrong with organization in the church. . . .

Even the complexity of organization per se cannot be condemned. Once organization is needed, its extent also must be gauged by the need. The needs of the church today are much more complex than they were in Paul's day. . . .

But there is yet the danger of having our vision so filled with work of the organization--the grinding of wheels and the blowing of whistles--that we lose sight

¹ Lyle E. Schaller, The Decision Makers (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 12.

² Ibid., pp. 52-53.

of the power that operates the whole.¹

What can be done to regain and/or maintain sight of that Power which operates the whole?

Dr. J. J. Packer wrote that "where we are not consciously relying on God, there we shall inevitably be found relying on ourselves". . . . A conscious reliance upon God, in specific terms, involves one essential ingredient: much prayer.²

Church decision-making meetings frequently begin and end with prayer. The presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit are invoked. Can this, however, be described as "much prayer"? The Spirit's direction of the meeting is generally requested, but what about His direction of specific issues? Would "much prayer" include praying through an agenda before it is talked through? Would it include a prayer break at points of apparent impasse? Should the burden of "much prayer" be for the issues being decided or for those deciding the issues?

The various authors studied do not specifically define how much praying constitutes "much prayer". The amount might vary due to the nature of the agenda and the gravity of the issues involved. However, those writers who did address the matter of prayer for the Holy Spirit all indicated the need for more than the perfunctory perform-

¹Raymond H. Woolsey, The Spirit and His Church (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970), pp. 45-46.

²Terrence Joshua, "Toward the Development of a Theological Critique of Church-Growth Principles from a S.D.A. Perspective" (D. Min. Project, Andrews University, 1980), p. 134.

ance of a formal prayer, if the Spirit's guidance is to be effective. Fraser offers a suggestion which underscores the decision makers' need to request the Spirit's direction of their hearts as well as their heads:

In seeking to discover . . . the mind of the Spirit of God in councils of the Church, I believe we must recognize a distinction between two types of questions with which the Church has to deal. One type is simply that of human judgment. The other, of spiritual guidance. . . .

The first expresses only the diversity of human personality. The second causes an offense against conscience.

Christian decision makers need to pray for a keenness of conscience, an openness of their spirits to the Holy Spirit that would (1) enable them to distinguish between issues of merely mundane, human concern versus those of divine concern, and (2) in those divine issues to be sensitive to the Spirit's desires.

In order to be sensitive yet sensible in matters of conscience, one's conscience must be properly informed. The informed, Spirit-sensitive conscience is developed through contact with God's Word. So how does one become sensitive to the Word? Lawrence Richards offers several suggestions for developing this sense of awareness. One of these is to involve oneself daily with a portion of Scripture spending a minimum of fifteen minutes meditating on the implications of that passage for one's life. Then the next twenty-four hours should be spent living out the

¹Fraser, p. 91.

implications of what was discovered.¹

Such processes of private reflection and response can enable one to become a more Spirit-directed decision maker within a corporate context. John Brunt explains how this type of Christian decision maker attempts to work.

Christian decision-making is a process of critical reflection that makes use of the guidance God has given in His Word. While our reason is not autonomous, neither is it idle. We attempt to see our situation in light of the principles of God's Word and after careful thought decide what course of action would be the most fitting response to God.²

The Christian decision maker who uses the process just described in his individual life, as well as in church decision making, works in harmony with principles God has used to direct many of His people in the past. This process does not, however, guarantee the infallibility of the decisions made. Schaller offers this pragmatic observation:

It is rarely possible to "solve" problems. Frequently decision making means trading one set of problems for a different set of problems. Usually this involves choosing from a comparatively long list of alternatives. . . . Rarely, however, is it possible for anyone to predict with certainty which set of problems from that list will turn out, in the light of subsequent evaluation, to have been the best set.³

¹ Richards, Personal Ministry, pp. 268-273.

² John Brunt, Decisions: How to Use Biblical Guidelines When Making Decisions (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), pp. 36-37.

³ Schaller, p. 13.

Even when sincerely dedicated Christian leaders make decisions concerning the church, their judgments "must always be recognized as relative and proximate decisions, themselves subject to the judgment of God."¹ While Christians can be assured of the Spirit's leading in their corporate decisions, they cannot assume His approval of each idea of the various decision makers.

A Christian borders on arrogance when he so easily and readily identifies something in his experience as of the Spirit of God when it is not more than a hunch or feeling that he has. The life of faith means that we persist in the Christian life when the situation is fluid and obscure!

When sin is sin and righteousness is righteousness, we may speak with certainty. However, when the situation is fluid and we cannot tell what is of the divine Spirit and what² is of the human spirit we must speak with humility.

Decision-making Dynamics

Decision making within a church context involves certain dynamics--some unique to the church, others common in any organization. A central, unique dynamism within church decision making is the fact that laymen and ministers are usually involved in seeking to reach accord on various issues. However, oftentimes the minister(s) and the laity fail to realize the different perspectives from which the other is coming. Schaller points out several areas in which ministers tend to differ from laity, areas that fre-

¹Welch, p. 245.

²Ramm, p. 101.

quently affect the decision-making process. Interviews with pastors and lay people reveal, for instance, that ministers define the "success" of the church differently from their parishioners. The clergy tend to define success in terms of "size, outreach, missions, evangelism, quality of spiritual life, and a sense of faithfulness." Their church members, on the other hand, relate success to statistical growth or decline, the vigor and size of the Sunday or Sabbath school, finances, and buildings.¹

Pastors tend to be oriented toward today and tomorrow while their congregations are more oriented to the past since they, more than the minister, are a part of the past of that church. More pastors than parishioners prefer a shared leadership style. The pastor's role is perceived by ministers in terms of specialized professional functions, while the laity think of them in personal, pastoral terms. Clergy tend to accept diversity and ambiguity far more readily than many in their congregations.

One final area of difference emphasized by Schaller is that the laity rate pastoral calling as a much higher priority than do most clergy. Schaller's conclusion is that "when they are seated around the same decision making table, both clergy and laity should remember that they do not speak from the same frame of reference."²

¹Schaller, pp. 46-48.

²Ibid.

Another dynamic of church decision making is one that is common among all organizations, yet the church frequently tries to imply that it is not found in its councils. That dynamic is the presence of institutional politics. Schaller proposes that because politics does exist within the church, and because the church generally deliberately ignores it, the church harms its decision-making abilities. He claims that the church would be better off to recognize the inevitable existence of politics, learn how it operates, then use it to advantage, rather than ignoring it and hoping it will go away.

If a political dynamic does exist within the church, how does it manifest itself, and how does it affect decision-making processes? Schaller states that a situation becomes political "whenever there is disagreement on alternatives."¹ More specifically, a decision in the church becomes a political decision when it involves

the allocation of scarce resources (ministerial manpower, lay leadership, church receipts . . .), the use of ecclesiastical machinery (the session, official board . . .), and choices between different purposes (hire more staff or put up a new educational wing).²

Given the fact, then, that many of the same decision-making dynamics operate within church groups as among other decision makers, even political ones, what are

¹Ibid., p. 113.

²Ibid., p. 112.

the basic elements involved in reaching a decision? James Dunning suggests that nearly every decision involves the following process: (1) motivation (a prod to get moving), (2) preparation and perspiration (researching resources), (3) incubation (reflective listening), (4) illumination (possible solution), (5) communication (acting on solution), (6) verification (getting feedback).¹

Dunning also suggests some helpful questions to facilitate the dynamics of this decision-making process: (1) What is to be done? (2) What if it is done? (3) Who is doing it (their situation)? (4) When is it happening? (5) Where is it happening? (6) What else can be done? (7) What helps or hinders? (8) Why is it being done?²

Through an understanding of the dynamics of a typical decision-making process (perhaps by using such questions as Dunning suggests), decisions can be reached in such a way that consensus is achieved. According to Richards, decision by consensus, rather than by vote of the majority, is the ideal to which Christian decision makers are called. Richards often tends toward the mystical in his approach, yet perhaps by use of such consensus techniques as suggested by Dunning and others, the combination of the practical and mystical can be achieved.

¹James B. Dunning, Values in Conflict (Cincinnati: Pflaum, 1976), pp. 57-59, 61-62.

²Ibid.

Richards recognizes the necessity of both the practical and the mystical in making decisions.

Responsible decision making is both a practical and a mystical process. It is practical in that we proceed to use all our capacities to make the best decisions we can; it is mystical in that we rely on God to shape our thoughts and understandings and also to speak to correct us if we turn to the left or the right.

Attitudes of Decision Makers

A key ingredient for responsible decision making is to have responsive decision makers--responsive to the Spirit as well as to their colleagues. What sort of attitudes foster this type of responsiveness?

Responsiveness to the Holy Spirit was discussed in connection with the Spirit's relationship with the church. It was suggested that the Spirit's direction does not necessarily come from a program of spiritual gifts, but rather from a realization of the Spirit's presence and purpose. Thus, the Spirit is better able to direct church leaders when

the members of the body realize the Spirit's presence in them, and, following His leading, actively step out to serve others. As they serve, the giftedness will emerge, whether previously recognized or not.²

Responsiveness to the Spirit must be accompanied

¹ Richards, Leadership, p. 307.

² Ibid., p. 261. For further ideas on how to personally experience the Spirit's guidance, see William A. Barry's, The Practice of Spiritual Direction (New York: Seabury Press, 1982).

by responsiveness to one's fellow decision makers, if the Lord's will is to be communicated and executed. In other words, acceptance of one another is essential. Acceptance fosters communication, leading in turn to trust, the basis upon which the Holy Spirit operates. But of what does acceptance consist, as seen in a decision-making meeting?

To accept a person is to grant him significance and worth. . . . Acceptance is not saying, "You're right, I agree with you" (when you actually do not). Acceptance is saying (for example): "you feel that forgiveness is an overrated virtue. I do not agree with you, but I want to understand why you feel that way."

To accept a person is to be able to hear and feel and understand strong feelings . . . as well as the happier expressions . . . without scorning, ignoring, rejecting, or condemning him for having those feelings.¹

Anderson goes on to suggest that acceptance involves more than a passive attitude; it also involves a very active form of listening and caring which he calls "listening with the heart."

By listening with the heart we mean paying strictest attention to one another. We listen without judgment or criticism or superiority, but with love. We try hard to understand the world from the point of view of the speaker. . . .

Listening with the heart is evidence of the deep commitment of one person to another. . . . The earliest church had this.²

The Spirit's operation, then, is best facilitated in meetings where those present are even more committed to lovingly care for one another, and those in their charge,

¹ Philip A. Anderson, Church Meetings That Matter (New York: Pilgrim, 1965), pp. 34-35.

² Ibid., pp. 29-30.

than they are to care about their personal opinions.

Conduct of Meetings

What can be done in the conducting of a meeting to foster this attitude of acceptance and openness to the Holy Spirit and one another? What needs to be done as plans are laid for the meeting? According to Anderson, that planning needs to include more than just the business at hand. Not only the plan but also the planners must be considered. He suggests four areas that must be planned if a meeting is to be productive and rewarding for its members:

1. Content means "What is this meeting all about?" . . . What the agenda is and what the secretary records in the minutes is what we usually think of as the content of a meeting. The one part of content often omitted in these records is the feelings that were present at the meeting. . . .
2. Process is the way the group handles the content and the way the members relate to one another. . . .
3. Responsibility means "Who is caring for the life of this group?" Who is responsible for the content and the process systems? . . .
4. Evaluation means, "How well is the group doing?" It is the appraisal of the group that everyone makes, consciously or unconsciously, during and after the meeting.

Thus, the meeting's planners need to be concerned with feelings as well as ideas, with relationships as well as business, with experience of the Christian faith as well as discussion and actions regarding it.² Planning

¹Ibid., p. 13.

²Ibid., pp. 16-19.

for the life of the group as well as its business helps to facilitate a climate of trust. Trust not only promotes openness to the Spirit and one another but also minimizes problems with hidden agendas, for members do not feel as much need to hide their true thoughts and feelings from each other.¹

Training the group in the listening skills referred to previously is important in building a climate of open trust. One such listening training exercise suggested by Anderson is to ask the group to agree that no one can bring up a new point until he has first restated the thoughts and feelings of the previous speaker to that speaker's satisfaction.²

While skillful listening to one another's ideas and feelings is essential, it is still not as important as another listening skill. That skill is listening to God. "Prayerful waiting on God is indispensable to effective service."³ Raymond McLaughlin, in his book on church communication, suggests a method that at first would seem noncommunicative. This is the Quaker practice of silence as a means of reaching agreement.

Quakers refuse to make decisions or to take action

¹Ibid., pp. 32-33.

²Ibid., p. 31.

³Daniel L. Mead and Darrel J. Allen, Ministry by Objectives (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Teacher Training Association, 1978), p. 18.

until they have unanimous agreement. This may seem impossible, but Quakers get an amazing amount of work accomplished through this method, and studying it is profitable. Silence provides for a time of prayer and inward probing; . . . it gives us time to examine our consciences.

This truth about communication with God also applies to each other. Sometimes one needs to stop talking in order to start communicating. If the Spirit is really to direct, then time should be taken for Him to do so. Especially should this be the case where matters of conscience or of questionable motives might be involved.

A final question remains regarding the planning and execution of a Spirit-led meeting. If the Holy Spirit is listened to, does that guarantee unanimity of opinion? Prior to the advent of modern conflict-management techniques and theories regarding the creative use of conflict, most religious writers would come close to saying that a unity in the Spirit equaled a unity of opinion. Fraser, for instance, writing in the 1940s said, "The Mind of the Spirit will produce unity of action in the Church."² He claims that the Holy Spirit is manifested by absolute unanimity in the body of Christ. When unanimity is not present, he suggests resorting to prayer; if that does not work, then action should be deferred until unity is

¹Raymond W. McLaughlin, Communication for the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), pp. 188-189.

²Fraser, pp. 97-101.

manifest.¹

Wand, writing during the same period, suggests that "we are told to be of one mind, but not necessarily one opinion." He continues by explaining that church men sometimes agree to differ; however, they are of the same mind as long as they are pursuing the same intent or purpose. Though there may be differences of opinion as to how that purpose is achieved, those pursuing the same objective must be essentially of one mind.²

Wand and Fraser both, apparently, come from a background of decision by majority vote and are concerned with problems caused by this decision-making method. Fraser offers this interesting observation regarding majorities, minorities, and unanimity:

Having challenged the will of the majority as being the will of God, we must say that there is nothing inherently right in being in a minority. "Because majorities are often wrong, it does not follow that minorities are always right." Neither, we must add, is there anything inherently right in unanimity. Hell is doubtless as unanimous as heaven. It is the mind of the Spirit that counts.³

Fraser correctly asserts that unanimity does not guarantee infallibility; nevertheless, a climate of unity is more conducive to the Spirit's leading. This climate is more likely to be present when decisions are made in a consensus

¹ Ibid.

² Wand, pp. 20-21.

³ Fraser, p. 89.

manner, rather than by majority vote, since vote of the majority tends to be divisive by its very nature.

Decision by consensus does not eliminate differences of opinion; however, decisions are approached in such a way that opinions can be expressed and handled without creating a win/lose situation. Starkey, an advocate of creative conflict, suggests that wholesome conflict can actually safeguard against apparently unified, yet poor, decisions:

We often believe the Holy Spirit produces instantaneous agreement, rather than enabling us to engage in wholesome conflict. Like sheep, we fall in line behind the person having the apparent or avowed "inside track" with the Holy Spirit, the person who usually "knows" what the church ought to do. Many well-meaning Christians operate on the level of magical thinking, making God and the devil responsible for their own good or bad feelings. The assumed involvement of these supernatural powers is then used to manipulate and control the decision-making process. By ignoring group process . . . and conflict management theory, we do the Holy Spirit a disservice, rendering impossible the unity and love he wishes to produce among us as we honestly¹ engage each other and the problems that confront us.

Does the Spirit's presence guarantee unanimity of opinion? Not necessarily. However, the Spirit's presence is marked by a unity of purpose, by an openness of ear, mind, and heart to His and each other's desires, and by a freedom to express varying viewpoints in an atmosphere of acceptance and trust.

¹Starkey, pp. 26-27.

PART II

DEVELOPING SPIRIT DEPENDENCE

CHAPTER III

A PROPOSED PROJECT FOR DEVELOPING CONSCIOUS SPIRIT DEPENDENCE

In the Church Nominating Committee

Past Approaches

During the past five years at the Bozeman and Mt. Ellis Seventh-day Adventist Churches, the nominating committees have attempted to correlate the various church offices with the spiritual gifts of the members. The methods used to achieve this match between offices and spiritual gifts have varied somewhat from year to year.

Despite minor variations, however, the basic approach has involved five steps: (1) Determine with the nominating committee the basic needs of the church for the coming year. These needs could be general--worship, fellowship, administration, or outreach--or they could be specific--church campouts planned on a regular basis. (2) Once these needs are determined, decide the various church offices required to meet them. The needs of the church are often met by existing church offices (those offices typically found in most Adventist churches). It is interesting to note, however, that some of the traditional church offices have been eliminated, since

there no longer seems to be any real need for them, and on the other hand, some new offices have been created to meet the specific needs of the congregation. (3) Having decided what offices are needed, determine the specific spiritual gifts required by those who are to fill the offices. The spiritual gifts considered in the past have been those specifically mentioned in the NT. (4) Determine which church members have the various spiritual gifts. This has been done through the use of spiritual-gifts inventories in conjunction with input from the nominating committee as to which members have the required gifts. (5) Ask parishioners to use their spiritual gifts in an area of need (church office) where those gifts are needed. This is usually done by the nominating committee members. If the church member feels his gifts could not be best used in that office, he is asked to suggest another area where he feels the Lord would want his gifts used.

New Insights

The study done in conjunction with this project has resulted in some changes in this approach. These changes are due to some new insights concerning the manner of the Spirit's working within the church.

The one which has the most impact on the work of the nominating committee comes from Lawrence Richards. He suggests that rather than conducting programs to enable each church member to discover which of the Biblical

charismata are his, the personal presence of the Spirit should be emphasized.¹ Once the people realize the presence and potential of the Spirit in their hearts and in their midst, spiritual gifts appear naturally and spontaneously.

For this to occur, however, a misconception--which says the only valid spiritual gifts are those specifically listed in the NT--must be cleared up. Richards cites examples of people in the OT who were "gifted" from God with extraordinary abilities for the construction of the tabernacle. He further points out that since we are living in a different world from that of the NT Church, we should expect the Spirit to impart gifts today that are not mentioned in the Bible. Modern-day charismata meet needs that exist today but did not exist then.²

Present Approach

The approach used by the Mt. Ellis Church nominating committee this year reflects, at least partially, some of Richard's suggestions. The process begins when a new approach to the work of the nominating committee is explained to the church board. Their approval and further ideas are obtained. The new approach is next explored with the nominating committee and their ideas are included.

¹ Richards, Personal Ministry, pp. 111-123.

² Ibid.

Based on mutual approval, the committee operates with three presuppositions: (1) Every church member is called to support the work of the church, not just a select few; (2) God gives each member certain abilities to be used in this support; and (3) acceptance and use of those respective abilities distribute the weight of responsibility so that all do something instead of a few doing everything.

Once these presuppositions are agreed upon, their implementation is discussed. With the Mt. Ellis group, it was determined that the new approach to nominating committee work would be explained first by a letter to each church member. The letter explains not only the three suppositions and their Biblical support but also suggests five general categories of ministry needed within the church. Committee members would then make a face-to-face or phone contact to determine the church members' responses to the letter.

The categories--organizers, speaker-teachers, helpers, clerical workers, and advisors--are not the same ones used by the NT writers. There are two reasons for this. First, these categories are intended as general designations of areas of ministry within which people might exercise various spiritual gifts. E.g., under the general category of speaker-teacher might be listed such spiritual gifts as prophecy, teaching, knowledge, and evangelism. Second, the specific charismata used by the NT writers are

not mentioned because, due to past emphases on spiritual gifts, members have focused more on which gifts were theirs than on ministering to needs through the Spirit's power. Instead of focusing on the needs and how the Spirit can enable them to meet those needs, they have focused on how to get the gifts.

These five categories of ability were seen as essential for meeting the needs of the congregation. Once the nominating committee had the individual responses indicating which of the five areas of service each person wished to support, they matched the member's indicated ability with the various offices. The committee's preference was passed on to the individual for a final decision.¹

In the Church Board

Description of Approach

To develop conscious Spirit dependence, both individually and corporately on the part of a church board, requires more than an assumption of God's presence. On the basis of this premise, the Mt. Ellis and Bozeman church boards devote the first portion of their monthly meetings to study of the Holy Spirit's functioning and to contemplation of and prayer for His presence and direction.

This approach consists of three parts: (1) a time of study devoted to the Holy Spirit and how He works with

¹ A copy of the letter explaining this approach to the Mt. Ellis members appears in appendix A.

us in decision-making processes;¹ (2) a period of sharing current needs and blessings within the church family; and (3) a season of prayer with each member participating in small bands, addressing the items just shared, and requesting the Spirit's presence and direction of the meeting.

This three-fold opening of the meeting fosters a climate in which the Spirit can lead.² The conscious study of the Holy Spirit serves as a reminder at every meeting that God's will cannot be understood or accomplished without the direction of His Spirit. The period of sharing helps promote the work of the Spirit by enabling the board members to see themselves primarily as ministers and only secondarily as decision makers. Sharing one another's needs and those of the church reminds them (1) that they are, first of all, spiritual leaders, and (2) as spiritual leaders they need to conduct any ensuing business in a spiritual manner, i.e., in a way that ministers to and does not undermine one another's needs.

The small prayer bands enable each board member to invite the Spirit's direction of his individual mind and

¹This study has been centering around a survey found in appendix B.

²The intent of this paper is not to imply that the Spirit's presence can be programmed in any way. However, preparations can be made for His presence and activity in decision making, thus creating a climate conducive to His guidance.

motives. It also gives opportunity to address concerns brought up during the sharing time, as well as items of particular concern on the agenda. Thus, the Spirit is given opportunity at the start of the meeting to minister to and through each individual present as he studies, shares, and prays.

Church Board Survey

The study by the church boards of how the Holy Spirit works with the church in making decisions centered around a survey which had a three-fold purpose: (1) to increase board members' understanding of the subject, (2) to inspire further inquiry into it, and (3) to heighten their dependence on the Holy Spirit. The survey sought their opinions regarding the nature of the church and the nature of the Spirit's work in church decision making.

The survey was administered to the Bozeman and Mt. Ellis church boards at their October 1983 meetings. The various parts of the survey were then discussed at each monthly meeting until May and June 1984. The board members were asked for an evaluation of their experience in this study of the Spirit's work with the church. At each monthly meeting, the results of the survey for the question(s) under discussion were given them. This was followed by my personal reflections based on my study in connection with this project.

The survey, developed in consultation with Dr.

Roger Dudley of the Andrews University Institute of Church Ministry, appears in appendix B. The first question concerning the nature of the church, received nearly identical responses in both church boards. The definition of the church considered most accurate was "a divine institution established for the benefit of humanity." This was followed--in order of preference--by "a human institution established for the accomplishment of divine purposes," "a collection of individual worshippers," and "a building where God is worshipped." Consequently, the majority in both boards apparently believe, at least in theory, that the church has definite divine facets, as well as human facets. This shows an openness on the part of committee members to leadership by the divine Spirit in a spiritual church body.

The second question dealt largely with the ways in which the Spirit could choose to work individually and/or corporately in a decision-making meeting. The responses to the second question are summarized in table 1.

TABLE 1

SUMMARIZATION OF RESPONSES BY BOARD MEMBERS
TO QUESTION 2.

Statements	Bozeman Board					Mt. Ellis Board				
	Strongly agree	Agree somewhat	Unsure	Disagree somewhat	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Agree somewhat	Unsure	Disagree somewhat	Strongly disagree
A group is always Spirit-led if it is composed of Spirit-led individuals.	1	4	1		1		1		4	1
The Spirit works in a group only as He influences various individuals within the group.	4	2				2	2	1	1	
A group is only Spirit led if it is composed of Spirit-led individuals.	4		2	1		1	1	1	3	
The Spirit works in a corporate sense in groups through the use of group dynamics and group processes such as discussion, voting, etc.	2	2	1		1	1		3	1	
In order to have Spirit leadership, meditation should be part of group as well as individual decision making.	4	2	1			2	4			
The democratic process is the best one for reaching Spirit-led decisions.	2	1		3	1		2	3	1	
The Spirit's work in a meeting deals more with the people involved than the issues they are deciding.	3	2		2		2	1	1	1	

As might be expected, opinions varied widely both within and between the two church boards. Only three statements appear to have strong support from both groups. These are: (1) the Spirit works in a group only as He influences various individuals within the group; (2) in order to have the Spirit's leadership, meditation should be part of group as well as individual decision making; and (3) the Spirit's work in a meeting deals more with the people involved than the issues they are deciding. The strong support for these three statements shows that the board members understand from the Scriptures that the work of the Holy Spirit is a very personal work. The Spirit deals more with people than with issues and does so on an individual basis. The Holy Spirit can work on a corporate basis, however, if the group is open to His influence via individual and group meditation.

The third question asked for individually expressed reactions to two statements. The first, "A Spirit-led decision is one in which there is unanimous consensus," received basically the same response from both boards. In essence, their answer indicated that a Spirit-led decision is not necessarily characterized by unanimous consensus. Thus, the board members feel there could be unity in the Spirit even though there would not always be unanimity of opinion.

The second statement in question three states,

"The primary qualification for a good church decision maker is his spirituality." Again, both boards gave basically the same answer: spirituality is the primary but certainly not the only qualification; competence and willingness to do research must be considered as well. Thus, while both boards sensed the primacy of spirituality in a church leader, they also implied that they had experienced poor decisions by spiritual, yet incompetent or unprepared decision makers.

The fourth question on a description of the climate in a Spirit-led meeting received a variety of answers. Only one characteristic, however, occurred on both boards' lists. This was a spirit of openness. Other characteristics listed for a climate in which the Spirit can work were: unity, prayer, desire for the good of the church, active listening, surrender to God's will, surrender of bias, willingness to compare viewpoints with Scripture, and like goals. The apparent implication from these answers is that respondents sensed no single, dominant characteristic in the climate of a Spirit-led meeting. That climate comes from a variety of factors working together.

Item 5 on the questionnaire dealt with various factors often present in typical church meetings. Respondents were asked to evaluate how important these factors are in obtaining Spirit-led decisions. Table 2 reveals the responses of the two boards.

TABLE 2

EVALUATION OF IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS IN SPIRIT-LED
DECISIONS--AS PERCEIVED BY BOARD MEMBERS

	<u>Bozeman Board</u>				<u>Mt. Ellis Board</u>			
	Essential	Important	Unimportant	Detrimental	Essential	Important	Unimportant	Detrimental
Debate	2		2	3	2	2	1	
References made to precedent		3	2			2	3	
Citing of Scriptural authority	3	3			2	3		
Voting	6	1				4	1	
Parliamentary Procedures	2	3	2			2	2	1
Elections	3	3				2	3	
Prayer	7				5			
Fasting	3		3			3	2	
Meditation	3	4			2	3		
Spiritual commitment of group members	5	2			4	1		
Capabilities and skills of group members	4	3				3	2	
Opinions of administrators		7				3	2	
Personal judgments	1	5	1			2	1	2
Interpersonal relations	3	3				3	1	
Use of logic	4	3				5		
Decisions by consensus	2	5				3	1	

The item seen as most essential to the Spirit's leadership by these two church boards is prayer. Other items which both boards considered important, if not essential, included use of Scriptural authority, voting, meditation, spiritual commitment of group members, interpersonal relationships, use of logic, and decision by consensus. The board members seem to imply here that they see the Spirit's leadership involving a combination of spiritual and organizational dynamics. The spiritual dynamics of prayer, Scriptural authority, meditation, and spiritual commitment are united with the organizational dynamics of voting, use of logic, decision by consensus, and interpersonal relationships.

In the Conference Executive Committee

The approach used with the Montana Conference Executive Committee consisted largely of the use of the same survey given to the church boards. The survey was filled out by the committee members at the November 21, 1983 meeting. Beginning at that meeting and during the devotional period at the start of each ensuing meeting until June 24, some aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in church decision making was discussed. The survey was used as a discussion guide. The tally of responses to the particular question under discussion was followed by my views. This series of presentations to the conference committee and church boards is not specifically given here

since it largely reflects views already presented in this study.

The conference committee answered the first question regarding the nature of the church the same way as the two church boards. They see the church as primarily a divine institution established for the benefit of humanity. Consequently, they, too, imply an openness to Spirit leadership in a spiritual church.

The responses to the second question regarding the ways the Spirit works individually and corporately are indicated in table 3.

TABLE 3

SUMMARIZATION OF RESPONSES BY CONFERENCE
COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO QUESTION 2

<u>Statements</u>	Strongly agree	Agree somewhat	Unsure	Disagree somewhat	Strongly disagree
A group is always Spirit led if it is composed of Spirit-led individuals.	3	5	1		
The Spirit works in a group as He influences various individuals within the group.	5	3	1		
A group is only Spirit led if it is composed of Spirit-led individuals.	4	1	1		3
The Spirit works in a corporate sense in groups through the use of group dynamics and group processes such as discussion and voting, etc.	4	5			
In order to have the Spirit's leadership, meditation should be a part of group as well as individual decision making.	8	1			
The democratic process is the best one for reaching Spirit-led decisions.	2	4	1	2	
The Spirit's work in a meeting deals more with the people involved than the issues they are deciding.	2	2	1	1	3

The committee members largely agreed on most of the statements in question two, especially on the need for meditation (implying perhaps that they desired more opportunity for meditation). They were largely unsure or divided, however, concerning (1) whether a group is only Spirit-led if composed of Spirit-led individuals, (2) whether the democratic process was best for Spirit-led decisions, and (3) whether the Spirit's work deals more with people than with issues. This would seem to imply an uncertainty regarding their understanding of how the Spirit works individually versus corporately and regarding the main thrust of the Spirit's work, i.e., with individuals or with issues.

The reaction of committee members to the first statement in question three--"A Spirit-led decision is one in which there is unanimous consensus"--was well summarized by one who wrote, "would be nice but not always the case." Apparently, then, they see unanimous consensus as ideal, but not essential.

Regarding the second part of question three dealing with whether a church decision maker's primary qualification is his spirituality, they reacted as did the church board members: spirituality may be primary, but certainly not the only thing needed. They too implied reticence toward any suggestion that spirituality is the only quality needed.

The characteristics of a Spirit-led climate given by these respondents in answer to question four were harmony, common goals, concern for others' needs, prayer for the Spirit's presence and will to be sensed, trust, willingness to work together, hearts in tune with Christ, and "a climate where details are explained." As with the church boards, they seem to feel that a Spirit-led climate is a multi-factored thing.

Responses to the final question, which concerns the relative importance of various factors in decision-making meetings, are listed in table 4.

TABLE 4

EVALUATION OF IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS IN SPIRIT-LED
DECISIONS--AS PERCEIVED BY CONFERENCE
COMMITTEE MEMBERS

	Essential	Important	Unimportant	Detrimental
Debate	2	4	1	1
References made to precedent		6	3	
Citing of Scriptural authority	5	4		
Voting	4	3	2	
Parliamentary procedures	3	4	2	
Elections	3	3	3	
Prayer	9			
Fasting	1	6	2	
Meditation	3	6		
Spiritual commitment of group members	9			
Capabilities and skills of group members	3	6		
Opinions of administrators	2	6	1	
Personal judgments	3	6		
Interpersonal relations	3	5		
Use of logic	3	5	1	
Decisions by consensus	3	5	1	

All of the factors listed were seen to have considerable importance in a Spirit-led meeting. However, only "prayer" and "the spiritual commitment of the group members" were considered absolutely essential for the Spirit to guide the decisions made. The implication appears to be that, aside from prayer and spiritual commitment, the Spirit may work in varying degrees with many other spiritual and organizational dynamics in church decision making.

Summary

The nominating committee, the two church boards, and the conference executive committee all indicated the desire to be led of the Spirit to discern God's will in their decisions. They recognized that the church is divine as well as human, and thus is in need of direction by the divine Spirit. Consequently, they were all willing to cooperate in a project to enhance their sensitivity to the Spirit's presence and leading.

The survey administered to the church boards and the conference committee was to determine their current understanding of the working relationship between the church and the Spirit, and to serve as a basis for further study. The initial responses to the survey revealed a recognition of need of the Spirit's guidance, yet in most cases an uncertainty as to what processes were involved in Spirit leadership was evident. There was general recog-

nition of the fact that the Spirit works with both spiritual processes--prayer--and organizational processes--discussion--in His leadership. Perhaps the primary concepts revealed by the survey were (1) the acknowledged need of the Spirit's help in making church decisions and (2) the lack of consensus on how help from the Spirit actually occurs.

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Effect on Church Nominating Committee

Problems with Past Approach

The approach used for the past several years by the Bozeman and Mt. Ellis nominating committees was explained in the previous chapter. Though this approach generally worked well, there were some problems which the current approach has helped to solve. (1) In the early approach, the means of gathering data on members' spiritual gifts seemed complicated and mechanical. To keep current, a spiritual gifts seminar, or at least a short series of sermons, seemed necessary every year. People's abilities and interests often change as they grow spiritually: thus the annual re-evaluation of their spiritual gifts. However, the re-administration of the same or a similar spiritual-gifts inventory became repetitious. A simpler re-evaluation system was needed for those already acquainted with the concept of spiritual gifts. This system was provided by the new approach described in chapter 3.¹

¹Cf. pp. 115-117.

(2) The members were unable to see how their unique abilities fit in with the various Biblical charismata.

They could comprehend their abilities in twentieth-century terms, but many had trouble seeing that these abilities are often the same as those gifts listed in the NT. This lack of perception caused many to believe that they did not have genuine spiritual gifts. These dedicated Christians could organize, teach, advise, etc., yet they could not see themselves as having spiritual gifts in the Biblical sense.

(3) The Biblical lists of charismata do not deal specifically with all of the current needs of the church. For instance, a spiritual gift of clerical abilities is not mentioned, except possibly under the general category of "helps." Yet many important functions of the church require those with clerical abilities.

Evaluation of Present Approach

The new approach used in this project helped toward the resolution of these three problems. (1) Its simplicity helped solve the problem of repeatedly completing spiritual-gifts inventories. (2) The members' inability to relate to Biblical categories of charismata was resolved by the use of terms they commonly use, e.g., organizer, teacher, etc. Every type of church need in the Bozeman and Mt. Ellis congregations can be included in one of these five categories and its correspondent charismata: organizer--the gifts of being an apostle, pastor, or admin-

istrator; speaker-teacher--the gifts of prophecy, teaching, knowledge, evangelism, tongues, and pastoring; advisor--prophecy, exhortation, wisdom, faith, and distinguishing spirits; helper--service, giving, mercy, healing, and miracles; and clerical worker--the gift of service. (3)

This in turn helps solve the third problem of not having sufficient, relevant spiritual gifts to encompass the needs of the church.

The response to this approach by the nominating committee and by the church members has been quite positive. The committee received the idea enthusiastically and reported that as they explained it to others, the response they received was gratifying. They indicated that the members especially appreciated (1) the attempt at an even distribution of church responsibilities, (2) that they were given a choice of service areas, and (3) that the process was presented in terms they could understand and relate to. The committee's work was finished quickly and positively. They have requested that the church continue to use this approach.

This particular approach to the work of the nominating committee seems to increase conscious awareness of the Holy Spirit for three reasons: (1) It is in harmony with the NT description of how the Spirit and His gifts are to work in the church. While the NT charismata are not specifically mentioned, the concept of the Spirit enabling us to use natural talents and abilities given for the glory

of God and the good of the church is presented to the congregation. Also presented to them is the ability of the church body to function effectively if each member does his part. (2) Since "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7), surely His Spirit works best with those who give willingly of their time and talents. Allowing the members to choose their area of service promotes this cheerful, willing cooperation with the Spirit. (3) The nominating committee allowed the church members the opportunity to pray about the area of service they should choose before they were asked to commit themselves. This provided time for the Spirit to work with them when reaching this important decision.

Effect on Church Boards

Initial Responses

The original proposal to spend some time at the beginning of each board meeting studying about the Holy Spirit met with considerable interest. Many board members had some of the same questions as I did. A sharing time followed by prayer bands was not new to either church board, but tying that into a study of the Holy Spirit was a new approach.

Initially, they considered the project survey a difficult assignment. They took the assignment seriously and spent considerable time on it. The typical, initial response was that the survey had "really made them think."

They had thought previously about some of the items on the survey; but many issues were new to them.

Developments during the Project

At each ensuing board meeting, following the completion of the survey, board members had an opportunity to see the combined results of their answers as well as time to discuss the various parts of the survey with me. Each member was interested to learn the results of the survey, including how their answers compared with the others as well as with those of the conference committee.

Three things stand out as significant developments in this experience with the church boards. (1) The Holy Spirit's presence and direction was consistently sought by nearly everyone during the prayer bands at the beginning of each meeting. The prayers seemed to reflect a renewed sense of urgency and importance in having the Spirit present. (2) A procedural change was a direct result of one of the discussions at the Bozeman board. It was suggested by one of the members that if meditation was important for the work of the Holy Spirit, board members needed copies of the agenda far enough in advance to spend time meditating and praying about the agenda items. Consequently, the agenda is now mailed out a week ahead of time, and members are encouraged to pray and think it through before coming to the meeting. (3) The spiritual benefit of praying together about particularly knotty problems on the agenda was

dramatically evidenced one evening at the Bozeman board. A disgruntled family that was leaving the church requested permission to appear before the board and explain their reasons for leaving. The situation was made the special burden of the opening season of prayer that evening. Then the family met with the board. Every board member later seemed to sense that their prayers had been answered and that the Holy Spirit had directed. An open, yet compassionate, atmosphere pervaded the whole encounter. Thus, even though the names of the family members were dropped, it was accomplished in a positive manner with a minimum of bitterness on either side.

Project Evaluation by the Church Boards

Over the course of several meetings, the church boards discussed various parts of the survey. Once this was accomplished, board members were asked to answer two additional questions:

(1) Having studied the Holy Spirit and church decision making for the last several sessions, look again at the original survey, then write your present understanding of how the Holy Spirit works with us and in us to aid in decision making.

(2) Please comment on (a) whether this study of the Holy Spirit has been helpful to you, (b) what you have learned or experienced during this time that most stands out in your mind, and (c) further suggestions on how this study could have been or could continue to be more profitable to you in the future.

Answers to the first question would reflect some of the understandings reached during the recent board meetings. Their answers reflected many of the views presented;

however, several additional insights were offered that had not been specifically discussed.

Their answers to the first question reflected the following aspects of the Holy Spirit's work in church decision-making concepts brought up in the board discussions:

(1) A group will be led by the Holy Spirit if (a) it asks for that guidance; (b) its members are willing to give up preconceptions; (c) members are willing to submit not only to the Holy Spirit but also to one another; (d) members are willing to study into and learn more about the issues they are deciding. (2) The Holy Spirit works in both a corporate and individual manner within a group. (3) The Spirit works on the heart as well as the mind, i.e., He works on the conscience in the clarification of right and wrong. (4) In order for the Spirit to work, the human spirit must be characterized by prayer, meditation, and dedication. (5) The Holy Spirit works in an atmosphere of freedom, even giving freedom to make poor choices at times, in order that Christians might learn from them; meanwhile, the Spirit continues to cooperate with them to bring good out of that decision.

Answers to the first question, which indicate their own individual reflections on the subject, include: (1) The Holy Spirit educates the conscience by supplying the gifts of spiritual change, repentance, and faith. (2) The Holy Spirit helps a group to make decisions by helping its members to relate to each other and to one another's

opinions. (3) The Spirit's usual medium of expression is common sense in decision making. But by asking for His guidance, decision makers open themselves to new insights, avenues of expression, and a larger perspective. (4) The Spirit's presence enables group members to remember what they have learned from past experience, reading, and reason. (5) The Spirit facilitates better church decisions since He leads the group to a clearer understanding of God, His principles, character, and goals.

Two possible conclusions from the boards' statements regarding their understanding of this topic are: (1) They found the concepts presented in the board meetings helpful enough to become part of their own understanding; and (2) they were prompted to do further reflecting and reach additional conclusions due to the interest generated by the studies given to the church boards.

These two conclusions seem further substantiated by the board members' responses to the first part of the second question--Was the study of the Holy Spirit and decision making useful? All indicated that it was. Some also indicated that new insights had been gained. One suggestion given in conjunction with this question stated that the theory discussed would have been more useful if it had been applied and discussed in connection with specific decisions with which the board was dealing.

The second part of question two--Did anything stand

out in your minds as we reviewed the experience?--received various answers which seemed to center around four themes: (1) Earnest prayer for the Spirit's presence and guidance is needed if that guidance is expected. (2) If the presence of the Spirit has been sincerely sought, decision makers can proceed in the faith that He will lead. (3) The Holy Spirit may not reveal clear-cut "yes" or "no" answers, but He will work to bring the best out of the decisions made. (4) Church decision makers need to seek a closer relationship with the Lord through the Spirit. Thus, they can be Spirit-led individuals as they continue to help with group decisions.

The final part of the second question--What suggestions would you make on how the study could have been, or could yet be, more valuable?--elicited two frequently mentioned suggestions: (1) They needed to be reminded of the importance of the Spirit's guidance on a regular basis, and (2) the material presented would be more useful if the presentations were closer together, i.e., not a month apart. Other suggestions included: (1) The study would be more useful if it could be coupled with a plan for simultaneous personal study by the board members; (2) the concepts need to be applied at other church meetings; and (3) too much time was devoted to the study and discussion in some of the board meetings.

Effect on the Conference Executive Committee

Responses to the Project

The initial response to the proposed project was quite favorable, both from the conference administrators and the conference committee members. The conference president, who had been pursuing an individual study of the Holy Spirit at the time the project was proposed, had a special interest in it.

As to the committee members, several said that the survey had challenged their thinking. They continued to express interest in and support for the project as the survey was discussed at ensuing meetings.

Over the course of the meetings at which the survey was discussed, three incidents occurred which seemed to indicate that the committee members were trying to put into practice some of the principles being discussed. The first occurred when the conference president stopped a meeting in the midst of a discussion of an item which evoked an obvious division of opinion. He called for discussion to cease until a period of prayer could be devoted to the item of business. The discussion at the beginning of the meeting had dealt with the need for "prayer breaks," particularly over important and/or controversial items.

The second incident relating to the project was several requests for more detailed agendas. Agendas had been mailed out in advance; however, the items listed were

so briefly stated that they were largely meaningless, except for items which had been discussed at previous meetings. The results of the committee survey indicate ready acceptance of the importance of meditation in Spirit-led decision making. The committee members apparently sensed the need to think, pray, and meditate over agenda items before they attended the meeting; thus, they have requested the annotated agendas.

The final incident relates to a comment by a layman during a rather emotional exchange which started to build between one of the other laymen and one of the conference administrators. This particular layman interrupted the exchange to say that he felt the comments made were not in harmony with "the spirit of the meeting." His comment regarding the climate in which the Spirit can work was greatly appreciated by many present. It also served as a reminder that one of the issues discussed was that the Spirit's work more frequently concerns those deciding the issues than the issues themselves.

Project Evaluation by the Conference Committee

At their June 24, 1984, meeting, the conference committee members responded to the same evaluation questions that had been given to the Bozeman and Mt. Ellis church boards. Their interest in the subject and their support of the entire project is evident in their responses to these questions. The first question regarded their

present understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in church decision making. Their responses indicated that they apparently had given considerable thought to this subject, and they reflected concepts which had been discussed during the various presentations.

Issues which they addressed were: (1) the need of an open atmosphere for frank and free discussion; (2) the responsibility of committee members to study issues ahead of time in order to formulate their own ideas, yet maintain a willingness to have these ideas changed if needed; (3) the necessity of prayer for the Spirit's presence and enlightenment; (4) the individual, spiritual preparation of committee members by the surrender of the heart, and by a personal walk with God in a life that seeks harmony with His will; (5) the recognition that the Spirit works amid discussion of ideas, and that He still can work even when everyone may not be in agreement; (6) that the Spirit can bring unity without uniformity, though this does not mean He condones sharp disagreements and political maneuvering; (7) that the Spirit works in individual decision makers to produce proper motives, clarity of thought, desire for cohesiveness, appreciation of others' points of view, and consensus; and (8) that the way individuals can realize the Spirit's leading during a meeting is to keep the promise of His presence and the desire to fulfill His plans foremost in their minds.

Two additional suggestions on how the Spirit works in decision making represent original suggestions that were not previously discussed at the committee meetings. The first was that the Spirit works to combine our feelings and desires with the desires of the heavenly Father in order to cause "all things to work together for good" (Rom 8:28). The second suggestion repeats the thought of one of the church board members: the Spirit aids in decision making by prompting the use of good judgment or common sense.

The next question deals with whether the study of the Holy Spirit and church decision making has been useful to the committee members. All indicated that it had been useful. However, some of them listed specific items which had been particularly helpful. One member wrote that it was useful to know that discussion was not out of harmony with the Spirit's leading in decision making. Another individual found "the principles by which the Holy Spirit works" particularly useful. A third member was thankful for the reminder that the church is primarily a spiritual/relational organization.

The questionnaire then asked for one concept they learned or experienced during the project which impressed them the most. Two responses related to something the respondents had experienced. The rest of the responses dealt with concepts they had learned. The first experiential response stated: "We have not fully taken advantage of

this Gift of God. We need to seek for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on a regular basis." The second experiential statement indicated a renewed sense of the importance of the Spirit in the life of both the individual and the church. These two comments indicate an apparent increased awareness of the need for conscious Spirit dependence by the committee members.

Concepts which stood out in the minds of the committee were: (1) God cares and works with us, not because of and at times in spite of us; (2) one can never exhaust a Biblical theme; (3). . . "if someone doesn't agree with me, he can still be led by the Spirit"; (4) God does speak through the group in the discussion of issues as well as through the "prophetic" office; (5) the mechanics of the committee process (parliamentary) are not as important as the relationships on a committee (member to God and member to member); and (6) the Holy Spirit is interested and willing to be involved in the affairs of men.

The final evaluation question asks for further suggestions on how the study could have been, or could yet be, more useful. Several suggestions were given: (1) More time for study and discussion of the topic is needed at the committee meetings; (2) Too much time lapsed between studies (this one was also mentioned by the church boards). This problem of time lapse might be resolved by following the suggestion of respondents that they be given something

to take with them for further reference.

Further suggestions dealt with the possibilities for future study and experimentation. These included the possibility of further study and discussion at a committee retreat, the chance to read the dissertation and the possibility of experimentation with a consensus decision-making process in the conference committee meetings. One final suggestion, to put into practice more fully the concepts studied, was an idea shared by all participating in the project. Thus, not only has the committee become more aware of their need for the Spirit's presence and direction, but they indicate a desire for further spiritual growth in this area in the future.

Effect on the Pastor

As I pastored the Bozeman and Mt. Ellis churches and served on the conference committee during the course of this project, I saw that the experience affected me in two areas: (1) my personal relationship with God and the church, and (2) my relationship with those on the church boards and the conference committee who were involved in this project.

Personally, the experience has resulted in a greater sense of the need for constant dependence on God through His Spirit. Studying and experiencing the Spirit's presence and help over the course of this project has helped me see the truth of a statement by one through whom

the Spirit worked in a marked way:

It is the absence of the Spirit that makes the gospel ministry so powerless. Learning, talent, eloquence, every natural or acquired endowment, may be possessed; but, without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner won to Christ. On the other hand, if they are connected with Christ, if the gifts of the Spirit are theirs, the poorest and most ignorant of His disciples will have a power that will tell upon hearts. God makes them channels for the outflowing of the highest influence in the universe.

This project has also clarified some of my questions regarding the nature of the church, and how I should relate to it as a church leader. If the church is primarily a human institution, then human organizational techniques should be foremost in its management. If, on the other hand, the church is God's institution, those techniques should be subservient to such spiritual processes as prayer, meditation, fasting, etc. The conclusion I reached is that, as a leader of a church that is primarily a spiritual institution led by the divine Spirit, my primary responsibility is to be personally led by that Spirit, so that I can in turn lead those in my charge. This leadership does not exclude the use of human management and decision-making techniques, for the Spirit worked via a number of human decision-making processes in the NT church. Yet those leadership processes must remain subservient to the personal, spiritual leadership of the Spirit.

My relationship with the nominating committee, the

¹White, Testimonies, 8:22.

church boards, and the conference committee has been affected variously due to this project. Since more time and effort was expended with the church boards than the other two committees, it seems that more progress was made with them in terms of a mutual experience of dependence on the Spirit. A closer bond was created as they shared common needs with one another and with the Spirit.

My pastoral relationship with the nominating committee was not altered greatly through this project, since the function of the nominating committee is temporary. Positive results did emerge, however, in the sense that the committee members and I together discovered an approach which we felt pleased God, the church members, and ourselves.

My relationship with the conference committee members has improved in terms of spiritual growth. Some of the members now discuss with me not only the Holy Spirit's relationship to their work as a committee, but also His guidance in their personal lives. Hopefully, I can be used by the Spirit to continue to foster healing within this committee which has had several experiences that have often split its membership.

Out of these developments in my relationship with God, the church, and some of its decision makers, there have arisen some implications for my own ministry. This experience has helped me to view pastoral ministry as an

extension of the ministry of Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. While the minister cannot program or direct the Spirit, the Spirit can direct the minister. This direction by the Spirit, however, is not so much a direction of plans and programs as it is a direction of attitudes and interpersonal relationships. The Spirit can direct a pastor and his parishioners in nearly any organized program, providing He can lead them to work in a spirit of candid openness, yet with harmony and love.

This is perhaps the greatest implication for my own pastoral growth. My ministry has been characterized by constant experimentation with new methods. This project has revealed that while experimentation is not necessarily harmful, it does not contain the real key to a spiritually vibrant church. The key to a spiritual church is the Spirit of Christ Himself. Whatever can be done to foster a closer relationship with Christ and His Spirit should be done. The doing of it must not, however, be just another method or program. Using Christ's analogy, the Spirit is as capable of being programmed as is the wind. It is a relational thing, and I have determined that I will continue to do whatever I can to foster the individual and corporate relationship between the Spirit and His church.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY WITHIN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

The Sense of the Divine

The first implication for ministry that emerges from this project is that a new, or renewed, sense of the divine calling of the church needs to be experienced. The humanity of the church is at times almost overwhelming. Has this overwhelming sense of humanity threatened to extinguish the appreciation of the fact that the church is also spiritual? The larger the church grows as an organization, the greater is the tendency to lose sight of the church as Christ's body. The greater the demands for increased and ever more efficient organization, the easier it becomes to rely more heavily on the human organization than on the divine Organizer.

This project has confirmed for me the need and value of frequently exploring with the church its divine aspects. The church needs to be reminded often that it is divinely derived by a divine calling. Further, it has a divine destiny, and the Godhead has offered one of its own to provide divine direction in reaching that destiny. Without that sense of the divine, without frequent

reminders that God desires to be present and to direct through His Spirit, church business tends to become "business as usual." Members and ministers alike need to be reminded constantly that the church's business is God's business on this earth. While there are aspects of it that are typical of any human organization, it is much more than that. Consequently, the conducting of God's business should include certain dynamics not found in strictly human enterprises. The additional dynamics are given in the implications for ministry within the Adventist Church.

The Study of the Early Church

Since the clearest, most authoritative example of the Holy Spirit's leadership of a church is described in the NT, the work and ways of the Spirit and the NT Church should be the frequent study of all involved in church leadership. This project has convinced me that a serious attempt to focus on the early church experience with its implications for today will help develop conscious dependence on the Spirit. This dependence can then result in a closer following of God's will in the various decisions made. This study should be conducted in such a manner that each church decision maker is personally involved in the study.

The Role of Prayer

The study of the Holy Spirit's work with the NT

Church should be closely tied to efforts toward meaningful group prayer experiences. Since the study concerns the Holy Spirit, prayer for the Spirit's own insights into how He desires to work with the church should be sought. The use of prayer before, during, and after the decision-making process is the experience which is most neglected. Agenda items need to be in the hands of decision makers in adequate time for prayer, meditation, and fasting, if necessary. In most church meetings, problems need to be approached with more prayer and less rhetoric. Most church decision makers are still growing in their desire to seek God's opinion rather than to express their own. The option of any member suggesting a period of prayer and/or silent meditation should be kept open. In order for the Spirit to continue to bless and guide in the decisions made, it is best to continue to seek His direction as those decisions are implemented. Sometimes good decisions become poor decisions, solely because of poor implementation. Prayers for the Spirit's guidance should not be left at the meeting.

The Choice of Decision Makers

The selection of church decision makers is usually based on the consideration of a variety of qualifications. The more specific the position to be filled, the more specific the qualifications frequently tend to be. E.g.,

a building contractor is selected to serve on a building committee because of his specific qualifications. A study of church leaders in the NT, however, reveals that the primary qualifications listed are spiritual.¹ This implies that, while specific intellectual and/or vocational skills are important, their importance should not exceed the spiritual qualifications of the person being considered for a church office.

Decisions for a spiritual body should be made by spiritual people. The decision makers chosen should be willing to commit themselves to the personal preparation required of those who would be Spirit led. Acquaintance with issues cannot replace personal acquaintance with God through His Spirit.

The Decision-Planning Process

A final implication for ministry is the intentional planning of attitudes as well as agendas in decision-making meetings.² This planning process would attempt to promote a climate in which the Holy Spirit could most effectively work. The foremost characteristic of this climate would be mutual ministry. The members would study together the role of the church in ministry. Even decision-making meetings are to be occasions where the Holy Spirit can minister to the needs of the group members:

¹ Cf. Acts 6:3-6; 1 Tim 3:1-13.

² Cf. Anderson, pp. 13, 16-19, 29-30.

where He can move these members to care for the physical and financial needs of the church, as well as minister to the emotional, social, and spiritual needs of those who are there.

Within this climate of mutual ministry, the decision makers move forward in faith, fully expecting the Spirit's leadership because they have surrendered their own wills to the accomplishment of God's will. They recognize that the Spirit's guidance may involve more than one possible solution to various problems. Consequently, if there is no unanimity of opinion on a particular decision, they can still believe in the Spirit's guidance. They recognize that unity in the Spirit does not require uniformity of opinion. On the other hand, unity in the Spirit is best maintained when a consensus decision-making model is used.

The implementation of these five factors--emphasizing the divine aspects of the church, study of the Spirit's work with the early church, meaningful group prayer experiences, prioritizing spirituality in the choice of decision makers, and advance planning of attitudes as well as agendas--have helped increase awareness and dependence on the Spirit in my churches and in the conference committee. Thus, I recommend them to those who wish to increase a conscious Spirit dependence in their decision-making church bodies.

Suggested Areas for Further Study

The study done in conjunction with this project has prompted interest in other aspects of the subject which could not be included in this paper. One of these, originally intended as part of this study, required information to which I did not have ready access. This subject concerns the relationship of the Holy Spirit to current organizational-management techniques being used in the church. While these techniques are in use at all levels, they are particularly present in upper administrative levels. This is to be expected since these levels deal almost entirely with management. Though these upper administrative levels are involved in management of an organization of human beings, yet they also manage a spiritual organism, the body of Christ. How then do human organizational techniques fit into the functioning of a spiritual organism? And how does the Holy Spirit, the divine Management Expert, relate to these human management techniques? Hopefully, someone familiar with and involved at these levels could do further research on this topic.

One further area for possible study is how the Holy Spirit impresses the human mind. More information is constantly coming to light concerning the way the mind functions, e.g., studies of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. It might prove helpful if someone familiar with these ideas could study ways in which the mind might

be made more receptive to the Spirit's impressions. There is evidence that certain parts of the brain deal with various types of information. Could a better understanding of these functions of the mind also improve understanding of how the Spirit tries to impress thoughts and emotions? Perhaps one with dual skills in psychology and theology could provide church decision makers with valuable help in their efforts to become ever better attuned to the still, small voice of God's Spirit.

The Spirit does wish to be heard, according to John the Revelator. May this study be another small step in facilitating the command John records: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7).

APPENDIX A

April 24, 1984

To the Saints of the Church at Mt. Ellis:

If this were the apostle Paul, he'd probably begin by writing, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren [and sisters], I do not want you to be unaware. To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

According to 1 Cor 12:2,7, which was just quoted, how many of you have been given at least one spiritual ability to be used for the common good of the church? "To each one" includes everyone; excludes no one.

Now, obviously, God provides spiritual gifts/talents/abilities to each and every church member, but does He expect us to use them? Remember the parable of the talents? What happened to the man who buried his talent? Moral of the story: use it or lose it.

Consequently, (1) God gives each of us at least some ability to be used for the good of His church, and (2) He asks us to invest that ability in His work. It would seem logical, then, that if each member uses his spiritual ability, the church will function efficiently without too heavy a load on any one member. Interestingly, in the Mt. Ellis church there is approximately one church office for each active member. In other words, if each member took on one church responsibility, no one would have to do double duty.

As this year's nominating committee looked over the various offices to be filled, they concluded that each office seemed to fit within five general categories. Following are those five categories, along with the church offices which seemed to be associated with them:

<u>Organizers</u>	<u>Speaker- Teachers</u>	<u>Clerical Workers</u>
Elders	S.S. leaders	Clerk
Music Coordinator	S.S. teachers	Treasurer
Youth Outreach	Elders	Personal Ministries
Family Ministries Coordinator	Health-Temperance	Secretary
Social Committee Head	Advisors	Public Relations
Head Deacon	Elders	Secretary
Head Deaconness	Lay Advisory delegate	S.S. Secretary
S.S. Superintendent		Mail Clerk
Reception Committee Head	Helpers	Religious Liberty
S.S. Division Coordinator	Deacons	Secretary.
Careweb Coordinator	Deaconesses	
	Community Services	
	Reception committee	
	Social Committee	

Since you would know better than anyone where your areas of skill and/or interest lie, we'd like to ask you to decide which of the five functions would be your first and second choice. You may, for instance, choose the clerical area first, for that's where your greatest skills are. But, you may choose the organizing function as second choice, because you'd like to develop some new spiritual abilities in that area.

Please pray about it, then choose the two areas you'd most prefer to be active in this year. The nominating committee will be contacting you within the next week to learn which ones you've chosen. When they contact you, you could also let them know if you have a preference for a specific church office, although they will want to look at the total needs of the church before they make final decisions.

We'll be praying for you and would ask that you do the same for us!

Your 1984-85 Church Nominating Committee

APPENDIX B

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND CHURCH DECISION MAKING

1. Place a '1' beside the following descriptions of the church which most accurately describes your understanding of it, a '2' beside the next most accurate, etc.
The church is:
____ primarily a divine institution established to benefit humanity.
____ primarily a human institution established for the accomplishment of divine purposes.
____ a building where God is worshipped.
____ a collection of individual worshippers.
2. Write 'strongly agree', 'agree somewhat', 'unsure', 'disagree somewhat', or 'strongly disagree' after the following statements. Explain your answer further if you like. Use the back of the sheet if necessary.
 - a. A group is always Spirit led if it is composed of Spirit-led individuals.
 - b. The Spirit works in a group only as He influences various individuals within the group.
 - c. A group is only Spirit led if it is composed of Spirit led individuals.
 - d. The Spirit works in a corporate sense in groups through the use of group dynamics and group processes such as discussion, voting etc.
 - e. In order to have the Spirit's leadership, meditation should be part of group as well as individual decision making.
 - f. The democratic process is the best for reaching Spirit-led decisions.
 - g. The Spirit's work in a meeting deals more with the people involved than the issues they are deciding.
3. Write your reaction to the following statements:
 - a. A Spirit-led decision is one in which there is unanimous consensus.
 - b. The primary qualification for a good church decision maker is his spirituality.
4. Describe the climate of a meeting in which the Spirit can work.

5. Describe the relative importance of the following items for Spirit-led decision making by rating each item as (a) essential, (b) important, (c) unimportant, (d) detrimental.

☐ debate
☐ references made to precedent
☐ citing scriptural authority
☐ voting
☐ parliamentary procedure
☐ elections
☐ prayer
☐ fasting
☐ meditation
☐ spiritual commitment of group members
☐ capabilities and skills of group members
☐ opinions of administrators
☐ personal judgments
☐ interpersonal relations among group members
☐ use of logic
☐ decisions by consensus

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