

FOUNDATIONS
of
ADVENTIST
LEADERSHIP

A LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

*Based on the Collected Papers
from the Leadership Symposium
General Conference Session*

July 3-7, 2005

seven



Leaders *and* Ecclesiastical Authority:

*Acceptance of
Authority—*

PART 2

Based on the Presentation by

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Biblical Research Institute

Session 7 will address *the* following questions:

1

For what three purposes should leaders use their ecclesiastical authority?

2

How do these three elements function within the church?

3

Within the Adventist Church, where does final authority reside? Why has the church chosen this model?

4

What challenges do we face in exercising ecclesiastical authority? How can each of these challenges be met?

5

As a church, we follow the consensus model of decision making. What criteria should consensus follow? What should be avoided in achieving consensus?

6

How can we evaluate a leader's use of ecclesiastical authority?

7

What does the proper use of ecclesiastical

III. Understanding *the Proper Use and the Limits of Ecclesiastical Authority* (continued)

C. Ecclesiastical Authority: Setting Limits

Leaders will use ecclesiastical authority to preserve

- *the integrity of the biblical **message***
- *the **mission** of the church*
- *the **unity** of the church*

These three elements were of central

Concerning His mission, Jesus said,

⁴“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

⁸“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

²²“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one, as

²³I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity . . .”

John 17:4,8,22,23 (NIV)



This triad

- *is of fundamental importance in defining the role of ecclesiastical authority*
- *belongs to the essential core of the nature of the Adventist Church*
- *expresses the identity and role of the Advent Movement within*



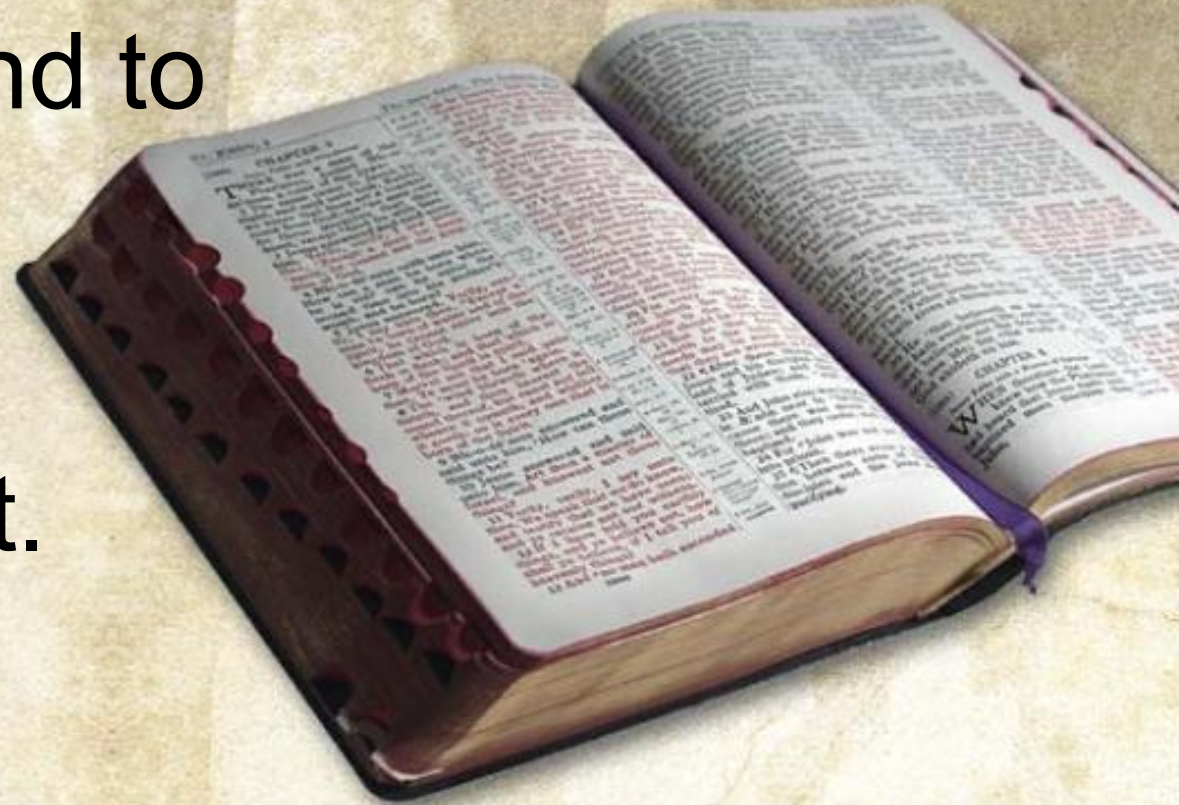
Adventist Church leaders received the **message** as a trust from the Lord.

Leaders do not own it; it belongs to the world church.



The **mission** of the Adventist movement is a call to restore biblical truth and to prepare the world for the return of Christ.

Leaders are to be totally committed to it.



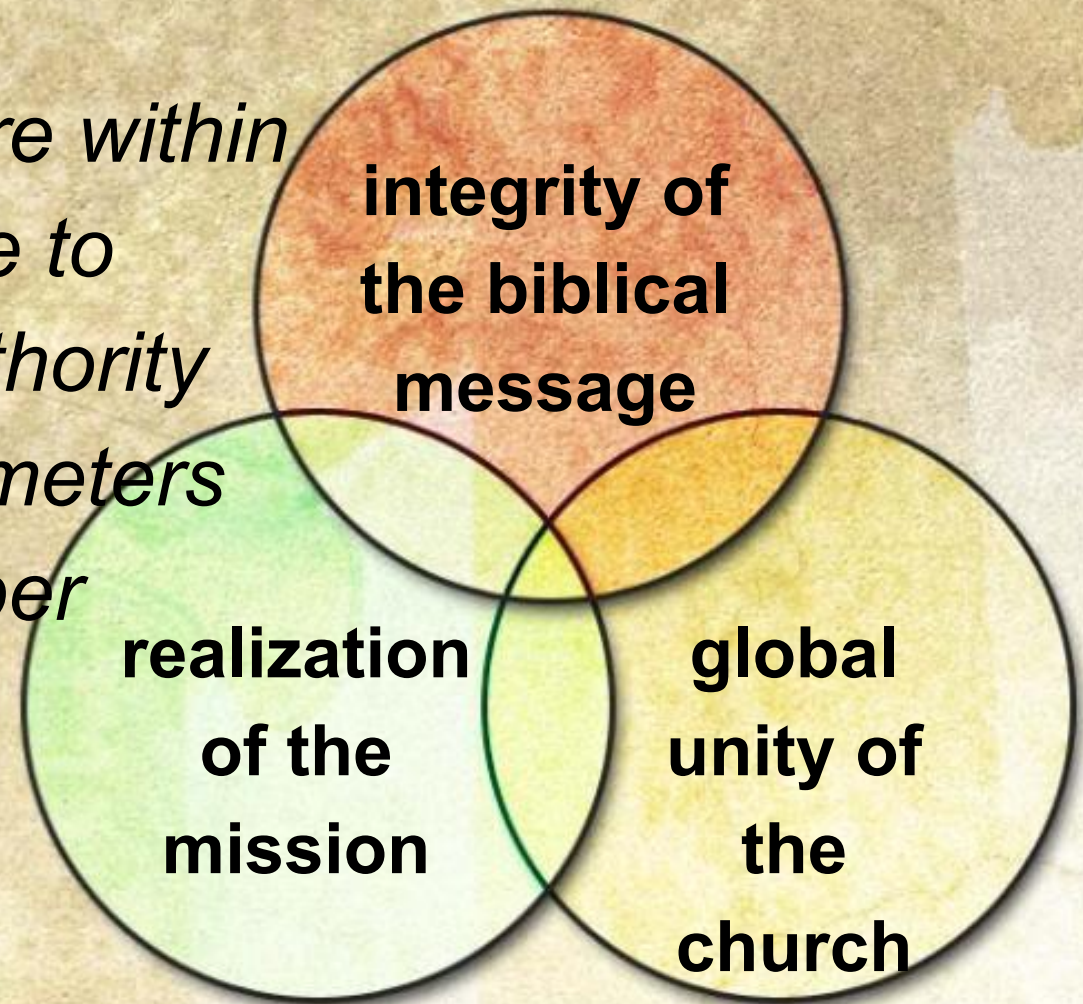
The **unity** of the church enables the global church to speak with one voice to the world

- *in proclaiming the message of the church*
- *in fulfilling its mission*




This triad

- *defines the sphere within which leaders are to exercise their authority*
- *creates the parameters within which proper use or misuse of authority can be identified*
- *could be the fundamental criterion*
 - *for the exercise of ecclesiastical authority*



Every plan, decision, and appointment can be evaluated through the prism of **message**, **mission**, and **unity**.



INITIAL
plans
decisions
appointments

TRIAD

FINAL
plans
decisions
appointments

D. Ecclesiastical Authority and Final Authority

Although delegated authority is used by different leaders and at different levels around the world, there is a final authority in the church.

The challenge is to define

- *how that authority is expressed*
- *who should exercise it*
- *what could limit it*

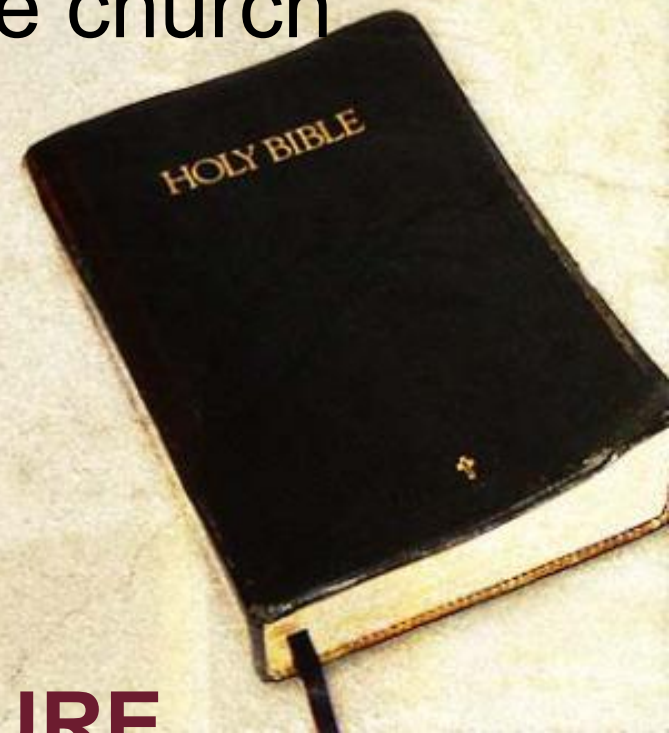
Adventist ecclesiology doesn't allow

Adventists believe that ultimate authority resides in the world church as it is subject to the Lordship of Christ.

This is based on the biblical model of the Jerusalem Council found in Acts 15.

We believe that the voice of the church is authoritative when the world church convenes in General Conference (GC) Session.

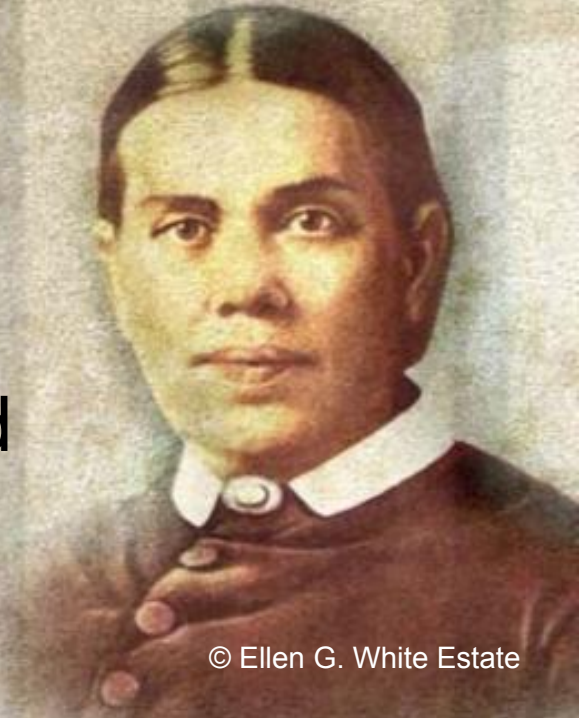
ULTIMATE AUTHORITY,
however, should always be
FAITHFULNESS TO SCRIPTURE



Ellen White supported this view.

“ . . . God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority. The error that some are in danger of committing is in giving to the mind and judgment of one man, or of a small group of men, the full measure of authority and influence that God has vested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work.”

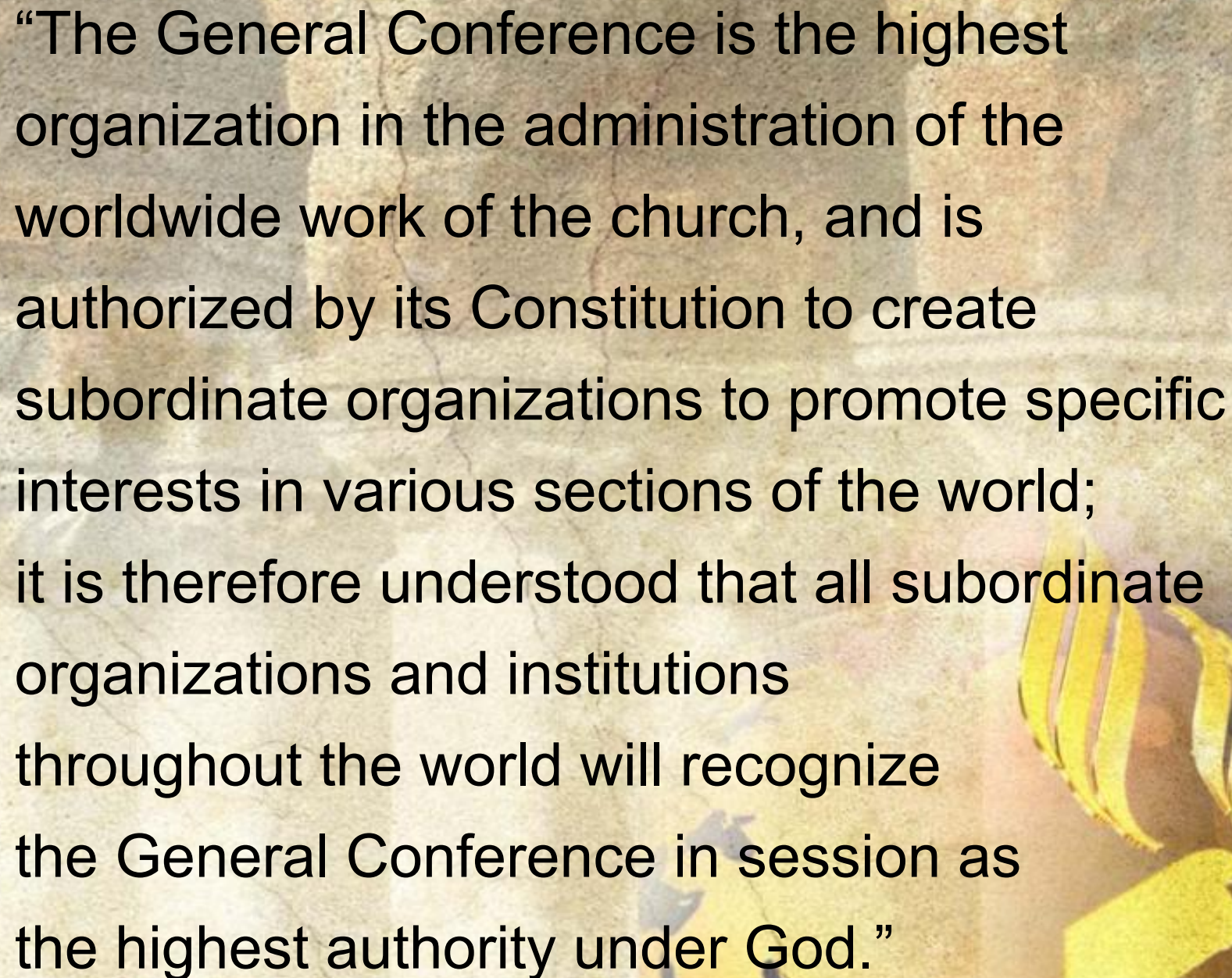
(Testimonies for the Church, Vol 9, 261)

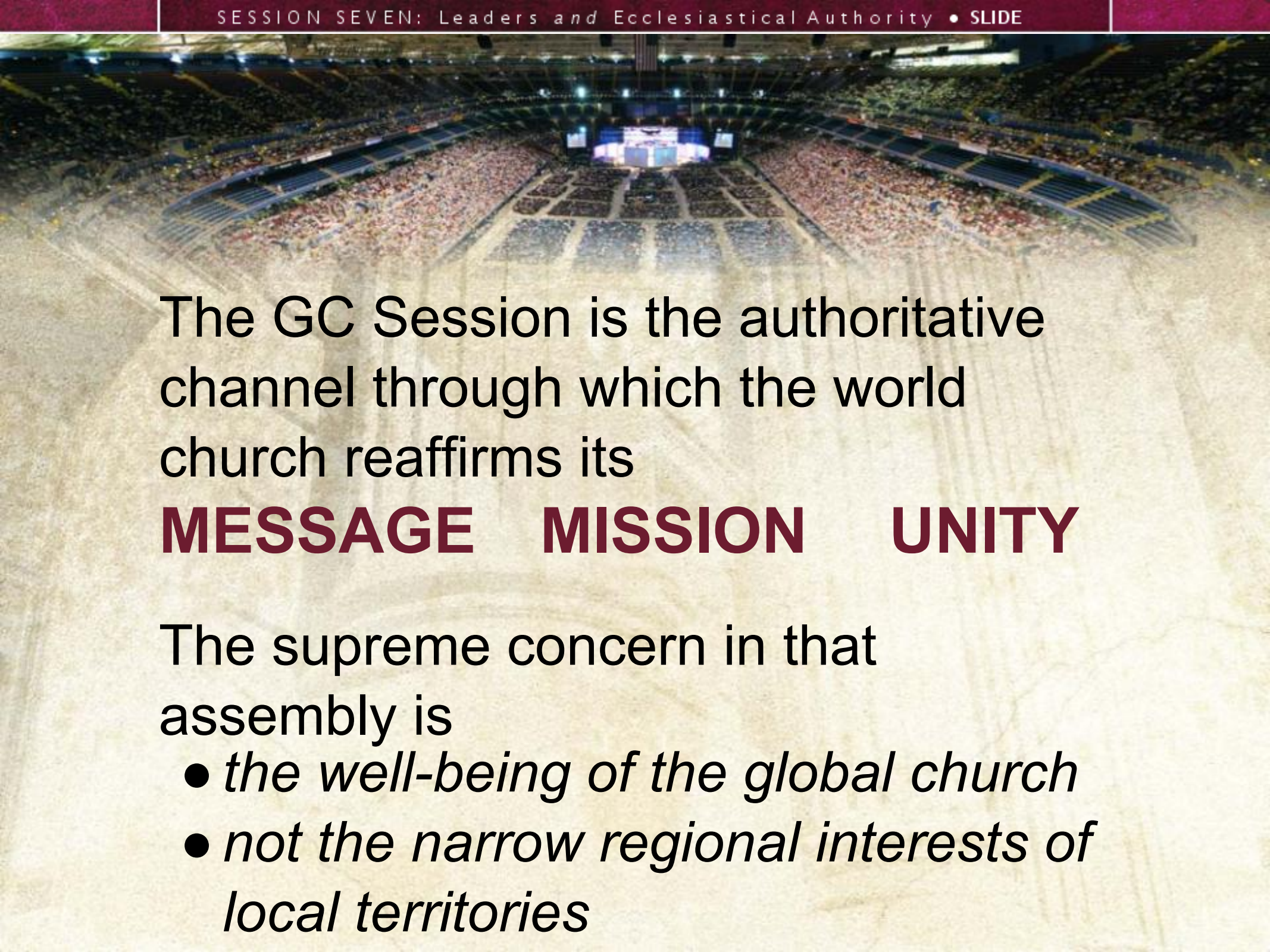


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General Conference secretariat working policy

“The General Conference is the highest organization in the administration of the worldwide work of the church, and is authorized by its Constitution to create subordinate organizations to promote specific interests in various sections of the world; it is therefore understood that all subordinate organizations and institutions throughout the world will recognize the General Conference in session as the highest authority under God.”



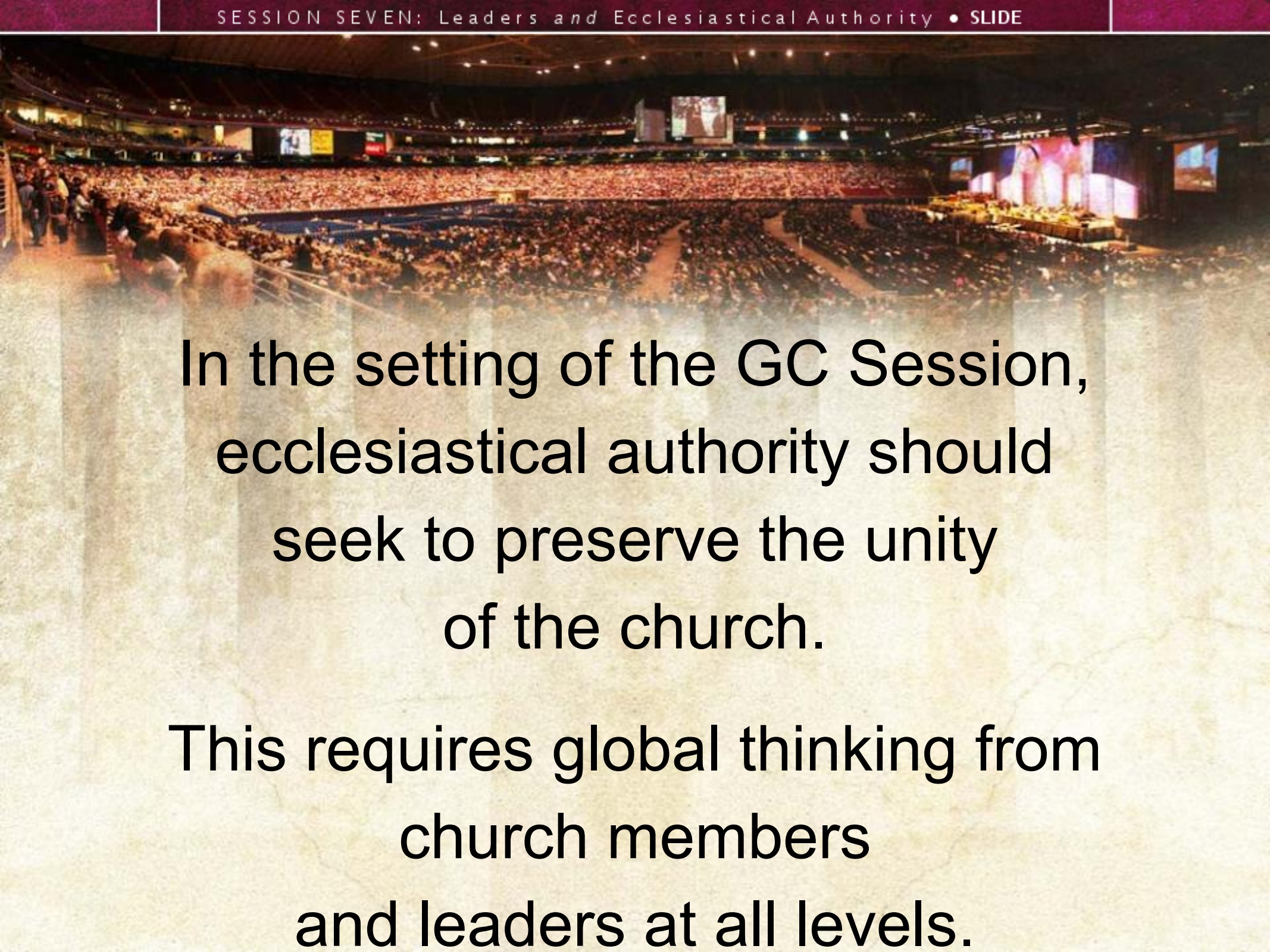


The GC Session is the authoritative channel through which the world church reaffirms its

MESSAGE MISSION UNITY

The supreme concern in that assembly is

- *the well-being of the global church*
- *not the narrow regional interests of local territories*



In the setting of the GC Session,
ecclesiastical authority should
seek to preserve the unity
of the church.

This requires global thinking from
church members
and leaders at all levels.

E. Ecclesiastical Authority: Implementing the Will of the Church

Since GC decisions were reached by representatives from the global church, believers around the world should willingly abide by its decisions.

Christ's authority within the church seeks to serve the well-being of local



When decisions have been made by the global church, leaders are entrusted with authority to implement these decisions in their regions.

Ecclesiastical authority does not ignore regional needs.



Although there is unity in the church, this unity includes an element of diversity in expression and action.

Diversity within unity is the goal.

Unity

- *is the central factor*
- *judges and defines the limits of diversity*
- *needs to be promoted*

Diversity

- *is subservient to unity*



When dealing with sensitive issues where diversity is involved, the main interest of church leaders should be



preserving the integrity of the message



fulfilling the mission



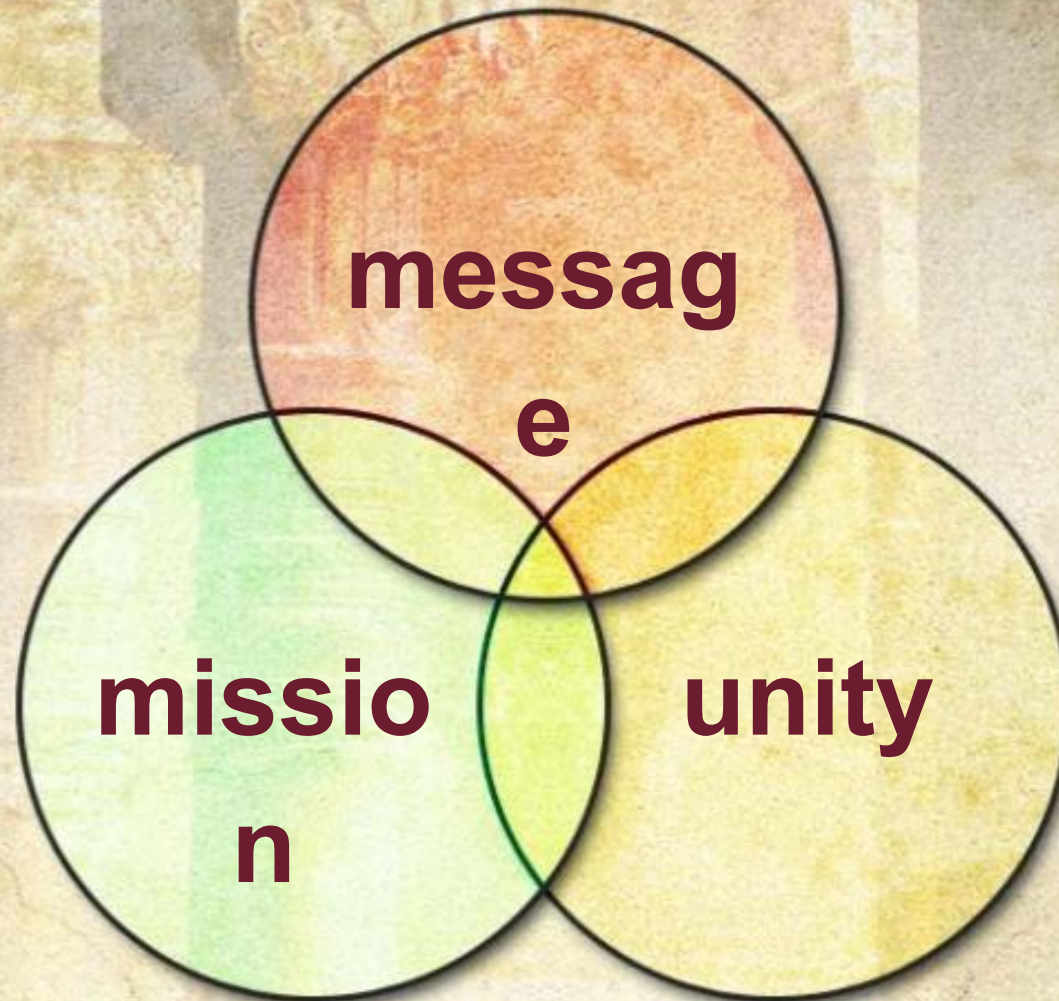
preserving the unity

A global church is
by nature diverse.

Because of this,
disagreements
concerning
the use of
ecclesiastical
authority can
be expected.



The challenge of the gospel is to form a body of believers that are committed to a global



IV. Challenges *in the Exercise of Ecclesiastical Authority*

Corruption

- *is one of the most threatening challenges that leaders face*
- *is a natural human tendency for those who exercise power*
- *results from change that is almost imperceptible at the beginning*

“Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Leaders who do not succumb to the insidious temptation to corruption that goes with power

- *combine delegated authority with internal spiritual authority*
- *demonstrate a life fully consecrated to the Lord*
- *reveal by their words, deportment, kindness and goodness, their personal communion with Christ*
- *are unconditionally dedicated to the*
 - *integrity of the message*
 - *fulfillment of the mission*

Balancing Local Needs with Needs of the Global Church



local needs

global
needs

When leaders overemphasize the authority of a particular segment rather than of the world church, fragmentation can occur.



To avoid this, leaders need to remember that their primary concern should be the

The Need to Work through Consensus

Leaders should seek consensus based on the best expression of their authority in the areas of

MESSAGE MISSION UNITY

A consensus should

- *be based on the most enriching biblical expression of an item*
- *be faithful to Scripture*

A consensus should not

- *seek to establish the minimum common denominator on an item*
- *allow for contradictory perspectives*
- *accommodate opposing views within the church in order to*

Attempts to Usurp Leaders' Power

Leaders must use their power and authority or others will usurp

Those who try to usurp leaders' authority **their authority.**

- *may promote personal agendas within the church*
- *usually promote a distorted view of the message, mission, and unity of the church*
- *may influence leaders to support their particular agendas*
- *may influence leaders to use church communication channels to promote their*

Uncertainty about the

MESSAGE MISSION UNITY

of the church makes a leader
vulnerable to usurpation of power.

A clear understanding of these
elements can help leaders avoid
power vacuums.

The Inclusive Nature of the Global Church



The Adventist movement is made up of people from “every nation, tribe, language and people.” (Rev 14:6)



Leaders need to listen to the many

Ethnic, gender or racial prejudice

- *will have a negative impact on a leader's use of authority*

- *should not be allowed to silence or limit the influence of any segment of the church*

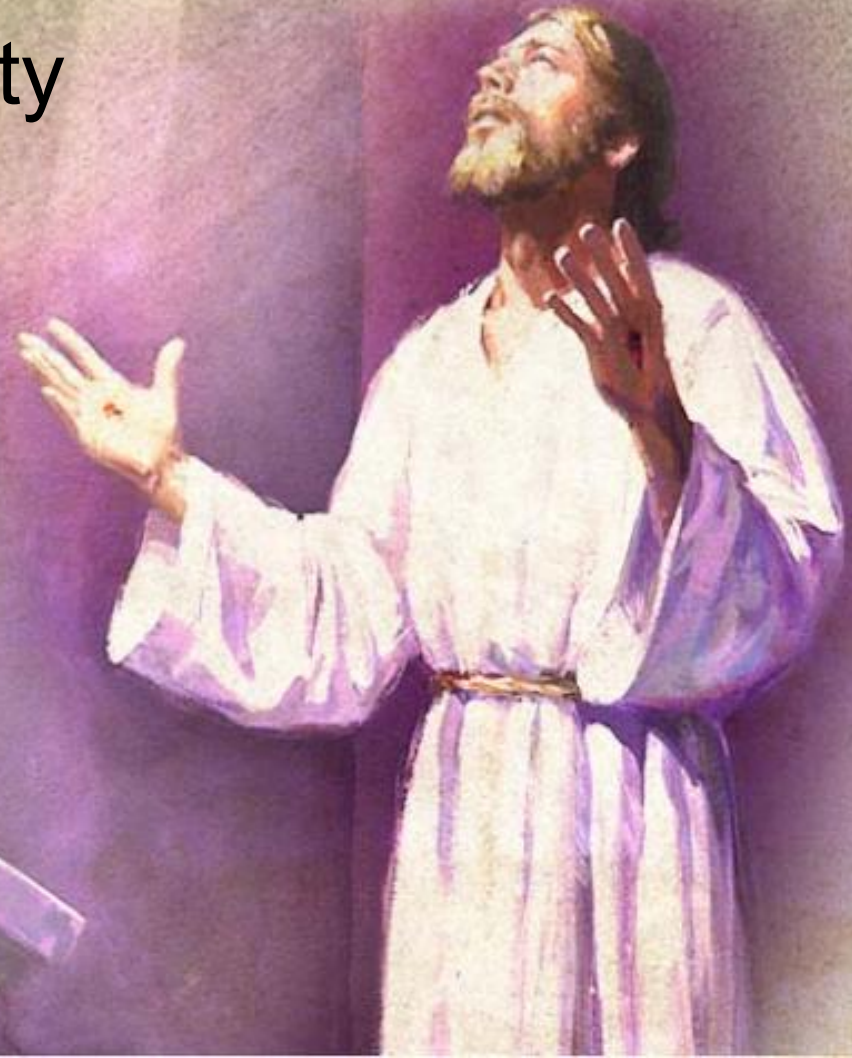
Interaction among the different cultural segments of the church will enrich all segments.

V. Conclusion

Any definition of ecclesiastical authority must begin with an understanding of God's power and authority as revealed in Christ.

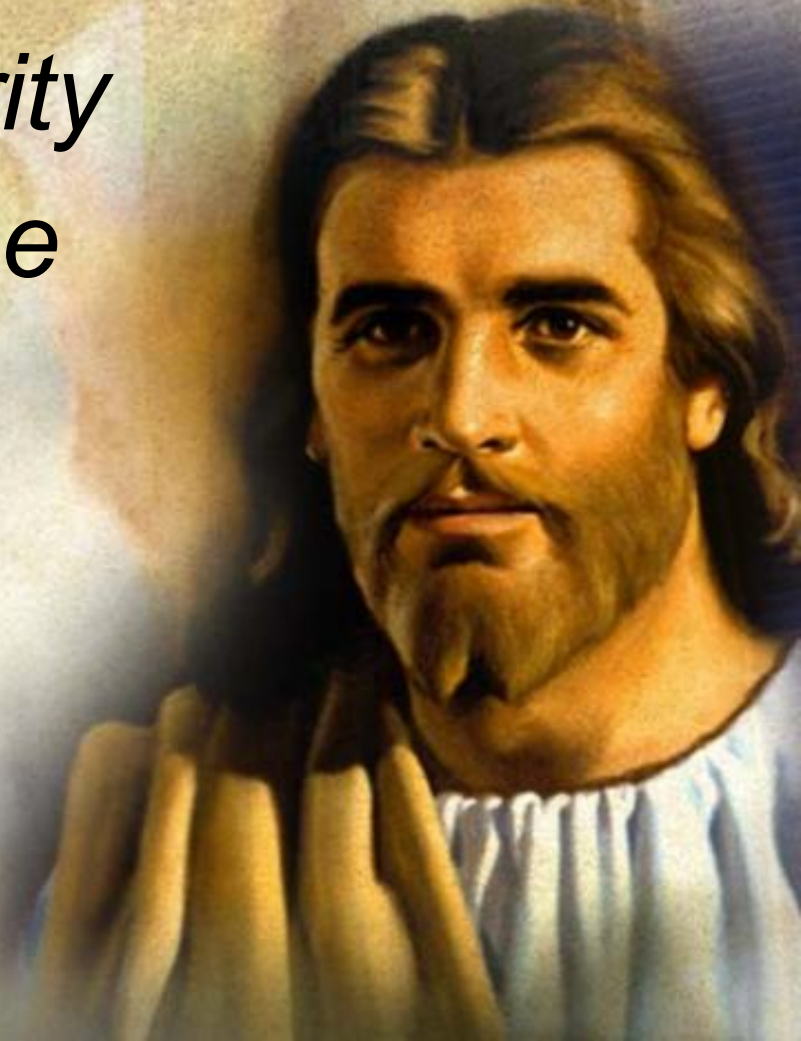
Christ used His authority to sustain, redeem, and preserve His creation.

God's display of power reveals His goodness and love.



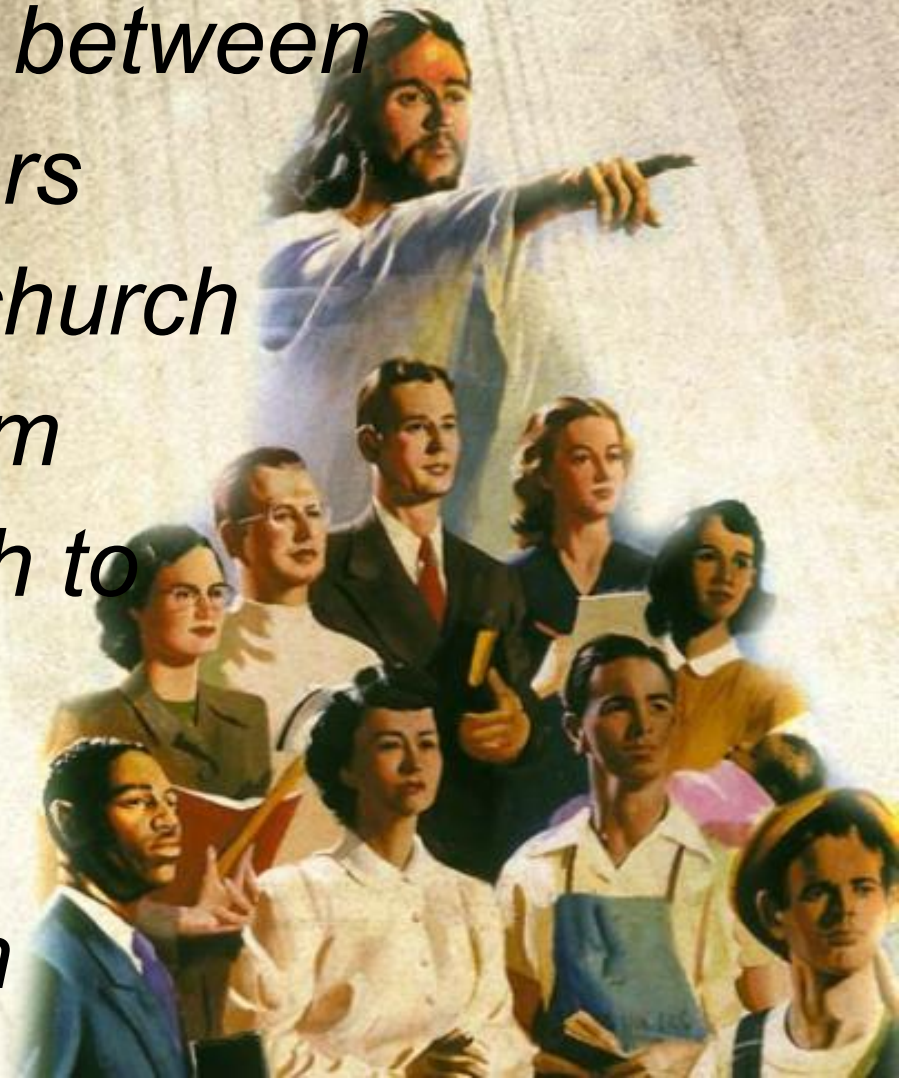
This Christological understanding of authority

- *forms the basis for ecclesiastical authority*
- *is oriented toward the well-being of others*
- *is the theological grounding of the authority of church leaders*



Ecclesiastical authority

- *does not mean that church leaders function as mediators between Christ and the believers*
- *resides in the global church*
- *consists in the freedom Christ gave the church to work with Him in the consummation of His mission of redemption*



Ecclesiastical authority is best expressed in the commitment of believers to the

**integrity of
the
message**



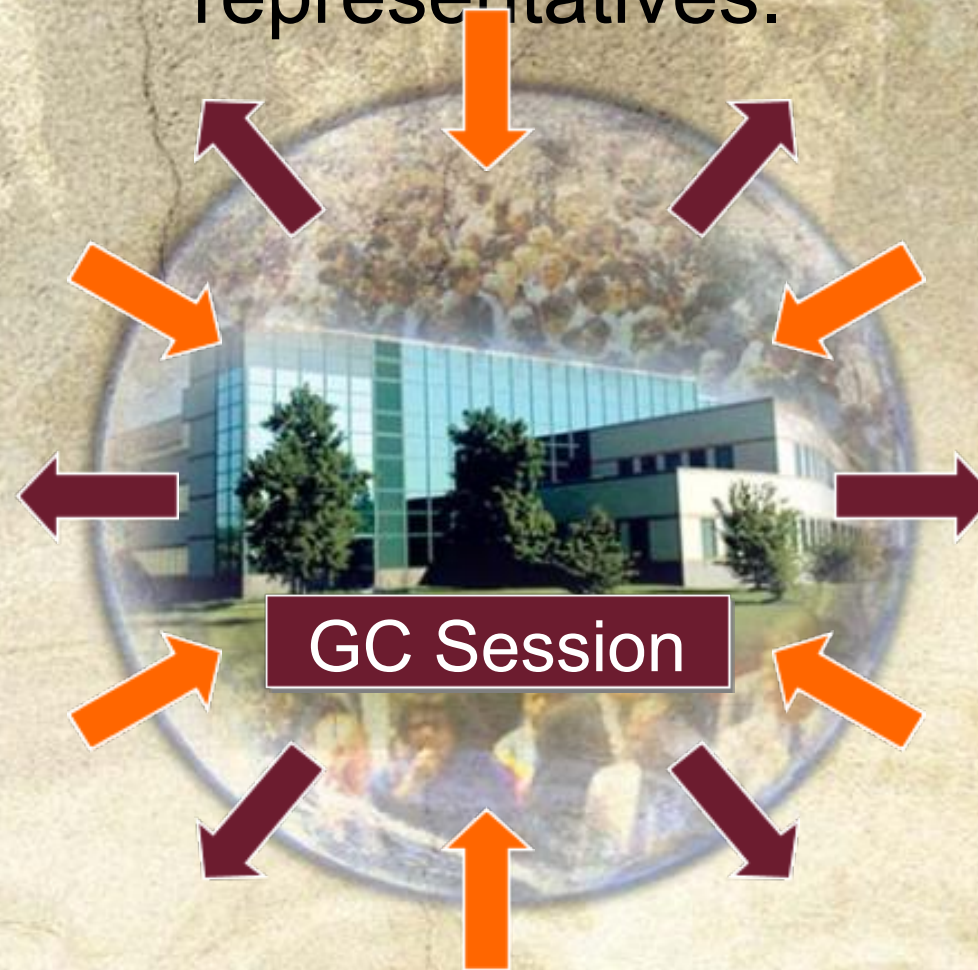
**fulfillment of
the mission**

**dedication to the
unity of the**

church

This formula could be useful for evaluating the proper or improper use of ecclesiastical authority.

Authority is diffused throughout the world church, but some of that authority is delegated to elected representatives.



In a GC Session, these delegates speak to the world field with final authority, with one final voice.

The use of ecclesiastical authority by elected leaders is legitimate to the extent that their understanding and use of it is Christologically determined.

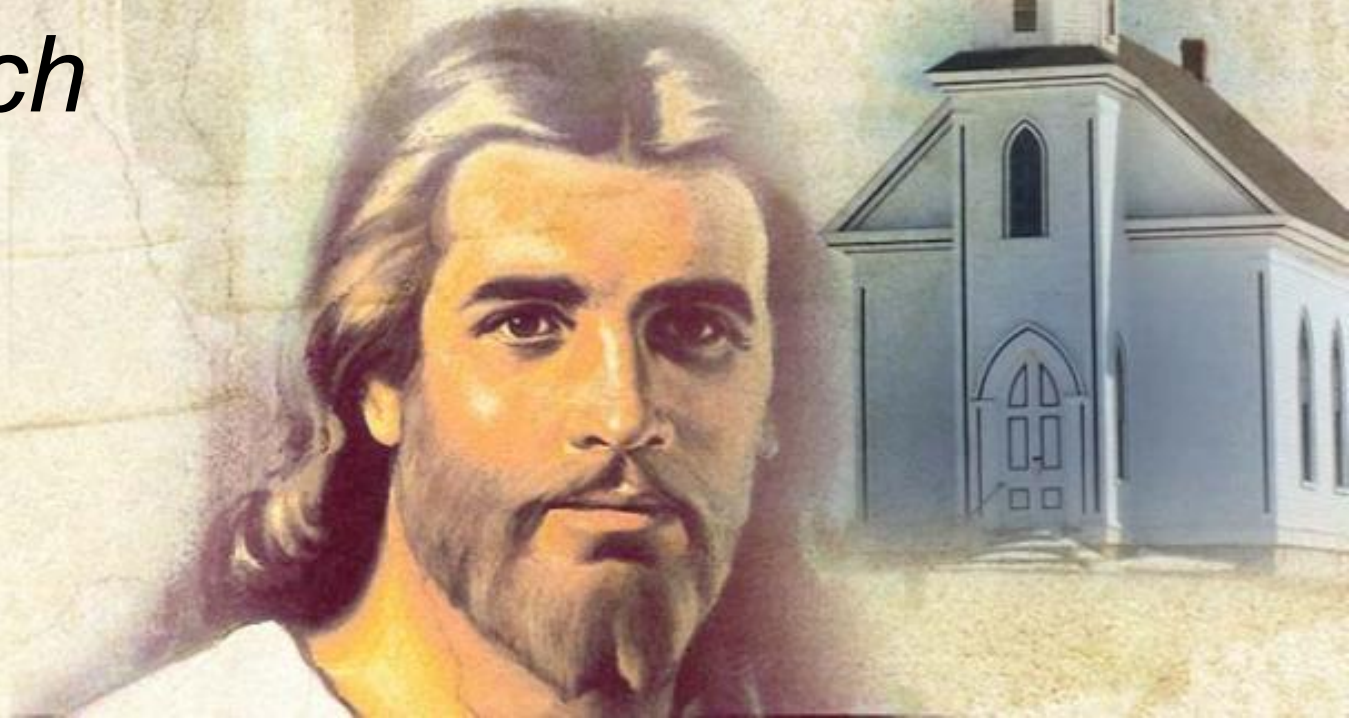
This will be shown in their commitment to the
MESSAGE MISSION UNITY

to procure the well-being of the global
community of believers.



Ecclesiastical Authority:

- *a sacred trust that makes us accountable to our Lord and to His church*
- *a gift entrusted to us to serve the church*



Modeled after Christ's authority, ecclesiastical authority focuses on the care of God's people.

²Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers— not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

³not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

The apostles accepted persecution and even martyrdom to fulfill the mission of the church.

Their compelling goal was building up the church, not their personal self-image.



Any use of ecclesiastical authority for personal gain is a misuse of it.

The use of ecclesiastical authority requires leaders to

- *always do what is good and right*
- *do what ought to be done for the church*
- *not make decisions based on how those decisions would impact them*