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ABSTRACT

CENTRALIZED FOR PROTECTION: GEORGE I. BUTLER
AND HIS PHILOSOPHY OF ONE-PERSON LEADERSHIP

by

Kevin M. Burton

Advisor: Denis Fortin

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: CENTRALIZED FOR PROTECTION: GEORGE I. BUTLER
AND HIS PHILOSOPHY OF ONE-PERSON LEADERSHIP

Name of researcher: Kevin M. Burton

Name and degree of faculty advisor: Denis Fortin, Ph.D.

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Statement of the Problem

On November 17, 1873, the General Conference adopted George I. Butler's leadership philosophy, which *officially* centralized ecclesiastical authority within one person. This statement on leadership and authority was deemed highly important and several resolutions, as well as a covenantal pledge, were voted and signed in promise that this new policy would be strictly followed. What led the Adventist Church to adopt such a policy and bind itself to it in this manner? What were the philosophical and theological tenets that the policy espoused? Since this position on leadership is no longer accepted in the Adventist Church today, what led the denomination to change its mind and how did the Leadership Controversy that erupted as a result of Butler's philosophy impact the history of the church?

The purpose of this thesis is to answer these questions in a threefold manner: (1) to set Butler's "leadership doctrine" within its Adventist historical context and briefly chronicle the events that prompted him to write *Leadership*, (2) to analyze, evaluate and critique Butler's philosophy of leadership, and (3) to chronicle the responses to Butler's essay and note the impact the Leadership Controversy had on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in subsequent years.

Methodology

This study was conducted on the basis of primary source research. The documents referenced include church publications and periodicals as well as correspondence, diaries, church record books, and other germane documents. More recent studies by scholars are also cited on occasion as secondary sources, either for support or critique.

Conclusion

Between the 1840s and 1863, James White, in effect, led the Sabbatarian Adventist movement as one man. Evidently, this informal type of governance was appropriate for this small group of Sabbath-keepers during this time. When the denomination officially organized in 1863, however, the locus of authority officially broadened from one informal leader to the formally elected three-person General Conference Executive Committee. It was difficult for Adventists to make this transition and questions regarding leadership began to arise. This became particularly pronounced during the years following James White's first stroke (1866-1877) as a controversy between leaders began to threaten denominational unity. In response, George I. Butler led Adventists to accept his philosophy of leadership and centralize power within one person

for the sake of protection. This caused the Adventist Church to officially revert to its first (though unofficial) conceptualization of church governance that was practiced between the 1840s and 1863.

Though this reversion came with great enthusiasm in 1873, it eventually sparked *the* Leadership Controversy of the 1870s as certain Adventists began to challenge Butler's philosophy. This controversy concluded in 1877 when the Adventist Church officially reaffirmed the oligarchical understanding of leadership that it adopted in 1863. In this way, the Leadership Controversy was resolved by broadening the locus of authority from one person to a small group of persons. Within the next decade, however, Ellen G. White realized that the church had grown too large to be governed so closely by the small General Conference Executive Committee. Though she supported an oligarchical form of leadership and authority in 1875, she began calling for change after the General Conference session in 1888. Eventually, in 1901, the Adventist Church recognized the need to broaden the locus of authority once again. In order to affirm this final shift between practiced models of leadership, Ellen White gave her final response to the Leadership Controversy of the 1870s in 1909, stating explicitly that ecclesiastical authority should not be centralized in one person *or* a small group of persons.

Andrews University
SDA Theological Seminary

CENTRALIZED FOR PROTECTION: GEORGE I. BUTLER
AND HIS PHILOSOPHY OF ONE-PERSON LEADERSHIP

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Religion

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2015

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Kevin M. Burton

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Denis Fortin, Ph.D., Advisor

Merlin D. Burt, Ph.D.

David J. B. Trim, Ph.D.

Date approved

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan
EGWE-GC	Ellen G. White Estate main office, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland
GCB, GCDB	<i>General Conference Bulletin, General Conference Daily Bulletin</i>
LT	Ellen G. White Letter
MS	Ellen G. White Manuscript
PH	Ellen G. White Pamphlet
<i>RH</i>	<i>Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Advent Review, Second Advent Review, Adventist Herald, Adventist Review</i>
SDBHS	Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, Janesville, Wisconsin
<i>ST</i>	<i>Signs of the Times</i>
1T, 2T, etc.	<i>Testimonies for the Church</i> . 9 vols., 1855-1909
WDF	White Document File
<i>YI</i>	<i>Youth's Instructor</i>

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I first became familiar with G. I. Butler's *Leadership* essay in August 2012 when Denis Fortin sat down with me in his office to talk about Adventist ecclesiology. Within a few days I obtained a copy of *Leadership* and sat down on the beach at Warren Dunes State Park to read through it for the first time. I was surprised by Butler's unique philosophy, and began to wonder: what led the Seventh-day Adventist Church to officially adopt this centralized view of leadership and authority and then later reject it? The present work outlines some of the details I uncovered in my search for a meaningful answer to this query.

There are numerous individuals and institutions that assisted me on this journey, for which I am truly grateful. First of all, I wish to thank Denis Fortin. This project began with him, and as my advisor he has guided me through to its end. He has read and re-read this document, providing thoughtful and constructive feedback along the way. In addition, I wish to also thank my other two advisors: Merlin Burt and David Trim. Both of these men spent numerous hours poring through this thesis and providing many suggestions to strengthen it.

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Scores of documents relating to Adventist history are currently only available in phonography (i.e., shorthand), including six letters that were crucial to this present study. Though I taught myself to read this lost form of artful writing, I could not have produced a complete transcription of any of these letters without the assistance of Beryl Pratt. Though we have never met in person, she has generously donated many hours of her time so that my research could be uniquely enhanced by sources that formerly appeared rather hieroglyphic.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 1863 Constitution of the General Conference and Questions Regarding Leadership and Authority

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists had no *official written policy* that *explicitly* defined leadership and authority prior to November 1873. Beginning in the 1840s, at the commencement of the movement, one man essentially led Sabbatarian Adventists—James White. Ellen White claimed that this informal type of governance was appropriate for the size of the body during the earliest years, explaining,

In the commencement of this work, there was needed *a man* to propose, to execute with determination, and to lead out, battling with error and surmounting obstacles. My husband bore the heaviest burden, and met the most determined opposition. But when we became a fully organized body [in 1863], and several men were chosen to act in responsible positions, then was the proper time for my husband to act no longer as *one man* to stand under the responsibilities.¹

Therefore, on the basis of *praxis*, it is apparent that the first concept of leadership and authority within Adventism was quasi-monarchical.

In 1863 Adventists took the first step toward defining the ecclesiastical concepts of leadership and authority. The General Conference was organized at this time and a Constitution adopted to define its functional role and jurisdiction. The 1863 Constitution

¹ Emphasis is mine. Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1875), 57; cf. Ellen G. White, 3T (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 500. References to the original and current publication of the *Testimonies* appear in the footnotes of this thesis. In most cases, the original publication is quoted in the body of this thesis and the current publication given because it is more accessible.

stated, “The officers of this Conference shall be a President, Secretary, Treasurer, and an Executive Committee of three.” Though the secretary and treasurer were not members of the Executive Committee, the president was part of this small group *ex officio*. Rather than fully define the roles of the president, secretary, and treasurer, the Constitution simply explained, “The duties of the President and Secretary shall be such respectively as usually pertain to those offices . . . It shall be the duty of the Treasurer to receive and disburse means under the direction of the Executive Committee, and keep an account of the same.” After these brief remarks, the primary focus of the Constitution shifted to the General Conference Executive Committee. As already indicated, this Committee was responsible for directing the treasurer in regard to the distribution of funds. This small group also had “the general supervision of all ministerial labor” to ensure “that the same is properly distributed” and “the special supervision of all missionary labor.” As “a missionary board” the Committee had “the power to decide where such labor is needed, and who shall go as missionaries to perform the same.” Finally, this Committee also had the authority to “call for means when needed” to accomplish missionary endeavors, oversee the actions of the State Conferences, and organize and execute General Conference annual sessions.²

While the 1863 Constitution was primarily concerned with the Executive Committee it also made some important statements about General Conference sessions. It stated that the delegates of the annual sessions were responsible for electing the General Conference officers and had the ability to alter or amend the Constitution “by a two-

² John Byington and U. Smith, “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1863, 204-205.

thirds vote.”³ In this way, the general body was able to determine the operating procedures of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Though this Constitution gave Adventists a representative church structure, it did not *explicitly* define the topics of leadership and authority.

The primary focus of the Constitution *implicitly* suggested that the General Conference Executive Committee held the highest authority in the Adventist Church. In November 1863, James White specifically affirmed that “the General Conference Committee [is] the highest authority in the church.”⁴ The Constitution also *implicitly* suggested that General Conference sessions have the highest authority along with the Executive Committee, as they have the ability to elect all of the officers of the General Conference. However, as George R. Knight explains, “the General Conference delegates from the local conferences met with each other in session for only a few [days] . . . each year. That resulted quite naturally in Adventists looking to the president of the General Conference and the members of the small executive committee for leadership.”⁵ Therefore, since the locus of authority officially broadened from one informal leader to three elected officers in 1863, it is apparent on the basis of *praxis*, that the second concept of leadership and authority within the Adventist Church was quasi-oligarchical as a small group of persons primarily oversaw operations as representatives of the body.

It was difficult for Adventists leaders to transition in *practice* from a quasi-

³ Ibid.

⁴ [James White], “Systematic Labor,” *RH*, November 24, 1863, 204; cf. General Conference Committee, “Question,” *RH*, April 24, 1866, 168.

⁵ George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 72.

monarchical view of leadership and authority to a quasi-oligarchical view. James White remained a strong and forceful leader in the 1860s and 1870s and other leaders, particularly J. N. Andrews, J. H. Waggoner, and Uriah Smith, struggled to understand their position alongside of him. During this controversy between leaders “considerable friction existed.” As G. I. Butler explained, “Even among leading brethren in reference to Brother White—attitude, position and methods of management . . . Some thought he assumed prerogatives that did not properly belong to him, which infringed on their right of private judgment . . . Some of his leading brethren did not feel free to express their opinions in his presence lest they should be censored by him.”⁶ Therefore, even after the denomination formally organized in 1863, it was clear that Adventists still needed “wisdom to use . . . [organization] properly.”⁷

Butler observed that Adventists needed a workable definition of leadership and authority so that their organizational system could function more effectively. He began to reflect on these topics in the early 1870s and eventually articulated his views in a tract, titled, *Leadership*, in 1873 [see Appendix A]. This theological and philosophical treatise was readily accepted at first, but became controversial because it centralized authority within one person, effectively moving the denomination back toward a monarchical form of ecclesiology. This caused a controversy between leaders to develop into *the* Leadership Controversy. Butler later explained this nomenclature as follows: “The name

⁶ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 103, CAR.

⁷ [James White], “Conference Address Before the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, March 11, 1873,” *RH*, May 20, 1873, 180.

‘Leadership’ came from a tract which I wrote and published, entitled, ‘Leadership.’”⁸

Years later, long after every major conflict in his life, he also stated in reference to this controversy, “I think I never was under bigger suspicion in all my life.”⁹

Though the offensive portions of *Leadership* were rescinded in 1877, the Leadership Controversy did force Adventists to consider the topics of leadership and authority more carefully. Even after 1877, however, some questions remained unanswered, particularly in Ellen White’s mind. She struggled with the concept of leadership throughout the 1870s, and beyond. Though she recognized that it was unwise for one person to have utmost authority in the 1870s, by the end of her life she also realized that it was unsafe for a small group of persons to possess this much power. Therefore, she upheld an important principle of leadership and authority: as the church expands and grows, the locus of authority should continually broaden in corresponding measure. Christ is the only head and leader of the Church and no one person, and no group of persons, can usurp His authority or take His place.

Statement of the Problem

On November 17, 1873, the General Conference adopted Butler’s leadership philosophy, which *officially* centralized ecclesiastical authority within one person. Adventists also gave this policy great force by “binding” themselves to it and promising

⁸ George I. Butler to Frank E. Belden, March 14, 1907, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 51, CAR.

⁹ George I. Butler to Irving Keck, June 7, 1905, Albion Fox Ballenger, Edward S. Ballenger, and Donald E. Mote Papers (087), Box 10, Folder 16, CAR.

to immediately correct “every act of rebellion against these principles.”¹⁰ What led the Adventist Church to adopt such a policy and bind itself to it in this manner? What were the philosophical and theological tenets that the policy espoused? Since this position on leadership is no longer accepted in the Adventist Church today, what led the denomination to change its mind and how did the Leadership Controversy impact the history of the church?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to answer these questions in a threefold manner: (1) to set Butler’s “leadership doctrine” within its Adventist historical context and briefly chronicle the events that prompted him to write *Leadership*, (2) to analyze, evaluate and critique Butler’s philosophy of leadership, and (3) to chronicle the responses to Butler’s essay and note the impact the Leadership Controversy had on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in subsequent years.

Justification for Study

The question of leadership remains relevant among Adventist scholars today.¹¹ Since the Adventist Church experienced many challenges regarding leadership between 1866 and 1877, the most important aspect of this study may be to gain insights from the church’s first major dispute over ecclesiastical authority. As this is done, insights can be gleaned from various events and statements in their original context. Hopefully,

¹⁰ [Seventh-day Adventist Church of Battle Creek, MI], “Pledge of the Church at Battle Creek, and others, to the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, Nov. 14-18, 1873,” WDF 453 #3, CAR.

¹¹ Cf. Stanley E. Patterson, “Kingly Power: Is It Finding a Place in the Adventist Church?” *Adventist Today*, September/October 2012, 4-9.

Adventists today can learn from this historical study of theology and avoid the same mistakes that leaders made as they struggled to work with each other between 1866 and 1873 as well as throughout the Leadership Controversy that transpired between 1874 and 1877.

A second reason for this study is its originality. While several authors have written a few pages regarding Butler's *Leadership* essay in broader works of history, no in-depth study is currently available.¹² Without comprehensive treatment, several errors of interpretation have crept into what has already been written. Therefore, with kindness and courtesy, this study will do its best to be corrective as necessary while providing a fuller picture of the controversy surrounding Butler's essay.

Finally, considering all of the major developments that took place between 1866-1877, more work needs to be done to bring this dynamic period of history back to life. While numerous studies exist on other major events in Adventism's past, few scholars have endeavored to focus on the period between the organization of the General

¹² While no in-depth study on Butler's *Leadership* essay yet exists, the following three works do address the issue: (1) Emmett K. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart: The Story of George I. Butler* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 38-43; (2) Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, vol. 2, *The Progressive Years: 1862-1876* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1986), pp. 393-400, 463-467; (3) Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 69-73. In addition, several authors have written briefly in regard to aspects of the controversies surrounding the document: Gary Land, *Uriah Smith: Apologist and Biblical Commentator* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 68-85; Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, Revised and Updated (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 250-252; Andrew Gordon Mustard, "James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization, 1844-1881," (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1987), 175-178; Barry David Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series XV (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989), 62-65; P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 257-258; Gerald Wheeler, *James White: Innovator and Overcomer*, [Adventist Pioneer Series], George R. Knight, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 176-184; Harry H. Leonard, "The Adventist Rubicon: John N. Andrews and the Mission to Europe," in *Parochialism, Pluralism, and Contextualization: Challenges to Adventist Mission in Europe (19th-21st Centuries)*, *Adventistica* 9, David J. B. Trim and Daniel Heinz, eds. (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2010), 31-50; Bert Haloviak, "SDAs and Organization, 1844-1907," August 1987, pp. 39-41, 001141, CAR.

Conference in 1863 and the Minneapolis Controversy of 1888. Therefore, by focusing on the period between these two major events, this study will hopefully help connect various threads in Adventist history and provide a fuller understanding of the theological developments that occurred between 1863-1888.

Methodology

This study was conducted on the basis of primary source research. The documents referenced include church publications and periodicals as well as correspondence, diaries, church record books, and other germane documents. More recent studies by scholars are also cited on occasion as secondary sources, either for support or critique.

This thesis includes three primary parts: (1) the Adventist background to Butler's *Leadership* essay and some of the events that led the church to accept it, (2) an analysis and critique of Butler's philosophy and theology of leadership, and finally (3) the responses and impact of *Leadership* on the Adventist Church.

Chapter 2 provides background information to Butler's tendentious essay. James White's character, which is central to Butler's *Leadership*, is highlighted as well as the tension he experienced with J. N. Andrews, J. H. Waggoner, and Uriah Smith. The tension between these four men became much more prominent after November 1870 and continued for several more years. It was this conflict that eventually motivated Butler to write *Leadership*. For this reason, chapter 2 is limited to details between White, Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith between late 1870 and 1873, while a few necessary historical events that transpired between 1866-1870 are also discussed. Finally, details regarding Butler and his attempts to restore union between these four men are documented as well.

Therefore, this chapter has a twofold purpose: first, to show the context in which Butler developed his leadership philosophy, and second, to provide historical data that is crucial for interpreting his *Leadership* tract.

Chapter 3 evaluates G. I. Butler's philosophy of leadership in detail. In the first portion of this chapter I simply describe Butler's essay and explain its theological and philosophical implications. In the latter part of this chapter, I provide a critique of Butler's *Leadership* essay in relation to the following categories: James White, the Adventist "Moses," the American context, the Papacy, Hero-Worship, the right of private judgment, and gender. Since this tract is central to this thesis, and due to its limited availability, it is provided in full in Appendix A.

Chapter 4 chronicles some events that took place from the adoption of *Leadership* in late 1873 to its repudiation in September 1877. Though brief in regard to historical detail, this chapter provides the most prominent responses to Butler's essay.

Chapter 5 briefly explains some of the ways the Leadership Controversy impacted the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Ellen G. White's perspectives on leadership and authority. After this epilogue, a summary and conclusion of the entire thesis brings this study to a close.

CHAPTER 2

TENSION BETWEEN “THE ORIGINAL FOUR” AND THE MOVEMENT TOWARD A CENTRALIZED ECCLESIOLOGY

Introduction

The primary purpose of G. I. Butler’s *Leadership* tract was to define the authoritative position of one man—James White. Even prior to the publication of this tract, Butler believed that White was God’s chosen leader for the Adventist Church. This position was based upon his interpretation of Ellen White’s *Testimonies for the Church*. As Butler observed the disrespect some leaders had for White (he was also part of the problem for a brief period), he began to formally develop his position on leadership. Between late 1866 and 1873 White experienced tension from practically every leader in the church. By the end of 1870, however, his problems primarily revolved around J. N. Andrews, J. H. Waggoner, and Uriah Smith. In the midst of this crisis, Butler became president of the General Conference. From the beginning of his time in office, Butler worked increasingly hard to restore union between these four men.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information for the Adventist context of G. I. Butler’s position on leadership. Since White was at the center of controversial matters between 1866-1873, the first section briefly highlights a few aspects of his character, describes his leadership role in the church, and explains his prescribed duty in giving reproof. The second and third sections outline the cases of J. N.

Andrews, J. H. Waggoner, and Uriah Smith. The conflict that White experienced with these men from late fall 1870 to the spring of 1872 is the primary focus of these sections. The final sections of this chapter are devoted to G. I. Butler and the movement toward a centralized ecclesiology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. More details are provided here to further explain some events between 1871 and 1872. From this point, the narrative progresses toward the date that Butler presented his leadership doctrine to the General Conference on November 15, 1873. Again, the conflict between White, Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith—referred to as “the original four” by Butler¹—is a primary focus. A second focus is to trace the development of Butler’s leadership theory from 1871 to 1873. This information will enhance the analysis of Butler’s *Leadership* essay, which follows in chapter 3.

James White: A Passionate Leader

James White was a passionate man, fervently dedicated to the Seventh-day Adventist mission. He was a zealous Yankee with “a strong personality.”² According to Gerald Wheeler, White’s most recent biographer, Yankees “stressed their traditional traits of honesty, thrift, frankness, self-reliance, thoroughness, and ruggedness.”³ With such strong qualities, White was naturally inclined as a leader.

From the beginning of the Sabbatarian Adventist movement, James White held a prominent position within the church. While he possessed administrative skills his wife

¹ George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

² George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

³ Wheeler, *James White*, 20.

was gifted with prophecy. On several occasions Ellen White received visions that outlined various needs or problems. Since these “views” rarely articulated a plan of action, her husband usually came up with the administrative plan to carry out the revelation.⁴ Such a partnership made the Whites a dynamic and authoritative team for more than three decades. Not surprisingly Adventists generally held them in high regard. To nonmembers, however, such great admiration caused some to fear that Adventists “exalted Mr. and Mrs. White” too much.⁵ This also led some to critically refer to the Whites as “the pope and she pope.”⁶

Ellen White had great authority in the church because Adventists generally believed that she maintained a special connection with the Lord. Though her visions placed her front and center, she was still a woman in a society governed by men. As a result, James White generally held more formal authority within the Adventist Church than his wife during his lifetime. As Adventist historian Harry H. Leonard observes, “White had been at the center of things ever since the late 1840s.”⁷ Prior to

⁴ For example, Ellen White was shown in vision in October 1868 that “there ought to be picked men at the heart of the work” in Battle Creek. Ellen G. White, 2T (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 460; Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 18* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1870), 156. By the spring of 1870, the Battle Creek congregation admitted that “God has repeatedly shown that not only faithful, but *picked*, men are needed at the heart of the work” in Battle Creek (emphasis is in original). J. N. Andrews, G. H. Bell, and U. Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1870), 113. Finally, in early 1871, a plan was set in place, largely through the efforts of James White, and “picked men” were selected to move to Battle Creek and manage things at Adventist headquarters. White, *The Progressive Years*, 315-317; cf. James White, “Statements and Suggestions,” *RH*, July 23, 1872, 44-45; J[ames] W[hite], “Permanency of the Cause,” *RH*, July 8, 1873, 28; J[ames] W[hite], “Organization,” *RH*, August 5, 1873, 60.

⁵ J. B. Clarke, “Report of Bro. V. Hull,” *The Sabbath Recorder*, December 25, 1873, p. 2, col. 8, SDBHS.

⁶ Brother Stockton to John N. Loughborough, March 17, 1873, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

⁷ Leonard, “The Adventist Rubicon,” 41.

denominational organization in 1863, White was the “one man . . . stand[ing] under the responsibilities and carry[ing] the heavy burdens” of the church⁸—a responsibility he carried “alone for years.”⁹ Within Adventist circles White was commonly referred to as “*the Elder*,”¹⁰ and, as G. I. Butler remarked: “Indeed he stood first in the esteem of most of our loyal people.”¹¹

White certainly held a unique position within the denomination. As early as 1862 J. N. Andrews stated that White was “called to fill an apostolic office” that no one else was qualified to occupy.¹² Like Andrews, other Adventists believed White should have more authority than others. For example, the New York State Conference unanimously adopted a resolution that publicly proclaimed that James White was “of God our chosen leader.”¹³ Therefore, in relation to organizational matters, James White was *the man* to which everyone looked for direction.

One of the many factors that justified White’s authoritative position within the church was his wife’s prophetic role. Ellen White was shown in vision on several occasions that her husband was “especially directed” by the Lord to reprove others when

⁸ White, 3T, 500; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 57.

⁹ White, 3T, 500; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 57-58.

¹⁰ Emphasis is mine. George W. Amadon, diary entry August 1, 1875, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 33, CAR; George W. Amadon, diary entry May 19, 1876, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 34, CAR; Ellet J. Waggoner to William C. White, May 9, 1875, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; George I. Butler to John H. Kellogg, June 11, 1905, E. K. Vande Vere Collection (004), Box 16.

¹¹ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

¹² John N. Andrews to James White, February 2, 1862, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 1, CAR; cf. J. N. Loughborough, Moses Hull, and M. E. Cornell, “Conference Address,” *RH*, October 15, 1861, 156-157.

¹³ A. Lanphear and R. F. Cottrell, “Fourth Annual Report of the N. Y. State Conference,” *RH*, October 31, 1865, 173.

necessary.¹⁴ She described her husband's position in the following manner: "From time to time for the past twenty years the Lord has shown me that he had qualified my husband for the work of faithfully dealing with the erring, and had laid the burden upon him, and if he should fail to do his duty in this respect he would incur the displeasure of the Lord." After making this statement, she clarified, "I have never regarded his judgment infallible, nor his words inspired." Though liable to make mistakes, this did not disqualify White from fulfilling the role that God had assigned to him. Ellen White continued,

I have ever believed him better qualified for this work than any other one of our preachers because of his long experience, and because I have seen that he was especially called and adapted to the work; and, also, because when some have risen up against his reproofs, I have, in many cases, been shown that he was right in his judgment of matters, and in his manner of reproof.¹⁵

White's ironclad personality and rich Christian experience made him unusually suited to carry out this prescribed duty. Butler described him as a man who "feared the face of no men" and "stood staunchly for what he thought was best for the denomination."¹⁶ Since nineteenth-century Christians considered discipline to be an essential aspect of church order, it was not a duty to be taken lightly.¹⁷ Though Christians believed discipline must be faithfully administered within their community, confrontation was never an enviable task. Nevertheless, James White remained faithful in his duty to

¹⁴ Cf. Ellen G. White, 1T (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), pp. 228, 247; Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 6* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1861), pp. 30, 58-59.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 13* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1867), 58; cf. White, 1T, 612.

¹⁶ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

¹⁷ Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900*, Religion in America Series, Harry S. Stout, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

give reproof as outlined in his wife's visions.¹⁸

White was called and adept in the area of church discipline, but frequently found himself at the center of controversies throughout his life due the sensitive nature of administering reproof. According to Ellen White, “an accusing spirit,” which caused some other Adventists to blame White for “cutting and slashing” them when they felt they did not deserve it, had followed her husband since the late 1840s.¹⁹ Though White was probably fair and just on the norm, he often met resistance from his Adventist associates, particularly in the *Review* Office. In a practical sense, he was a perfectionist²⁰ and “a demanding task master.”²¹ Since White was a determined manager and maintained high expectations, he was also sometimes overly critical and even harsh when others did not meet his standards.

Scholars have readily acknowledged White's occasional severity and observed his rigid personality.²² While this is clearly highlighted in Adventist historiography, there are

¹⁸ Cf. White, 1T, 320; Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 8* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1862), 22.

¹⁹ White, 1T, 612; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 13*, 59. Ellen White explained that “cutting and slashing” is an expression “often used to represent the manners and words of persons who reprove those who are wrong or are supposed to be wrong. It is properly applied to those who have no duty to reprove their brethren, yet are ready to engage in this work in a rash and unsparing manner. It is improperly applied to those who have a special duty to do in reproofing wrongs in the church. Such have the burden of the work and feel compelled, from a love of precious souls, to deal faithfully.” White, 1T, 612; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 13*, 58.

²⁰ Ellen White has stated, “My husband has it in his mind that things must be done thus and so, and he takes upon himself burdens which others should bear, fearing that mistakes will be made and matters will not go straight.” Ellen G. White, *Testimony re. James and Ellen White*, MS 001, 1863.

²¹ Ron Graybill, “The Life and Love of Annie Smith,” *Adventist Heritage* 2.1 (Summer 1975): 17; cf. Ellen G. White, *Testimony re. James and Ellen White*, MS 001, 1863.

²² Virgil Robinson, *James White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 289-290; Milton Raymond Hook, *Flames Over Battle Creek* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1977), 61; Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 38; Joseph G. Smoot, “The Churchman: Andrews' Relationship with Church Leaders,” in *J. N. Andrews: The Man and the Mission*, Harry Leonard, ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985), 49-50; Mustard, “James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization,”

six important points regarding this issue that must be emphasized in order to provide a fuller understanding of White, his role in the Adventist Church, and other leaders' reactions to him. First, it is important to note that James White was directed by his wife's visions to faithfully and consistently reprove others when necessary. As described above, the visions indicated that White was "especially directed" by God to administer church discipline. Given his occasional severity, this created somewhat of a conundrum. On the one hand, Ellen White made it emphatically clear that he was called by God to reprove his brethren (including other leaders) when necessary, in an appropriate manner. Yet, on the other hand, White sometimes came down too hard on people. Since Adventists were keenly aware of White's calling *and* mistakes, questions frequently arose when he rebuked someone. Were they reprimanded justly or unjustly? Was White following God's will in their case or was he simply being too harsh? As a result, this complex situation made life difficult for the first generations of Adventists, especially in Battle Creek.

Historians have also noted that Ellen White reproved her husband for being too severe at times.²³ While this is true, a second point can be stressed relating to the timing of these reproofs. The first published testimony for general distribution to mention White's occasional severity was *Testimony for the Church, No. 13*, which appeared in October 1867.²⁴ Though this *Testimony* indicates that White had occasionally "been too

264; Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 158-159; George R. Knight, *Walking with Ellen White: The Human Interest Story* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 73-74; Wheeler, *James White*, pp. 178, 198, 200, 216-218, 230-233; Leonard, "The Adventist Rubicon," 41; Jonathan M. Butler, "A Portrait," in *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15; Terrie Dopp Aamodt, "Speaker," in *Ellen Harmon White*, 114-115; Land, *Uriah Smith*, 73.

²³ Cf. Knight, *Walking with Ellen White*, 73-74.

²⁴ James White, "[Testimony No. 13]," *RH*, October 22, 1867, 296. Ellen White did mention James White's occasional severity very briefly in two places in a tract addressed to J. N. Andrews and Harriet Smith that only had limited circulation. Both comments, however, are situated within a larger

exacting toward those who were wrong,” its primary purpose was to show White that “his greatest wrong in the past” was “an unforgiving spirit toward his brethren.”²⁵ It was no coincidence that this information first appeared publicly in October 1867. Though Ellen White received this reproof for her husband on December 25, 1865, she chose not to include this information in either *Testimony for the Church, No. 11* or *No. 12*, which appeared in February 1867²⁶ and September 1867,²⁷ respectively.

Between October 11 and 21, 1867, a church trial was held in Battle Creek to investigate several rumors that were circulating about the Whites.²⁸ *Testimony, No. 13* was published in conjunction with these meetings and was essentially a defense of both James and Ellen White. Though Ellen White briefly mentioned her husband’s occasional severity, this statement is actually situated within a larger commentary made in his defense. Rather than simply expose her husband, Ellen White was attempting to vindicate him vis-à-vis those accusing him of “cutting and slashing.” In reality, she only mentioned his shortcomings briefly while she spent more time defending his character, church position, and manner of giving reproof.²⁹

The timing of *Testimony, No. 13*’s publication is also connected with a third issue relating to White’s occasional severity. Scholars have noted that White was never the

defense of James White and his manner of reproving. Ellen G. White, *To Brother J. N. Andrews and Sister H. N. Smith*, [PH 016] ([Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1860]), 1-40.

²⁵ White, 1T, 613-614; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 13*, 59.

²⁶ “[Editorial Note],” *RH*, February 19, 1867, 132.

²⁷ James White, “[Testimony for the Church, No. 12],” *RH*, September 17, 1867, 224.

²⁸ John N. Loughborough, diary entries October 11-21, 1867, John N. Loughborough Papers (327), Box 1, Folder 14, CAR.

²⁹ White, 1T, 612-620; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 13*, 58-69.

same after his first stroke in 1865. While this was significant, perhaps a more significant factor to affect his personality was the intense criticism he received between 1866 and 1869. Most of the criticisms during this period fall into two basic categories. First, many viewed White's failing health as God's punishment for being overbearing, and second, many believed that White was a wealthy penny-pincher that misappropriated church monies for his own advantage. This caused most Adventist leaders to protest against White's "counsel in matters," which he claimed were "despised" between 1866 and 1869.³⁰ During this period the Whites both experienced firm resistance from other leaders and their influence within the Seventh-day Adventist Church arguably reached its lowest point in history.³¹ Undoubtedly these criticisms, which were mostly leveled against James White, had an impact on his patience levels and his manner of giving reproof.

A fourth point in relation to James White's occasional severity clarifies this fact even more. As mentioned above, scholars have noted that James White became more irritable and increasingly less sensitive after his first stroke.³² Even White's contemporaries, such as G. I. Butler noted, "After his stroke of paralysis and long sickness and partial recovery, he was never quite the same as he had been previously. He was perhaps less patient and less able to put up with the weaknesses of peculiar

³⁰ James White, *A Solemn Appeal to the Ministry and the People* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1873), 15.

³¹ Though the Whites did experience major opposition from other leaders at other points of history (specifically 1854-1855, 1860, and 1863), the years 1866-1869 stand out for one primary reason: James White's first stroke. After this stroke, White was too feeble to labor in 1866 (even though he held major offices, the work was done by others) and held no offices in the church in 1867. Though he became a director in the Health Institute in 1868 and was re-elected president of the publishing association in 1869, White spent much of his time trying to correct the errors that he believed others had introduced during his absence. Naturally, those that filled the leadership gap created by White's first stroke did not react well to all of these events.

³² Knight, *Walking with Ellen White*, 73-74.

temperaments of his brethren.”³³ While this is true to some degree, it is more accurate to associate a significant change in White’s mood with his second stroke. White’s second stroke took place in the midst of a major crisis in his life and clearly altered his personality.³⁴ Though White did make mistakes in earlier years, he was not overly harsh or insensitive to extreme degrees on the norm. Beginning in the late fall of 1870, however, events transpired in Battle Creek that sent White over the edge.

Many suffered from severe illness throughout the fall of 1870 in Battle Creek. In October Ellen White stated, “There is much sickness in Battle Creek”³⁵ and two months later lamented, “We are amid the dying and the dead . . . Typhoid fever rages to a fearful extent.”³⁶ Due to widespread sickness, three important persons were unable to fulfill their duties at the *Review* Office between October and December while a fourth was mysteriously absent during this same period. Uriah Smith, editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, contracted a “bilious fever”³⁷ at the beginning of October and did not return to work until the beginning of December.³⁸ Adelia P. Van Horn, the secretary

³³ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

³⁴ Arthur L. White does mention some of the events of this crisis. Nevertheless, he does not emphasize the importance of these events or seem to recognize this as a transition point in James White’s life. White, *The Progressive Years*, 306-309.

³⁵ Ellen G. White to William C. White, October 6, 1870, LT 015, 1870; cf. Ellen G. White to William C. White, September 23, 1870, LT 013, 1870; A. C. Bourdeau and D. T. Bourdeau, “Vermont Camp-Meeting,” *RH*, September 13, 1870, 101.

³⁶ Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, December 16, 1870, LT 022, 1870; cf. Francis A. Walker, *Statistical Atlas of the United States Based on the Results of the Ninth Census 1870* . . . ([New York]: Julius Bien, 1874), Pl. XLII.

³⁷ W. C. G[age], “[Note],” *RH*, October 18, 1870, 144.

³⁸ George W. Amadon, diary entries December 2, 5, 7, 1870, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 29, CAR.

of the Publishing Association,³⁹ also contracted ague fever near the end of October and resumed her duties about the same time as Smith.⁴⁰

While Smith and Van Horn were down sick, William C. Gage, the foreman⁴¹ at the Office, took “a pleasure excursion” to Chicago. Due to poor weather and late nights, Gage also contracted a fever and was still quite sick throughout December.⁴² The final person was Goodloe Harper Bell, the editor of the *Youth’s Instructor*. Though he may have been sick, the reason for his absence remains a mystery. James White merely stated that he “left his post of duty, and was in a northern county” while everyone else was down sick.⁴³ As a result, five important persons were actually away from the *Review* Office during the fall of 1870; three from sickness, another for an unknown reason, and one more—James White—due to camp meeting labor.

During the summer of 1870 the Whites “attended twelve campmeetings . . . from Minnesota to Maine, and Missouri to Kansas.”⁴⁴ Though they had worked hard throughout these meetings, White remained in good health until roughly the third week of

³⁹ James White and E. S. Walker, “S. D. A. Publishing Association: Its Tenth Annual Meeting,” *RH*, March 22, 1870, 106.

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church*, [PH 159] ([Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872]), 22-23; Adelia P. Van Horn, “Obituary Notices: [Patten],” *RH*, November 22, 1870, 183; I. D. Van Horn, “Notice,” *RH*, November 8, 1870, 168; I. D. Van Horn, “Labor in Ohio,” *RH*, December 27, 1870, 14.

⁴¹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 27; cf. James White, “The Review and Herald,” *RH*, December 6, 1870, 200.

⁴² White, *Testimony for the Church*, 22-23; cf. Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, November 9, 1870, LT 018, 1870; Ellen G. White to [Edson and Emma White], December 2, 1870, LT 021, 1870.

⁴³ James White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173.

⁴⁴ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 22.

October.⁴⁵ While White was still on the camp meeting circuit, Smith became sick, which meant that White now had to do his best to “fill the editor’s place [on the fourth page of the *Review*]” from a distance.⁴⁶ The Whites returned to Battle Creek on November 7,⁴⁷ and to his horror, White found “the work had nearly stopped”⁴⁸ because the *Review* Office was “nearly deserted.”⁴⁹ In this situation, White found himself with “the work of three men upon him”⁵⁰ and had to labor “about sixteen hours out of each twenty-four” just to keep the presses going.⁵¹ In order to cope, White made numerous appeals for help, but met continual resistance from others in the form of a variety of excuses.

White was so busy during this crisis that he was unable to look after his health or “personal interests.” The primary item of “personal interest” that harrowed White’s emotions was his dying parents. In June 1870 Betsey White received a debilitating “stroke of paralysis.” She remained frail in the months that followed while her husband, John White, “was [also] very feeble.”⁵² Though White’s parents desired his company

⁴⁵ Ellen G. White to William C. White, September 27, 1870, LT 014, 1870; Ellen G. White to William C. White, October 24, 1870, LT 017, 1870.

⁴⁶ James White, “The Review and Herald,” *RH*, December 6, 1870, 200; cf. G[age], “[Note],” *RH*, October 18, 1870, 144.

⁴⁷ James White, “Home Again,” *RH*, November 15, 1870, 176; Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, November 9, 1870, LT 018, 1870.

⁴⁸ White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173.

⁴⁹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, pp. 41-42, 46, 107; White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173.

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White to Cousin Reed, [1870], LT 020, 1870.

⁵¹ White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173. Ellen White added that “he [also] could not cease labor for even a day.” Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, November 27, 1870, LT 019, 1870.

⁵² J. N. Andrews, “Obituary Notices: [White],” *RH*, January 24, 1871, 47; White, *Testimony for the Church*, 218.

after he returned from the camp meetings, the “general interests of the cause” demanded his time and his beloved parents “could not receive a single hour of [his] personal attention.”⁵³ In the midst of this nightmare, his “dear mother” passed away on January 9, 1871,⁵⁴ and his father also died a few months later.⁵⁵

The combination of all these disappointments and pressures strained White physically, mentally, and emotionally to his breaking point. The “General Conference was called in February [1871], one month early,” so that White could be relieved of some responsibilities.⁵⁶ Though the Conference convened early for this purpose, it was a time “of triple care”⁵⁷ and Ellen White stated that all of his duties during the Conference “nearly finished him.”⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, White had a “second shock of partial paralysis” during this time. After experiencing three more strokes in 1873, he claimed that he had not yet fully recovered from this second stroke.⁵⁹

The crisis in the fall of 1870, which resulted in a second stroke, was a major turning point in White’s life. After this period of stressful events, it is evident that he became less patient with others, more severe in giving reproof, frequently depressed and discouraged, paranoid of his brethren, and increasingly more defensive. He recognized

⁵³ White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173.

⁵⁴ James White, “My Mother,” *RH*, January 24, 1871, 45.

⁵⁵ James White, “Obituary Notices: [White],” *RH*, July 18, 1871, 39.

⁵⁶ [James White], “An Explanation,” *RH*, August 29, 1871, 88.

⁵⁷ White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173.

⁵⁸ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 219.

⁵⁹ W[hite], “Permanency of the Cause,” *RH*, July 8, 1873, 28; cf. White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173; White, *Testimony for the Church*, 219-220; [White], “An Explanation,” *RH*, August 29, 1871, 88.

this transition point himself by referring back to this crisis numerous times⁶⁰ and admitting on January 1, 1873, that a “terrible weight of discouragement and gloom” had been upon him “much of the time for the past two years.” White made no such apology for his general conduct between 1866-1869.⁶¹ As a result, it seems that White’s second stroke and the crisis that began in the late fall of 1870 marks a significant change in his mood, temperament, and constitution, rather than his first stroke in 1865.

A fifth point of emphasis relates to Ellen White’s perspective of her husband’s position and character. When Ellen White reproved her husband she usually contrasted this reproof with someone she believed was even more severe. In *Testimony for the Church, No. 13* it was M. E. Cornell,⁶² while *Testimony, No. 21* exposed J. H. Waggoner⁶³ and *No. 25* contrasted White’s occasional severity with the fire and brimstone sermons of G. I. Butler.⁶⁴ She explained,

Some feel that Brother White is altogether too severe in speaking in a decided manner to individuals, in reproofing what he thinks is wrong in them. He may be in danger of not being so careful in his manner of reproofing as to give no occasion for reflection; but some of those who complain of his manner of reproofing use the most cutting, reproofing, condemnatory language, too indiscriminating to be spoken to a congregation, and they feel that they have relieved their souls and done a good work. But the angels of God do not always approve such labor. If Brother White makes one individual feel that he is not doing right, if he is too severe toward that one and needs to be taught to modify his manners, to soften his spirit, how much more necessary for

⁶⁰ Cf. James White, “Present Truth, and Present Conflicts: Or, the Duties and Dangers of Our Time, Number Three,” *RH*, November 22, 1870, 181; [White], “An Explanation,” *RH*, August 29, 1871, 88; White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173; W[hite], “Permanency of the Cause,” *RH*, July 8, 1873, 28.

⁶¹ White, *A Solemn Appeal to the Ministry and the People*, pp. 11, 15; cf. White, “Statements and Suggestions,” *RH*, July 23, 1872, 45.

⁶² White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 13*, 69.

⁶³ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 129.

⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25 [Special]* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1875), pp. 89, 92.

his ministering brethren to feel the inconsistency of making a large congregation suffer from cutting reproofs and strong denunciations, when the really innocent must suffer with the guilty.⁶⁵

By 1875 Ellen White had even more to say in defense of her husband. She stated, “I was shown that my husband’s course has not been perfect. He has erred sometimes in murmuring and in giving too severe reproof. But from what I have seen, he has not been so greatly at fault in this respect as many have supposed and as I have sometimes feared.”⁶⁶ Ellen White added,

[Many] have had fears in reference to Bro. White’s injuring individuals by his severity. As the case has been presented before me in the last view given me [on January 3, 1875], I have different feelings in regard to this matter. I am now convinced that the very ones who have felt burdened over his close talk which appeared severe in some individual cases, would not do nearly as well as he has done were they similarly situated. None should deceive themselves in this respect.⁶⁷

Therefore, in the opinion of the person most closely connected to James White, he was sometimes guilty of occasional severity, but not as guilty as he was often portrayed.

A final point also highlights a more nuanced reality in regard to James White’s occasional severity. Though he possessed a strong personality, tenacious spirit, and iron will, it would not be entirely accurate to simply suggest that White was overbearing and let the matter rest. White was a complex man with a complex character and a complex role in the Adventist Church. Though it is commonly suggested that James White “persisted in working himself into an early grave,”⁶⁸ it is also equally true that *his brethren persistently worked him into the grave*. White was naturally inclined to lead; yet

⁶⁵ White, 3T, 507; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 68-69.

⁶⁶ White, 3T, 508; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 70.

⁶⁷ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25 [Special], 88.

⁶⁸ Butler, “A Portrait,” in *Ellen Harmon White*, 15.

he often accepted offices reluctantly because no one else was willing to take on the responsibility.⁶⁹ Ellen White stated,

My husband has frequently been left almost alone to see and feel the wants of the cause of God, and to act promptly. His leading brethren were not deficient in intellect, but they lacked a willing mind to stand in the position which my husband has occupied. They have inconsistently allowed a paralytic to bear the burdens and responsibilities of this work which no one of them alone could endure with their strong nerves and firm muscles. . . . He has not been placed in this unreasonable position by the Lord *but by his brethren*. His life has been but little better than *a species of slavery*. The constant trial, the harassing care, the exhausting brain-work, have not been valued by his brethren. He has led an unenjoyed life.⁷⁰

Though James White possessed more administrative authority than anyone else in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he was not treated like royalty. Rather, his strong personality, coupled with his occasional outbursts of severity, caused his brethren to fear him in many ways. As a result, many Adventist leaders viewed White as a tyrannical slave master. Though he was guilty at times, it seems that he was most often in the right. Nevertheless, the reigning perception of his character caused others to often neglect him so that he had to carry the heavy burdens alone. Though he loved the cause and loved to be active, he did not always enjoy his life of bondage. He was, by volition and violation, an Adventist slave in some sense of the word. By the late fall of 1870 and early winter of 1871, the pressure became too much for him and he increasingly became less servile and more harsh and exacting. After the crisis that began in the fall of 1870 White became particularly suspicious of J. N. Andrews, J. H. Waggoner, and Uriah Smith.

⁶⁹ White, *To Brother J. N. Andrews and Sister H. N. Smith*, 17.

⁷⁰ Emphasis is mine. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 58; cf. White, 3T, 501.

The Cases of J. N. Andrews and J. H. Waggoner

From May 1869 to March 1873 James White, J. N. Andrews, and J. H. Waggoner were the three members of the Committee on Publications for the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association.⁷¹ In addition to this, these same men comprised the three-person General Conference Executive Committee from May 1869 to February 1871.⁷² As a result, they all worked closely together in connection with the *Review* Office and the General Conference.

Tension existed between White and Andrews from essentially the beginning of their relationship. Andrews was one of the first Adventists to accuse White of being too harsh and began to make these claims in the early 1850s in Paris, Maine, and Rochester, New York. Due to his influence (along with Harriet Smith), Ellen White claimed that these problems followed her husband to Battle Creek, which allowed them to persist throughout his lifetime.⁷³ As mentioned previously, Andrews struggled with understanding White's authoritative role in the church and eventually decided that White must be *the* Adventist apostle. Andrews also played a prominent role in the criticisms of White in the mid-late 1860s by claiming that White's first stroke was a punishment from

⁷¹ E. S. Walker, "S. D. A. Publishing Association: Its Ninth Annual Meeting," *RH*, May 25, 1869, 174; White and Walker, "S. D. A. Publishing Association: Its Tenth Annual Meeting," *RH*, March 22, 1870, 106; James White and A. P. Van Horn, "Seventh-Day [*sic*] Adventist Publishing Association: Eleventh Annual Meeting," *RH*, February 14, 1871, 68-69; James White and A. P. Van Horn, "Seventh-Day [*sic*] Adventist Publishing Association: Twelfth Annual Session," *RH*, January 2, 1872, 21.

⁷² J. N. Andrews and Uriah Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *RH*, May 25, 1869, 172-173; James White and U. Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *RH*, March 22, 1870, 109-110; James White and U. Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *RH*, February 14, 1871, 68.

⁷³ White, *To Brother J. N. Andrews and Sister H. N. Smith*, 6; White, *Testimony for the Church*, 175-177; cf. Ellen G. White to Harriet N. Smith, June 1860, LT 007, 1860; Joseph H. Waggoner to James White, April 3, 1869, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

God for cutting and slashing.⁷⁴

Though Waggoner was not connected with the Sabbatarian Adventist movement as early as Andrews, he also had run-ins with White during the 1850s. In the later years of this decade Waggoner came into a three-way conflict with Smith and White. Rather than admit his own severity, it seems that Waggoner downplayed Smith's errors in the Office, which made White appear more tyrannical.⁷⁵ Though sufficient details are scarce in regard to Waggoner's conflict with the Whites between 1866-1869, he was, like Andrews, consumed with the rumors and gossip that circulated during these years and made several confessions.⁷⁶

Though White, Andrews, and Waggoner experienced sporadic tension for years, matters intensified during the crisis in the late fall of 1870. At this time White sent numerous letters to Andrews and Waggoner, begging for assistance. Both men refused to come to Battle Creek to help, however, in spite of the positions they held with White in the *Review* Office. Ellen White explained in a *Testimony* that, “[James White] was not encouraged by Brn. Andrews and Waggoner when they knew he was standing under the burdens at Battle Creek alone. They did not stay up his hands. They wrote in a most discouraging manner of their poor health, and being in so exhausted a condition that they could not be depended on to accomplish any labor.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 41-43.

⁷⁵ White, *To Brother J. N. Andrews and Sister H. N. Smith*, 6.

⁷⁶ J. H. Waggoner, “Testimonies 12 and 13,” *RH*, Nov. 19, 1867, 352-353; cf. J. H. Waggoner, “An Acknowledgement,” *RH*, June 2, 1868, 377; J. H. Waggoner, “To the Believers in the Third Angel’s Message,” *RH*, September 1, 1868, 165.

⁷⁷ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 42.

Before Ellen White reproved Andrews and Waggoner in 1872, it seems that they may have tried to avoid James White in certain ways. The most notable example relates to publications in foreign languages. At the camp meeting in South Lancaster, MA in August 1870, “the committee on publication of books [i.e., White, Andrews, and Waggoner] considered the matter of preparing pamphlets to be circulated among the French people.” According to Ellen White, “The decision was in accordance with the light which God had previously given in testimony.” Though Andrews and Waggoner promised their services, it was claimed that they did very little to assist White on this project. Ellen White explained, “Brn. Waggoner and Andrews have seemed to feel no burden of the matter since this decision [in Lancaster, MA], although they assumed equal responsibilities with my husband.”⁷⁸ For more than two years, people waited for these tracts, yet nothing was accomplished even by the end of 1872.⁷⁹

In time, some Adventists began to hold James White responsible for the delay of publications in foreign languages, undoubtedly because he was the president of the Publishing Association.⁸⁰ As a result, the Whites both wrote in his defense⁸¹ affirming that the “blame of publications not being given to the French people” was not James White’s fault.⁸²

Though Andrews and Waggoner had their flaws, James White did as well. After

⁷⁸ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 218.

⁷⁹ White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173.

⁸⁰ Cf. J. H. W[aggoner], “The State of the Cause,” *RH*, January 23, 1872, 44.

⁸¹ White, “Publications in Other Languages,” *RH*, November 12, 1872, 173.

⁸² Ellen G. White, *Testimony to the Church at Battle Creek*, [extended ed., PH 123] (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872), 116.

the crisis that began in the fall of 1870, he became increasingly suspicious of Andrews and Waggoner. By the fall of 1871 he was determined to “publish the failings and errors of the responsible men among Seventh-day Adventists.” Though White wanted his wife’s support in this publishing endeavor, she firmly replied, “I dare not do it even for your love and confidence.”⁸³

Ellen White then exhorted her husband to give up the notion and warned him of his present mistakes. She stated, “God has shown me you were unforgiving to your brethren . . . Do you guard this point as God would have you?” In regard to Andrews specifically, Ellen White explained, “What do you desire Brother Andrews to do? He has already confessed heartily over and over again his errors until you have entreated him to no more make reference to it . . . Would you destroy the confidence of God’s people in Brother Andrews because an idea enters your mind that he may not be right? What can he do to get right, which would fully satisfy?” She then quoted Matthew 7:1, stating, “Judge not that ye be not judged” (KJV).⁸⁴

In addition to being unforgiving of his brethren, White was reacting too harshly toward Andrews and Waggoner. Ellen White stated,

If you will with me covenant to leave the things which are behind and take your hands off of Brother Andrews and Waggoner and leave them with a little spark of courage and of their manhood, I believe you will be free . . . They would help you, either of them, if they could. But it is the greatest wonder to me considering your feelings to them that they have not resented your severe reflection upon them and lost their love and interest for you. The confidence they have in the work and that God is leading you has led them to frequently sacrifice their own judgment to yours which has made them weak men.

⁸³ Ellen G. White to James White, September 2, 1871, LT 013, 1871.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Clearly White was acting in an overbearing manner and Ellen White pleaded with him, “You may take a course to humble Brethren Andrews and Waggoner so that with all their infirmities of body and deprivation and opposition they meet everywhere, they will have no courage, no confidence in anything they may do or say. What will they be worth then? Nothing at all.”⁸⁵

Ellen White’s message humbled her husband and during the tenth annual session of the General Conference, which met between December 1871 and January 1872, White “received and acknowledged the testimony of reproof for him” and “asked the forgiveness of his brethren for feeling as he had done.” Ellen White also explained that “all present [at the conference] felt that my husband had done all that he could do on his part to meet the mind of the Lord.”⁸⁶

During the conference, the Battle Creek church was “stirred by successful labor” and many “humbled their hearts before the Lord” as a “wonderful spirit of freedom came into the meetings.”⁸⁷ This attitude was apparent at the commencement, as G. W. Amadon recorded in his diary on the first conference Sabbath, “A good day. Good meetings—good sermons—good social seasons—good everything.”⁸⁸ By the end of the meetings “almost the entire body of ministers, Office-hands, and people, covenanted with God by a rising vote that they would commence the year 1872 and labor to serve and obey him as

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 194.

⁸⁷ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 195.

⁸⁸ George W. Amadon, diary entry December 30, 1871, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 30, CAR.

never before.”⁸⁹

After the General Conference a great spirit of revival continued in Battle Creek as the people sought to keep their covenant. Deeply moved, the members “put forth individual effort for one another”⁹⁰ by “visiting from house to house, exhorting and praying.”⁹¹ For more than a month these resident “missionaries” visited each other door to door, seeking out “those who were in a low state.”⁹² As a result of the church’s teamed effort, White further explained that “many have been reclaimed, and there are several cases of clear conversions.”⁹³ Ellen White echoed her husband, stating, “Quite a number have been converted and backsliders have been reclaimed.”⁹⁴

During the revival, Waggoner took “a leading part,”⁹⁵ but the “burden of that work” was “principally left” with the church members.⁹⁶ Though Waggoner began in earnest and his efforts were “highly valued,”⁹⁷ his attitude quickly began to change. Ellen White explained, “Bro. Waggoner seemed to take the credit of this good work to his efforts. As he did this, he became lifted up, and thought that he was especially led out by God to do a work for the church.” At this point, things took a decided turn for the worse

⁸⁹ Joseph Bates, “Meetings in Michigan,” *RH*, January 23, 1872, 46.

⁹⁰ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 195.

⁹¹ J[ames] W[hite], “Progress of the Cause,” *RH*, February 6, 1872, 60.

⁹² Cf. John Byington, diary entries January 14, 1872, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 1, Envelope 7, CAR.

⁹³ W[hite], “Progress of the Cause,” *RH*, February 6, 1872, 60.

⁹⁴ Ellen G. White to [William H. Worcester] Ball, February 27, 1872, LT 028, 1872.

⁹⁵ W[hite], “Progress of the Cause,” *RH*, February 6, 1872, 60.

⁹⁶ W[aggoner], “The State of the Cause,” *RH*, January 23, 1872, 44.

⁹⁷ W[hite], “Progress of the Cause,” *RH*, February 6, 1872, 60.

in Battle Creek. Ellen White remarked that “the Spirit of the Lord left Bro. Waggoner to move in his own judgment and wisdom . . . [and] Bro. Waggoner then acted out J. H. Waggoner.”⁹⁸

Since James White had confessed his wrongs publically at the General Conference session, Waggoner “seemed to take it for granted that he had been right, and [James White] wrong.” Ellen White explained that Waggoner “overlooked the repeated and direct private testimonies that had been given him. He [also] thought the warnings and cautions from [James White], which were in union with the testimonies of reproof, restricted his liberty, and brought him into bondage.”⁹⁹

In the midst of the revival in Battle Creek, at some point in January 1872, James White had his “third slight shock” of paralysis.¹⁰⁰ Just as many had done with White’s first stroke, Waggoner interpreted this event as a sign of divine judgment upon White for his occasional severity and convinced many of this theory.¹⁰¹ To make matters worse, Waggoner also viewed White’s third stroke as a sign initiating his own rise to power. He stood before the people in Battle Creek and “stated his great trials over Bro. White’s reproofs and warnings, but that now Bro. White was reprovved by testimony, and that he was failing in health, and God was lifting him [Bro. Waggoner] up, and giving him freedom, that God had through testimony justified him, and condemned Bro. White,

⁹⁸ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 195-196.

⁹⁹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 194-196.

¹⁰⁰ W[hite], “Permanency of the Cause,” *RH*, July 8, 1873, 28; Ellen G. White to [William H. Worcester] Ball, April 11, 1872, LT 004, 1872.

¹⁰¹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, 199.

showing that he was right, and that Bro. White was wrong.”¹⁰² In Ellen White’s opinion, “this was cruelty itself” and she explained, “That my husband’s confidence in Bro. Waggoner was shaken, I cannot doubt, and that he has sufficient reason, I cannot question.”¹⁰³

As Waggoner began to turn people against James White and exalt his own leadership, 1872 unfortunately did not witness the service and obedience to the Lord that the Battle Creek church had covenanted to carry out. Later in the year, Ira Abbey lamented, “Bro. J. H. Waggoner . . . left his influence here [in Battle Creek] & it sticks like poison. . . . O it [is] like death to get rid of [it]. May the Lord help us.”¹⁰⁴ This influence particularly impacted Uriah Smith, who was, as Butler remarked, “a sort of center around which all the dark overhung.”¹⁰⁵

The Case of Uriah Smith

Uriah Smith, like Andrews and Waggoner, experienced a long history of conflict with James White that also had its origins in the 1850s. As with Andrews and Waggoner, Smith often felt that White was overbearing and dictatorial.¹⁰⁶ Between 1866 and 1869 (the years that James White recognized as particularly difficult), Smith was also critical

¹⁰² The brackets are in the original. *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁰⁴ Ira Abbey to Lucinda Hall, November 25, 1872, Lucinda Hall Collection, Folder 16, EGWE-GC.

¹⁰⁵ George I. Butler to James White, October 15, 1872, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁰⁶ See the entirety of White, *To Brother J. N. Andrews and Sister H. N. Smith*, 1-40. This is corrective of Eugene F. Durand, who states, “The first signs of tension between the two leaders [i.e., Smith and James White] appeared in 1869.” Eugene F. Durand, *Yours in the Blessed Hope, Uriah Smith* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 272.

of the Whites. He participated in gossip and perpetuated rumors that circulated throughout the entire church.¹⁰⁷ While other leaders confessed, however, Smith made no public confession in the late 1860s and became increasingly resentful, which eventually compromised his leadership position for a period of time.

Though Andrews and Waggoner were connected with the work in the *Review* Office, they lived outside of Battle Creek. Smith, however, lived in this town and was daily involved with the *Review and Herald* as editor. Naturally, the editor worked closely with the president of the Publishing Association, which was James White until August 1865. At this time White's first stroke forced him to retire until the fall of 1868.¹⁰⁸ J. M. Aldrich, an esteemed Adventist from New York, began to work in the Office a few short weeks after White's stroke. Shortly after his arrival, Aldrich began to take on numerous offices and soon replaced White as Association president. Between 1866 and 1868 Aldrich managed the Office quite differently than White with a style that others preferred—especially Uriah Smith.¹⁰⁹

Smith greatly admired Aldrich and the two men became close friends. When Aldrich was exposed for his unethical business practices and asked to resign from the Office in September 1868,¹¹⁰ Smith continued to defend him and take his side in the

¹⁰⁷ Cf. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 13, 37; White, 1T, 596.

¹⁰⁸ Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 36-37; James White to [Uriah] Smith, [George W.] Amadon, and [William C.] Gage, April 30, [1869], Uriah Smith/Mark Bovee Collection (146), Box 2, Folder 16, CAR.

¹⁰⁹ Kevin M. Burton, "An Adventist Gentleman in Battle Creek: The Leadership of Jotham M. Aldrich, 1866-1868," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 16.2 (2013): 127-152.

¹¹⁰ Andrews, Bell, and Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad*, 34-37.

conflict. In Smith's opinion, the Whites had misunderstood Aldrich and were being too hard on him.¹¹¹ Ellen White wrote several *Testimonies* for Aldrich in 1868-1869 and Smith did not see the need for them. He apparently challenged her by asking, "Why all this exactness about J. M. Aldrich? He is right after all. These testimonies are uncalled for."¹¹²

Tension between Smith and the Whites grew especially intense during the spring of 1869. At this time Smith was among those who refused to support the Whites during a series of meetings held in Battle Creek that convened to deal with the current problem.¹¹³ According to James White, there was "not a man in the Battle Creek church who has dared to risk his reputation" and stand up in their defense. White was, therefore, "left to call a council" and plead his "own cause for more than three weeks before one . . . was ready to take a decided stand." Though all the leaders in Battle Creek were indifferent toward the Whites at the beginning of these meetings, it was, in the White's opinion, "the studious manner in which Brother Smith (with his wife) . . . occupied a non-committal position . . . [that was] the most painful."¹¹⁴

After these meetings concluded, a fiery exchange of letter erupted between Smith

¹¹¹ Cf. Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith and George W. Amadon, April 23, 1869, LT 003, 1869, CAR; Ellen G. White to Harriet [N. Smith], Cornelia [A. Cornell], and Martha [D. Amadon], September 24, 1869, LT 013, 1869, CAR; Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith, May 14, 1873, LT 010, 1873, CAR.

¹¹² Ellen G. White to Harriet [N. Smith], Cornelia [A. Cornell], and Martha [D. Amadon], September 24, 1869, LT 013, 1869, CAR; cf. Michael W. Campbell, "Aldrich, Jotham M. and Jerusha B. (Mandiville)," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, (2014), 290.

¹¹³ Cf. Ellen G. White, *Special Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, [PH 085] (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1869), pp. 1, 5-7, 8-9, 10-11; Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith and George W. Amadon, April 23, 1869, LT 003, 1869; cf. Ellen G. White to Aurora Lockwood, October 25, 1869, LT 18, 1869; "[Editorial Note]," *RH*, March 30, 1869, 112.

¹¹⁴ James White to [Uriah] Smith, [George W.] Amadon, and [William C.] Gage, April 18, 1869, Uriah Smith/Mark Bovee Collection (146), Box 2, Folder 16, CAR; Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith and George W. Amadon, April 23, 1869, LT 003, 1869.

and the Whites. Though Smith eventually apologized and stated that the matters were now clear to his mind,¹¹⁵ these events still resulted in a career change for him. James White made it emphatically clear that unless Smith experienced “a thorough conversion” he would “withhold [his] vote” at the next annual session of the Publishing Association.¹¹⁶ By May 1869, White had apparently convinced others to do the same and Smith was removed from his editorial position in the *Review* Office after filling that role for well over a decade.¹¹⁷

On January 1, 1870, Harriet Smith lamented in her diary, “I feel bad because U[riah] feels so [discouraged] about returning to the O[ffice]. I want to see him engaged in the cause of the truth in some way, but I will try to pray for him & say little.”¹¹⁸ Though Smith was despondent, James White worked particularly hard to encourage him and bring him back into the church work.¹¹⁹ Eventually, Smith was re-elected, it was announced: “After being relieved one year, Bro. Smith resumes the position which he has so long filled with ability.”¹²⁰

Smith was also re-elected president of the Michigan Conference and secretary of

¹¹⁵ Uriah Smith to Ellen G. White, May 22, 1869, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 1, CAR (a copy of this letter is also found in Uriah Smith/Mark Bovee Collection (146), Box 2, Folder 16, CAR).

¹¹⁶ James White to [Uriah] Smith, [George W.] Amadon, and [William C.] Gage, May 2, [1869], Uriah Smith/Mark Bovee Collection (146), Box 2, Folder 16, CAR.

¹¹⁷ Walker, “S. D. A. Publishing Association: Its Ninth Annual Meeting,” *RH*, May 25, 1869, 174.

¹¹⁸ Harriet N. Smith, diary entry February 8, 1869, Uriah Smith/Mark Bovee Collection (146), Box 1, Envelope 43, CAR. Harriet Smith began writing her entry for January 1, 1870, on the February 4 page of her 1869 diary. This long New Year’s entry continued several pages in the 1869 diary, finally concluding on the page for February 9, 1869.

¹¹⁹ Uriah Smith to James White, November 16, 1869, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 1, CAR.

¹²⁰ J. N. Andrews, “[Editorial Note],” *RH*, March 29, 1870, 116.

the General Conference in March 1870. Though things seemed to be improving, Smith's joys were cut short on April 6, 1870, when he and his wife were disfellowshipped from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Though the duration of Smith's disfellowshipment is unknown,¹²¹ he presumably, and somewhat ironically, continued to hold his offices though he was not an official member of the church.¹²²

1870 was a terribly difficult year for Smith. In many ways, it ended as it began—with Smith discouraged and ready to quit his work for the church. As mentioned previously, Smith became ill in October and had to cease his duties for a period. Though he could have remained in Battle Creek to recover, Smith chose to recover while traveling. In reality he wanted to move his family out of Battle Creek¹²³ and was looking for a new job in New York or New England.¹²⁴

Given the situation, White had more than enough reason to be suspicious of Smith's journey east while he was professedly too sick to work. As early as November

¹²¹ Gary Land has stated that Uriah and Harriet Smith "regained their membership in early 1871." Land, *Uriah Smith*, 80. Though Land provides sources for this statement, these documents only confirm George and Martha Amadon's re-admittance in January and February 1871 (respectively), not the Smiths. According to Amadon's diary, the Battle Creek church began to readmit some former members only three days later on April 9. Very few were accepted, however, as Amadon stated, "In afternoon 2 meetings to re-organize the church. Oh, how careful the Brn. seem to move in taking in members. I handed in my name, but it was not accepted." George W. Amadon, diary entry April 9, 1870. Though Uriah Smith could have been readmitted on April 9, 1870, it is very unlikely given the dim view he maintained during this period. Cf. Harriet N. Smith to James and Ellen White, [April] 1870, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 1, CAR.

¹²² There is no indication that a new Michigan Conference president or General Conference secretary was elected mid-term and Smith was even re-elected to these positions in 1871. Furthermore, his name remained on the masthead of the *Review* as editor throughout 1870-1872 and beyond. Therefore, as peculiar as it may be, Smith apparently held three major positions in the denomination for a period of time (possibly several months) while he was not even a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

¹²³ John N. Andrews to Ellen G. White, December 21, 1870, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 1, CAR; Uriah Smith to James White, November 16, 1869.

¹²⁴ Cf. [Smith], "[Note]," *RH*, December 13, 1870, 208; John N. Andrews to Ellen G. White, December 21, 1870.

1869 Smith had admitted to White, “I have thought for a long time that I could perhaps . . . [assist the church] better away from Battle Creek.”¹²⁵ Since several other key leaders were absent from the Office during the fall of 1870, White was apparently upset with the timing of Smith’s journey east. He probably assumed, and perhaps rightly so, that if Smith was well enough for such travels he was probably well enough to work.¹²⁶

In 1872 Ellen White published a testimony to Uriah and Harriet Smith, stating that “it was not natural” for Smith “to take responsibilities.” She continued, “The Lord qualified Bro. Smith to be a strong helper in the cause. If he would feel the importance of making God his trust, he would have grace to endure, and power from the Lord to fortify him.”¹²⁷ According to Ellen White, many of Smith’s apparent deficiencies had stemmed from his wife’s occasional disgruntled attitude. Harriet had been involved in conflict with the Whites from the very beginning in Paris, Maine. After her marriage to Uriah, it seems that she played a role in casting doubt in her husband’s mind in regard to the Whites. Ellen White explained, “Sister Smith has been a great hindrance to her husband. . . . Years past, the testimonies pointed out definitely the attacks Satan would make, and the course to pursue to avoid them. But there was a neglect on their part to follow out and act upon the light given.”¹²⁸ Most of Smith’s frustrations were targeted toward James White. Ellen White stated, “The unconsecrated have had their [the Smith’s] sympathies, while my husband, who has had the pressure of care and the burden of responsibility, has had

¹²⁵ Uriah Smith to James White, November 16, 1869.

¹²⁶ Cf. Land, *Uriah Smith*, 81; George W. Amadon, diary entries December 5 and 7, 1870.

¹²⁷ White, *Testimony to the Church at Battle Creek*, [extended ed.], 34-35.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

their [the Smith's] suspicion and distrust."¹²⁹ In addition to their occasionally coarse attitudes, it seems that Uriah Smith was also sometimes negligent when he could have been helpful. According to Ellen White, "Bro. Smith should have, as far as possible, relieved my husband from the burdens which were crushing him."¹³⁰

In the main, Ellen White wanted to make it clear to Smith that "God designed that Bro. Smith and my husband should be true yoke-fellows, united to support and strengthen each other."¹³¹ Though this statement was given specifically to Uriah Smith in this testimony, Ellen White elsewhere included Andrews and Waggoner, stating, "The Lord would have Brn. Andrews, Waggoner, Smith and White, stand united in the work of God . . . They may each have a particular work, for which they are best adapted, and which they love ; but their attachment to one particular branch should not be indulged in, and lead them to leave the heaviest and most perplexing burdens upon my husband."¹³²

Beginning in the late fall of 1870, when James White returned to Battle Creek and found many absent from their posts, he became very suspicious of Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith. Though these three men could have relieved White of many burdens through their assistance, Andrews and Waggoner refused, while Smith lethargically returned to his post. During 1871 and 1872 the tension between these leaders was visible to others. As a result, when G. I. Butler accepted the General Conference presidency in early 1872, he made it his primary objective to re-unite these men.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² White, *Testimony for the Church*, 190.

The Case of G. I. Butler

Unlike Smith, Andrews or Waggoner, G. I. Butler did not have a very long history of controversy with James White. Born on November 12, 1834,¹³³ Butler was still a young and inexperienced leader during the 1850s and early 1860s. In spite of his young age, Butler rose to prominence in the mid-1860s during a controversy with B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff, two Adventist ministers and Iowa State Conference officers who were expressing doubts in Ellen White's prophetic gift, James White's leadership, and the purity of the Battle Creek church. In July 1865, when Butler was only 30 years of age, he replaced Snook as president of the Iowa Conference while H. E. Carver took Brinkerhoff's former position as secretary. Interestingly, White essentially handpicked Butler in the midst of this crisis and was heavily involved in this election.¹³⁴ Butler continued to battle against this "party" from Marion, Iowa, with apparent success and about two years later White also officiated Butler's ministerial ordination.¹³⁵ Since White took Butler under his wing during these troublesome times, Butler became very attached to him from the outset and considered him a "father" to him for the rest of his life—in spite of occasional difficulties they had with one another.

Though Butler was heavily involved with the Marion Party crisis in the mid-late 1860s, he was not a central figure in the controversy between leaders in Battle Creek between 1866 and 1871. Nevertheless, he lived in the Adventist community around

¹³³ Francis McLellen Wilcox, "Death of Elder George I. Butler," *RH*, August 8, 1918, 746.

¹³⁴ G. I. Butler and H. E. Carver, "Business Proceedings of the Iowa State Conference Held at Pilot Grove, Iowa, July 3, 1865," *RH*, August 1, 1865, 70.

¹³⁵ [Uriah Smith], "Editorial Correspondence, No. 3," *RH*, October 8, 1867, 264; cf. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 18-24; Theodore N. Levterov, "Marion Party," *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2014), 959-960.

Waukon, Iowa, for several years, which was a hotbed for contention. The Butlers were in close association with the Andrews and Stevens families in this community. The Andrews were the parents of J. N. Andrews, who married Angeline Stevens, the Stevens' daughter. Another daughter, Harriet Stevens, married Uriah Smith in 1857. Though these families were well connected with prominent leaders in the church, it seems that they were also two of the most critical families in the denomination of James and Ellen White.¹³⁶

When the Andrews and Stevens families arrived in Waukon in 1855, the Butlers were already well established within the community.¹³⁷ By living in close proximity with the Andrews and Stevens families, G. I. Butler had no trouble staying up-to-date on the most recent gossip about the Whites.¹³⁸ Though he lived outside of Battle Creek, he was very aware of the tensions that existed among leaders between 1866 and 1871¹³⁹ and also “criticized [James White’s] course” during this time.¹⁴⁰ As he stated years later, “I was fully conversant with the condition of affairs in the denomination. I knew very well that considerable friction existed.”¹⁴¹

Since Butler was aware of the tension, he was quite reluctant when he was elected president of the General Conference in late 1871. He also could not fathom an Adventism

¹³⁶ Cf. James White to E[zra] P. Butler, December 12, 1861, Heritage M-Film 53, James S. White Correspondence 1, CAR; White, *To Brother J. N. Andrews and Sister H. N. Smith*, 1-40.

¹³⁷ According to Vande Vere, the Butlers moved to Iowa in 1853. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 12.

¹³⁸ Cf. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25 [Special]*, pp. 75, 77.

¹³⁹ Cf. John N. Loughborough, diary entry October 18, 1867; J. N. Loughborough and J. N. Andrews to J. B. Frisbie, October 18, 1867, John N. Loughborough Papers (327), Box 4, Folder 1, CAR.

¹⁴⁰ George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875.

¹⁴¹ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

without the leadership of James White. White was Butler's hero—the man he affectionately called his “father” and zealously named his “general.”¹⁴² Similarly, Butler referred to Ellen White as his “mother”¹⁴³ and fervently believed her testimonies were from the Lord. Butler was, therefore, ardently convinced that God had “especially called and adapted [James White] to the work.”¹⁴⁴ White was God's chosen leader, and the *Testimonies* were Butler's verifiable proof.

Shortly after his presidential election in December 1871, Butler explained his refusal to accept this office to White. “The main difficulty in my mind that keeps me from taking the office,” lamented Butler, “is what she [Ellen White] has said concerning you being called of the Lord to fill the position the brethren are trying to crowd me into.” Though Butler respected the delegate's vote, his unyielding interpretation of the *Testimonies* trumped the united voice of man. He stated,

It is not that I respect the judgment of my brethren less, but the testimonies of the Lord more . . . Is it not a fact that the Lord has shown that you were called to this position and must occupy it till He raised up some other person to fill your place? . . . the Lord has shown that this place you are called to fill, and when it comes to what He has shown and the judgment of ten conferences, I should choose the former.

For Butler, his decision was firm and final. He stated, “So, Brother White, I must say with the greatest respect and with sadness of heart, that unless Sister White can give me satisfactory assurances that in what has been shown her relative to this matter, there is nothing contrary to my receiving this position, you must consider my decision final and I

¹⁴² See the section, titled, “James White, the ‘Moses’ of Adventism” in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁴³ George I. Butler to James and Ellen White, December 26, 1873, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; George I. Butler to James and Ellen White, May 3, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; George I. Butler to Ellen G. White, October 19, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁴⁴ White, 1T, 612; cf. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 13, 58.

cannot accept it.” In conclusion, Butler quoted the great Protestant hero, Martin Luther, and declared: “Here I stand. I can do no other way.”¹⁴⁵

Unfortunately, subsequent details regarding this situation are lacking. It is clear, however, that Butler eventually accepted the presidential office. Given his firm resolve, it is likely that Ellen White had to convince him that his election was not contrary to the will of God. Shortly before Butler’s election, Ellen White received a vision on December 10, 1871, which included some information about her husband. These statements were eventually published in the summer of 1872 and likely echo Ellen White’s counsel to Butler earlier in the year that eventually turned his mind. Ellen White related, “I was shown that my husband should stand there [in Battle Creek] no longer unless there are men who will feel the wants of the cause and bear the burdens of the work, while he shall simply act as a counselor. He must lay the burden down, for God has an important work for him to do in writing and speaking the truth.”¹⁴⁶

Butler’s reluctance to accept the General Conference presidency highlights a subtler problem that emerged in his mind at this time and impacted him deeply. Beginning in late December 1871 Butler realized the significance and importance of interpreting Ellen White’s *Testimonies for the Church* in a new way. Questions about the *Testimonies* consumed his thoughts throughout the year and he informed White, “I am preaching a sermon on that subject in each camp meeting at such times as when none are present but our people. I want all to know how I stand on this subject . . . [and] the use we

¹⁴⁵ Emphasis is in original. George I. Butler to James White, January 24, 1872, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR; cf. George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875; White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25 [Special]*, 43-44.

¹⁴⁶ White, 3T, 91; Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 21* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872), 137.

should make of [the *Testimonies*].”¹⁴⁷

In another letter, Butler explained to White, “I preached on the visions all through” the east and “had the satisfaction of knowing of quite a number who professed faith in them who never had before.” Butler felt the issue was greatly important and stated, “The visions, as I tell our people, is [*sic*] the real strategic point where the battle turns, and when the Devil tempts men first when they give them up, they must give up the rest. We may as well understand it first as last. We have got to make a big fight on this point sooner or later.”¹⁴⁸

Shortly after making this statement Butler engaged in a “big fight” in Battle Creek in the fall of 1872 in which the *Testimonies* were central. The stage for this fight began to be set during the spring, when Butler finally accepted the presidential office of the General Conference¹⁴⁹ and came to Battle Creek to take care of business matters. Arriving on March 3, 1872,¹⁵⁰ he quickly realized that his new position placed him in the midst of a struggle between “the original four” (White, Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith). At this time, Waggoner was exalting himself as God’s newly chosen leader in the denomination. James White had also just suffered his third stroke, and for many (at Waggoner’s instigation), this was interpreted as an act of God’s judgment. From this time, and progressively throughout the year, the members of the Battle Creek church

¹⁴⁷ George I. Butler to James White, August 22, 1872, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁴⁸ George I. Butler to James White, September 12, 1872, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Iowa,” *RH*, February 27, 1872, 86.

¹⁵⁰ Rhoda B. Abbey to Lucinda Hall, March 3, 1872, Lucinda Hall Collection, Folder 16, EGWE-GC.

drew farther and farther into two camps, placing camp Waggoner against camp White. By March 1872 the great revival in Battle Creek had dwindled into a great rivalry, and though Butler did not witness all of the issues personally, he was certainly well informed of all the pertinent details.

Throughout the year, Butler tried to mediate between White, Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith. When he passed through Battle Creek during the summer, he remarked that things were in “a bad state.”¹⁵¹ Butler was keenly aware of Waggoner’s self-exaltation and further estimated that Smith was the “sort of center around which all the dark overhung” in Battle Creek.¹⁵² Throughout 1872 it seems that Smith was squarely in the Waggoner camp and determined to advance its influence. As Michigan Conference president Smith had responsibilities within the entire state. For this reason he invited Waggoner to participate in the Michigan camp meeting, even though he knew James White wouldn’t like it. When Smith asked if Butler, on behalf of the General Conference, would extend Waggoner an invitation to participate, Butler replied that he “should not.” He stated, “I [have] not confidence in his spiritual discernment in such meetings and therefore I should not call him there to act in such a position.” Since Waggoner did accept Smith’s invitation, Butler found himself in a “rather delicate place.”¹⁵³

Smith didn’t stop there, however. During the meetings Butler kept Waggoner from the pulpit as much as possible, giving him only one speaking appointment.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ George I. Butler to James White, August 22, 1872.

¹⁵² George I. Butler to James White, October 15, 1872.

¹⁵³ George I. Butler to James White, August 22, 1872.

¹⁵⁴ John Byington, diary entries September 4-9, 1872; cf. J. H. Waggoner, “A Great Wrong,” *RH*, November 11, 1873, 172.

Though Butler found this awkward, Waggoner “manifested no desire to act a prominent part” and “took a very quiet course and acted modestly.” Nevertheless, Smith thought Waggoner should be more involved and “put him in [as] Chairman of [the] Nominating Committee” for the Michigan Conference. Butler later told White, “I was a little surprised that he [Smith] did this when he knew your mind.” Though Smith acted spitefully, Butler gained the upper hand through a surprising maneuver. He spoke with Waggoner and convinced him to counteract Smith’s plans. According to Butler, “[Waggoner] would have put Uriah [Smith] and [J. Warren] Batchellor [*sic*] in [as] President and Secretary. But at our suggestion changed these to [E. H.] Root and [I. D.] Van Horn.”¹⁵⁵

After he shrewdly negotiated this precarious situation, Butler had to face Battle Creek. Not surprisingly, he was apprehensive because of Smith. Butler admitted, “I have imagined even Brother Smith felt toward me as if he did not care to see me, if I could judge of his feelings by his actions.”¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Butler arrived at the end of September ready to fight¹⁵⁷ and much to his surprise, events turned out far better than he imagined—at least from his perspective.

Butler was intent on trying to settle conflicts between the Whites and other leaders. A key debate in Battle Creek that challenged the White’s leadership related to dress reform; an initiative they began to advocate in the mid-1860s. Though tension

¹⁵⁵ George I. Butler to James White, September 12, 1872; U. Smith and J. R. Trembley, “Michigan Conference of S. D. Adventists: Twelfth Annual Session,” *RH*, September 10, 1872, 102.

¹⁵⁶ George I. Butler to James White, September 12, 1872.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Ira Abbey to Lucinda Hall, September 22, 1872, Lucinda Hall Collection, Folder 16, EGWE-GC; George I. Butler to James White, October 15, 1872.

existed from the outset,¹⁵⁸ the Health Convention in Battle Creek during the summer of 1871 demonstrated that Adventists still resisted the change. The Whites were shocked by this disastrous event, and as a result, contention over dress reform reached an all-time high in Battle Creek during 1872.¹⁵⁹ Ira Abbey, Ransom Lockwood, and M. G. Kellogg did all within their power to promote dress reform in Battle Creek throughout the year, but by fall the tension escalated¹⁶⁰ and Butler came to Battle Creek after the Michigan camp meeting and joined the crusade. He immediately set to work through his “plain and pointed” preaching and organized numerous church meetings. Butler’s stringent use of the *Testimonies* characterized these meetings and he admitted to White,

We pressed the thing as far as it seemed to me wise to do it. I could of course have worked things so as to force confessions out of individuals. But I have not faith in any that are not made voluntarily, as cheerful service is all that God will accept. As soon as it became evident to me that we could go no further . . . I felt very clear in stopping rather than see the thing sort of peter out.¹⁶¹

Butler not only preached on the “proper” use of the *Testimonies* throughout the summer of 1872, but he brought a “big fight” to Battle Creek through his sermons during the fall, demonstrating his beliefs by action.

The fight continued as Butler also did his best to vindicate James White during

¹⁵⁸ White, *Special Testimony for the Battle Creek Church*, 7.

¹⁵⁹ At this time hundreds of people, including many of “the principal families in [Battle Creek],” gathered to hear the Adventist perspective on dress reform (“Hygienic Festival,” *RH*, August 22, 1871, 74; cf. J. H. Waggoner, “Health Convention at Battle Creek,” *RH*, August 1, 1871, 52; Joseph Bates, “Michigan,” *RH*, August 22, 1871, 78). Rather than support the reform on this occasion, “several sisters who had previously worn the reform dress appear[ed] upon this occasion with their long dresses” (White, *Testimony to the Church at Battle Creek*, [extended ed.], 58-60). Not surprisingly, this act distressed the Whites greatly.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. James White to Edson White, September 30, 1872, Heritage M-Film 53, James S. White Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁶¹ George I. Butler to James White, October 15, 1872.

the fall meetings in 1872. He “began with Waggoner’s labors . . . [the previous] winter [and] showed how that the Lord blessed that work at first, till finally, under Brother Waggoner’s own lead it resulted in extremes and fanaticism.” He then “contrasted his [Waggoner’s] leadership with” James White’s leadership. Butler explained that for the past 25 years White had “never run to such extremes in a single instance.” He then “showed that as the interest [of the revival meetings] died down, two parties were virtually developed, those whose sympathies were with [James White] . . . and the other class . . . whose labors had been specially with [J. H. Waggoner].” This obviously caused tension within the church and “a real lack of union was developed and a real division of feeling.” After all of his preaching that fall, however, Butler believed he had restored union and later stated with pride, “I think Waggoner’s stock don’t stand as high as before.”¹⁶²

Butler believed he had handled the situation judiciously by staunchly defending the Whites and the *Testimonies* and gave a positive report of these meetings to James White. The Whites, however, viewed his work in the exact opposite manner. In their opinion, an “unwarrantable raid was made upon the church” in Battle Creek¹⁶³ and Butler’s brother-in-law, Ransom Lockwood, was most culpable. In January 1875 Ellen White wrote a testimony to Butler, explaining, “Ransom was shown to me as standing before the people uttering words of condemnation and bitterness against the church very unbecoming, which brought the frown of God upon him and all who gave sanction to him.” As Lockwood “hurl[ed] out his invectives against the people of God,” the other

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25 [Special]*, 93.

men (particularly Butler) fully supported his efforts. Ellen White explained that, “The hearers were disgusted, and the angels of God were disgusted. Such extremes always bring reaction.”¹⁶⁴

As General Conference president, Butler should have manifested better judgment. Nevertheless, he contributed to the problem by making “the dress question . . . *the burden* of religious experience, and *the test* of Christian character.” Furthermore, “Testimonies which God had given to meet certain wrongs were brought in to sustain and give force to the fanatical movements of Ransom and others.” In Ellen White’s opinion, “There the light God had given was put to a wrong use. It was abused.”¹⁶⁵

The Battle Creek church was absolutely bewildered by the end of 1872 and the Whites’ nerves were on edge. Though the people made a solemn covenant with God to support them and the Adventist movement at the beginning of the year, the work of J. H. Waggoner and G. I. Butler rendered this goal unachievable. Rather than move forward, the church slid backward.

Though he did not realize it at the time, Butler’s first attempt to resolve the controversy among leaders utterly failed. He was not reprovved for his behavior in Battle Creek during the fall of 1872 until the spring of 1873 and did not receive a testimony regarding this issue until January 1875. In the meantime, he continued to think that he

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹⁶⁵ Emphasis is mine. Ibid., 82. It is important to note that while Butler, Lockwood, Abbey, Ings, and others were making dress reform a test of fellowship in Battle Creek in mid-late 1872, the Whites were trying to correct the “false statements” of some of the “bitterest enemies in reference to . . . [Adventists] making the subject of health reform and Mrs. White’s testimonies a test of church fellowship” in other localities. White, “Statements and Suggestions,” *RH*, July 23, 1872, 44. Therefore, the extreme measures that these men took directly countered the White’s attempts to have their religion solely based upon Scripture.

had won a decisive battle by staunchly defending the White's honor. This, perhaps, led him to contract a more prideful perspective of his own leadership ability and authoritative status. Throughout the latter part of 1872 and the beginning of 1873, Butler demonstrated a more independent approach to leadership. During these months he became increasingly stubborn, which eventually caused him to clash with James White—the man he usually defended. Therefore, the trajectory that Butler began in the fall of 1872 continued into the first months of 1873.¹⁶⁶

The tenth annual session of the General Conference convened in late December 1871 and continued into early January 1872. Since sessions were held yearly at this time it was generally expected that the next one would convene about a year after the previous session. In order for this to happen in 1873, the eleventh annual session needed to convene around January. The General Conference Executive Committee of 1872, which included G. I. Butler, S. N. Haskell, and Ira Abbey, was in charge of planning and organizing the annual meetings.¹⁶⁷ As president, it was Butler's responsibility to spearhead this process, but he chose to delay it instead.

Planning probably should have commenced around October 1872 while Butler was at headquarters, but this did not happen. He arrived at his home in Iowa on October 24 and then left for Kansas and Missouri in early December,¹⁶⁸ remaining there until

¹⁶⁶ Ellen White briefly describes Butler's extreme "independence" and "proud, unyielding will" in the first three paragraphs of her 1875 testimony to him. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25 [Special]*, 42-44 (cf. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*, 42-44; White, 3T, 492). This perspective is also detailed further between pages 44 and 52 of this thesis.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Byington and Smith, "Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *RH*, May 26, 1863, 205.

¹⁶⁸ Geo[rge] I. Butler, "Since the Camp-Meetings," *RH*, December 24, 1872, 12-13; George I. Butler to James White, October 15, 1872; Geo[rge] I. Butler, "Missouri and Kansas," *RH*, January 21, 1873, 46.

early February 1873.¹⁶⁹ Butler acted independently when he traveled south at this time and made “no appointments in the REVIEW.” After weeks of virtual silence, he eventually explained his reasoning as follows: “Because of uncertainty concerning the time of holding the General Conference, and perplexity as to when I should go, owing to other calls for labor, I had not time to put appointments in the paper before I wished to start, so I notified the friends of my coming, by letter.”¹⁷⁰

It seems that Butler was the primary cause of “uncertainty” and “perplexity” in regard to “the time of holding the General Conference.”¹⁷¹ This resulted in “the work” at headquarters being “much hindered by [his] delay” and independent wanderings in the south. As “repeated and urgent calls” from White and the other members of “the General Conference [Executive Committee]” came, Butler “persistently maintain[ed]” his “private judgment” in regard to “duty against the voice” of others. According to Ellen White, this led him to “an independence, and a set, willful spirit, which was all wrong.” For these reasons, she later stated that his labors in Kansas and Missouri were “an experience for [Butler’s] own benefit,” something that “was highly essential to [him].”¹⁷²

Butler probably also felt incapable of handling General Conference affairs without James White’s leadership. This is apparently the primary reason Butler delayed the annual meetings. White was in California at the time and had no plans to attend. In spite of this, Butler patently refused to hold the next annual meeting unless White could

¹⁶⁹ Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Report from Missouri and Kansas,” *RH*, February 25, 1873, 86.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25 [Special]*, 42-44.

be present. On January 5, 1873, Ira Abbey explained to his daughter, Lucinda Hall, “no use to have General Conference till Bro White is here[.] what could we do[?] no one know[s] anything[.]”¹⁷³ Lucinda Hall was with the Whites in California at this time and likely queried her father about the conference after White queried her about the continual delays. Abbey was a member of the Executive Committee and partially responsible for planning and it is possible that White began to work through Abbey because he could get nowhere with Butler. Though the precise reasons cannot be determined, it is clear that White continued to express his concerns and Abbey continued to make excuses—excuses that seem to mimic Butler’s determined effort to tell White what to do.¹⁷⁴

A notice finally appeared in the *Review* on February 11, 1873, stating that the next session of the General Conference would commence in Battle Creek on March 11¹⁷⁵—three months later than expected. The Whites eventually changed their minds and decided to attend the conference, arriving in Battle Creek on March 4, 1873.¹⁷⁶ The intensity of the annual meetings carried over into the weeks that followed the General Conference and during this time, conflicts between White, Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith reached their breaking point. Already on a reckless trajectory since the fall of 1872, Butler was also a major part of the problem until mid-May 1873. After a genuine “conversion” in May, he deeply realized the perils of disunity within the church and made a second attempt to solve the crisis between leaders.

¹⁷³ Ira Abbey to Lucinda Hall, January 5, 1873, Lucinda Hall Collection, Folder 17, EGWE-GC.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25 [Special], 44.

¹⁷⁵ Geo[rge] I. Butler, S. N. Haskell, and Ira Abbey, “General Conference,” *RH*, February 11, 1873, 72.

¹⁷⁶ Ellen G. White, *Diary*: March 1 to 31, 1873, MS 005, 1873.

The Pinnacle of the Crisis Between Leaders

Numerous meetings were held in March and April 1873 to resolve conflict between the Whites and other leaders. The situation was certainly stressful and James White continued to push himself to his limits. He was not well much of the time and the stress and tension he experienced in Battle Creek, particularly in the *Review* Office, quickly took its toll. On April 22, 1873, White suffered his fourth partial stroke. He managed to get a few days of rest after this stroke and also tried to free himself from various responsibilities so as to fully recuperate. He essentially resigned his positions at the Publishing Association and the Health Institute.¹⁷⁷ In spite of his poor health and attempts to resign, however, Butler continued to press White with business matters. Not only did Butler apparently lack the confidence to make decisions on his own, but he also firmly believed that White must take the lead, no matter what.

Perhaps the most stressful situation for White (as well as other leaders) related to Uriah Smith. On May 7 a meeting was held in the *Review* Office and Ellen White told Smith “that his position was of that character to encourage a loose state of things in the office.” Smith had been negligent in the Office for a long time by this point. For example, Smith sometimes passed in minister’s appointments carelessly, which did not provide enough time for people to prepare for and come to the meetings. The press was also delayed on occasion because Smith sometimes submitted copy for articles too late.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, he sometimes acted irresponsibly during the Office’s council meetings.

¹⁷⁷ Ellen G. White, *Diary: April 1 to 30, 1873*, MS 006, 1873; George W. Amadon, diary entry April 22, 1873, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 31, CAR.

¹⁷⁸ Ellen G. White, *Diary: May 1 to 31, 1873*, MS 007, 1873.

During the fall of 1872 Butler was shocked to see Smith sit through one of these meeting “looking at a paper and saying scarcely anything at all.”¹⁷⁹

Another matter that probably distracted Smith at this time involved various patents. Though he received nine patents for his own inventions throughout his life, he was also somewhat involved with three more in early 1873. In March 1873, Willard Jefts received two patents relating to a particular kind of table. Smith signed as a witness on both documents, which suggests some level of participation.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, in April 1873, Othniel F. Tripp filed his patent for an “Improvement in Knitting-Machines” with Smith’s signature as a witness.¹⁸¹ Though these patents involved Smith less directly, he was also sidetracked during the spring of 1873 with his toy gun invention. The final preparations for this invention were completed in the spring and the patent was filed at the Patent Office on May 19, 1873.¹⁸² Though Smith was never criticized for his involvement with patents, his vested interest in four different patents (particularly his own) at this time likely indicates some level of distraction from his regular duties.

While issues with Smith continued to reach their breaking point, problems with Butler increased concurrently. On May 7, Ellen White lamented in her diary that Butler did “not take a right position in regard to Ransom’s course during the winter” and stated

¹⁷⁹ George I. Butler to James White, October 15, 1872.

¹⁸⁰ Willard Jefts, Improvement in Tables, US Patent 136,837, no file date, and issued March 18, 1873; Willard Jefts, Improvement in Table-Leaf Supports, US Patent 136,836, no file date, and issued March 18, 1873.

¹⁸¹ Othniel F. Tripp, Improvement in Knitting-Machines, US Patent 140,800, filed April 8, 1873, and issued July 15, 1873.

¹⁸² Uriah Smith, Improvement in Toy Guns, US Patent 154,810, filed May 19, 1873, and issued September 8, 1874; cf. Uriah Smith to Harriet N. Smith, July 1, [1873], Uriah Smith/Mark Bovee Collection (146), Box 2, Folder 27, CAR.

that “his conversation is not pleasing upon this subject.” In addition to the dress reform issue, Lockwood also became involved in the *Review* Office though he was not authorized to do so. Butler supported his brother-in-law during all of these events and as the Whites tried to reprove Lockwood, Butler apparently tried to reprove the Whites. Though Ellen White commented that, “Brother Butler is seeking to do what he can to right up things in Battle Creek” she further mentioned that on May 8, “Butler and my husband had conversation not very pleasant in reference to matters in the office. Brother Butler is in the dark. He is not viewing matters correctly.”¹⁸³

The situation with Butler intensified the next day. Ellen White wrote that Lockwood was “deceived by Satan” and had “taken burdens God or his brethren did not lay upon him.” Rather than correct the error, she stated that “Brother Butler, we fear, has given him influence.” In the evening a meeting was held for “Brother and Sister Lockwood, Brother Butler, and the directors [of the Health Institute].” Rather than support the Whites as he usually did, Butler hardened and remained on the defensive. Ellen White remarked that “Brother Butler took a firm, unyielding stand, contrary to our views of the condition of things. He was very persistent.”¹⁸⁴

Though “Bro. Butler, Lockwood & Ings confessed,”¹⁸⁵ it seems that they were not yet prepared to make full reconciliation. Once the afternoon meeting concluded on May 10, another meeting was held that evening. Ellen White remarked in her diary that “Brother Butler’s position was such that it greatly burdened my husband.” In her opinion,

¹⁸³ Ellen G. White, *Diary: May 1 to 31, 1873*, MS 007, 1873.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ George W. Amadon, diary entry May 10, 1873.

“Butler was in the dark . . . [and] had a spirit of his own; unyielding and stubborn.” The day ended bitterly for the Whites and they “retired to bed grieved and distressed.”¹⁸⁶

On the next day Ellen White lamented in her diary, “We positively must have rest. My husband is in danger of his life every hour he remains in Battle Creek.” As a result, the Whites left and sought “retirement” in Potterville, Michigan. The stress followed the Whites, however, as there were letters—many of them—from J. H. Waggoner,¹⁸⁷ G. I. Butler,¹⁸⁸ Uriah Smith,¹⁸⁹ and several others, which required responses.¹⁹⁰ Two days after their departure, Butler traveled to Potterville with Harmon Lindsay to make a heartfelt apology for his wrongs. According to Ellen White, “Brother Butler confessed his wrong with deep humility of spirit.”¹⁹¹ Butler’s visit to Potterville, however, had a twofold purpose. In addition to making confession, he needed James White’s advice in regard to Uriah Smith. Butler explained to White,

Last evening we called Bro. Smith in and labored with him two hours & a half. . . . We talked over his past course. . . . We placed the importance of the work in the Association before him, the importance of himself & you as the two leading men in it being in union, the certainty of great harm to the cause if you were not in union and the fact that he had not done all on his part to bring about that union. And commented freely on his past course, his neglect of bearing responsibility, his lack of faithfulness, &c., &c. and that this state of things could not go on. God would hold us as Trustees

¹⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, *Diary: May 1 to 31, 1873*, MS 007, 1873.

¹⁸⁷ Joseph H. Waggoner to James and Ellen White, May 12, 1873, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁸⁸ George I. Butler to James and Ellen White, May 13, [1873], Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁸⁹ Uriah Smith to James White, May 14, 1873, Uriah Smith/Mark Bovee Collection (146), Box 2, Folder 16, CAR.

¹⁹⁰ James White to [Ira A.] Abbey, May 12, 1873, Heritage M-Film 53, James S. White Correspondence 2, CAR; Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith, May 14, 1873, LT 010, 1873, CAR.

¹⁹¹ Ellen G. White, *Diary: May 1 to 31, 1873*, MS 007, 1873.

to an account if we should suffer it.¹⁹²

In order to avoid “rash conclusions,” the Trustees gave Smith one day to think things over. From Butler’s perspective, however, it didn’t look as though Smith would give “an inch.” Though Butler stated that they were “willing to put him [Smith] out” if he refused to cooperate, he also confided to White that “in such an important sli[k] [sic] I should not feel free to act without your judgment.”¹⁹³ Naturally, an issue of this magnitude greatly stressed White as well. While Butler had good intentions, the added stress of his visit contributed to James White’s second partial stroke within a three-week period,¹⁹⁴ making a total of five strokes since August 16, 1865.

On May 15, two days after Butler’s visit and White’s fifth stroke, Smith was fired from the *Review* Office.¹⁹⁵ Though he was occasionally negligent in his duties, sometimes critical of the White’s leadership, and often lax in reproofing others, it was truly a sad day for Adventist leaders. To make matters worse, Smith was not alone. For reasons currently unknown, J. H. Waggoner also lost his position as corresponding editor for the *Review* at the same time as Smith.¹⁹⁶ Shortly afterward, Waggoner reacted

¹⁹² Emphasis is in original. George I. Butler to James and Ellen White, May 13, [1873].

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Diary*: May 1 to 31, 1873, MS 007, 1873.

¹⁹⁵ Harmon Lindsay to James and Ellen White, May 15, 1873, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁹⁶ Both editor’s names were dropped from the masthead of the editorial page of the *Review* (the fourth page) in the May 27, 1873, issue. It is possible that G. I. Butler was involved in removing both Smith and Waggoner from the Office. E. K. Vande Vere quotes a letter written by Butler to C. C. Crisler on September 25, 1914, as follows: “I was the unfortunate man [as president of the General Conference] who had to stand the responsibility of letting the two men [Smith and Amadon] go [from the Press]. But you may be sure I should not have done it without the suggestion and advice of Bro[ther] White.” Information in brackets is in original. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 39-40. There are two problems with this citation, however. First of all, G. W. Amadon was not fired from the *Review* Office at this time. His 1873 diary clearly indicates that he retained his position. Since this is the case, it would seem natural that the second

strongly in a Sabbath afternoon meeting by striking “a wrong cord” and making “a jar,” which caused Ellen White to lament in her diary, “This is the saddest day I ever experienced.”¹⁹⁷

On May 19 J. Warren Bacheller and Wilbur Whitney defied the authority of the Trustees by making Smith the president of the Review and Herald Literary Society. This society was founded in 1871 to “appeal to . . . ministers, and many of . . . [the] brethren and sisters to contribute to the literary and spiritual interests of . . . [Adventist] periodicals.”¹⁹⁸ Therefore, Bacheller and Whitney’s insubordinate act was an attempt to give Smith position and authority within the *Review* Office once again. Both men were fired the next day for their behavior.¹⁹⁹

The Whites returned to Battle Creek on May 16 and on their way to the city they met Butler. When he saw them he “wept and confessed his errors” once again and then they all journeyed to Battle Creek. In January 1875, Ellen White remarked that when Butler’s “proud, unyielding will was subdued” he had a “genuine conversion.” This

man to lose his job would be Waggoner. Though this is very possible, the reality is complicated by a second problem. According to the handwritten letter available in the Incoming Correspondence at the Ellen G. White Estate, Butler’s letter to Crisler actually reads: “I was the unfortunate man who had to stand the responsibility as president of the General Conference. But you may be sure I should not have done it without the suggestion and advice of Brother White.” George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914. Unfortunately, the key phrase, “of letting the two men go” is missing from the letter preserved by the White Estate. Therefore, Vande Vere either misquoted Butler’s letter to Crisler, or two versions of the letter exist. It seems less likely that Vande Vere would misquote the letter, especially since he supplied two men’s names in brackets. Therefore, it seems most likely that two versions of Butler’s letter to Crisler were written and one version did indicate that Butler was partially responsible for firing two men from the Office. It is clear from other sources that Smith was one of the men. Since Waggoner’s name was dropped from the masthead at the exact same time, it seems very likely that Waggoner was the second man.

¹⁹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Diary: May 1 to 31, 1873*, MS 007, 1873.

¹⁹⁸ James White and E. W. Whitney, “Organization of the Review and Herald Literary Society,” *RH*, March 28, 1871, 120; James White, “The Review and Herald Literary Society,” *RH*, March 28, 1871, 120.

¹⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Diary: May 1 to 31, 1873*, MS 007, 1873; George W. Amadon, diary entries May 19-20, 1873.

comment, which undoubtedly refers to Butler's multiple confessions in May 1873, "led to reflection, and to [Butler's] position upon Leadership."²⁰⁰ This reflection probably began on Sabbath afternoon, May 17, when Butler listened to Ellen White speak "in regard to the case of Brother Smith." After reading some of her letters to him, she "then referred to the travels of the children of Israel, their rebellion, and the visitation of God because of their sins." She explained that "God designed that there should be men to reprove sin and wrong or His people would become careless and corrupt their ways before Him."²⁰¹ Whether or not this sermon inspired Butler's reflection upon leadership, the rebellion of Israel against Moses and God's desire for someone to reprove sin in the church were both prominent themes in his soon-to-be published essay, *Leadership*.

Butler's Sermon on Leadership

During the summer and fall of 1873 G. I. Butler and S. N. Haskell attended most of the Adventist camp meetings around the country.²⁰² Two of their primary tasks were, first, to vindicate James White and his leadership, and second, to raise money to establish a new school in Battle Creek. Butler wrote a sermon on leadership to meet the former objective that also contributed to the latter indirectly.²⁰³ The contents of this sermon are

²⁰⁰ White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25 [Special]*, 44.

²⁰¹ Ellen G. White, *Diary: May 1 to 31, 1873*, MS 007, 1873.

²⁰² Wm. Covert and S. H. Lane, "Indiana State Conference," *RH*, October 7, 1873, 134; R. F. Andrews and T. M. Steward, "Illinois State Conference," *RH*, October 14, 1873, 142-143; L. Bean and N. Orcutt, "Report of the Vermont State Conference: Eleventh Annual Meeting," *RH*, September 16, 1873, 110-111; S. N. Haskell and M. Wood, "The New England Conference," *RH*, September 16, 1873, 110; J. B. Goodrich and W. H. Blaisdell, "The Maine Conference," *RH*, September 16, 1873, 110.

²⁰³ Cf. George W. Amadon, diary entry September 7, 1873; John H. Kellogg to William C. White, September 14, 1873.

recorded, presumably after some editing, in his published tract.²⁰⁴ Though an analysis of this tract is provided in chapter 3, some comments about the sermon itself are worth mentioning here. The New York and Pennsylvania Conference opened on August 6, 1873, in Kirkville, New York.²⁰⁵ As with the other conferences and camp meetings, Butler and Haskell were present and active. In regard to their preaching, one Adventist, stated,

WHILE listening to the straight and pointed testimony from Brn. Butler and Haskell at our camp-meeting, I thought I never heard the truth presented so close and searching before . . . I thank God I can say my heart is in full sympathy with the servants of God who are called to take the charge of this work, and that God has chosen them for this purpose.²⁰⁶

R. F. Cottrell was even more specific in his reflections on the conference and enthusiastically paraphrased Butler's leadership sermon in an article in the *Review*. He commented:

And there must be union, there must be order. An army without discipline and leadership cannot be successful. There is order in the work of God. In every special movement in the work of God, in every new development of truth in the great plan, God chooses whom he will to lead. His choice must be wise and judicious ; therefore it is the best. No man is without fault—no man infallible. It is God who leads. Those who murmur, murmur against God. We have our examples in the ancient people of God. Some of Israel rebelled ; some discouraged the people with their lack of faith ; some fell victims to their lusts ; and some despised the food that God had given them, and grumbled at the health reform. “Now all these things happened to them for ensamples : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” Shall we be admonished by them?²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ George I. Butler to James White, March 13 and 15, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

²⁰⁵ P. Z. Kinne and S. B. Whitney, “Twelfth Annual Session of the N. Y. and Pa. Conference,” *RH*, August 26, 1873, 86.

²⁰⁶ C. Lawton, “The Straight Testimony,” *RH*, November 11, 1873, 173.

²⁰⁷ R. F. Cottrell, “New York Camp-Meeting,” *RH*, August 26, 1873, 85.

The theme of “union” and “order” permeated Butler’s sermon on leadership. The sermon also included an illustration relating to “an army without discipline and leadership,” as well as an account of “special movements” throughout history. In each of these movements, Butler argued that God had chosen a leader. Though Butler rejected human infallibility, he emphasized that “those who murmur, murmur against God.” Despite the fact that Cottrell did not mention Butler by name in his article, Butler’s sermon clearly left a great impression upon his heart and mind.

While Adventists appreciated Butler’s sermon,²⁰⁸ Varnum Hull, a Seventh Day Baptist minister, expressed great concern after he heard the leadership discourse at the Iowa camp meeting.²⁰⁹ When Hull commented on these meetings he gave a fairly affirmative report, but had nothing positive to say in regard to Butler’s sermon. He lamented,

I however regretted to hear Eld. Butler urge, with much earnestness, the authority of Eld. White and the visions of Mrs. White. He put Mr. White in the same relation to them that Moses held to Israel as a leader, and to my understanding, taught, that to murmur against him was to murmur against God. To give force to what he said, he quoted 1 Cor. 10:1, 12, emphasizing the second and eleventh verses. I confess that I heard him with sorrow.²¹⁰

Hull was the first person to react negatively to Butler’s sermon and philosophy of leadership. While he immediately recognized theological problems with Butler’s view, it would take many Adventists a few years to realize its perils.

Though all of the conferences happily received Butler and Haskell, the Michigan

²⁰⁸ Cf. Joseph Clarke, “Our Camp-Meeting,” *RH*, December 9, 1873, 206.

²⁰⁹ Geo[rge] I. Butler and S. N. Haskell, “A General Meeting in Iowa,” *RH*, September 30, 1873, 128; Geo[rge] I. Butler, “The Meeting at Osceola, Iowa,” *RH*, October 28, 1873, 157.

²¹⁰ J. B. Clarke, “Report of Bro. V. Hull,” *The Sabbath Recorder*, December 25, 1873, p. 2, col. 8, SDBHS; cf. Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Minnesota and the S. D. Baptists,” *RH*, February 17, 1874, 78.

Conference certainly expressed the greatest level of appreciation. This is not surprising since these meetings were held on the campground in Battle Creek—the epicenter of contention. The Conference opened on September 4, 1873, and “1000 copies” of Ellen G. White’s *Testimony for the Church, No. 23* came off the steam press the same day.²¹¹ This new *Testimony* contained two important articles that explained the current problem Adventists (and particularly the leaders) faced. The first was Ellen White’s message to “The Laodicean Church,” which filled up the first 57 pages of the *Testimony*, and the second was James White’s “Earnest Appeal,” which took up the last 47 pages of the tract (though paginated separately from Ellen White’s writings).²¹²

J. H. Waggoner explained that “Testimony No. 23, to the Laodiceans, was brought on the ground the second day of the meeting, and the preaching of Brn. Butler and Haskell was well suited to the occasion, and to the condition of the people.”²¹³ Waggoner’s comment highlights a significant point that should not be overlooked. While the Whites described the current problem in a way that resonated with the people, it was Butler’s sermon on leadership that provided a solution “well suited to the occasion.” The Whites had reproved and corrected Adventist leaders from the beginning. In particular, Ellen White had published twelve different *Testimonies for the Church* between 1867 and 1873, all of which contained timely reproof. What made the situation different in September 1873 was Butler’s system of leadership—in reality, a formulated plan to

²¹¹ George W. Amadon, diary entry September 4, 1873; cf. White, 3T, 252-338.

²¹² Cf. Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Testimony No. 23 and Bro. White’s Address,” *RH*, November 4, 1873, 164.

²¹³ Joseph H. W[aggoner], “Michigan Camp-Meeting,” *RH*, September 9, 1873, 101; cf. Geo[rge] I. Butler, “The Michigan Camp-Meeting,” *RH*, September 9, 1873, 100.

resolve the problem. Therefore, the response to the Whites previous appeals paled greatly in comparison to the reaction that began to take place at the Michigan camp meeting in 1873.

Up to this point, Seventh-day Adventists struggled in regard to “attitude, position and methods of management” in the church. James White had been the primary leader of the denomination for more than two decades, and, as Butler explained, “Some thought he assumed prerogatives that did not properly belong to him, which infringed on their right of private judgment.”²¹⁴ Therefore, the significance of Butler’s leadership sermon and subsequent tract should not be missed. Butler provided the Adventist Church with its first detailed position on leadership and authority with a practical plan of action. Though Butler’s *Leadership* eventually caused issues in the church between 1874 and 1877, it also did some good by forcing Adventists to consider some important ecclesiological questions that were previously unresolved.

Butler spoke two days after *Testimony No. 23* was distributed at the camp meeting, which meant that the people had had time to peruse its contents before he spoke on leadership. Ellen White’s message to “The Laodicean Church” and James White’s “Earnest Appeal” seemed to dovetail perfectly with Butler’s prepared sermon on leadership. The response was overwhelmingly positive. D. T. Bourdeau related,

I most solemnly believe that one great cause of our lukewarm condition has been to murmur against those whom God has appointed to lead out in this work. I was confirmed in this belief in hearing a discourse by Bro. Butler on this subject. . . . How forcible was the remark by Bro. Butler that “not a single instance could be found where ancient Israel murmured directly against the Lord. It was against their leaders, whom God had appointed, and whom they had received from God’s appointment. Yet

²¹⁴ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

their murmurings were against the Most High.²¹⁵

Unlike the other camp meetings that summer, *Testimony No. 23* added great significance and importance to Butler's message. Adventists in Michigan quickly linked the two messages together and adopted three resolutions that demonstrated their commitment to Butler's position on leadership. The first resolution stated: "*Resolved*, 1. That we deeply deplore our wretched condition as shown by Testimony No. 23, to the church of the Laodiceans ; and we acknowledge the special hand of God in the plain, straight testimonies borne by Brn. Butler and Haskell on this and kindred subjects." Of particular interest was Butler's sermon on leadership, as the final two resolutions clearly echo Butler's sentiments. The Michigan Conference resolved,

2. That we believe the time has fully come when we, as a people, should take a more decided stand in favor of the order which God himself has ordained in the work of the third angel's message. While we have formally acknowledged this order, and professed a belief in the gift of the Spirit, and in the position which Bro. White is called of God to occupy in this work, we confess that we have not heartily acted consistently with this profession ; for which we feel to humble ourselves before the Lord. . . .

3. That we now view all our murmurings, complainings, and fault-findings against those whom God has selected to bear special burdens and responsibilities in the third angel's message, and our great lack of sympathy with them in their afflictions, and of support in their work, as not wrongs against them merely, but as grievous sins against God, the author of this sacred work. And we believe that this, in a great measure, is the cause of our lukewarm condition, as God's Spirit has been grieved away by our murmurings.²¹⁶

Many Adventists considered the third resolution the most important. Convinced by Butler's reasoning, they believed that to murmur against a leader (specifically James White) equaled complaining against God. According to J. H. Waggoner, "Many pointed

²¹⁵ D. T. Bourdeau, "Testimony No. 23," *RH*, October 14, 1873, 141.

²¹⁶ E. H. Root and I. D. Van Horn, "Michigan Conference of S. D. Adventists: Thirteenth Annual Session," *RH*, September 16, 1873, 110.

and timely testimonies were given, such as brought freedom to the meeting and relief to the souls of those who offered them. This was especially the case in regard to the subject of murmurings, as presented in Resolution number 3.”²¹⁷ In Butler’s opinion, these confessions led to “a clearer understanding of the system and discipline necessary among us than heretofore existed.”²¹⁸

Many hailed the Michigan camp meeting as a great success. As Waggoner observed, “It was generally said that this was one of the best camp-meetings, if not the best one, that has been held in the State.”²¹⁹ James White even praised Butler very highly in regard to his work throughout the summer and fall. He stated publicly,

We bear cheerful and decided testimony that we have seen the hand of God guiding Brn. Butler and Haskell in the important matters of the camp-meeting season. The amount of labor which Bro. Butler has done is astonishing . . . Bro. Butler has been drinking deep the past season of true Christian experience under circumstances calculated to make him a safe counselor. Our young men should seek his advice.²²⁰

Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith all reacted very positively to Butler’s preaching throughout the camp meetings. As previously noted, Waggoner stated his approval of Butler’s sermon on leadership during the Michigan camp meeting. Smith was also in Battle Creek for the meetings and on September 8, the day after Butler preached on leadership at the Michigan Conference, there was a “presentation of Uriah’s case at

²¹⁷ W[aggoner], “Michigan Camp-Meeting,” *RH*, September 9, 1873, 101.

²¹⁸ Butler, “The Michigan Camp-Meeting,” *RH*, September 9, 1873, 100.

²¹⁹ W[aggoner], “Michigan Camp-Meeting,” *RH*, September 9, 1873, 101; cf. John H. Kellogg to William C. White, September 14, 1873, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

²²⁰ J[ames] W[hite], “Camp-Meeting Season,” *RH*, October 21, 1873, 148; cf. George I. Butler to James White, October 23, 1873, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

5:30.”²²¹ Butler’s sermon had apparently softened Smith’s heart and he was now ready to make amends with the Whites. He immediately wrote a letter of confession to both of them. When the Whites received it on September 13, they stated with relief, “We were rejoiced to read its contents. He [Smith] confesses his wrong course the few months past. If the scales are falling from his eyes we praise God.”²²²

Similarly, Butler’s message had struck a chord with Andrews as well. On September 16, 1873, Andrews published an article in the *Review*, titled, “Duty Toward Those that Have the Rule,” which clearly echoed Butler’s sermon on leadership. Andrews stated, “God has in all ages called men to fill important places in his work . . . [and] has conferred on them a measure of authority adequate to that task. Such has been the case with all the eminent servants of God in Bible times, and since those times, it has been the same.” In regard to ecclesiastical authority, Andrews concurred with Butler, acknowledging that there are

those who are called to bear the chief responsibility in the work of God . . . The Spirit of God having selected these as the most suitable persons to employ in the work of leading out in the cause, it is in the highest degree reasonable to believe that those thus chosen should have clearer and juster ideas by far of the steps that should be taken than those can have who are not thus called of God.

How should God’s specially chosen leaders be treated? In Butleresque fashion, Andrews explained that there should be no “distrust and murmuring” against such persons. “But whenever God is specially at work, there will he have men to lead and to bear responsibility in counseling and directing. . . . These are the ones who are entitled to our

²²¹ George W. Amadon, diary entry September 8, 1873.

²²² Ellen G. White, *Diary: September 1 to 30, 1873*, MS 011, 1873.

support and obedience.”²²³

Butler’s Plans for the Twelfth Annual Session of the General Conference

Butler recognized that Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith were more supportive of White as a result of his sermon on leadership, yet the conflict between “the original four” remained deeply distressing to him. In late October he related to White, “I tell you, Brother White, as hard-hearted a man as I am supposed to be, I have wept over this state of things.”²²⁴ He also commented, “The tangle at Battle Creek is a terrible perplexity to me. How we are going to get through it I can’t see.”²²⁵ As a result, Butler believed it was necessary to convene the General Conference “early, probably earlier than ever before.”²²⁶ Throughout October he communicated with the Whites in regard to this proposition.²²⁷ Though the official agenda included other matters,²²⁸ the primary purpose of convening the conference early was to settle the conflict between White, Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith.²²⁹ For this reason, Butler stated to White, “I think the matter of sufficient importance to warrant me as President of the General Conference to summon

²²³ J. N. A[ndrews], “Duty Toward Those that Have the Rule,” *RH*, September 16, 1873, 108.

²²⁴ George I. Butler to James White, October 23, 1873.

²²⁵ George I. Butler to James White, October 26, 1873, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ See diary entries for October 10, 11, and 20 in Ellen G. White, *Diary: October 1 to 26, 1873*, MS 012, 1873.

²²⁸ George I. Butler to James White, October 26, 1873.

²²⁹ According to the *Michigan Tribune*, “Comparatively but little business was done” at the November 1873 General Conference, “as most of the time was spent in social and religious meetings.” “[The Seventh-day Adventist General Conference],” *Battle Creek Michigan Tribune*, November 27, 1873, p. 3, col. 3, Willard Library Newspaper Collection, Battle Creek, MI. This seems to indicate that “business” was not the primary concern of Seventh-day Adventists at this particular General Conference.

all four of you together to see if something could not be done to get this great hindrance out of the way.”²³⁰

Butler succeeded with his plans and the twelfth annual session of the General Conference assembled on November 14. Andrews excitedly proclaimed, “never has a Conference opened with greater indications of God’s mercy than has the present one . . . it was evident that the Spirit of God in an unusual measure was present to bless and to guide the meeting.”²³¹ Sabbath, November 15, was “a good day all day.” According to Amadon, the preaching came “from the heart & reached the heart.” People talked and exhorted and in response the “brethren confessed, and the Lord came near.”²³² That “evening, Bro. Butler read” his essay on leadership and the response was overwhelmingly positive. According to Andrews, “There was perfect unanimity of opinion and of feeling in the discussion of the subject.”²³³ Butler’s essay brought a perfect ending to a perfect day. Amadon captured the general feeling of the people well when he stated of the conference, “Oh, indeed, it was good to be there.”²³⁴ Similarly, Ellen White rejoiced that day by stating,

The Lord is at work in this place. My husband has borne a very plain testimony accompanied by the Spirit of God. Brother [Smith] has made a full confession of his wrong course at last conference. Brethren Andrews and Waggoner have taken their stand fully, and are of better courage than they have been for years. We hope to see the cause here placed upon a firmer basis than ever before.²³⁵

²³⁰ George I. Butler to James White, October 23, 1873.

²³¹ J. N. A[ndrews], “The General Conference,” *RH*, November 18, 1873, 180.

²³² George W. Amadon, diary entry November 15, 1873.

²³³ A[ndrews], “The General Conference,” *RH*, November 18, 1873, 180.

²³⁴ George W. Amadon, diary entry November 15, 1873.

²³⁵ Ellen G. White to Dudley M. Canright, November 12, 15, and 24, 1873, LT 001, 1873.

Conclusion

Since late 1866 the Whites (particularly James) experienced considerable tension with practically every other leader in the church. Rumors were spread, doubts regarding James White's leadership ability compounded, and distrust in regard to his Christian character prevailed. As White tried to defend his honor and guide the church in a more positive direction, his efforts were strongly resisted. In late autumn 1870, the situation remained very stressful as many of the leaders were too sick to work in the publication department. In response, Andrews and Waggoner refused to help White while Smith slowly returned to his post. This placed the burden on White's shoulders and pushed him to his breaking point. Not only did this cause his second stroke, but also he became increasingly more suspicious and distrustful of other leaders as a result, particularly Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith.

G. I. Butler was elected to the General Conference presidency about one year later. He was keenly aware of the struggles between "the original four" from the beginning of the conflict. As General Conference president, Butler felt primarily responsible for restoring unity within the church. Union was paramount for Butler and it became his primary objective to restore it at all costs. His first attempts to restore union failed and backfired. Beginning in the late summer of 1872 Butler employed rather forceful tactics to restore union at Adventist headquarters. With the assistance of Lockwood, Abbey, and others, Butler made dress reform a test of fellowship in Battle Creek. Since the Whites were emphasizing this reform in their ministry, Butler viewed any resistance to this change as a sign of disrespect. In response, he coerced others to obey his strict dictum by the authority of Ellen White's *Testimonies*. This forceful

attempt to restore union among leaders only brought negative results, however, and splintered the church in Battle Creek.

At first Butler believed his work in Battle Creek successful, which may have caused him to become proud and, as a result, part of the problem between late 1872 and spring 1873. Though he genuinely confessed a short time later, the situation remained intense throughout the year. During the summer of 1873 Butler regained his courage and made a second attempt at restoring unity within the church. Unlike his first attempt, his second plan to restore union eventually proved successful—at least at first. Though his success will be discussed further in chapter 4, it is important to note here that this second plan illustrates an important principle: when unity is threatened, people tend to centralize in some way for protection. The turbulent events that transpired between late 1866 and mid-1873 caused Butler to develop a theology of leadership that promoted an attractive formula for protection—authority centralized in one person.

CHAPTER 3

THE HOPEFUL SOLUTION

G. I. Butler's *Leadership* Essay

Butler's *Leadership* essay [see Appendix A] provided Adventists with a much-needed model of governance, which defined the role of leaders in the church and their relationship with one another—particularly in reference to James White. The General Conference had not defined authority and order *explicitly* and *officially* prior to this time. As a result, this document stands as a milestone within Seventh-day Adventist history. Though written by one person, *Leadership* was highly praised and enthusiastically received in 1873 and its sentiments represent the general Adventist view of ecclesiology at the time. It is, therefore, necessary to expound on Butler's essay to gain insights into the nineteenth-century Adventist mindset in regard to church order.¹

¹ Butler's concept of leadership was based upon the understanding that the apostolic gift did not expire after the twelve apostles of Christ. This concept was widely accepted by Sabbatarian Adventists (and, subsequently, by Seventh-day Adventists) many years prior to Butler's leadership. Specifically, the "Conference Address" written by J. N. Loughborough, Moses Hull, and M. E. Cornell in 1861 contains some striking similarities with certain aspects of Butler's *Leadership* of 1873. Though this document was widely circulated by denominational leaders, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists never adopted it as official policy. In spite of its unofficial status, however, the document—or at least the theology it expressed—apparently influenced Butler to a significant degree. Within the "Conference Address" of 1861 the authors state that apostles hold the highest ecclesiastical office "by virtue of an especial call from God." Since God, rather than the church, elected apostles, the authors believed that this office was "more especially" filled by those who are "called of God to lead out in any new truth or reform," such as "Luther, Melancthon, Wesley, and William Miller." Loughborough, Hull, and Cornell, "Conference Address," *RH*, October 15, 1861, 156-157 (cf. *Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* ([Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1863]), 9-16; *Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, in *S. D. Advent Library*, vol. 2 ([Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1864?]), 9-16; *Gen. Conf. Reports of 1864-6* ([Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1866]), 8-14). In his *Leadership* essay Butler reiterated this same theological view of apostles and their authoritative status. A primary difference between

The Literary Structure and Hermeneutical Method

This sixteen-page essay was a comfortable sermon length and its literary structure can be simplified into the following six parts:

1. The leadership philosophy (1.1-2.1)²
2. Arguments from Scripture and history (2.2-9.2)
3. Application to the Seventh-day Adventist movement (9.3-12.3)
4. Nine ways to follow the leader (13.1-14.3)
5. Brief answers to potential criticisms (14.4-15.3)
6. Personal appeal and concluding example (15.4-16.2)

As the structure elucidates, Butler's argumentation was rather linear. He began with a philosophical statement and then provided the necessary argumentation for his theology of leadership. These first two sections comprise about half of the document, which is followed by an application of these principles to the Adventist context. Section three constitutes about a third of the essay. After explaining this theory and naming the chosen leader, Butler outlined nine points that describe the relationship people have with their leader. The final pages contain answers to potential objections, a personal appeal, and an illustration from the American context.

Since this tract is theological and philosophical in nature, it is important to understand something about Butler's hermeneutical approach to the topic of leadership. Butler appealed to history (tradition), reason, experience, and Scripture to create his theology of leadership. While much of Butler's use of tradition is derived from Biblical history, he ventured beyond the New Testament period by highlighting various reformers throughout Christian history. This dependence on the lives of great leaders, from Noah to

Leadership (1873) and the "Conference Address" of 1861 is that Butler specifically named an apostolic successor to William Miller whereas the earlier document was silent on this point.

² This notation is my own and corresponds to *Leadership* by noting the page and paragraph of the essay. For example, 1.3 references page 1, paragraph 3.

the present time (i.e., 1873), was more than an illustration. Rather, these “heroes” were an essential aspect of Butler’s theology of leadership. The essay begins: “There never was any great movement in this world without a leader.”³ Without an appeal to tradition, this claim is rendered meaningless.

Reason also formed a prominent part of Butler’s methodology. For example, after stating his philosophy at the beginning of the essay, Butler wrote, “When plans are made, somebody must make them, and carry them into effect ; and *it is self-evident to all* that those should do this who give most evidence of fitness.”⁴ In another place, Butler stated, “This conclusion is *reasonable*, consistent, and in harmony with God’s appointment.”⁵ Both of these statements explain how the people choose their leader. For Butler, this aspect of leadership was equally important with other facets because he believed that the people must choose and support their leader (or more accurately, choose God’s choice), if leadership was to mean anything at all.⁶

A third component of Butler’s hermeneutical approach was experience. The historical background clarifies that Butler’s own experience highly informed him as he wrote out his theory. In fact, as mentioned in chapter 2, his experiences during the spring of 1873 were the primary factor that got him thinking about the subject of leadership in the first place. In addition to this, experience was a vital component of Butler’s definition

³ George I. Butler, *Leadership* ([Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1873]), 1.

⁴ Emphasis is mine. *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ Emphasis is mine. *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ For example, Butler stated, “Never can much be accomplished in any movement until those interested become settled in their minds that the one of their choice is worthy of their confidence and support. Confusion will mark their counsels, and their strength will be wasted in laboring to no purpose, or in opposite directions.” *Ibid.*, 1.

of leadership itself. He explained that a true leader is someone who has shown “sufficient evidence of fitness” throughout his or her own experience.⁷ This experience was the necessary teacher for any true leader. Likewise, this principle applied to followers as well since “success will be apt to attend that movement which closely follows the suggestions of those whom experience teaches give intelligent and judicious advice.”⁸ Experience, then, provided followers with the evidence they needed to faithfully support their leader as well as train the leader to be worthy of being followed. Therefore, for Butler, experience was a vital component of leadership as the teacher of all.

The fourth methodological component is Butler’s primary source—Scripture. His use of the Bible and employment of Greek exegesis comprised a large part of the essay. Numerous texts were either directly quoted or alluded to from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. He also referenced the Greek New Testament several times and cited the 19th century philologist, William Greenfield, as a lexicographic authority.

While numerous other examples could be presented, the illustrations provided demonstrate that the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which includes Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, best describes Butler’s hermeneutical method. This also shows that Butler followed a *prima scriptura* approach to theology. Though Adventists question his conclusions today, Butler did uphold the Bible as his greatest authority and this fact cannot be denied.

Butler’s *Leadership* Philosophy

⁷ Butler, *Leadership*, 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

Butler's philosophy is concisely presented within the first four paragraphs of his essay. Though it is not numbered or outlined in query-form, these paragraphs answer five questions about the topic of leadership, including:

1. Why is leadership necessary?
2. How is leadership ordered?
3. Who is qualified to be the leader?
4. How is a true leader defined?
5. How is the leader to be treated by others?

The opening statement of the essay answered the first question, stating, "There never was any great movement in this world without a leader ; and in the nature of things there cannot be." In this first sentence Butler stated why he believed leadership was necessary—because great movements required it. If any movement was to prosper, leadership was a nonnegotiable. Butler wrote, "success will be apt to attend that movement which closely follows the suggestions of those whom experience teaches give intelligent and judicious advice."⁹

Butler also began to answer the second question within the first sentence of his essay. According to him, good leadership was ordered from the top down. The first sentence reads, "There never was any great movement in this world without *a* leader."¹⁰ The use of the singular form of the indefinite article ("a leader" vs. leaders) is the first indication that Butler's theology of leadership is hierarchical in nature. According to him, one person was in charge and other leaders were subordinate to that person. Several statements make this point emphatically clear. In perhaps his most explicit statement, he asserted:

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Emphasis is mine. Ibid.

What would an army be without *a* leader? What would a government be *if all concerned in its administration were of equal authority*? What would it accomplish *if all were captains, equal in command*? The whole economy of God, as brought to view in the Bible and in all his providential dealings with the race, recognizes this principle. There is not a single important movement spoken of in Scripture in which there was not *some person* chosen to lead out.¹¹

Once Butler established that one leader was above everyone else, he offered various criteria as to who could fill this office. To begin with, the leader must be someone that has the gift of leadership. Butler explained, “As nature bestows upon men a variety of gifts, it follows that some have clearer views than others of what best advances the interests of any cause.”¹² Therefore, some have the gift while others do not. Those lacking the gift of leadership are best suited to fill other roles. Another criterion stated that the leader must possess a history that demonstrated their devotion to the movement they were to lead. According to Butler, there must be evidence of “past faithfulness.” The next prerequisite is closely related to one’s past experience. As Butler put it, there must be “sufficient evidence of [the leaders’] fitness.” In other words, the people must be able to recognize that a person is qualified to lead them.¹³

The final qualifying mark of a true leader was based upon divine election, but not in the Calvinistic sense. Rather, Butler stated that there must be “reliable evidence of God’s special selection” for a leader to be truly qualified. This is a point that Butler strongly emphasized and is paramount to his argument. He repeatedly used phrases like, “his [i.e., God’s] selection of proper instruments,”¹⁴ “those specially raised up . . . by the

¹¹ Ibid., 2.

¹² Ibid., 1.

¹³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

providence or Spirit of God,”¹⁵ “[those God] had specially appointed,” “[God gave them] a special position,” or “God’s appointment,”¹⁶ in reference to the leader and their position. With these delimited qualifications a subtle, yet important point, is made: only certain people are capable of being a true leader. Not everyone is gifted or called by God for such a position; nor do all people have the experience that enables them to be a successful leader. Therefore, while some are gifted and called to lead, those with other gifts should not seek to fill the highest position in the church.

The fourth question that Butler addressed relates to the definition of a leader. Naturally, this point is closely associated with the qualifications a leader must possess before taking their position. In other words, a leader is gifted, has past experience, is recognized as competent by the people, and is called by God to lead the church. In addition, when Butler directly addressed this point he began with a positive description, stating, “A true leader represents and embodies the views and will of those who follow his counsels. His success is their success.” Butler then contrasted a true leader with a tyrant—someone he defined as one who “exercises influence and authority to gratify his own wishes or caprice.”¹⁷ In short, he defined a true leader as self-sacrificing and a tyrant as self-gratifying.

Butler’s final point in this section explained how followers should treat and interact with their leader. To start with, followers must be “settled in their minds that the

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1

one of their choice is worthy of their confidence and support.”¹⁸ According to Butler, this is accomplished by recognizing the leader’s giftedness, “past faithfulness, and sufficient evidence of fitness, or by reliable evidence of God’s special selection.” These four things naturally correspond with the four prerequisite qualities a true leader must possess prior to their appointment. Butler continued, “And when all these are combined, the evidence in the case is overwhelming.”¹⁹ Since Butler admitted that any one of his four criteria provided enough proof for competent leadership, this comment regarding “overwhelming evidence” is best understood as a rhetorical device that foreshadowed his application to the Adventist Church later in the essay. How were Adventists to identify the one qualified to be their leader? For Butler, the answer was overwhelmingly obvious.

This final point was highly essential to Butler. Since *Leadership* was written as an attempt to quell seven years of conflict, this is not surprising. Numerous statements in the essay all seem to say the same thing: do what your leader tells you to do, no questions asked. It is more than simply doing what you are told, however. For Butler, the question of leadership was essential for salvation²⁰ and could not be ignored. Since he believed a true leader was “especially selected” by God the stakes were high. In fact, he argued, “When God calls a person to this position, and the one called works with his counsel, it is no small thing to hinder him in his work. Doing so, really works against God, who has made him his agent. We must acknowledge this to be true, or deny that God ever does

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

²⁰ Butler stated, “He [Christ] works through these agents [i.e., God’s leaders throughout history], and leads them to exert a strong influence upon others ; and thus, far more is accomplished for man’s salvation than could be were none especially led by him.” Ibid., 6.

work by special agencies.”²¹ Therefore, *Leadership* explicitly forbade speaking out against the leader or questioning their judgment.

In summary, Butler claimed five different things in the opening section of his essay. First, it is necessary to have a strong leader if a great movement is going to be successful. Second, leadership is hierarchical, ordered from top to bottom. Third, only certain people are qualified to hold the highest position in the church. Those not qualified should be satisfied with other callings. Fourth, a true leader benevolently serves the people in an unselfish manner. This person is gifted, qualified, recognized by others, and selected by God. Finally, the followers in the church should never question the judgment of this person (unless they act as a tyrant) because by challenging their leader’s authority, they challenge the authority of God.

Arguments from Scripture and History

After outlining these five principles, Butler began to provide the necessary support for his philosophy. He stated, “It is fully believed that the facts of history and the declarations of God’s word show the truthfulness of the above principles. The Bible authorized the existence of human governments. And what are governments but an application of these principles among mankind?” He then explained that the government of the church is hierarchical in nature with one person at the top. The leaders in the church are not “of equal authority . . . [or] equal in command.” According to Butler, this form of church governance was the only one the Bible authorized and the only one God employed throughout history, from the leadership of Noah to the guidance of William

²¹ Ibid., 8.

Miller. In his view, “The whole economy of God . . . recognizes this principle.”²²

Anticipating resistance, Butler acknowledged, on the basis of Matthew 23:8-12, “An objection may be raised here that the spirit of the New Testament is against this idea because it is repeatedly stated that Christ is the head of the church.” While recognizing the challenge this, and other, passages created, Butler moved forward, admitting: “We are as ready to grant the full force of these statements as any. But such a view of them should be taken as will harmonize with other scriptures and with Christ’s own appointment.”²³

Butler then admitted that the New Testament shunned those who sought honor for themselves and “titles from men.” A true leader does not “seek place and position” and is only honored “as God honors him.” Furthermore, Butler acknowledged that, “Christ is the head of all his people . . . [and] no man must pretend to take his place, or take honors to himself which belong to Christ.”²⁴ Though Butler did place one person at the top of Christ’s earthly church, this person was not to usurp the authority of Christ, nor were they recognized as the head of the Church. Rather, the designation of headship was reserved for Christ alone.

Though Butler conceded that Christ is *the* head of the Church, he believed that Scripture clearly taught that Christ delegated leadership responsibility for His church to *a* head in His stead with His authority. Butler asked, “But does it follow . . . that there is no authority in the Christian church? that all are exactly upon a level so far as position is concerned? Has Christ forbidden the church to assign to those best qualified to guide and

²² Ibid., 2.

²³ Ibid., 3.

²⁴ Ibid.

direct any office of authority or influence?” From this point, Butler turned to Scripture and remarked, “Let his word decide this point.”²⁵

Butler defended his view of authority solely from the New Testament by appealing to the apostolic office. Luke 6:13 was his first text, which mentions that Christ chose twelve disciples and called them apostles. Butler then connected this passage with Matthew 10:40 (KJV) and suggested that when Christ said, “He that receiveth you receiveth me,” meant that Christ gave authority to His apostles to carry out His special instructions. Butler supported this notion with a quotation from William Greenfield, the respected nineteenth century philologist. According to Greenfield, the word “apostle” means “one sent with commands or a message.” In Butler’s mind, since Christ sends apostles, they carry out commands in His stead with His authority.²⁶

After quoting Greenfield, Butler stated, “In the ministry of Christ, he saw fit to choose just twelve. But the office was not confined to just these persons originally chosen.” The vacancy made by Judas was a primary example. According to Acts 1:26, “the lot fell upon Matthias ; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (KJV) after Judas apostatized. Furthermore, Butler explained that more confirmation was provided since Paul and Barnabas were called apostles (cf. Acts 13:2; 14:14), as well as Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 2:6), and even Christ Himself (Heb. 3:1). After looking at these “plain facts,” Butler saw no reason to claim that the apostolic office was limited to only twelve people.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

²⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

Butler then sought to demonstrate that the apostolic office still continues in the Church today. He reasoned, “As the term signifies, ‘one sent with a message,’ it seems properly to refer to those specially raised up, and sent out by the providence or Spirit of God, to act a leading part in his work.” Since God still has a message for his Church today, Butler believed that apostles were the ones to relay that message. He then cited the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:11, which he said “expressly states that apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists, and teachers, were placed in the church for the same object, and to continue the same length of time.”²⁸

After claiming that the apostolic office still exists, Butler defined the authoritative status of this position within the Church. He explained that apostles evidently hold “the highest office in the church” and cited 1 Corinthians 12:28 as his primary (and only) text. The verse begins, as quoted by Butler, “And God hath set some in the church, *first* apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers . . .” Butler then reiterated his interpretive view of the passage, explaining, “When he says, ‘first apostles,’ he must refer to authority or position.”²⁹

So if an apostle holds “the highest office in the church” how does Christ head the Church? Butler explained, “While we are therefore willing to freely admit that Christ is ‘the head of the church,’ we must also conclude that some men are placed higher in authority in the church than others.”³⁰ Instead of providing further explanation, Butler moved on by offering more examples from Scripture as proof for his rather arcane

²⁸ Ibid. 5.

²⁹ Emphasis is in original. Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

definition of headship. In spite of this, Butler clearly acknowledged Christ as the head of the Church *and* claimed that an apostle held the “highest office in the church.”

Unfortunately, what is not clarified is how these two statements are compatible with one another. Suggestions could be offered, but since Butler left it open for the reader to decide, it seems best to do the same here.

As Butler began to show that church offices were ordered hierarchically, he immediately turned to Peter, James, and John. According to Butler, these three men “were often the special companions of the Saviour himself, and shared most in his special counsels.” In addition to these three “pillars,” Butler added a fourth, stating that Paul “reckoned himself not a whit behind the chiefest apostles.” Butler then quoted much of Galatians 2:1-9 to illustrate this point further and offered some “interesting facts” as to why he believed one person (as opposed to three or four) held the highest position in the New Testament church. He claimed that Peter, James, and John acknowledged that God had “specially appointed and qualified” Paul to work among the Gentiles. In addition, Butler claimed that “God had [also] given Peter a special position in the work among the Jews.” As a result, both men held a “special position” of authority within the Church—Peter among the Jews and Paul among the Gentiles. Since they were both selected by God to work in separate spheres, Butler believed that both men held the highest position in their respective sphere of the Church. As this does sound contradictory to his theory of one-person leadership, he claimed, “Here was no conflict. Each was to work in his special sphere. But some were higher in position than others [i.e., Paul and Peter], and that by God’s appointment.”³¹ Therefore, by suggesting that the one Church had two

³¹ Ibid., 5-6.

distinct spheres in the New Testament era, Butler was able to claim later in his essay that one person held the highest position in the Adventist sphere of the Church.

After making these points, Butler wrote, “But if there are those who still think no man is ever authorized to exert any authority in the Christian church, and that all stand upon a level, let such carefully consider the following scriptures.” Butler then cited Hebrews 13:17 (KJV), which reads, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves,” and stated that according to Greenfield the word “rule” means “to lead the way, to be over.” It was further suggested that “rule” conveyed the idea of having authority over, being leader or chief, and to preside or govern.³² This meant, for Butler, that others were to always obey and submit to the leader.

Butler then commented on other related passages in Scripture, citing 1 Tim. 5:17, 20; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Titus 1:13 and 2:15 as examples and concluded that “these scriptures are sufficient to show that there is authority placed upon some in the Christian church, if human language can show anything.” With confidence, Butler disallowed other possible interpretations of these texts by saying, “Those who object to this must object to the Bible, for these passages are quoted from that book.” In conclusion to his theology of apostleship, he wrote, “This authority is not contrary to the leadership of Christ, but by his direct appointment, and can only be exercised by those who are appointed by his direction, and who live in harmony with his Spirit.”³³

At this juncture, Butler explained that his points thus far illustrated the hierarchy of the church during “ordinary times.” He then clarified that “there are occasions when

³² Ibid., 7.

³³ Ibid.

God evidently designs to accomplish a special work” in His church. These “special” times called for “special agencies,” which God raised up “to carry out his design.” By distinguishing between the “special” and the “ordinary” in this manner, Butler added great force to his philosophy of leadership, especially when he applied all of this to the Adventist context.

Butler believed these “special” times occurred “after long periods of backsliding and settling down in the public mind, until some of the great principles of God’s government were lost sight of.” After these dark periods, “the Lord raised up agents” to lead the people back to Himself. Butler then provided a broad sweep of history to prove that this was God’s *modus operandi* for leadership in the Church. He began with “the preaching of Noah,” and then continued with “the leading out of Israel by Moses, the work of Elijah, and several of the prophets, the preparing of the way by John the Baptist, the work of the apostles, and other reform movements since the Dark Ages.”³⁴

These reforms were “always unpopular,” Butler continued, and “through them, the loyalty of man to his Creator is tested.” This meant that loyalty to God is tested by the people’s devotion to their leader. He explained, “When God calls a person to this position, and the one called works with his counsel, it is no small thing to hinder him in his work. Doing so, really works against God, who made him his agent.” This is why “perfect union among those in leading positions is most important to success.” If other leaders do not cooperate with their commander-in-chief, accept his counsel, and do their share of the work, they “will certainly bring upon themselves the frown of God.”³⁵

³⁴ Ibid., 8.

³⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

Before applying all of the foregoing to the Adventist context, Butler offered two more examples. First, he chose “the case of Moses” because details of his “life and trials” are well documented in the Bible. Butler began,

Paul informs us that the dealings of God with Israel under the leadership of Moses were examples or types for the admonition of these living in the last days. He was specially prepared for his ministry by his experience in exile where he learned humility and how to walk with God. In every instance when that people murmured against him (and they were many), it was counted as murmuring against God.

After this example, Butler mentioned the relationship between King Saul and David and pointed out that even though Samuel anointed David, David refused to harm his king and showed “meekness and respect . . . toward wicked Saul.” In Butler’s opinion, this was “not only one of the most beautiful traits of his character, but clearly shows our duty to respect God’s appointments.”³⁶

This statement concludes the section of Butler’s leadership essay that supports his philosophy by the authority of Scripture and history. After the example of David’s respect for King Saul, Butler began to apply his principles of leadership and discussion of “special” movements to the Adventist context. However, even before he made any of these connections explicitly, Butler’s audience was already prepared for his conclusion due to numerous subtle hints throughout the essay. When Butler suggested that one person should hold the highest position in the church the audience understood that this leader must be the one who had an “experience in exile” that taught them “humility and how to walk with God.” When he suggested that the people must know that God had “specially selected” this leader, those listening knew who Butler pointed to as God’s messenger. As “a special work” at the end of time was discussed, the crowd immediately

³⁶ Ibid., 9.

recognized the allusion to the work of the Adventist movement. As Butler explained that “special” movements followed “long periods of backsliding,” the people present were reminded of the last seven years of conflict. When Butler suggested that “perfect union” must exist among leaders, the Conference attendees quickly perceived the leaders Butler had in mind. And finally, when Butler warned those out of harmony with their leader that they will bring upon themselves “the frown of God,” his audience recognized the weight of this phrase they had heard often over the past seven years. Therefore, even before Butler made his application to the Adventist context explicit, his audience knew exactly what to expect.

Application to the Seventh-day Adventist Movement

Butler sought to demonstrate his leadership philosophy by employing a list of successive leaders that God had specially selected throughout history. Before applying his philosophy to the Adventist context, his list ranged from Noah to William Miller. In this way, Butler demonstrated that God had raised up leaders in different periods from antediluvian times to the modern world. Yet, Butler’s *Leadership* would amount to little if his list simply ended with Miller—he needed to demonstrate who the leader was at the present time in 1873.

Butler began by explaining the importance of the Adventist movement. Adventists were part of a “grand [theological] reform” taking place “at the close of six thousand years of wickedness,” which led him to confidently proclaim: “Never in the history of the world was there a movement more important than this . . . [and it] is impossible for us to overestimate the greatness of it.” Since Butler believed the Adventist movement was the greatest throughout all history, he asked, “When we reach the closing

message of probation, the greatest of all movements, has he [i.e., God] placed everybody upon a level, so far as responsibility or authority is concerned, and that contrary to his uniform course for six thousand years? Has God changed? or learned better by experience?" For Butler, the implied answer to these inquiries was an emphatic "no," and he was confident that others would agree.³⁷

After his general application to Adventism, Butler gave a "personal example" because his "subject and object make it necessary." He then began to reveal the present leader, reasoning, "While it is a fact that other men have acted a prominent part in this work more or less, it is well known to all that Elder James White and wife have exerted a leading influence from its rise." They had labored hard and proved more devoted to the cause than anyone else and the past "twenty-five years of faithful effort have settled that point forever." During these years Adventists arose from a few scattered people, eventually establishing a publishing house and health institute with a "present magnitude" that was "a matter of wonder" to those outside the denomination. Therefore, Butler concluded, "It is but just to say that in the accomplishment of these objects, the leadership of Eld. James White and wife is incontestable."³⁸

After recognizing the accomplishments of both James and Ellen White, Butler asked, "What has the Lord said to us in regard to Bro. White's position especially?" A series of quotations from the *Testimonies* provided his answer. One of the most important statements, as quoted by Butler, reads: "I was shown his position to the people of God was similar, in some respects, to that of Moses. There were murmurers against Moses

³⁷ Ibid., 9-10.

³⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

when in adverse circumstances, and there have been murmurers against him. There has been no one in the ranks of Sabbath-keepers who would do as my husband has done.” Immediately after this quotation, Butler references one more *Testimony*, which states, “God has given my husband especial qualifications, natural ability, and he selected him, and gave him an experience, to lead out his people in the advance work.”³⁹

According to Butler, these statements about White “should be sufficient to prove beyond a doubt to all who have any real faith in this message and in the testimonies of the Spirit of God connected with it, that a leading position in it has been given to him.” He continued, “The providence of God, the experience of our people, the evidence of successful management for twenty-five years of most trying labor, and the positive declarations of the testimonies of God’s Spirit, should settle this question forever.” With Adventism’s prime leader now explicitly identified, Butler summarized how this man was to be treated by his contemporaries.⁴⁰

Nine Ways to Follow the Leader

Butler opined that God wanted one person to possess more authority than all others in the Adventist Church. Since this meant that everyone else was a follower, Butler began to explain how “we, as ministers and people, conduct ourselves” in relation to this leader in a nine-point summary [see Appendix A]. These points primarily relate to attitude and commitment, stating that everyone should acknowledge that God has chosen a leader for them to follow and that they should *cheerfully* (note Butler’s repetition of this

³⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

word) defer their judgment to one person. Followers should not criticize this person, but have a “jealous interest” for their leader’s reputation. Furthermore, the people are to recognize that their leader has the authority to “reprove and rebuke” them as God directs and should “exercise this right without question, so far as his course does not conflict with moral principle.”⁴¹

Answers to Potential Criticisms

After Butler’s nine points, he defended his philosophy against three major criticisms. He wrote, “These positions may be called, by some, popery, man-worship, and surrendering our right of private judgment, &c.” Butler “confidently believe[d]” that the principles of leadership that he articulated were “in harmony with a sensible private judgment and with the word of God.” “No one is called upon to do things which violate his conscience in regard to right and wrong,” he wrote, “or to make confessions which he does not believe are true.” Even though everyone must recognize the leader is “chosen of God” and that they have “the authority to fill that position,” Butler claimed, “the right of private judgment is not interfered with by so doing.”⁴²

Butler also defended his philosophy against the charge of papalism. Butler explained, “Popery claims supreme control over men’s consciences, and full authority to compel obedience to its dictates. Nothing of the kind is claimed in these principles.” He acknowledged that the leader was human and could err and made it clear that there was

⁴¹ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴² Ibid., 14-15. In his reply to Varnum Hull, Butler stated, “I confidently believe the great danger of the American people is, not in cultivating union and respect for authority, but in self-assertion and leveling down all authority and rule. While I would claim the right of private judgment and conscience as strongly as any, I would not consider it wise to go to the extreme, and lose respect for that authority which the Bible plainly teaches.” Butler, “Minnesota and the S. D. Baptists,” *RH*, February 17, 1874, 78.

“no claim made that the one chosen as leader is infallible.” Butler explained, “popery” was an “extreme of absolutism” and must be avoided along with the opposite extreme “of laxity and confusion,” which maintains “no order, no authority, [and] no discipline.” By contrasting his view with these extremes, Butler believed that he had found the “happy mean” of “true order” within the church.⁴³

Finally, Butler claimed that his leadership philosophy was not “open to the charge of man-worship,” or Heroism. All leaders throughout history, including the one present in their midst, was “in need of divine aid . . . at every step.” Butler never suggested that the leader should be worshiped, or even that God is best worshipped when His leader is worshipped. Rather, he felt that his understanding of leadership “simply impl[ied] the carrying into effect the appointment God [had] made” that everyone acknowledged.⁴⁴

Personal Appeal and Concluding Example

After this brief defense, Butler began to make a personal appeal. “I fully believe,” he wrote, “that many of our troubles in the past have arisen from a neglect of some one of these principles.” Though he could have been harsh, Butler did not condemn his audience. He simply admitted that difficulties had arisen because no one had “experience in these” principles and all “had it to learn.” As this was the case, Butler assured, “We cannot wonder that men of ability, with the natural besetments of the human heart and with independence of character, should, with these principles measurably undefined, come from time to time in collision.” Since there was a need for leadership and authority

⁴³ Butler, *Leadership*, 14-15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

to be *explicitly* defined and *officially* stated, Butler hoped that his essay would aid in establishing better order.⁴⁵

Butler wanted peace and was tired of the fighting. He entreated his listeners, “I look forward with eager interest to a point in this work when perfect union will exist among those whom God has called to leading positions.” In some ways the last seven years had seemed like a war, but not just any war. These battles had placed brother against brother—it was a civil war! With the troops all gathered together in the Battle Creek meetinghouse, Butler ended with rallying call to a different battle—one with a common enemy. It was time to move forward “like a well-drilled army,” Butler implored, with “each officer and private in his place, with the leaders of God’s appointment guiding by their counsel, and Christ, our captain over all and above all, giving us the victory.” When everyone filled their own position and honored their superiors, “then indeed will God’s people be ‘terrible as an army of banners.’”⁴⁶

To illustrate this further, Butler employed a fresh example from the American context. “Our great Southern rebellion serves as a good illustration,” he suggested—and indeed it did. The Civil War, like the controversy between Adventist leaders, placed friends, family and loved ones against each other. Like the Civil War, the Adventist crisis also began with a rebellion against those in authority. As the confederates had seceded from the Union, some Adventist leaders had acted similarly by rebelling against their leader. Yes, in many ways, this illustration seemed to fit the Adventist situation perfectly. Since Butler felt this was the case, he continued, stating, “In the first stage of the war,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.

there was no real head, no general to whom all looked with respect.” What was the result of this? Disunity and confusion: counsels were divided, people labored at “cross-purposes,” and progress was slow. However, “when Gen. Grant was appointed commander-in-chief, *and* the different corps were officered by those who would heed his counsels, there was union of effort, general success, and final victory.” This is what Adventism needed: a “commander-*in-chief*” and officers willing to “heed his counsels.” With an order such as this, victory was inevitable and the great controversy would soon come to its close.⁴⁷

On this note, with its warlike vernacular, Butler drew his leadership essay to a close. He concluded, “What we most need is real union among leading men. This must be an intelligent union upon principle. We must put away distrust, draw together, shut the devil out of the camp by following the light God has given us, feel an interest for each other’s reputation, and especially for those who stand in the forefront of the battle, cordially support the leaders God has appointed, and then victory will crown our efforts. Amen.”⁴⁸

James White, the Adventist “Moses”

Many have misinterpreted *Leadership* in two primary ways. First, some scholars have suggested that Butler wrote his essay to secure more power for himself. As George R. Knight has stated, “While Butler was ostensibly writing to support James White as the true leader of the Adventist Church, undoubtedly Butler was at the same time seeking to

⁴⁷ Emphasis is mine. *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

strengthen his own leadership position.”⁴⁹ The suggestion that he was trying to “strengthen his own leadership position” is inferred by two assumptions: first, Butler must have been writing for his own benefit since he was General Conference President; and second, Ellen White’s use of the phrase “for your own benefit” in her testimony to him in 1875 is thought to be a reference to the *Leadership* essay and substantiate a “power-grabbing” motive.⁵⁰ It can be demonstrated, however, that both of these points, do not reflect Butler’s style of management in the 1870s or accurately portray his intentions for writing *Leadership* in 1873.

Though G. I. Butler was president of the General Conference when his *Leadership* essay was adopted, he did not try to secure more authority for himself. Rather, he only pointed to one man—James White—not himself, or even the office of General Conference president. Not only is this clear throughout the entirety of *Leadership* itself (Butler never talks about himself or the presidential office), but Butler later explained his reason for writing the tract. He stated, “I thought, and others thought, that he [James White] stood in a position in connection with the denomination higher than anyone else, and he claimed superior judgment and the right of superior position,

⁴⁹ Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 70. Knight presumably received this perspective from Barry D. Oliver, who wrote in his dissertation, “Although James White made it clear that he did not agree with Butler’s position [on leadership], and despite Ellen White’s continuous appeals, Butler did not modify his leadership style very much until well after he was voted out of the presidency at the 1888 General Conference session.” Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure*, 63. Similarly, Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf write, “During those years [i.e., all of the years of his presidency] it is doubtful that Butler ever relinquished his views of a strong presidency.” Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 251. Gerald Wheeler has also made such a claim, suggesting, “Ultimately he [i.e., Butler] would produce a booklet on leadership that reflected Butler’s own authoritarian management style more than it did what the Bible taught.” Wheeler, *James White*, 180.

⁵⁰ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 43; cf. White, 3T, 492.

over all the rest of us.”⁵¹ Butler then wrote a philosophy of leadership that matched his perception of White’s management style. He admitted, “I fully believe that Brother White in some instances took positions and did things that could be justified on no other grounds than those same principles of leadership [in my essay] . . . I could not, on mature reflection, see any other conclusion.”⁵² Though it has been suggested that Butler’s *Leadership* reflected his “own authoritarian management style,”⁵³ several Adventists (especially Butler) believed that it actually reflected the leadership style of James White, not its author.

Butler also reluctantly held the office of General Conference president in the 1870s. He felt forced into office when elected in December 1871 and refused to accept it for more than a month afterward. After admitting that he felt “crowded” into that position, Butler told James White, “You must consider my decision final and I cannot accept it.”⁵⁴ Eventually he did change his mind and unenthusiastically accepted the position.

Butler felt unqualified throughout his entire presidential tenure in the 1870s. He made numerous comments about his insufficiency as a leader, such as: “I have felt very much like a man who was wading in water that was too deep for him,”⁵⁵ or, “I thank you for your kind words, Brother White. You don’t know how much joy it gives me to feel

⁵¹ George I. Butler to Frank E. Belden, March 14, 1907.

⁵² George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

⁵³ Wheeler, *James White*, 180.

⁵⁴ Emphasis is in original. George I. Butler to James White, January 24, 1872.

⁵⁵ George I. Butler to James White, September 12, 1872.

that you are in union with my poor efforts, or how much pain when I feel the contrary.”⁵⁶

Butler also believed White was the only leader that should hold this office at that time.

He wrote to White, “I expect to see you strong in God and strong in health to labor in this cause and Oh, how much I desire it, to have you a father to us all.”⁵⁷ Butler also admitted to him, “I ain’t much on planning, Brother White. I look largely to you for plans and think I do pretty well if I can carry half of them out.”⁵⁸

After the Adventist Church adopted Butler’s *Leadership*, he became even more direct in his comments. On December 26, 1873, Butler stated, “Brother White’s letters, rolling the responsibilities upon me, till my poor weak heart cries out, is something like the stern father who sees what ought to be done. To this I bow in submission.”⁵⁹

Similarly, Butler wrote to White, “You cannot suppose . . . I should act without asking your advice, after all I have said and felt about Leadership . . . Brother White, I value your advice. I would not dare to go there [i.e., move to Battle Creek] against your judgment.”⁶⁰ On March 15, 1874, Butler divulged to White, “I know I have been stuck into a very unnatural and embarrassing position for the last two years. You know how I fought and protested against it. The position I hold should always have been held by you.”⁶¹ All of these instances coincide with Ellen White’s testimony to Butler in January

⁵⁶ George I. Butler to James White, October 15, 1872.

⁵⁷ Emphasis is in original. George I. Butler to James White, October 23, 1873.

⁵⁸ Emphasis is in original. George I. Butler to James White, October 26, 1873.

⁵⁹ Emphasis is in original. George I. Butler to James and Ellen G. White, December 26, 1873.

⁶⁰ George I. Butler to James White, February 15, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

⁶¹ George I. Butler to James White, March 13 and 15, 1874; cf. James White to George I. Butler, July 13, 1874, Heritage M-Film 53, James S. White Correspondence 2, CAR.

1875, in which she stated, “You are making a mistake in relying upon my husband to tell you what to do. This is not the work God has given my husband. You should search out what is to be done, and lift the disagreeable burdens yourself . . . You will never gain the experience necessary for any important position in being told what to do.”⁶²

The above factors make it clear that Butler felt uncomfortable holding the presidential office of the General Conference in the 1870s. Rather, he believed that White was God’s choice for this position, which supports Vande Vere’s assessment that Butler was “a caretaker president, very much James White’s man.”⁶³ Before it can be fully established that Butler was not trying to grab power for himself, however, another misunderstanding must be addressed. Knight has also proposed that Ellen White asserted that Butler, “in defense of his independent style of leadership and rather highhanded manner, had developed his ideas on leadership for his ‘own benefit.’”⁶⁴ It seems that this interpretation has been suggested by a misreading of Ellen White’s testimony.

The original publication of Ellen White’s testimony to Butler begins with the sentence: “Bro. [Butler], your *experience* in reference to leadership *two years since* was an *experience* for your own benefit, which was highly essential to you.”⁶⁵ A casual and isolated reading of this opening phrase seems to support Knight’s claim: that Butler “developed his ideas on leadership for his ‘own benefit.’” After all, Ellen White did state, “two years since.” Since Butler delivered his leadership essay in 1873 and the *Testimony*

⁶² White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*, 48; cf. White, 3T, 495; White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25 [Special]*, 47-48.

⁶³ Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 31.

⁶⁴ Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 71. The only source that Knight references in support of his claim is Ellen White’s testimony to Butler.

⁶⁵ Emphasis is mine. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*, 42-43; cf. White, 3T, 492.

was published in 1875, this statement seems to refer to Butler's *position on Leadership*. Butler delivered his essay on November 15, 1873, however, which is close to the end of the year. Furthermore, Ellen White wrote her testimony to Butler between January 5 and 13, 1875, and it was published by the end of the month.⁶⁶ As a result, Butler's *Leadership* was actually delivered closer to "one year since," rather than two.

What Ellen White referred to in this opening sentence was an "*experience* in reference to *leadership*." Note the word "experience" and the use of the lowercase "i" in this sentence. About two years before Ellen White's *Testimony, No. 25* was written and published, Butler did have an "experience" in reference to leadership that was for his own benefit. Between late 1872 and early 1873 Butler took some firm and unyielding positions in regard to his ministerial duties. Rather than consult with others, he held meetings in Kansas and Missouri for ten weeks without appointments. He also delayed the eleventh annual session of the General Conference for about three months and tried to forcefully persuade White to attend against his will. His short self-absorbed "experience" continued into the spring of 1873 when Ellen White recorded Butler's verbal attacks on her husband in her diary.⁶⁷ This was a brief anomaly in Butler's presidency in the 1870s—not the norm—and fits squarely with the reference marker of "two years since."

This point is further supported in the fourth paragraph of the testimony. This paragraph echoes the first, and begins, "God gave you [Butler] a precious *experience* at that time [i.e., about two years since], which was of value to you, and which has greatly

⁶⁶ George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875; George W. Amadon, diary entries January 14-25, 1875; "The Recent Testimonies," *RH*, February 4, 1875, 48.

⁶⁷ White, "Diary [May 1-31]," MS 007, 1873.

increased your success as a minister of Christ. Your proud, unyielding will was subdued. *You had a genuine conversion.*”⁶⁸ This “genuine conversion” is also chronicled in Ellen White’s diary in the spring of 1873, which came directly after Butler’s stubbornness toward James White.⁶⁹ Immediately after this comment, Ellen White continued, “This [i.e., his genuine conversion] led to reflection, and to your *position* upon *Leadership*.”⁷⁰ The use of the word “position” and the capitalized “L” are explicitly contrasted to the first sentence in the testimony, which mentioned Butler’s “experience” in regard to leadership with a lowercase “l.” The capitalized “L” in the fourth paragraph, coupled with the key term, “position,” is a clear reference to Butler’s *Leadership* essay. Therefore, when Ellen White made her comment about Butler’s “experience” of leadership being for “his own benefit,” she did not have *Leadership* in mind at all.⁷¹

The second misunderstanding regarding Butler’s *Leadership* also relates to which person he stated should fill the highest office in the Adventist Church. Though it has been demonstrated that Butler did not write *Leadership* for his “own benefit,” some have also assumed that Butler referred to James *and* Ellen White’s authority in his essay. However, this notion also does not reflect Butler’s intention, as his purpose was to centralize

⁶⁸ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 44; cf. White, 3T, 493.

⁶⁹ White, “Diary [May 1-31],” MS 007, 1873.

⁷⁰ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 44; White, 3T, 493.

⁷¹ Recent editions of *Testimony*, No. 25 edited out the capitalized “L,” which appears twice in the third paragraph and once in the fourth paragraph of the testimony. In the first publication (which includes the names of people) the first two occurrences were in paragraph four and the third was in paragraph five. In each of these three occurrences, *Leadership* with a capitalized “L” is accompanied with either “position” or “principles,” which is in clear contrast to “experience.” Furthermore, *leadership* with a lowercase “l” appears only once, in the first sentence of the testimony. This editorial change took place after the General Conference decided to republish the *Testimonies* after a more “thorough editorial process” in 1883. Denis Fortin, “Testimonies for the Church,” *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2014), 1212-1214; cf. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Oakland, CA and Battle Creek, MI: Pacific Press and Review & Herald, 1885), 493.

authority in one person.

About forty years after Butler's *Leadership* was written, C. C. Crisler and a new generation of Adventists asked if Butler's "leadership doctrine" had placed utmost authority in James *and* Ellen White.⁷² In recent years, this same idea has been suggested,⁷³ which raises the question: did Butler really centralize authority in just one person? When asked if Ellen White's authority was also described in *Leadership*, Butler's response was a resounding "no." He explained, "It might possibly be thought, from one or two expressions that in my tract, the leadership question included Sister White as well as her husband. If so, that would be an erroneous opinion. The leadership considered only related to Brother White."⁷⁴ This is also seen within the tract itself, particularly in Butler's explanation of 1 Corinthians 12:28, which he interpreted hierarchically, ordered from the top down: "*first* apostles, secondarily prophets." In Butler's mind, James White clearly filled the apostolic role while his wife filled the prophetic. Therefore, this seems to imply that Butler believed White was to have more administrative authority in the church than his wife.⁷⁵

⁷² George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

⁷³ In his doctoral dissertation, Andrew Gordon Mustard wrote, "Butler was president of the General Conference when he expressed his ideas on leadership. Yet he did not have himself in mind when he wrote. Rather, he was referring to the Whites, in particular James, as the ones to whom respect and submission were due as founders of the movement." Mustard, "James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization, 177. Several other scholars have also advanced this notion, Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 70; Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 40; Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 250. It should also be stated that Schwarz and Greenleaf have incorrectly suggested that Butler's *Leadership* promoted a "Centralization of Power in the General Conference." Ibid. As the tract clearly indicates, Butler centralized authority in James White, not the presidential office of the General Conference.

⁷⁴ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

⁷⁵ Though Butler apparently believed that James White had more administrative authority than his wife, this certainly does not imply that he believed White had any authority over his wife's *visions*. Butler may have rationalized this seeming contradiction by drawing a distinction between Ellen White and her

Butler portrayed James White as the “Adventist Moses.” Like Moses, White had gone through a wilderness experience after his first stroke and throughout his prolonged sickness. Like Moses, many had murmured and grumbled against him. Like Moses, he was specially called by God to be the leader in the cause of Present Truth. Like Moses, to speak out against the authority of White was essentially “counted as murmuring against God.”⁷⁶

Butler arrived at these conclusions with the help of various statements in *Testimony for the Church, No. 21*.⁷⁷ One of these statements reads: “I was shown his [James White] position to the people of God was similar, in some respects, to that of Moses to Israel.”⁷⁸ Based upon this, and four other quotations from Ellen White, Butler concluded, “These extracts should be sufficient to prove beyond a doubt . . . that a leading position in it [the Adventist movement] has been given to [White].”⁷⁹ From this

God-given visions. In other words, it seems that he considered the visions, and, by extension, the *Testimonies*, to be the words of God while Ellen White, when not in vision or writing out her view, spoke merely as a human. Before quoting from Ellen White’s *Testimonies* in his *Leadership* essay, Butler stated, “What has *the Lord said* to us in regard to Bro. White’s position especially? I will quote from various testimonies for the benefit of those interested on this point.” Rather than credit Ellen White for the *Testimonies*, Butler consistently referred to them as “the testimonies of the Spirit of God.” Emphasis is mine. Butler, *Leadership*, 11-12. Therefore, if Butler did dissect the visionary relationship between the divine and human in this manner (as seems to be the case), then his statements regarding the authority of visions (i.e., the words of God), apostles (i.e., James White), and prophets (i.e., Ellen White) harmonize.

⁷⁶ Butler, *Leadership*, 9; cf. J. B. Clarke, “Report of Bro. V. Hull,” *The Sabbath Recorder*, December 25, 1873, p. 2, col. 8, SDBHS; Wolcott H. Littlejohn to Ellen G. White, October 26, 1874, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

⁷⁷ The quotations are listed here in the order that Butler used them: First, (“I saw that important moves would be made . . .”) Butler, *Leadership*, 11-12 and White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 21*, 6 [cf. White, 3T, 11]; Second, (“I was shown that he was raised up by the Lord . . .”) *Leadership*, 12 and *Testimony, No. 21*, 13 [cf. White, 3T, 15]; Third, (“I was shown his position to the people of God was similar, in some respects, to that of Moses . . .”) *Leadership*, 12 and *Testimony, No. 21*, 126-127 [cf. White, 3T, 85]; Fourth, (“God has given my husband especial qualifications . . .”) *Leadership*, 12 and *Testimony, No. 21*, 133 [cf. White, 3T, 89]; Fifth, (“he shall simply act as a counsellor”) *Leadership*, 12 and *Testimony, No. 21*, 137 [cf. White, 3T, 91].

⁷⁸ White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 21*, 126-127; cf. White, 3T, 85.

⁷⁹ Butler, *Leadership*, 12.

statement, and the thrust of Butler's leadership philosophy, it is apparent that he interpreted Ellen White's statement about Moses in terms of authority. In his view, White must be entitled to the highest authoritative position in the Adventist Church because Moses held this position over Israel.

This is not, however, what Ellen White had in mind at all. She provided a caveat within the statement itself, in the phrase, "in some respects." Immediately after this sentence, she explained how White was like Moses. The full statement reads: "I was shown his [James White] position to the people of God was similar, in some respects, to that of Moses to Israel. There were murmurers against Moses, when in adverse circumstances, and there have been murmurers against him."⁸⁰ There is no association with authoritative status, but rather an analogy between two men that many people murmured against.⁸¹ When Ellen White was later pressed over this issue, she admitted, "My burden was not to claim for my husband a leadership like that of Moses."⁸² In order to provide more clarity, the word "position" in this sentence of the *Testimony* was changed several years later to "relation." The current version of the *Testimonies* reads: "I was shown that his *relation* to the people of God was similar, in some respects, to that of Moses to Israel."⁸³ Therefore, it seems that Butler's interpretation of Ellen White's statements from *Testimony No. 21* represents his own philosophy rather than the mind of

⁸⁰ White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 21*, 126-127; cf. White, 3T, 85.

⁸¹ The same is true of other passages in this testimony that Butler did not quote. See White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 21*, 133-134; cf. White, 3T, 89-90.

⁸² Ellen G. White to Brethren and Sisters in Allegan and Monterey, December 24, 1874, LT 064, 1874.

⁸³ This change was also made in 1885 (see footnote 71 in the present chapter). Emphasis is mine. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, 85.

the one who wrote them down.

Leadership and the American Context

George Ide Butler was a very patriotic man with military blood coursing through his veins. Ezra Pitt Butler, George's grandfather, was a Revolutionary War veteran and displayed his patriotism through politics. Aside from holding numerous other prestigious positions, Ezra served as Governor of Vermont in the mid-1820s. George's father, also named Ezra Pitt Butler, carried on this patriotic spirit as a captain in the War of 1812. Though G. I. Butler never served in the military himself, he would continue to identify with the patriotic and militant ethos of his father and grandfather.⁸⁴

Despite his lack of military experience, Butler's life was still largely defined by the battles he fought. In the 1860s he battled against "the Marion Party," in the 1870s he fought over leadership, in the 1880s he attacked Jones and Waggoner's view of righteousness by faith, and in the early 1900s he tried to pacify the famous Adventist doctor during "the Kellogg crisis." Before his death in 1881, James White once remarked, "Butler has been through enough to kill three or four ordinary men,"⁸⁵ and when Butler

⁸⁴ Cf. Geo[rge] I. Butler, "The South as a Field of Labor," *RH*, September 30, 1875, 101. One of the most striking threads to highlight Butler pride, military fascination, and patriotism is observed in the family's namesake. As Vande Vere has observed, Ezra Pitt Butler, Sr.'s (1763-1838) "middle name probably honored William Pitt, who was then the British empire builder" (Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 9). William Pitt's life was perhaps best characterized by his political leadership during the Seven Years' War/French and Indian War, which ended in British victory the same year Ezra Pitt Butler, Sr. was born (1763). From then on, the Butler family never failed to honor the legacy of William Pitt. Ezra Pitt Butler, Jr. came next, who in turn named one of his sons William Pitt Butler. William's brother, G. I. Butler, continued the tradition by also naming his firstborn son William Pitt Butler ("Vermont Death Records, 1909-2008," Washington County, Vermont, town of Waterbury, William Pitt Butler, in Ancestry.com, accessed 16 January 2015, <http://www.ancestry.com>, user box number PR-01560, roll S-30681, archive M-1984155). Unwilling to let an old tradition die, William Pitt Butler bequeathed this legacy on to his own firstborn son, William Pitt Butler, Jr., who recently passed away in 2001 ("At Rest: Butler, William Pitt, Jr.," *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 2003, 50).

⁸⁵ George I. Butler to John H. Kellogg, June 11, 1905.

reflected back upon his eventful life he claimed, in military fashion, that he must be “somewhat ‘bullet proof.’”⁸⁶

The American context greatly influenced Butler’s leadership views and he believed that the army was “the most complete system of organization that exists anywhere among men.”⁸⁷ This is particularly noticeable in how he crafted his document in relation to his statements on “human governments” and the “great Southern rebellion.” He wrote, “What would an army be without a leader? What would a government be if all concerned in its administration were of equal authority? What would it accomplish if all were captains, equal in command?”⁸⁸

Butler only pointed to one exemplary leader that was not found in the Bible or Christian history—his hero, Ulysses S. Grant. His great admiration for General Grant is observable in his tract on leadership as well as in his persistent recollection of Grant during chaotic periods in his life. In his conversations with Kellogg in the 1900s, Butler reiterated Grant’s 1868 presidential campaign slogan, stating, “In the words of the immortal Grant, let us have peace.”⁸⁹ In Butler’s mind, “the immortal Grant” remained America’s foremost example of true leadership.

⁸⁶ George I. Butler to John H. Kellogg, March 17, 1905, E. K. Vande Vere Collection (004), Box 16.

⁸⁷ In an expanded article on the topic of leadership, Butler explained, “Perhaps the most complete system of organization that exists anywhere among men is found in the army. Every man has his special duty assigned him, and just how he shall do it. One mind, perhaps, moves a million men. At a word they are all in motion. The perilous and fearful responsibilities of war make it necessary that power should be exercised by one man, because it is found to be most effective. If anyone doubts the effectiveness of organization, let him conceive of putting down our great rebellion without it. Had each man of our vast army started out on his own hook, most of them would have never reached the South at all.” Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Thoughts on Church Government—No. 3,” *RH*, August 18, 1874, 68.

⁸⁸ Butler, *Leadership*, 2.

⁸⁹ George I. Butler to John H. Kellogg, March 17, 1905.

This was likely true for many reasons. To start with, Grant succeeded when others failed. His success came with increased power, but not the self-gratifying kind.

According to Al Kaltman, Grant “looked upon being given increased responsibility not as increasing his power, but as increasing his ability to get the job done.”⁹⁰ This unsuspecting view of authority matches Butler’s hope that a true leader will not abuse his power. In spite of potential risks, Butler and Grant both believed that victory comes when, as Kaltman explains, there is “a single project leader with full authority to take whatever actions are necessary.”⁹¹ As Grant stated himself, “Two commanders on the same field are always one too many.”⁹²

James White was Butler’s Adventist general and he often referred to White, in writing and in person, as “the General.”⁹³ Perhaps if Butler’s leadership philosophy had continued in official capacity, a “General’s Conference” would run the Adventist Church today—one where the General said, like Ulysses S. Grant, “I [am] ready to hear any suggestions; but . . . hold the power of deciding entirely in my own hands.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Al Kaltman, *Cigars, Whiskey & Winning: Leadership Lessons from General Ulysses S. Grant* (Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall Press, 1998), xii.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 63. Kaltman points out several other examples of Grant’s philosophy of leadership that seem similar to Butler’s view. See leadership lesson numbers 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 22, 28, 29, 39, 44, 50, 52, 67, 69, 87, 91, 92, 114, 118, 121, 122, and 141 in Kaltman’s book.

⁹² Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, two volumes in one (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1894), 253.

⁹³ George I. Butler to James White, December 21, 1869, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 1, CAR; George I. Butler to James White, October 15, 1872; George I. Butler to John H. Kellogg, June 11, 1905.

⁹⁴ Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, 329. General Grant reportedly stated, “I believe it is better for a commander charged with the responsibility of all the operations of his army to consult his generals freely but informally, get their views and opinions, and then make up his mind what action to take, and act accordingly. There is too much truth in the old adage, ‘Councils of war do not fight.’” General Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: The Century Co., 1897), 316.

Butler also referred to three other notions that were common within the American context in a defensive manner. With an exonerative tone, he declared, “These positions may be called, by some, popery, man-worship, and the surrendering our right of private judgment, &c.”⁹⁵ After this statement he began his with the concept of “popery.”

Leadership and the Papacy

American Protestants, including Seventh-day Adventists, were highly suspicious of Roman Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Since the time of Martin Luther (1483-1546), many Protestants have claimed that the pope in Rome fits the description of the Antichrist as described in the New Testament. As a democratic, and predominantly Protestant nation, many Americans were especially concerned that the Catholic Church may try and take away the freedom of religion. When Pius IX’s encyclical *Quanta Cura* appeared in 1864, fears were heightened as “the notion of church-state separation” was attacked.⁹⁶ As such, it is not surprising that Butler possessed a strong tone when speaking against Catholicism. This is most noticeable in his term, “popery,” which he used to describe Catholic ecclesiology.

In defense of his view, Butler retorted, “Popery claims supreme control over men’s consciences, and full authority to compel obedience to its dictates. Nothing of the kind is claimed in these principles.”⁹⁷ In spite of this defense, some of his contemporaries

⁹⁵ Butler, *Leadership*, 14.

⁹⁶ Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short Story*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 256.

⁹⁷ Butler, *Leadership*, 14.

apparently felt that his theology of leadership edged too close to Catholicism.⁹⁸ Why would a staunch Protestant like Butler be suspected of leaning towards “popery”? Perhaps some insights can be gained by comparing the concept of authority within the Catholic Church with Butler’s leadership theology. This analysis will evaluate three interrelated facets of Catholic ecclesiology: primacy, apostolic succession, and infallibility. Such an examination will create a more rich understanding of Butler’s concept of authority in the Adventist Church as well as provide understanding for the criticism he received from some of his contemporaries.

Primacy was very clearly defined in the Catholic document, *Pastor Aeternus*, which was crafted during the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). This official declaration states: “If anyone, therefore, shall say that Blessed Peter the Apostle was not appointed the Prince of all the Apostles and the visible Head of the whole Church Militant; or that the same, directly and immediately, received from the same, Our Lord Jesus Christ, a primacy of honor only, and not of true and proper jurisdiction; let him be anathema.”⁹⁹ According to this strict definition, Butler was “cursed” by his statements about Peter and Paul.

In Butler’s mind, Paul had a special work “among the Gentiles” while “God had given Peter a special position in the work among the Jews.” Butler, aware of the Catholic position on the primacy of Peter, carefully avoided placing Peter at the head of the Church during the first century. Instead, he referenced Peter *and* Paul, claiming “some

⁹⁸ Cf. [James White], “Leadership,” *ST*, June 4, 1874, 4.

⁹⁹ “First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ: *Pastor Aeternus*,” Catholic Planet, accessed 13 February 2015, <http://www.catholicplanet.org/councils/20-Pastor-Aeternus.htm>; cf. John F. Broderick, trans., *Documents of Vatican Council I, 1869-1870* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1971), 55.

were higher in position than others” within the Church—each the highest in “his special sphere.”¹⁰⁰ This may imply that Butler’s view of the Church included more than just Seventh-day Adventists. In an expanded article on the topic of church governance he defined the Church openly, as

an organized body of believers in Jesus Christ who take the Holy Scriptures for their rule of faith and practice, and labor for the salvation of their fellow-men, who receive additions to their membership upon proper professions of faith, who accept the ordinances which Christ gave for his church, and who have repented of their sins, and believed on the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, and are trying to carry out the principles of holy living taught by him.¹⁰¹

Since many churches fit this definition, it seems that Butler believed that Adventists occupied only one sphere of the Christian Church.

While Butler did not advocate a Petrine primacy over all of Christianity, did he abandon the concept of primacy altogether? Upon analysis of *Leadership*, it seems that “no” would be the most appropriate response. What Butler offers is a different definition of primacy; one limited to a single sphere of the Church. In the case of Adventism, Butler emphatically insisted that God had selected James White to hold the highest position within this sphere of Christianity which was to lead out in God’s “grand reform . . . preparatory to Christ’s [second] coming.”¹⁰²

In order to support this notion of primacy, Butler endorsed the apostolic office within the perceived ecclesiastical hierarchy.¹⁰³ Those gifted with “helps” were at the bottom of the chain of command. Deacons were ordered above these “volunteers,” or

¹⁰⁰ Butler, *Leadership*, 6.

¹⁰¹ Geo[orge] I. Butler, “Thoughts on Church Government—No. 2,” *RH*, August 4, 1874, 60.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰³ Cf. Loughborough, Hull, and Cornell, “Conference Address,” *RH*, October 15, 1861, 156-157.

“helpers.” The local elders came next in the hierarchy, with the ministers (or evangelists) normally holding the highest position within the church.¹⁰⁴ What Butler promoted was a fifth office within the church—an office that trumped the ministerial office during “special” times. The entire purpose of Butler’s *Leadership* was to make two points explicitly clear: God had especially selected “apostles” throughout history to hold the highest office in His cause *and* He had specifically chosen James White as the current apostle. Butler later developed his concept of leadership in a series of articles, titled, “Thoughts on Church Government.” In these articles he emphasized the authoritative position of this fifth office in further detail. He explained,

The office of apostle was a very prominent one in the early church. It would be thought very improper, not to say fanatical, to apply that title to any officer of our modern churches. *And yet* the derivation of the word in the Greek would not make it improper to apply it to certain individuals raised up by the special providence of God to perform his work. . . . We are nowhere informed that it was the duty of the church to select individuals to fill this office in succeeding ages, though it would be reasonable to expect that when the providence of God made it manifest that he had raised up a man to do a special work in his cause, *the church should cheerfully give him his proper degree of influence and position.*¹⁰⁵

Butler, therefore, did advocate a form of primacy within the Church. Yet, he limited this office to “special” times in which God especially raised up one primal leader to govern a specific sphere of Christendom. Since Butler firmly believed that there had “never in the history of the world” been “a movement more important” than the Seventh-day Adventist

¹⁰⁴ Butler, “Thoughts on Church Government—No. 3,” *RH*, August 18, 1874, 69; Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Thoughts on Church Government—No. 5,” *RH*, September 1, 1874, 85; Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Thoughts on Church Government—No. 5,” *RH*, September 8, 1874, 92; Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Thoughts on Church Government—No. 6,” *RH*, September 15, 1874, 101.

¹⁰⁵ Emphasis is mine. Butler, “Thoughts on Church Government—No. 3,” *RH*, August 18, 1874, 69.

movement,¹⁰⁶ he clearly gave James White a very honored position within the history of the world.

Closely connected with the concept of primacy is the notion of apostolic succession. *Pastor Aeternus* had much to say regarding this doctrine as well. The document states: “Thus, whosoever succeeds Peter in this Chair, obtains, by the institution of Christ Himself, the Primacy of Peter over the whole Church.”¹⁰⁷ Though Butler did not suggest that one person was prime over all the denominations of Christendom, he did advocate a form of apostolic succession. First, the bulk of Butler’s Biblical excursus sought to demonstrate that the apostolic gift was “designed to continue with the church” and “must refer to [the highest] authority or position.”¹⁰⁸ Second, this position passed on through succession because God (not man or the church) appoints “apostles” to govern in each special era. As Butler explained, “God carries on his work upon the same general principles in all ages. And we have every reason to believe that he has raised up special instruments *all the way down to the present time* to carry on his work.”¹⁰⁹ This statement also highlights a third aspect of Butler’s definition of apostolic succession. He claimed that this institution was by “Christ’s appointment.”¹¹⁰

In these three points there is marked similarity with the Roman Catholic definition of apostolic succession. There are three primary differences, however, which must also

¹⁰⁶ Butler, *Leadership*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ “First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ: *Pastor Aeternus*,” Catholic Planet, accessed 13 February 2015, <http://www.catholicplanet.org/councils/20-Pastor-Aeternus.htm>; cf. Broderick, trans., *Documents of Vatican Council I*, 56-57.

¹⁰⁸ Butler, *Leadership*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Emphasis is mine. *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

be mentioned. The first, which has already been discussed, is that Butler did not suggest that one leader should rule over the entire Christian Church. A second major difference relates to the “keys of the kingdom” which the Catholic Church suggests were given to Peter, who “lives, presides, and judges, to this day and always, in his successors the Bishops of the Holy See of Rome.”¹¹¹ Butler rejected the belief that Peter reigned over the Church through his successors. This suggestion falls outside of Adventist beliefs and is certainly not suggested in Butler’s *Leadership*. Third, while the Catholic Church insists that the true successors of Peter are inducted through the rite of ordination, Butler makes no such suggestion. Though he discussed the concept of ordination for other offices within the church,¹¹² *Leadership* does not suggest that ordination was a prerequisite for the apostolic office.¹¹³

Butler believed that Christ would return soon—perhaps “within five years.”¹¹⁴ This is probably why he did not mention an apostle succeeding James White. Nevertheless, his document was built upon a form of apostolic succession during “special” times, as opposed to a direct unbroken line validated by ordination. Butler emphasized that apostolic succession was determined by God—not humans—and

¹¹¹ “First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ: *Pastor Aeternus*,” Catholic Planet, accessed 13 February 2015, <http://www.catholicplanet.org/councils/20-Pastor-Aeternus.htm>; cf. Broderick, trans., *Documents of Vatican Council I*, 56.

¹¹² G. I. Butler, “Ordination,” *RH*, February 13, 1879, 50-51; cf. Denis Kaiser, “Setting Apart for the Ministry: Theory and Practice in Seventh-day Adventism (1850-1920),” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 51, no. 2 (2013): 198ff.

¹¹³ The 1861 “Conference Address” also implies that ordination was not requisite for apostles (or evangelists) to fill their God-given office. Loughborough, Hull, and Cornell, “Conference Address,” *RH*, October 15, 1861, 156-157.

¹¹⁴ Clarke, “Report of Bro. V. Hull,” *The Sabbath Recorder*, December 25, 1873, p. 2, col. 8, SDBHS.

insisted that this practice would continue until Christ's return.¹¹⁵

The third aspect of ecclesiastical authority relates to infallibility. This doctrine was officially pronounced at Vatican I in the document, *Pastor Aeternus*.¹¹⁶ Since papal infallibility was dogmatized in the Catholic Church in 1870, it was fresh in Butler's memory as he wrote his *Leadership*. He patently, and quite emphatically, rejected the notion of infallibility. Butler wrote, "There is no claim made that the one chosen as leader is infallible, or anything but a man of like passions with ourselves, and constantly exposed to temptations and sin, and in need of divine aid like ourselves at every step."¹¹⁷ Therefore, in regard to this aspect of ecclesiology, there is nothing in Butler's *Leadership* that is analogous with the concept of infallibility.

Though Butler denied that the Adventist leader was infallible he did adopt a form of primacy and apostolic succession. It is, therefore, somewhat accurate to refer to Butler's leadership doctrine as "quasi papalism" as Vande Vere has suggested.¹¹⁸ However, due to important differences, strong emphasis should be placed upon the "quasi," and since the designation is somewhat offensive it is not encouraged. Though Butler clearly denied that the Adventist leader was infallible, he did invest this person with a heroic amount of authority—a problem which some believed led to "man-worship."

¹¹⁵ Butler, *Leadership*, 10.

¹¹⁶ "First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ: *Pastor Aeternus*," Catholic Planet, accessed 13 February 2015, <http://www.catholicplanet.org/councils/20-Pastor-Aeternus.htm>; cf. Broderick, trans., *Documents of Vatican Council I*, 63.

¹¹⁷ Butler, *Leadership*, 14-15.

¹¹⁸ Emmett K. Vandevere [sic], "Years of Expansion: 1865-1885," in Gary Land, ed. *Adventism in America: A History*, rev. ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 72-73.

Leadership and Hero-Worship

The Trait School of leadership dominated nineteenth-century discussions on leadership. The most prominent theory within this school was the Great-Man theory (or theories), and as Bernard M. Bass observes, “The great-man theories drew attention to the specific qualities of leaders” through the evaluation of personality traits and characteristics, such as honesty, tenacity, perseverance, and strong leadership.¹¹⁹ An influential Scottish philosopher named Thomas Carlyle articulated “the most famous” of these theories, known as Heroism, or Hero-Worship.¹²⁰ In essence, Heroism is both a philosophy of history and leadership that suggests that Great Men are “the soul of the whole world’s history.” Carlyle stated, “they were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain.”¹²¹

According to Eric Bentley, the fundamental principle of Heroism is “that great men should rule and that others should revere them.”¹²² It was a theory of leadership that placed one person above all others. In Carlyle’s words, “All dignities of rank, on which human association rests, are what we may call a *Heroarchy* (Government of Heroes),—or

¹¹⁹ Bernard M. Bass with Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2008), 49-50; David V. Day and John Antonakis, eds., *The Nature of Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 7.

¹²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 180; Bass with Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 49.

¹²¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840), 1-2.

¹²² Eric Bentley, *A Century of Hero-Worship: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche, with Notes on Wagner, Spengler, Stefan George, and D. H. Lawrence*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957), 34.

a Hierarchy,”¹²³ which was cast with “the truest-hearted, justest, [and] the Noblest Man” at the top.¹²⁴

Walter E. Houghton explains that “hero worship is a nineteenth-century phenomenon.”¹²⁵ In 1870, J. William Jones delivered an address in honor of Robert E. Lee and admitted that Americans, specifically, lived in an “age of hero-worship.”¹²⁶ Though Heroism was present in the United States decades earlier,¹²⁷ this lived philosophy rapidly grew in popularity throughout the Civil War and gained ascendancy in the years that followed. War breeds heroes—and many emerged in America in the 1860s. James Cruickshanks captured the situation well when he lamented the prevalence of Hero-Worship in a sermon preached on August 4, 1864, by claiming,

The General—whoever he may be—who is on the crest of popularity is, for the time being, the demigod of the nation. If his reputation has been established as a military leader, he becomes the idol of the nation. The people accord to him every attribute except that of deity, and even this—blasphemous as it appears—seems not to be withheld when the people are glutted with the success of their deified hero.¹²⁸

Adventists were not immune to these sentiments and were also taught to admire bravery, manliness or womanliness, honor, and courage as well as shun cowardice, timidity, and

¹²³ Emphasis is in original. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 11.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹²⁵ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 305.

¹²⁶ J. W. Jones, “General R. E. Lee’s Religious Character,” *The (Lexington, MO) Weekly Caucasian*, November 26, 1870, p. 1, cols. 6-7, accessed 19 November 2015, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.

¹²⁷ Alexander Mackay, *The Western World; or, Travels in the United States in 1846-47 . . .*, Vol. 3 (London: Richard Bentley, 1850), 346.

¹²⁸ James Cruickshanks, *A Sermon Preached in the Congregational Church, Spencer, Mass. on the Occasion of the National Fast, August 4th, 1864* (Worcester, MA : Adams & Brown, [1864?]), 11-13.

fear.¹²⁹

When the war broke out on April 12, 1861, G. I. Butler was only 26. At this young age, and during such a time, it is not surprising that he became proud of his nation and greatly admired men like General Grant. Furthermore, considering his family's military history and sense of patriotism it is not surprising that *Leadership* is somewhat heroic in nature. Though Butler disavowed "man-worship" three times in his essay,¹³⁰ never used the term, "hero" (the terms "great" and "special" are used often), and never quoted Thomas Carlyle, his philosophy resembles Heroism in many striking ways.¹³¹ Since Adventists were familiar with Carlyle's work and Hero-Worship (which was advocated by many, not just Carlyle),¹³² some were able to recognize the similarities between the two philosophies and even accused Butler of being "a man-worshipper."¹³³

Though there is no evidence that Carlyle influenced Butler directly, there are at

¹²⁹ Cf. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation*, 100-109. The terms "manliness" or "womanliness" were particularly popular during the Civil War and subsequent years. These terms were also popular among Adventists. For example, in describing his views on church governance, Butler explained that "the manly and honorable course" for ministers should be to present unique Adventist beliefs in new fields first. Though his point was to help people understand where Seventh-day Adventists stood doctrinally, Butler's choice of adjectives is illustrative of his times. Geo[rge] I. Butler, "Thoughts on Church Government—No. 4," *RH*, August 25, 1874, 76.

¹³⁰ Butler, *Leadership*, 3, 14.

¹³¹ Due to his widespread use of military themes, terminology, and examples, Butler's concept of church governance also bears significant resemblance to the "variant of the great-man theory" known as the Warrior Model of Leadership. Bass with Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 49.

¹³² Cf. "The Day of the Lord," *RH*, March 7, 1865, 107; Mary W. Howard, "Thomas Carlyle's Millennium Views," *RH*, October 6, 1867, 266; "Anecdotes of Carlyle," *RH*, June 6, 1871, 199 (this article was reprinted: "Anecdote of Carlyle," *RH*, March 1, 1877, 67); "The Art of Speaking and Writing," *RH*, October 8, 1872, 131; J. H. Waggoner, "Spiritualism—No. 12," *RH*, November 3, 1874, 150; "Carlyle on Darwin," *RH*, January 17, 1878, 19; C. W. Stone, "Spiritualism in Europe," *RH*, June 27, 1878, 5; "The Heroes of Murder," *ST*, May 13, 1880, 209; "Make Your Own Sphere," *RH*, January 25, 1881, 53; "Notes of News," *RH*, February 8, 1881, 94; "Notes of News," *RH*, April 19, 1881, 254; "Hero Worship," *ST*, July 14, 1887, 432; L. A. S[mith], "Known By Its Fruits," *RH*, November 8, 1887, 696; Eva Bell Giles, "The Teacher's Privileges," *YI*, November 9, 1887, 215.

¹³³ George I. Butler to James White, March 13 and 15, 1874.

least six primary ways that Butler's *Leadership* reflects Carlyle's version of Hero-Worship.¹³⁴ First of all, both Butler and Carlyle posited their theories as a solution to a crisis. For Butler, it was the crisis in leadership that placed the mission of the Adventist Church in jeopardy. For Carlyle, it was the economic crisis in Britain and rise of democracy. As Houghton has stated, Hero-Worship was meant "to correct the ills of a commercial society . . . [and] was brought forward as the solution for . . . economic problems."¹³⁵ This similar reaction to crises highlights a common human response to threatened unity—centralization for protection.

Second, Butler's entire philosophy is based upon the same premise as Carlyle's Heroism. Butler stated, "There never was any great movement in this world without a leader ; and in the nature of things there cannot be."¹³⁶ In *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, Carlyle made the same claim: "In all epochs of the world's history, we shall find the Great Man to have been the indispensable saviour of his epoch ;—the lightning, without which the fuel never would have burnt."¹³⁷ By avoiding terms like "saviour" Butler's rendition of this philosophy was more palatable to Adventism. Nevertheless, both men expressed the same worldview: great leaders have always existed and society could not move forward without them.

Third, to support the foundation of their philosophy, both Butler and Carlyle listed several examples of great leaders throughout history. While Butler chose to list only

¹³⁴ I am not suggesting that a link between Butler and Carlyle exists. Since Carlyle was arguably the foremost proponent of Heroism in the nineteenth-century, however, I have focused exclusively on his writing to make the comparison and contrast with Butler's leadership views more distinct and concise.

¹³⁵ Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 318; cf. Bentley, *A Century of Hero-Worship*, 29.

¹³⁶ Butler, *Leadership*, 1.

¹³⁷ Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 12.

Biblical characters and Christian reformers (aside from General Grant), Carlyle was more comfortable stepping outside of the sphere of Christendom by exalting Odin, Mahomet, William Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Robert Burns, Oliver Cromwell, and Napoleon Bonaparte.¹³⁸ Interestingly, Butler and Carlyle both converge on Martin Luther. Though this is the case, they both articulate their admiration of the Great Reformer in a very different fashion.

A fourth similarity between Butler and Carlyle relates to how a true leader is identified by the people. The style of leadership that both men proposed is classified as Trait Theory today, “which saw the shaping of history through the lens of exceptional individuals.”¹³⁹ In his essay, Butler emphasized that a true leader should possess traits such as intelligence, wisdom,¹⁴⁰ efficiency,¹⁴¹ faithfulness, competence,¹⁴² honorableness, diligence, self-sacrifice,¹⁴³ and greatness.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, Carlyle believed that a true hero characteristically possessed greatness, ideality, exemplariness, creativity,¹⁴⁵ manliness,

¹³⁸ See the table of contents in *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Day and Antonakis, eds., *The Nature of Leadership*, 7.

¹⁴⁰ Butler states that a true leader will “give intelligent and judicious advice.” Butler, *Leadership*, 1.

¹⁴¹ Butler explained, “Efficiency is the result of wise leadership.” *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Butler wrote that a true leader should have demonstrated “past faithfulness, and [show] sufficient evidence of fitness.” *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴³ Butler claimed, “Man is nothing, only as God honors him. And the one he honors is the one who will labor most, and sacrifice most, in his cause.” *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Butler intimated, “The responsibility of leading out in such a work is great, not to say fearful.” *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴⁵ Carlyle wrote, “They were the leaders of men, these great ones ; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators.” Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 1.

nobility,¹⁴⁶ discernment, valor,¹⁴⁷ and heroicism. In summary, Carlyle said of a true leader: “The Ablest Man . . . [is] the truest-hearted, justest, the Noblest Man : what he *tells us to do* must be precisely the wisest, [and] fittest, that we could anywhere or anyhow learn.”¹⁴⁸ Though both men emphasized some different attributes, many were identical. Regardless of any minor differences, both men belonged to the Trait School of leadership.

Closely related to the marks of a true leader is a fifth similarity between Butler and Carlyle—that people must recognize the one gifted to lead for leadership to be effective. Though John Marrow correctly explains that in Carlyle’s system, “Heroic leaders would be recognised as such by members of the public at large,”¹⁴⁹ Carlyle himself lamented that Great Men were rarely recognized. He wrote, “‘Know the men that are to be trusted :’ alas, this is yet, in these days, very far from us.” In Carlyle’s mind a key element must necessarily be in place for Heroism to be observable. He continued, “The sincere alone can recognise sincerity. Not a Hero only is needed, but a world fit for him.”¹⁵⁰ Therefore, Carlyle “claimed that effective leadership could only be exercised over those who were themselves heroic to some significant degree.”¹⁵¹

Butler also emphasized these points regarding the followers. The first item in his

¹⁴⁶ Carlyle suggested that a true leader was “of manhood and heroic nobleness.” *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁷ Carlyle argued that true heroes possessed “wisdom to discern truly what the Time wanted, [and] valour to lead it on the right road thither.” *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴⁸ Emphasis is in original. *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁴⁹ John Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 157.

¹⁵⁰ Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 199.

¹⁵¹ Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle*, 103.

nine-point list stated that the people were “to believe his [i.e., the leaders] appointment suitable.”¹⁵² As he explained, “Never can much be accomplished in any movement until those interested become settled in their minds that the one of their choice is worthy of their confidence and support.”¹⁵³ Therefore, the people must recognize the leader and his ability to lead them well. This recognition, however, is dependent upon the people’s possession of heroic traits themselves. In Butler’s mind, the people must be clever and lend “an intelligent support” to their leader.¹⁵⁴ They must possess the trait of humility (like their leader); otherwise they would “certainly bring upon themselves the frown of God.”¹⁵⁵ Other attributes the followers were to have included: a loving heart, respectfulness, cheerfulness, meekness, cordiality, and “a jealous interest for” their leaders reputation.¹⁵⁶ If the people did not possess these traits, leadership could not be effective.

Finally, Butler and Carlyle agree on the amount of authority given to the one leader. Butler believed that the people should, “In all matters of expediency connected with the cause, to give his [i.e., the leader] judgment the preference, and cheerfully endeavor to carry it out as fully as though it was our own.”¹⁵⁷ Carlyle agreed wholeheartedly. He wrote, “There is a *Greatest Man* . . . [and] *he* is discoverable . . . once

¹⁵² Butler, *Leadership*, 13.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Most of these traits are found within Butler’s nine-point list. *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

discovered, we ought to treat him with an obedience which knows no bounds!”¹⁵⁸ This sentiment and level of authority is consistently described throughout Butler’s *Leadership* and Carlyle’s works on Heroism.

James White was the man that Butler believed was the truest and greatest leader in his day. White, however, also embodied the traits of a true hero as defined by Americans in general. He admired and practiced the principle given by Colonel David Crockett, “Be always sure you’re right—then go ahead!”¹⁵⁹ This famous motto was considered an “approved American doctrine” and demonstrated that White was “firm and self-confident in leadership.”¹⁶⁰ White truly was a great man—brilliant in many respects. He refused to be worshiped, however, and quickly recognized problems with *Leadership* due to its similarities with Heroism. Yet, when White accused Butler of advocating Hero-Worship, Butler emphatically replied, “I am not a man-worshipper, and I don’t propose to follow any man further than I follow Christ, not at all.”¹⁶¹

There is one major difference between Butler’s philosophy of leadership and Carlyle’s philosophy of Heroism—namely, the aspect of worship. Butler never used the term “worship” to refer to a man and found the idea revolting. It was, on the other hand,

¹⁵⁸ Carlyle continued, “This is the truth of Grand Lamaism; the ‘discoverability’ is the only error here [i.e., and not the amount of authority given to the Great Man]. The Thibet priests have methods of their own of discovering what Man is Greatest, fit to be supreme over them. Bad methods : but are they so much worse than our methods,—of understanding him to be always the eldest-born of a certain genealogy? Alas, it is a difficult thing to find methods for!” Emphasis is in original. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia: E. L. Carey and A. Hart, 1834), title page; cf. James White to William C. White, February 11, 1874, Heritage M-Film 53, James S. White Correspondence 2, CAR; Ellen G. White to P[ercy] T. Magan and E[dward] A. Sutherland, 18 July 1902, LT 096, 1902.

¹⁶⁰ Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship* (1941; repr. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 482.

¹⁶¹ George I. Butler to James White, March 13 and 15, 1874.

Carlyle's mantra—one that caused some Christians great uneasiness. Carlyle advocated a theology of divine immanence and articulated his *Heroarchy* in terms of gradation. According to Carlyle, worship should be given to “all things and everything” that is “an emblem of the Godlike.” Though lower emblems abound (i.e., stars, grass, etc.), man is the highest emblem of God because his body is a sanctuary—the only “Temple in the Universe.” By worshipping gradationally through this *Heroarchy*, he claimed that humans were brought closer to Christ as they worshipped up the ladder of being. By worshipping a man specifically (i.e., the greatest emblem of God), the people were brought closest to God and were in essence worshipping God Himself. Therefore, to worship truly Great Men was to worship God in a higher degree than by revering an average man or lower being in creation. Carlyle reasoned, “Is not that the germ of Christianity itself?” After all, through this *Heroarchy* people are led to Christ, “The greatest of all Heroes.”¹⁶²

George Butler never made claims that resembled Carlyle's *Heroarchy* of being or his definition of worship. This is the primary and fundamental difference between the two philosophies. Nevertheless, it is interesting that in spite of this major difference, some felt that Butler did advocate “man-worship.” Therefore, the question remains: can “man-worship” be defined in more than one way? Undoubtedly this is the case, yet in fairness to Butler, it cannot be suggested that he intentionally supported the philosophy of Heroism in terms of worship. According to him all were to follow their one leader, but the Bible offers “a plain rebuke . . . to man-worship, and the seeking for ourselves honors and titles from men.”¹⁶³ Even still, with the amount of authority given to one person,

¹⁶² Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 9-11.

¹⁶³ Butler, *Leadership*, 3.

another question remains unanswered: did Butler's concept of leadership nullify one of America's most fundamental principles of government?

Leadership and the Right of Private Judgment

The right of private judgment was an American motto of freedom—both in religious and civil concerns. Out of the three attacks that Butler anticipated, he tried the hardest to show that his theology of leadership did not nullify this Protestant principle. He wrote,

I confidently believe that they [his principles of leadership] are in perfect harmony with a sensible private judgment and with the word of God. . . . The right of private judgment and of personal accountability to God is not interfered with, but expressly guarded. No one is called upon to do things which violate his conscience in regard to right and wrong, or to make confessions which he does not believe are true. Nor is there any interference with one's own private matters on the part of a leader authorized by these principles. Each is perfectly free to act in these directions.¹⁶⁴

Butler explicitly stated that his leadership doctrine was not meant to violate individual conscience, or compel someone to “make confessions” of faith that they could not in good conscience do. If this were all that Butler said it would be difficult to see how his philosophy of leadership greatly endangered the Protestant principle.

Immediately after the statement above, Butler continued:

But it does give the one acknowledged to be chosen of God to lead out in his cause the authority to fill that position ; and it demands of those who acknowledge it respect for that position. And why should not this be so? Has not God a right to call whom he chooses to lead out in his work? Should not all, when they identify themselves with it, recognize that appointment cheerfully, especially when they acknowledge the appointment to have been made? The right of private judgment is not interfered with by so doing, but the act of so doing is an exercise of it.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 15.

Butler's claim here is that the Protestant principle is "exercised" by recognizing God's special selection of a leader, the leader's authority to fill the position, and the demand that the leader be respected in their position. What did this demanded respect entail? Butler explained, "There never can be real union of counsel and action without the judgment of *some person* is regarded of importance and special weight."¹⁶⁶ With statements like this, Butler essentially declared that one person's judgment was absolute and that this leader should have the final say in all matters pertaining to the cause of God. In other words, "In all matters of expediency connected with the cause," all were "to give his [the one leader's] judgment the preference." If this wasn't clear enough, Butler stated that all of the people were to "cheerfully endeavor to carry it out as fully as though it was [their] own." To avoid such a duty was disastrous in Butler's opinion. He explained, "the moment we give our judgment the preference in those things in which God has called him to lead, we place ourselves in the position God has assigned to him."¹⁶⁷

The close association that this one leader supposedly held with God gave Butler's theology formidable force. Butler explained, "When God calls a person to this position, and the one called works with his counsel, it is no small thing to hinder him in his work. Doing so, really works against God, who has made him his agent."¹⁶⁸ Since James White was practically equated with Moses and since Butler placed the gift of apostleship above prophecy (and other gifts), some may have feared that Butler was in essence declaring James White to be "a god" to the Adventist Israel with Ellen, his wife, as his prophet (cf.

¹⁶⁶ Emphasis is mine. *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

Ex. 7:1).

If one person carried this much authority in the Adventist Church, it is necessary to ask: is the right of private judgment “expressly guarded” by Butler’s leadership principles as he claimed? Though he insisted that he did not reject the Protestant principle, it is accurate *and* fair to suggest that his leadership doctrine defined one’s right of private judgment in such a way as to jeopardize freedom in matters of faith. As defined by Butler, every person must submit his or her judgment to one person and make their judgment their own.¹⁶⁹ As this is the case, personal private judgment is denied in ecclesiastical matters, which necessarily threatens matters of faith. Therefore, private judgment is relegated to the sphere of private life. Any matters related to a person’s community, which frequently revolved around the church, were decided by one person since Butler’s leadership doctrine demanded that every man, woman, and child show respect for their leader; “cheerfully” making his judgment their own. This demand was truly fearful as the people were forcibly reminded that to work against their leader “really works against God.”

At this point it is possible to understand that Butler’s leadership philosophy does in fact contradict the right of private judgment in matters of faith. However, is it *fair* to Butler to make such an observation? After all, he did declare that his theology guarded a “sensible” view of private judgment. Furthermore, when he was criticized by his contemporaries he responded, “You seem to have the idea that it [i.e., *Leadership*] surrenders the right of private judgment and conscience, not at all. There are few men in

¹⁶⁹ Butler later defined submission by stating, “By submission, I mean the *full yielding of the will* to a higher power [i.e., the leader].” Emphasis is mine. Geo[rge] I. Butler, “Thoughts on Church Government—No. 1,” *RH*, July 28, 1874, 53.

this world who are more tenacious of that right than I. It gives no man authority to lord it over anybody, or swallow any man's opinions down as gospel. I for one am in no special danger on that point."¹⁷⁰ Perhaps, Butler has been misjudged?

Butler learned a great deal from the Leadership Controversy of the 1870s (see chapter 4). The issue eventually “exploded” after Ellen White’s testimony to Butler in January 1875. After this he began to realize problems with the leadership doctrine he introduced. He later admitted that his mind had been “somewhat warped” and that he was glad to be “corrected by the Testimony.”¹⁷¹ He confessed that he had written *Leadership* because some, including himself, thought James White “assumed prerogatives that did not properly belong to him, which infringed on their right of private judgment.” Butler even admitted that the Protestant principle was “the doctrine that I had held to myself up to a brief period previous to the writing of my tract on leadership.” Therefore, he eventually recognized that his motives for writing the tract led him to undermine private judgment and stated, “I was exceedingly glad that the testimony endorsed the right of private judgment.”¹⁷² Since Butler could later admit that his views on leadership took away God-given freedoms, it is fair indeed to recognize this point along with him.

Leadership and Gender

Butler consistently used masculine terminology in his *Leadership* essay to refer to the one “specially selected” leader in the Adventist Church. He also clearly had a man in

¹⁷⁰ George I. Butler to James White, March 13 and 15, 1874.

¹⁷¹ George I. Butler to Ellen G. White, December 9, 1875, Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹⁷² George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

mind for the position—James White. In spite of this, the question can be asked: did Butler’s leadership doctrine exclude women from holding the highest position in the Adventist Church? Interestingly, Butler’s essay actually allows for a woman to hold this position and even acknowledges that God had “specially selected” at least one woman to lead the Church of Israel in this capacity.

In order to show that God had selected someone to lead His people throughout the history of the world, Butler included a partial list of leaders, or “apostles.” This list began with a series of proto-apostles, then included the twelve apostles themselves, and continued with modern apostles throughout Christian history, ending with James White.¹⁷³ What is striking about this list is the inclusion of one woman—Deborah.

One could question Butler’s motive for the inclusion of Deborah. Though Butler never stated his reason for highlighting certain leaders throughout history, there are some factors that do suggest Butler’s intentionality in including Deborah in his list. In other words, it was apparently a conscious thought for Butler, rather than a casual selection.

First of all, Butler did not simply quote the list of Biblical heroes found in Hebrews 11. Butler’s list of leaders appears in a completely different order and either includes some not found in Hebrews or excludes some that are there. Second, Butler’s list of names is not in chronological order. For example, Samuel appears before all of the other judges listed—Jephthah, Samson, Gideon, and Deborah. Also, Gideon is listed after Jephthah and Samson, even though he lived before either person. Finally, Deborah is

¹⁷³ Butler’s list appears as follows: “Noah, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Jephthah, Samson, Gideon, Deborah, David, the different kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, and many other persons in the Old Testament,” “Elijah, and several of the prophets,” “John the Baptist and Christ’s apostles [specifically Peter, James and John],” “Paul,” “[Martin] Luther, [John] Wesley, William Miller, and others,” and finally “James White” (Butler, *Leadership*, pp. 2, 5, 6, 8, 11-13).

included after Jephthah, Samson, and Gideon—an order that is also out of historical sequence. These facts suggest that Butler included names of Biblical heroes from the top of his head. Interestingly, a woman came to his mind and was specifically included in his list due to her prominent role as a leader.

Following the trajectory of his philosophy it is clear that Butler believed all of the leaders in his list held the highest position in God’s movement in their time and in their sphere. This does not exclude the female judge and warrior, Deborah. Though Deborah is the only woman mentioned by name, it is possible that Butler would have included others if it were his purpose to be comprehensive. Since it was not his objective to provide an unbroken line of successors, Butler was satisfied with mentioning only the most prominent leaders. From a single example of a “proto-apostle” in the Old Testament it is impossible to know if Butler would have allowed for a woman to hold the highest position within the Adventist Church in his day. What is evident, however, is that Butler did recognize that at least one woman had been “specially selected” by God and given the highest ecclesiastical office in the “Church” in history.

Butler’s View of “God’s Government”

Butler refers to his fundamental principles of leadership as “the great principles of God’s government.”¹⁷⁴ So how can this form of government be described? It seems that Butler’s *Leadership* is actually influenced by aspects of three different models of government. First of all, there are elements of monarchy in Butler’s philosophy of leadership. As Barry D. Oliver has observed, “Butler described a leader as a benevolent

¹⁷⁴ Butler, *Leadership*, 8.

monarch.”¹⁷⁵ This form of government captures the facet of leadership that places one person at the top. Since Butler used, “David, [and] the different kings” as examples,¹⁷⁶ this analogy seems appropriate.

Monarchy is certainly more fitting than other alternatives. It would be inaccurate to equate Butler’s view of government with an autocratic model. There were limitations to the leader’s power. As Butler stated, “He [the leader] must have room to exercise this [his duty to reprove when necessary] right without question, *so far as his course does not conflict with moral principle.*”¹⁷⁷ Though one person is in charge, they are not to act like a dictator. While centralized authority explicitly excludes other models like oligarchy or egalitarianism, monarchy does seem to be more a more fitting descriptor than autocracy.

Butler’s *Leadership* also resembles a second concept of government to some degree—democracy. Though God specially appoints a leader of His choosing, the people are also supposed to choose their leader. However, since Butler intimates that the people’s choice should reflect God’s choice one wonders how much freedom is allocated to each person. Even still, this concept bears some resemblance to democracy, which is not surprising given Butler’s cultural context. This notion is strengthened when Butler claims that “a true leader *represents and embodies* the views and will” of the people.¹⁷⁸ While some notions of democracy are present in Butler’s *Leadership*, there are other aspects that are missing. For example, he establishes no system of checks and balances

¹⁷⁵ Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure*, 62.

¹⁷⁶ Butler, *Leadership*, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Emphasis is mine. *Ibid.*, 14. Butler also stated that a leader must not do anything that “conflict[s] with right and the teachings of God’s word.” *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷⁸ Emphasis is mine. Butler, *Leadership*, 1.

other than alluding to the fact that if a leader ceases to act in accord with God's will, then they must be removed. There is, however, no specified protocol in the *Leadership* essay that explains how one can know the leader is out of harmony with God. His example of David's relation to "wicked Saul" and the past seven years of conflict certainly lend credence to the necessity of such advice and clarification.

Third, allusions to a theocracy arise with Butler's appeal for divine selection. In fact, Butler's theology of leadership bears striking resemblance to the theocracy described in the Old Testament prior to the life of King Saul. During this period of Israel's history, God appointed His commanders—a process that Butler suggested continued in all ages, including his present time. These overtones are only heightened as Butler continues in his essay, especially through his illustration from the life of Moses. This form of government is further supported by Butler's continual use of the term "apostle."¹⁷⁹ God specifically selected these apostles—meaning God is ultimately in charge—and they were to rule in His stead with His authority.

Butler's description of "the great principles of God's government" contains similarities with monarchy, shows influences from democracy, and is fundamentally rooted in the idea of theocracy. As Butler emphasized, it is "God's government," not man's or the Church's. Though Butler envisioned and attempted to describe "God's government" and its earthly manifestations, he was not very concerned about making his

¹⁷⁹ This sentiment is further articulated in Butler's articles, titled, "Thoughts on Church Government." For example, he commented, "God is evidently the author of government, and he has designed it for the good of his creatures. All rightful government centers in him, and is exercised by virtue of his authority. The power to create carries with it the right to direct and control." After making this point, Butler described the human leadership role in God's Government. "God has authorized government among the nations. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God." Butler, "Thoughts on Church Government—No. 1," *RH*, July 28, 1874, 52.

leadership doctrine fit within a specific model of government. When Butler expanded his ideas on leadership in his article, titled, “Thoughts on Church Government,” he made this point more clear. He admitted,

Government of any kind is better than anarchy. It is really the embodiment of the will of the people, whether imperial, kingly, or republican, in form ; for the majority of the people have the right and the power to make or change it to any form they choose. Rulers represent the people, and act in their stead and by virtue of their will. God, for wise purposes, has committed the right and power to control and govern individuals, with certain limitations, to the aggregate mass composed of these individuals. . . . But within these limitations it is reasonable that the few should conform to such rules as the many are willing to submit to. And God has endowed them with authority to enforce obedience. To resist that authority within the limits suggested, is to resist the ordinance of God who has given this authority.¹⁸⁰

Since Butler’s concept of God’s Governments is similar to three forms of human government, yet defies any singular classification, it seems best to recognize a blending of governing theories. Perhaps Butler’s concept of government can be described as a “theocentric-monocratic-republic.” Such a classification would place God in ultimate control with one chosen person possessing authority above the people in his or her given sphere.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE REACTION AND RESPONSE TO *LEADERSHIP*

The Binding Pledge and Initial Response to *Leadership*

Butler's *Leadership* essay represented a tremendous victory for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and enabled the denomination to move forward in its mission. As Emmett K. Vande Vere has observed, "*Leadership* appeared to offer the estranged men a face-saving formula: They should elevate White. The rest of the church could cheerfully bear up under his dominance as a good work—and everything would be according to Holy Writ."¹ As a result, the essay was unanimously voted by the General Conference as the official policy on leadership on November 17, 1873.² The adopted resolution stated,

Resolved, That we fully indorse the position taken in the paper read by Eld. Butler on Leadership. And we express our firm conviction, that our failure to appreciate the guiding hand of God in the selection of his instruments to lead out in this work has resulted in serious injury to the prosperity of the cause, and in spiritual loss to ourselves. And we hereby express our full purpose of heart faithfully to regard these principles, and we invite all our brethren to unite with us in this action.³

¹ Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 41. Harry H. Leonard has also recognized that Butler's *Leadership* essay "had done so much to bring White's critics to heel." Leonard, "The Adventist Rubicon," 46.

² It should be noted that the first page of Butler's *Leadership* bears the incorrect date for the adoption of this policy. Butler's tract states that this occurred on November 14, 1873, which is the day the General Conference session opened. The essay was not read before all of the conference attendees (though it had been discussed by leaders in private several days earlier) until Saturday evening, November 15. The correct date for the adoption of this policy is found in George W. Amadon, diary entry November 17, 1873.

³ Geo[rge] I. Butler and U. Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the S. D. A. General Conference," *RH*, November 25, 1873, 190. According to W. H. Littlejohn, the crafters of this, and related, resolutions at the General Conference were afraid of stating their acceptance of Butler's essay too strongly. As a result, the resolutions were toned down "lest their doctrine should prove too bold for general acceptance." Wolcott H. Littlejohn to Ellen G. White, October 26, 1874.

Evidently Seventh-day Adventists held this new policy in high regard. They viewed it as God’s solution to a great crisis and His method of governance that would guide the church forward to “final victory.” This policy was not only adopted unanimously, but also most Adventists at the General Conference considered it “new light.” Uriah Smith, J. N. Andrews, and J. H. Waggoner all “heartily” endorsed the essay, “and felt it was *light from the Lord*”—a phrase generally reserved for Ellen G. White’s visions. According to Butler, “the General Conference affirmed ditto,”⁴ and his perspective is supported by the resolutions adopted by Adventists at this time. In addition to the resolution that mentioned Butler’s *Leadership* by name, one more statement was adopted at the General Conference that highlights the praise this document received, though in a subtler manner. The Adventist Church,

Resolved, That as a Conference we express our sincere approval of the action of our Executive Committee [G. I. Butler, S. N. Haskell, and Harmon Lindsay] during the past year, involving, as it has, peculiar responsibilities in respect to the advancement of the work of God, *and making more definite and plain the principles which should govern our action, as a people, and we believe that in these things they have had the special guidance of the Holy Spirit.*⁵

Butler was the only member of the General Conference Executive Committee to set forth any “definite and plain” principles to “govern” the actions of Seventh-day Adventists.

Since Adventists believed that the Holy Spirit guided Butler in this work, it is possible to understand why his *Leadership* essay was so highly acclaimed at first.

⁴ Emphasis is mine. George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914; George I. Butler to Frank E. Belden, March 14, 1907. Butler, himself, was convinced that his essay revealed “new light.” He stated with pride on November 23, “Internal as well as external difficulties have stood in the way of our prosperity. But we thank God that these have of late been vanishing, and *light and union* are coming in more fully than before.” Emphasis is mine. Geo[orge] I. Butler, “Our Position and Work,” *RH Supplement*, November 25, 1873, 2.

⁵ Emphasis is mine. Butler and Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the S. D. A. General Conference,” *RH*, November 25, 1873, 190.

One significant event that occurred shortly after the General Conference also illustrates that Seventh-day Adventists eagerly supported Butler's *Leadership*. On November 29, the Battle Creek church called a business meeting to elect church officers.⁶ This election placed Myron J. Cornell and Orrin B. Jones in as deacons and Uriah Smith and Harmon Lindsay in as elders. James White was also elected pastor,⁷ which was somewhat unique (probably a first) at the time for two reasons. First, though all Adventist congregations elected deacons and elders, there were no elected pastors within Adventist churches at this time.⁸ Second, White remained a resident of California even after this election and did not spend much time in Battle Creek. Though these events may seem surprising, it is important to note that this election was motivated by Butler's *Leadership* hierarchy, which dictated that White should possess authority above all others.⁹

Butler's *Leadership* also influenced the social meeting that followed the elections later that day. At this time more than 200 people "entered into a solemn covenant with the Lord and with each other to hold up the hands of those whom God has called to lead

⁶ George W. Amadon, diary entry November 29, 1873. It should be noted that Uriah Smith returned to his position as editor of the *Review and Herald* on the following day, November 30. Some have incorrectly placed Smith's return to the Office on Sabbath, November 29. George W. Amadon, diary entry November 30, 1873. Durand, *Yours in the Blessed Hope, Uriah Smith*, 277; Wheeler, *James White*, 181.

⁷ A[ndrews], "Meetings at Battle Creek Since the Conference," *RH*, December 2, 1873, 196.

⁸ The "Conference Address" of 1861 stated that "the different names of elder, bishop, and pastor are applied to the same office." Loughborough, Hull, and Cornell, "Conference Address," *RH*, October 15, 1861, 156-157. Therefore, White's pastoral election seems to illustrate that Adventists were now willing to distinguish between the terms "elder" and "pastor."

⁹ Arthur L. White stated in regard to White's pastoral election, "This is perhaps understandable in the light of the philosophy of leadership advocated by Butler a week earlier." White, *The Progressive Years*, 398.

out [i.e., James White¹⁰] in the work.”¹¹ In addition, they all wrote out their confessions, pledges, and names with a gold pen on a large scroll. Uriah Smith then dedicated the document and a few days later it was laid up as a “nice memorial” in a mahogany box along with the gold pen and ink fountain. The box was then “fastened to the speaker’s stand in the front of the large Bible” in the church as a visual reminder “that the covenant [was] literally between . . . [James White] and the people” when he spoke before the congregation in the meetinghouse.¹²

This covenant was considered to be of “paramount importance” and was eventually printed for distribution. The document was titled, “Pledge of the Church at Battle Creek, and others, to the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, Nov. 14-18, 1873,” and declared,

We acknowledge the correctness of the principles set forth in the article written by Bro. Butler, entitled, “Leadership ;” principles which are sustained by reason and Scripture, *and which are made binding in a practical manner on this people* by the testimonies of the Spirit of the Lord to us ; and we pledge ourselves, with these principles thus clearly defined before us, to stand by, and stay up the hands of, those who are called to lead out, and bear responsibilities in this cause, and to bring ourselves into strict scriptural discipline in the work of the Lord. *And every rebellion against these principles shall be promptly discountenanced, and immediately corrected,* so far as in our power to correct it.¹³

Butler’s *Leadership* essay was certainly given great authority within the Adventist

¹⁰ J[ames] W[hite], “Eight Weeks at Battle Creek,” *RH*, June 1, 1876, 172.

¹¹ A[ndrews], “Meetings at Battle Creek Since the Conference,” *RH*, December 2, 1873, 196.

¹² W[hite], “Eight Weeks at Battle Creek,” *RH*, June 1, 1876, 172; cf. George I. Butler to James White, January 2, [1874], Heritage M-Film 52, White Estate Incoming Correspondence 2, CAR.

¹³ Emphasis is mine. [Seventh-day Adventist Church of Battle Creek, MI], “Pledge of the Church at Battle Creek, and others, to the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, Nov. 14-18, 1873,” WDF 453 #3, CAR. “Covenant” and “pledge” were interchangeable terms used to describe this document. Cf. “Battle Creek,” *RH*, February 5, 1880, 89; George W. Amadon, diary entry February 1, 1880, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 38, CAR.

Church. That it was made “binding” upon Adventists *and* that “rebellion against” its principles would be “immediately corrected,” illustrates how seriously Seventh-day Adventists treated this covenant when it was adopted. The people longed for peace after seven years of turmoil and would have it at all costs—even at the expense of their freedom.

Though Adventists in Battle Creek rallied to support James White on the newfound basis of Butler’s *Leadership*, White did not publish his own perspective of events surrounding the General Conference until after his departure from Battle Creek on December 18, 1873.¹⁴ That no comment regarding the Conference appeared from his pen before this time may indicate some caution on his part. After all, his hopes were raised many times over the last seven years, and as promises were broken and problems grew worse he became discouraged. After his departure, however, White was ready to state his opinion, testifying,

We witnessed the steady, distinct advance of the work as we never before saw it at Battle Creek. And we left with faith and hope for the permanency and progress of the cause, such as we have not enjoyed for several years. Things which have greatly injured the cause, and have driven us from the work in discouragement and feebleness, have been more clearly seen, and the strongest union now exists between those who have not been able to see eye to eye.

After this subtle reference to his reconciliation with Andrews, Waggoner, and Smith, White stated, “With this improved state of things has come a spirit of prayer, and of faith, and a large degree of the Spirit of God.”¹⁵

Though White spoke of unity, it is important to note that he did not quote, or even

¹⁴ George W. Amadon, diary entry December 18, 1873; U[riah] S[mith], “Personal,” *RH*, December 23, 1873, 12.

¹⁵ W[hite], “The Cause at Battle Creek,” *RH*, December 30, 1873, 20.

echo, Butler's *Leadership* in any of his reflections, either published or private. He praised the *results* it brought to the church while remaining somewhat reserved in regard to its *contents*. He did eventually react against the new policy on leadership, and was probably the first Adventist to do so, but at this time no one realized that *Leadership* was flawed. White was, in fact, part of the committee that oversaw the publication of Butler's document,¹⁶ which went to press on December 19, 1873—the day after his departure from Battle Creek.¹⁷ That White was partially responsible for the publication of *Leadership* in tract form indicates that he was not completely opposed to its contents at this time. Unity, though a precious gift, blinded Adventists to the theological pitfalls that Butler's essay introduced. No one, in fact, questioned any of Butler's principles on leadership in 1873. As Arthur L. White perceptively wrote, "The perils of this philosophy were not at the moment seen, but in time they would have to be reckoned with."¹⁸

The Leadership Controversy: 1874-1877

Although most Adventists generally accepted the new leadership doctrine with favor, a small minority began to react in a negative way. Perhaps the first Seventh-day Adventist to do so was James White, the man at the center of it all. At first White observed the changed behavior among his brethren with relief, but as people began to

¹⁶ "The Seventh-day Adventists: Closing Session of the General Conference," *Battle Creek (MI) Journal*, November 26, 1873, p. 3, col. 3, Willard Library Newspaper Collection, Battle Creek, MI.

¹⁷ George W. Amadon, diary entry December 19, 1873. On Sunday, December 21, Butler stated in a letter to James White, "The tract Leadership is published. They struck off 960." Emphasis is in original. George I. Butler to James White, December 21, 1873. This is corrective of Arthur L. White, who wrote that "this was done in the late spring of 1874." White, *The Progressive Years*, 464. By way of comparison, it is significant that 960 copies of Butler's *Leadership* were printed as only 1000 copies of Ellen G. White's, *Testimony for the Church, No. 23*, were printed on the first run. George W. Amadon, diary entry September 4, 1873.

¹⁸ White, *The Progressive Years*, 395.

revere him more and more, he quickly realized the perils of Butler's new philosophy. According to White this took place "only a few weeks after" Butler's *Leadership* was published, at a time when he believed himself to be "the only person who rejected the leading ideas of the essay."¹⁹ White's reaction marks the beginning point of the Leadership Controversy that transpired in the Seventh-day Adventist Church between 1874 and 1877. Though controversies between leaders existed prior to this time (such as 1866-1873²⁰), the Leadership Controversy erupted in direct retaliation against *Leadership*—the published tract and General Conference policy on the subject. Near the end of his life Butler explained this to a new generation of Adventists as follows: "The name 'Leadership' came from a tract which I wrote and published, entitled, 'Leadership.'"²¹ It is important to highlight this distinction because it was the designated nomenclature of contemporary Adventists and since nearly every use of the word "leadership" appearing in Adventist sources between 1874 and 1877, both published and private, is either a direct or indirect reference to Butler's tract and the controversy in which it was involved.

Contemporary Adventists also referred to the Leadership Controversy between 1874 and 1877 as "the leadership question."²² This referent identifies the type of crisis the church faced at this time. *Leadership*, as well as the reactions against this document, forced Adventists to wrestle with theological questions regarding leadership and

¹⁹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 190.

²⁰ Cf. Leonard, "The Adventist Rubicon," 31-50.

²¹ George I. Butler to Frank E. Belden, March 14, 1907.

²² James White, "Good Meetings," *RH*, July 22, 1875, 32; James White, "Good Meetings," *ST*, July 22, 1875, 304; Ellen G. White to William C. White, August 8, 1875, LT 029, 1875.

authority. It was a “question” for two primary reasons: first, there was no general agreement or consensus regarding these ecclesiological topics, and second, many Adventists were unable to articulate a sound Scriptural definition to these difficult and important questions throughout these years. Between 1874 and 1877 numerous letters were exchanged, articles written, and meetings held to discuss (and often argue about) these theological issues. Therefore, the prevailing theme of the Leadership Controversy should be understood as “the leadership question.”

James White’s Article on Leadership

The earliest known evidence regarding White’s negative reaction to Butler’s view on leadership is found on March 6, 1874. On this date “Bro. White spoke on Leadership” in Santa Rosa, California.²³ About this time, White also wrote a letter to G. I. Butler, which carried a strong reactionary tone against Butler’s tract on leadership. In this letter, which is unfortunately not extant, White apparently reprimanded Butler’s view because it “surrenders the right of private judgment and conscience,” gives the leader the “authority” to lord it over any[one],” as well as advocates “man-worship” (i.e., Hero-Worship).²⁴ Though the exact contents of White’s discourse on leadership and his letter to Butler remain unknown, both sources affirm White’s statement that he reacted “only a few weeks after” *Leadership* was published.

A few months later White made his private views on the subject more public in a published article, titled, “Leadership.” This four-part article appeared in the first four

²³ John N. Loughborough, diary entry March 6, 1874, John N. Loughborough Papers (327), Box 1, Folder 20, CAR.

²⁴ George I. Butler to James White, March 13 and 15, 1874.

issues of the *Signs of the Times* in June and July 1874. At this time White articulated at least five different points in stark contrast to Butler's leadership views. His first point was that "Christ is the only head [and leader] of the church,"²⁵ which he supported with his primary text: Matthew 23:8, which in the KJV states, "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." As he expounded on this text it became clear that White actually agreed with the concept of one-person leadership in the Church in this way: Christ, the God-man, is the one leader in the Church, not any one fallible human. As White stated, "Christ proposes to lead his servants, and it is their privilege to approach the throne of grace, and receive from their sovereign Leader fresh rations, and orders direct from headquarters."²⁶

According to White, Christ was the only One who was great. He was the "great Leader,"²⁷ "Great Shepherd," "great Teacher,"²⁸ and "the great head of the church, and the only one to whom she should look for leadership."²⁹ This was not a principle of leadership that could be ignored. Strict acknowledgement of the sole headship of Christ was "important to the purity of the church, while departure from it . . . marked the progress of different forms of corrupted Christianity." In White's opinion, "The most prominent among these is the Roman church, which has set one man over the church." To emphasize his point strongly, White declared, "Thank Heaven, the Christian church has

²⁵ The phrase in brackets ["and leader"] was added by White when his article on leadership was published in the *Review and Herald* at the end of 1874. Cf. [White], "Leadership," *ST*, June 4, 1874, 4; J[ames] W[hite], "Leadership," *RH*, December 1, 1874, 180.

²⁶ [White], "Leadership," *ST*, June 4, 1874, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ [White], "Leadership," *ST*, July 9, 1874, 28.

²⁹ [White], "Leadership," *ST*, June 4, 1874, 4.

no use for the pope.”³⁰

In order to emphasize that Christ is the sole head and leader of the Church, White made a second point: leadership of the Church is not (and never has been) transferred to one person.³¹ As White stated, “At no time during his public ministry does Christ intimate that any one of his disciples should be designated as their leader.” Many different men and women in the Bible provide good examples of leadership and “the church [is] benefited by the experience of the heroes of faith, mentioned in the eleventh chapter [of Hebrews].” Though the Apostle Paul provides this list of heroes, “he faithfully guards the church against looking back to them with a spirit of idolatry, or accepting any man as their leader, or pattern of the Christian life, in these three words: ‘Look unto Jesus.’ [Heb. 12:2].”³²

Since Christ did not transfer ecclesiastical authority to any one person in the Church, White stresses that there is no primacy among earthly leaders—his third point. Rather than propose a hierarchy based upon position or calling, White suggests that ministers sustain one another by mutual submission. “Mutual submission,” he wrote, “is demanded of all in the spirit of humility, in all their labors and councils.” This principle also acknowledged that “age and experience are regarded as worthy of especial respect by the younger.”³³ White supported this notion with 1 Peter 5:5, which reads in the KJV:

³⁰ Ibid. It is interesting to note that White’s comment about the pope was removed when his article was reprinted in the *Review and Herald* at the end of the year, probably because it was offensive. Cf. W[hite], “Leadership,” *RH*, December 1, 1874, 180.

³¹ In his revised article for the *Review*, White stated, “Christ is the leader of his people, and . . . the work and office of leadership has not been laid upon any one person, at any one time, in the Christian age.” Ibid.

³² [White], “Leadership,” *ST*, June 4, 1874, 4.

³³ Ibid.

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility ; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”³⁴

White also recognized that the concept of mutual submission was illustrated in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. In this “case of difference of opinion . . . the apostles and elders at Jerusalem acted as counselors, in a manner to give room for the Holy Ghost to act as Judge.”³⁵ White later emphasized this point in a stronger manner, stating,

Christ will lead his people, if they will be led. He came into that assembly [in Jerusalem] by his Spirit, and found apostles, elders, and all the brotherhood in a teachable frame of mind and at once led them out of their difficulties. In this case, at an early date in the Christian church the true doctrine of the leadership of Christ and the equality of the ministerial brotherhood stands the test, and the triumphant record is immortalized among the acts of inspired men.³⁶

After stating that Christ is the only head and leader in the Church, that His authority was never transferred to any one person, and that ministers were supposed to mutually submit to one another, White provided a definition for a true minister. He stated this fourth point as follows: “All true ministers are Christ’s ambassadors.” White consciously chose the term, “embassdor,” over the similar term, “ambassador,” on the basis of Webster’s definition: an ambassador “is a minister of the highest rank, employed by one prince or State at the Court of another, to manage the public concerns of his own prince or State, and representing the power and dignity of his sovereign.” As ambassadors, true minsters submit only to Christ. White explained, “No man can be

³⁴ Emphasis is in original. [James White], “Leadership,” *ST*, June 11, 1874, 12; cf. J[ames] W[hite], “Mutual Obligations: Unity of the Church of Jesus Christ,” *ST*, January 27, 1876, 68.

³⁵ [White], “Leadership,” *ST*, June 11, 1874, 12.

³⁶ W[hite], “Leadership,” *RH*, December 1, 1874, 180.

Christ's ambassador until he has made a complete surrender of his right of private judgment to Christ. Neither can any man properly represent Christ who surrenders his judgment to his fellow-man."³⁷ Ministers, then, have a choice: will they surrender their private judgment to Christ or another person? So that his point is clearly made, White stated, "the minister who submits his ministry to a superior, the bishop, the president, or one in authority in the church, to be sent out and directed in his ministry, cannot in the fullest sense, be Christ's ambassador."³⁸

White's fifth point related to unity and church order in a general manner. He wrote, "Organization was designed to secure unity of action, and as a protection from imposture. It was never intended as a scourge to compel obedience, but, rather, for the protection of the people of God. Christ does not drive his people. He calls them."³⁹ According to White, "Creed power has been called to the rescue in vain . . . church force cannot produce unity ; but has caused divisions, and has given rise to religious sects and parties almost innumerable."⁴⁰ Believers were called "to press to the true standard of Christian unity,"⁴¹ which was cultivated by "the spirit of love" and "the bond of peace."⁴² In conclusion then, White reasoned "that the simple organization suggested in the New Testament is not designed, by any means, to take the leadership of the church out of the hands of Christ, to be used as a church power to press members to submission and

³⁷ [White], "Leadership," *ST*, June 4, 1874, 4.

³⁸ [White], "Leadership," *ST*, June 11, 1874, 12.

³⁹ [White], "Leadership," *ST*, July 9, 1874, 28.

⁴⁰ [White], "Leadership," *ST*, June 4, 1874, 5.

⁴¹ [James White], "Leadership," *ST*, June 25, 1874, 20.

⁴² [White], "Leadership," *ST*, July 9, 1874, 28.

obedience.”⁴³

It is quite clear that James White wrote his article in opposition to Butler’s view. The title, “Leadership,” was the first clue and the contents remove all doubt to the contrary. Though there are many nuances between the two views, the primary contrast relates to the topic of authority. Whereas Butler placed all ecclesiastical power in the hands of one person, White rejoined that Christ was the only head and leader in the Church. According to White’s view, all ministers were to mutually submit in love to one another, with respect to age and experience. White also criticized Butler’s *Leadership* when he subtly compared it to the Roman Catholic Church, Hero-Worship, and an incorrect view of the right of private judgment. In White’s opinion, Butler’s view would lead to “church force” and “a spirit of idolatry” directed toward “heroes of faith.” With such a contrasted perspective on the subject of leadership, it is very clear that a Leadership Controversy had now erupted within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Ellen White likely sensed this and was not in favor of James publishing his article on leadership at this time. She did believe her husband’s views “to be sound,” but she also did not see any “danger” in Butler’s view or “think it policy” for him to present “so publicly . . . an opposite view from that of Brother Butler.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, White made his views public and Ellen White later realized that her husband knew best.⁴⁵

⁴³ [White], “Leadership,” *ST*, June 25, 1874, 20.

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 11, 1874, LT 061, 1874.

⁴⁵ For example, James White’s article on leadership was later published as a part of Ellen White’s *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*.

W. H. Littlejohn and His Views on Leadership

One more Adventist minister reacted negatively to Butler's new view about this same time—Wolcott Hackley Littlejohn.⁴⁶ The vehicle for departure was Butler's *Leadership* and once Littlejohn began to react against it, he made his position very clear: the new policy on leadership must be immediately revoked by the General Conference or he would leave the church. This process began with correspondence with the Whites,⁴⁷ none of which survives, which persuaded Ellen White to visit with Littlejohn to discuss the issue. On the evening of July 30, 1874, she met with the Littlejohn family and “tarried [at their home] . . . over night.” Her report of this meeting was brief, yet positive. She simply stated, “I had a good visit with Brother Littlejohn.”⁴⁸ Littlejohn, on the other hand, reflected more upon this visit. He explained his anxiety to Ellen White “without the least attempt at concealment the fears which [he] indulged in regard to this matter.” He then told her that in his view people gave James White too much authority. During some Adventist conferences it seemed to Littlejohn “as if the great majority present [,] instead of engaging devoutly in this work [of earnest prayer,] were seeking simply to get some clue to the mind or wishes of Bro. W. in order that they might carry them out to the fullest extent without stoping [*sic*] to discuss the soundness of his plans, or the estimation [*sic*] in which God might hold them.” In light of alarming reports of this nature Littlejohn

⁴⁶ See Kevin M. Burton, “Wolcott Hackley Littlejohn: Defender of the Faith.” *Andrews University Seminary Student Journal*, 1.1 (2015): 85-105.

⁴⁷ Ellen White mentioned that Littlejohn had sent “letters.” Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 4, 1874, LT 058, 1874; Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 11, 1874, LT 061, 1874.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, August 5, 1874, LT 046a, 1874; cf. George W. Amadon, diary entry August 3, 1874, Byington-Amadon Diaries Collection (012), Box 2, Envelope 32, CAR.

believed it categorically wrong to teach that he was “a second Moses.” Rather, it was better to ascribe to White “a leadership such as [Martin] Luther, [John] Wesley, and [William] Miller, had.”⁴⁹

By late October Littlejohn was more upset and expressed his “great anxiety” to Ellen White along with a patent ultimatum. Littlejohn bluntly declared, “Matters have now gone so far, and the neglect of the Conference to repeal the address has so far shaken my confidence in the professions made, that I must be re-assured, or else I must withdraw from the body, and thus relieve myself from all responsibility for views which are not only erroneous but also pernicious in the extreme.” He was, in fact, “astonished that Bro. W. should do himself so great injustice as to leave the address still unrepealed.” In Littlejohn’s opinion, this issue was “one of vital principle.” He explained to Ellen White, “If Bro. W. is such a leader as Eld. Buttler [*sic*] thinks him to be, then his view should be studiously and universally inculcated. If he is not, then surely the sooner, and the more emphatically, that the people are informed of this fact, the better it will be for them, and the more pleasing it will be to the Lord.”⁵⁰

Littlejohn was annoyed, disappointed, and on the verge of severing his ties with Seventh-day Adventists. He was motivated from theological concerns to some degree, but his primary objection related to James White and his leadership. Though Littlejohn expressed some of these concerns to Ellen White during her summer visit, he now gave his opinion much stronger. In a long, yet insightful statement, Littlejohn demonstrated that his problem with *Leadership* rested primarily with the man it greatly honored. He

⁴⁹ Wolcott H. Littlejohn to Ellen G. White, October 26, 1874.

⁵⁰ Emphasis is in original. Wolcott H. Littlejohn to Ellen G. White, October 26, 1874.

wrote,

I can but think that Bro. White's power instead of being increased, as many still desire that it should be has need rather of limitation and restraint. Our people need to be taught that they must lean more upon God and less upon him. While Bro. W. has many qualities which fit him for successful leadership in a limited degree, he has also qualities, as I think that he, himself will confess, which render it necessary that he should be carefully watched, and boldly opposed whenever it becomes apparent, that he is either faulty in spirit or mistaken in judgment. This privilege I claim, not only for myself, but also for the humblest Sabbath Keeper in our midst. I shall insist upon the privilege of all to oppose him by voice, or pen, or vote, whenever in their judgment the occasion demands it. I believe that the time has now come, when criticism should be encouraged rather than discouraged. I do not mean by this, that any should indulge [*sic*] a factious, faultfinding spirit, but that each should assert his individuality before God.⁵¹

Littlejohn did not want White to receive more authority in the church. He claimed that during his observation of White “for several years” (they met in 1867) that he had “at times been hard and harsh and even oppressive upon some of his brethren in the Ministry.” For this reason he felt “forced to the conclusion that [White] would be better off, as well as the cause, if his power had been decreased, and their Christian manhood enlarged.”⁵² According to Littlejohn's perspective, if someone determined that a leader acted (or reacted) in a displeasing manner, this act (or acts) disqualified the leader as a legitimate authority.

Though Littlejohn articulated his frustrations regarding *Leadership* in relation to White and his occasional severity, it is evident that his concerns were also theologically and philosophically based. Unfortunately he did not elaborate his views in a published article during the Leadership Controversy. Therefore, an analysis of his stance is limited to his October 26, 1874, letter to Ellen White and her subsequent, yet only partially

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Emphasis is in original. Ibid.

available, testimony to him in January 1875. In spite of the scarcity of sources, it seems that Littlejohn's definition of a leader resembled Heroism and was rooted in Trait Theory, though not as much as Butler's view. He believed that a true leader should possess certain "qualities" that enabled them to successfully lead. Likewise other "qualities," such as "hard" or "harsh" behavior and "oppressiveness," rendered the leader unfit for such a position. In addition to necessary traits of character, a true leader was to also model great men, such as "Luther, Wesley, and Miller." Unlike Butler, however, Littlejohn believed some heroes were beyond emulation—namely, the great leaders of the Bible. No modern leader could assume the status of "a second Moses" or a second "Paul." By such a distinction Littlejohn expressed his belief in a "limitation" or "restraint" of power.

In regard to the followers, Littlejohn explained that everyone should have the "privilege" to "boldly oppose" their leader "by voice, or pen, or vote, whenever in their judgment the occasion demands it." It was their duty to critique this leader as long as this did not develop into "a factious, faultfinding spirit." In short, "each should assert his individuality before God." From these statements it seems that Littlejohn favored a high view of the right of private judgment. In his opinion individuality was key to successful leadership as all were to be thinkers, well-equipped to assist with their own opinions and advice. The follower's duty, according to Littlejohn, also involved constructive criticism, presumably to prevent the leader from possessing too much authority. The operative word was "individuality," which seems to bear resemblance to Ralph Waldo Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance, which redefined Thomas Carlyle's Heroism to some degree.⁵³

⁵³ Cf. R. W. Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Boston, MA: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1850); Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. In his famous essay on *Self-Reliance*, Emerson declared, "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your

Littlejohn stressed that leaders and followers “must lean more upon God,” yet it was “the mind of the Spirit of the Lord [that] should be sought after more earnestly.” The people were to follow the Spirit rather than a human leader or even a council. In other words, when “any person” believed the Spirit personally guided them in a way that “conflict[ed] with” their leader, they “should be taught that it is his [or her] privilege and duty to follow” their own conviction. Though Littlejohn correctly suggests that it is good to rely on the Spirit’s guidance, he ignored the difficulties associated with testing the accuracy of the Spirit’s leading. Since it is quite difficult, if not impossible, for this to be done on an *individual* basis, such clarification is crucial.

According to Littlejohn’s other comments, it is possible to see that he reacted strongly against the extreme of autarchy, which made him lean toward the extreme of anarchy.⁵⁴ In reality, however, Littlejohn and Butler both advocated one-person leadership.⁵⁵ While Butler advocated that every person’s judgment should be submitted to the one leader, Littlejohn proclaimed that the one leader should submit to the judgment of every person.

Ellen White’s Testimony on Leadership

Ellen White’s reaction to *Leadership* has been misunderstood in two primary ways. First, scholars have assumed that Ellen White disapproved of Butler’s *Leadership*

private heart is true for all men—that is genius.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays*, Merrill’s English Texts (New York: Charles E. Merrill Co., 1907), 79. Throughout his teachings, Emerson’s mantra was, “self-trust,” which he believed to be “the essence of heroism” where “all the virtues are comprehended.” *Ibid.*, 145, 38.

⁵⁴ Ellen White referred to Littlejohn’s view of leadership as one of “extreme independence.” Ellen G. White, Testimony Re. Wolcott Littlejohn, MS 003, 1875.

⁵⁵ Ellen White explained in regard to Littlejohn, “This is one man power indeed which would claim that everything must bend to this one mind, this one will.” *Ibid.*

from the outset, and second, it has been suggested that she “vigorously opposed” Butler’s position.⁵⁶ In reality, Ellen White supported Butler’s position without any major objections for a full year, and possibly a little longer. In response to Littlejohn in November 1874, Ellen White explained,

That it would have been best to rescind the vote in regard to leadership [at the 1874 General Conference] I am not certain. With a few minds it might have been better, but as far as the majority was concerned, would, I think, have done harm and placed Brother Butler in a wrong position before them. I thought upon reflection that the least said about it before that crowd the better it would be for the interest of the cause.⁵⁷

In summary, Ellen White believed that “to make a special move to call the attention of the people to leadership at the present time, and to treat it as a dangerous matter that must be acted upon at once . . . would not be wise policy.”⁵⁸

One reason Ellen White did not wish the matter discussed is that she did not see anything theologically wrong with *Leadership* at the present time.⁵⁹ “The dangers” that Littlejohn perceived “in reference to Brother Butler’s position” were expressly denied by

⁵⁶ Michael W. Campbell, “Butler, George Ide and Lentha (Lockwood),” *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, (2014), 331. Vande Vere suggests that Ellen White “doubted the policy was appropriate for the modern age” when Butler’s *Leadership* essay was read to her and her husband. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 41; cf. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 70; White, *The Progressive Years*, 464. Schwarz and Greenleaf make a similar statement, claiming, “Although the General Conference in session endorsed Butler’s views, the action made the Whites nervous. Shortly after, Ellen pointed out the dangers of one person’s judgment controlling the minds of others.” Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 250. Harry H. Leonard reflects this sentiment as well, suggesting that “neither Ellen nor James was entirely happy with Butler’s pamphlet on leadership” from the very beginning. Leonard, “The Adventist Rubicon,” 46. There is no solid evidence that the General Conference endorsement of *Leadership* made “the Whites nervous” at the time. It took James White several weeks to realize the perils of Butler’s philosophy and Ellen White at least a full year to understand the dangers.

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 4, 1874, LT 058, 1874.

⁵⁸ Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 11, 1874, LT 061, 1874.

⁵⁹ Ellen White did speak against one-person leadership earlier in 1874 in a manner more analogous with extreme independence. She did not specifically apply the principles of this testimony to Butler’s view (extreme submissiveness) until January 1875. (Ellen G. White, *Methods of Labor/Work in the Cities*, MS 001 1874; Ellen G. White to Charles Lee, October 24, 1874, LT 054, 1874).

Butler, who “maintain[ed] strongly [that they] d[id] not exist.”⁶⁰ Ellen White believed Butler and felt comfortable admitting, “I see no one who has been in any special danger through *believing or accepting* Brother Butler’s view of the matter.” After making this statement, however, she did admit that she might not fully understand his philosophy of leadership.⁶¹

Although Ellen White did not yet perceive Butler’s view to be dangerous, she also did not believe his position on leadership was perfect. It was a serious attempt to explain an important subject and should therefore be improved as time allowed. She explained to Littlejohn,

In regard to leadership, we want no special reaction to take place upon that subject . . . We think in a very short time there will be a correct position taken on this question, in every conference in the different states. But there is a work that needs immediate attention, a work that cannot be deferred. We must work in the right direction at the right time.⁶²

In her view, Ellen White “thought that until all parties could have their minds brought more directly to leadership and thoroughly canvas the matter and get a fair understanding of the positions of all, nothing could be done in reference to the subject.”⁶³

Though Ellen White realized that Butler’s essay was not perfect, her perspective on the principles of leadership deepened some after her January 3, 1875, vision—a perspective that would deepen even more throughout the 1880s and 1890s. G. I. Butler and W. H. Littlejohn were both prominent figures in this vision, even though the details

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 4, 1874, LT 058, 1874.

⁶¹ Emphasis is mine. Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 11, 1874, LT 061, 1874.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 4, 1874, LT 058, 1874.

were not strictly limited to them or the Leadership Controversy. Ellen White wrote a testimony for each man in January 1875,⁶⁴ writing to Butler first. This testimony to Butler redefined *Leadership* in two primary ways. First, it addressed the topic of authority, and second, it provided an alternate definition of the right of private judgment.

Ellen White confronted the issue of authority directly, stating to Butler, “Your position on Leadership is correct if you give to the highest organized authority in the church what you have given to one man. God never designed that his work should bear the stamp of one man’s mind and one man’s judgment.”⁶⁵ Two points are emphasized in this statement: first, Ellen White affirmed that there is a supreme earthly authority in the Adventist Church, and second, that this authority was not limited to one individual. In an even stronger statement, she wrote, “When this power which God has placed in the church is accredited to one man, and he is invested with the authority to be judgment for other minds, then the true Bible order is changed. Satan’s efforts upon such a man’s mind will be the most subtle and sometimes overpowering, because through this mind he thinks he can affect many others.”⁶⁶

While it is clear that one leader should not rule the church, further examination is required to accurately identify “the highest organized authority” of the church. Ellen White explained, “I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which

⁶⁴ The testimony to Butler does not include the date of the vision, but some letters from Butler confirm that this was part of “the vision” that was received on January 3, 1875—a vision Butler called “that view of me.” George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875; George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

⁶⁵ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 45; cf. White, 3T, 493.

⁶⁶ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 44-45; cf. White, 3T, 493.

is the highest authority God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”⁶⁷

According to this statement (as well as others within the testimony), Ellen White affirmed that the General Conference was “the highest authority God has upon the earth.” Since this can be interpreted three different ways, it is necessary to ask the following questions: 1) Does Ellen White indicate that the General Conference *in session* is the highest authority in the church; or, 2) that the General Conference *Executive Committee* holds this position; or, 3) that both of these groups of people were the highest authority (i.e., that the Executive Committee possesses ultimate authority between General Conference sessions)? Most scholars only affirm the first option, interpreting the references to “the General Conference” within *Testimony, No. 25* as the General Conference in session.⁶⁸ Though this interpretation is generally accepted in Adventist historiography, there is a major problem with this understanding, as the immediate context *and* the historical background do not support this isolated reading. Rather, it is evident that Ellen White placed the highest authority within the Adventist Church in the hands of the General Conference Executive Committee *and* General Conference sessions *at this point in time and in this particular document.*

The discussion of authority and the General Conference began with a reference to the “position of independence” that Butler exhibited in his work in Kansas and Missouri “two years” earlier between December 1872 and February 1873. As demonstrated in

⁶⁷ White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*, 43; cf. White, 3T, 492.

⁶⁸ George R. Knight, for example, states, “While denying the authority of any one person as leader, she [Ellen White] upheld the authority of the General Conference *as a body.*” Emphasis is mine. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 71.

chapter 2, Butler followed his own protocol during this time, ignoring “the repeated and urgent calls of the General Conference” Executive Committee (and James White) to return to Battle Creek to organize the next General Conference session. Butler’s actions caused the annual meetings of the General Conference to convene about three months later than the previous year. This stubborn resistance exemplified one extreme of one-person leadership since one man (Butler) ignored the judgment of his brethren and caused important church business to be delayed. Ellen White explained it to Butler as follows: “Your error was in persistently maintaining your private judgment of your duty against the voice of the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth. After you had taken your own time, and after the work had been much hindered by your delay, you came to Battle Creek in answer to the repeated and urgent calls of the General Conference.” In regard to context, it is clear that a General Conference session could not repeatedly call or urge Butler to return to Battle Creek. Too much time elapsed between each annual session and slow methods of communication prohibited this possibility during any single session. In regard to the historical background, it is also evident that a General Conference was not in session when Butler was urgently and repeatedly called to Battle Creek. When the General Conference meetings did commence in this city, Butler was already there and remained for the duration. Based upon this information, then, it is apparent that Ellen White included the General Conference Executive Committee as part of “the highest authority God has upon the earth.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 42-43; cf. White, 3T, 492. This conclusion is supported through an analysis of the broader historical background as well. Beginning with official church organization in 1863, the adopted Constitution of the General Conference clearly defined the authority of the General Conference Executive Committee (Byington and Smith, “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1863, 204-205). The articles of the Constitution (particularly articles IV and V) specified that the General Conference Executive Committee held more authority than

Though it seems that Ellen White intended to place ultimate authority in the hands of General Conference sessions as well as the Executive Committee, she did not do so *explicitly* in her testimony to Butler in 1875. Rather, it seems that the statement is purposefully inclusive in order to refer to General Conference sessions as well as the General Conference Executive Committee.⁷⁰ Since Ellen White wrote of the General Conference in broad terms in 1875, it seems best to acknowledge her endorsement of both aspects of the General Conference—the Committee and sessions—rather than focus on only one aspect. Though Ellen White wrote in this manner in the mid-1870s, she did continue to grow in her understanding of ecclesiastical authority as the Adventist Church expanded and grew, and eventually rewrote her 1875 testimony to Butler near the end of her life with a new emphasis.

any other officer or group of persons in the church between the annual sessions of the General Conference. A few months after the General Conference was organized, James White specifically stated that “the General Conference Committee [is] the highest authority in the church” ([White], “Systematic Labor,” *RH*, November 24, 1863, 204). Similarly, throughout subsequent years, when Adventists needed an answer from “the highest authority,” the General Conference Executive Committee responded (General Conference Committee, “Question,” *RH*, April 24, 1866, 168). In an article titled, “Organization,” which appeared in August 1873, James White clearly and emphatically emphasized the ultimate authority of the General Conference Executive Committee. He stated, “Our General Conference is the highest earthly authority with our people, and is designed to take charge of the entire work in this and all other countries. The officers of our State Conferences, and, also, those of our institutions located at Battle Creek, are expected to respect our General Conference Committee as the men appointed to take the general supervision of the cause in all its branches and interests . . . It is the duty of our General Conference Committee to understand every rope in the ship, to know how matters are moving, to correct wrongs, and to sustain the right. And it would be an exhibition of consummate folly for those who know but very little of the workings of the cause to set up their judgment against those who know all about it, and are annually appointed to take charge of it.” W[hite], “Organization,” *RH*, August 5, 1873, 60.

⁷⁰ The *implicit* acknowledgment of the authority of General Conference sessions was apparently the norm in the 1860s and 1870s. Cf. Byington and Smith, “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1863, 204-205; [White], “Systematic Labor,” *RH*, November 24, 1863, 204; General Conference Committee, “Question,” *RH*, April 24, 1866, 168; White, “Gratuities and Wills,” *RH*, August 20, 1872, 76; J[ames] W[hite], “Reflections by the Way,” *ST*, October 7, 1875, 372; J[ames] W[hite], “The Voice of God,” *RH*, December 2, 1875, 172; J[ames] W[hite], “Bible Religion,” *RH*, December 9, 1875, 181; James White, “Conference Address to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Convened at Battle Creek, Mich., March 1, 1878,” *RH*, March 14, 1878, 81; J[ames] W[hite], “Grow Old Gracefully,” *RH*, May 15, 1879, 156; Charles P. Whitford, “The T. & M. Work in District No. 1, Vt.,” *RH*, January 13, 1876, 15.

After discussing “the highest authority” in the church, it is also important to recognize the limitations Ellen White subtly placed on its jurisdiction. In order to do so, it is first necessary to understand Ellen White’s definition of the right of private judgment—her second major critique of Butler’s *Leadership*. According to Ellen White, this Protestant principle has two divergent extremes, both of which deviate from a balanced interpretation of this philosophical concept. Leaders go to one extreme when they surrender their private judgment to one person. “Satan is pleased to have one man’s mind and one man’s judgment control the minds and judgment of those who believe present truth,” she wrote.⁷¹ Leaders that suffer from this extreme lack self-confidence and doubt their ability and fulfill their duty.⁷² These leaders are not “self-reliant,” oftentimes because “they have shunned responsibilities . . . assuming . . . their deficiencies would be brought to light.”⁷³ Since these people have no confidence that God is leading them,⁷⁴ they rely too much on “one man to plan for them, and to do the thinking they are highly capable of doing themselves.”⁷⁵ Those lacking self-confidence “will feel inferior, and leave an impression of inferiority, which will greatly limit the influence you might have for good.”⁷⁶ Rather than produce strong leaders, Ellen White suggested that those who go to this extreme are nothing but “mere machines.”⁷⁷ This radical view of private judgment

⁷¹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 58; cf. White, 3T, 500.

⁷² White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 65; cf. White, 3T, 505.

⁷³ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 45; cf. White, 3T, 493.

⁷⁴ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 46; cf. White, 3T, 494.

⁷⁵ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 49; cf. White, 3T, 495.

⁷⁶ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 66; cf. White, 3T, 506.

⁷⁷ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 50; cf. White, 3T, 495.

is only one example of one-person leadership.

The second extreme of the right of private judgment is the polar opposite of the first as well as another example of one-person leadership. Ellen White explained, “If you form too high an opinion of yourself, you will think your labors are of more real consequence than they will bear, and you will plead individual independence which borders on arrogance.”⁷⁸ When leaders go to this extreme, holding “marked and decided views in regard to individual independence and right to private judgment,” they refuse to counsel with others in regard to their duty. As these leaders “firmly maintain” that they have “done right in following [their] own convictions of duty,”⁷⁹ they demonstrate their belief that they are the only one that can tell themselves what to do or how to do it. Due to its individualistic nature, this interpretation of private judgment is also an extreme identifiable as one-person leadership. Whereas the first extreme places all authority into *one person’s hands*, this second extreme places all authority into every *individual’s hands*. In either radical view of private judgment, authority is centralized in one person.

According to Ellen White, leaders “should avoid either extreme.” The best safety measure to take in order to avoid polarization is to “form a correct estimate of yourself.” It is possible to “be dignified without vain self-confidence,” she reasoned. Leaders “may be condescending and yielding without sacrificing self-respect or individual independence.” If this balance can be maintained, then leaders “may be of great influence with those in the higher as well as the lower walks of life.”⁸⁰ True leaders, therefore,

⁷⁸ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 66; cf. White, 3T, 506.

⁷⁹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 43; cf. White, 3T, 492.

⁸⁰ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 66; cf. White, 3T, 506.

should maintain a balanced interpretation of private judgment and possess an appropriate amount of authority (i.e., authority that is properly allocated among the entire leadership) to fulfill their duties.

According to Ellen White, Butler was guilty of both of these extremes at different times during his first years as General Conference president. On the norm, he relied too much upon James White for orders throughout the 1870s. As a result, Ellen White informed Butler, “You will never gain the experience necessary for any important position in being told what to do.”⁸¹ Though this extreme of one-person leadership was Butler’s greatest weakness, he also shifted to the other extreme for a brief period of time in late 1872 and early 1873. When Ellen White commented on the topic of authority and acknowledged “the highest authority” within the church, she made these statements in relation to Butler’s experience regarding the second extreme of one-person leadership. As mentioned previously, she wrote, “You had very marked and decided views in regard to individual independence and right to private judgment. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”⁸² During the fall of 1872 Butler seemingly became proud when he thought he had solved the crisis in Battle Creek regarding dress reform. Due to his success he apparently decided that he no longer needed the advice of his peers and traveled south to minister wherever he wished, without seeking the advice of others. He also sought to dictate James White’s duty, refusing to hold another General Conference session until

⁸¹ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 48; cf. White, 3T, 495.

⁸² White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 43; cf. White, 3T, 492.

White could be present. Therefore, it is in the context of the extreme of ultra-independence (rather than ultra-submissiveness) that Ellen White endeavored to discuss the topic of authority.

This assessment is vital in understanding Ellen White’s view of the jurisdiction of “the highest authority” within the church. She reproved Butler for not listening to the elected officers of the General Conference when his presence was requested in Battle Creek to assist in *business matters*. Butler was the president of the General Conference at this time, yet refused the repeated and urgent calls from his brethren. These details emphasize that Ellen White limited the jurisdiction of General Conference officers to matters of business executed by church employees. In other words, she did not specify that the highest power in the church had any authority over anyone in regard to *doctrine* or *theological matters*—such an interpretation is not supported by the context of the testimony or the accompanying historical background.

This information clarifies the following statement: “But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”⁸³ Ellen White did not suggest that any Adventist should surrender his or her private judgment to the General Conference officers in regard to *matters of conscience*. Rather, a minister of the gospel or church administrator should not oppose the General Conference Executive Committee’s recommendation when they agree that said person should labor in a particular area or fulfill a certain mission-related task. Instead, church employees should surrender their “private judgment” and counsel with others in regard to

⁸³ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 43; cf. White, 3T, 492.

ministerial duties. Therefore, Ellen White indicates that the General Conference Executive Committee and General Conference sessions hold “the highest” position of authority within the church, but does not suggest that these bodies have the authority to encroach upon matters of conscience by dictating doctrinal beliefs or establishing theological interpretations for the body of believers.⁸⁴

Ellen White’s definition of authority and perspective on the right of private judgment are in stark contrast to Butler’s views on these topics. Butler gave one man “the highest authority” in the church while Ellen White affirmed that it was best to distribute this authority among a group of leaders. Butler’s *Leadership* also abolished the Protestant principle by requiring people to surrender their judgment to one person. In contrast, Ellen White declared, “Individual independence and individual power is what is now needed. Individual character need not be sacrificed, but modulated, refined, elevated.”⁸⁵ Though she indicated that this independence should be balanced, it is evident that her “testimony

⁸⁴ It is important to recognize that this conclusion coincides precisely with Article V of the Constitution of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Article V specifies that the Executive Committee’s jurisdiction is limited to “ministerial labor” and “missionary labor.” Byington and Smith, “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1863, 205. Early Adventists avoided anything that appeared creedal, or even quasi-creedal. For this reason, it was understood that the General Conference had no jurisdiction over matters of conscience. If the general body discussed and voted on a theological issue, this adopted position still needed to be ratified by other Adventists before it was considered a standard belief or practice. Systematic Benevolence, or even the organization of the General and State Conferences, illustrates this point. Once approved by a general conference, the voted positions on these issues were presented to Adventists in different localities for their ratification. This practice was still followed in the 1870s, which is demonstrated by the vote to adopt Butler’s leadership theology. The General Conference resolution stated, “That we fully indorse the position taken in the paper read by Eld. Butler on Leadership . . . And we hereby express our full purpose of heart faithfully to regard these principles, and *we invite all our brethren to unite with us in this action.*” Emphasis is mine. Butler and Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the S. D. A. General Conference,” *RH*, November 25, 1873, 190. Littlejohn recognized that this official policy of the General Conference still needed ratified by Adventists throughout the country. He claimed that the crafters of this resolution were afraid of stating their acceptance of Butler’s essay too strongly and the resolution was toned down “lest their doctrine should prove too bold *for general acceptance.*” Emphasis is mine. Wolcott H. Littlejohn to Ellen G. White, October 26, 1874.

⁸⁵ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 51; cf. White, 3T, 496.

endorsed the right of private judgment”⁸⁶ rather than abolish the Protestant principle.

Ellen White’s Testimony to W. H. Littlejohn

On January 15, Ellen White wrote, “I was shown, Jan. 3, that our dear Brother Littlejohn was going into darkness.” She explained that he had “a very, independent mind” that believed that “he would sacrifice his right of private judgment if he should yield his ideas and plans to accept the judgment and views of any other man.” He was a man, she stated, that “takes the position not in words but actions of infallibility . . . for it is next to an impossibility for Brother Littlejohn to yield or give up his opinion.” Ellen White stated, “This bears not the marks of God’s hand. The word of God will not justify [his] extreme independence. This is one man power indeed which would claim that everything must bend to this one mind, this one will.”⁸⁷

Ellen White tried to help Littlejohn understand that his views on leadership were insufficient in a similar way to Butler’s. As stated previously, both men advocated one-person leadership, but from opposite extremes: Butler preferred a more centralized authority while Littlejohn opted for an authority entirely devolved of power. Though both perspectives were flawed, Ellen White was apparently more upset with Littlejohn. Butler’s view did possess dangerous tenets, but it was at least written for a positive purpose. Whereas Butler tried to proactively assist the church with a much-needed policy on leadership, Littlejohn made no real contribution. He was overly critical and refused to write out his perspective for publication.

⁸⁶ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, Testimony re. Br. Littlejohn, MS 003, 1875.

Butler's Reaction to Ellen White and Her Testimonies

While the testimony to Littlejohn was probably conveyed to him by mail, the testimony to Butler was delivered to him orally in early January 1875. Since Butler honestly believed that Ellen White endorsed the general principles of his *Leadership* prior to this time, her testimony came as a complete shock to him.⁸⁸ Before she had even finished writing the whole thing, “a portion of it was read . . . in the presence of quite a number.” After hearing the first section, Butler immediately wondered if he should continue in the work. Once the manuscript was finished and he sat through the second reading, Butler believed that his “question was answered plainly.”⁸⁹ The testimony explicitly stated, “If it is as you think impossible for you to change this phase in your character [i.e., Butler’s doubting and critical nature], your best course would be to remove yourself for the time being entirely from the cause of God, and leave the course of others unobstructed from your defects of character.”⁹⁰ After hearing these words, the situation was clear to Butler. “My mind was settled before the reading of the testimony was finished,” he explained, and “I resigned [all public offices] at once.”⁹¹ Butler returned to his home in Iowa on January 14, 1875,⁹² and spent the next few months in

⁸⁸ George I. Butler to Ellen G. White, December 26, 1876, White Estate Received Correspondence File, EGWE-GC.

⁸⁹ George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875.

⁹⁰ White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25 [Special], 72.

⁹¹ George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875. These facts correct three misunderstandings regarding this situation. First, these events happened in early January 1875, not in 1874. Second, Butler did not resign from the General Conference presidency in 1874. James White was elected General Conference president in 1874 and held that office in January 1875. Third, no “eighteen-page letter” was ever sent to Butler as the testimony was delivered orally. Cf. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart*, 42; Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 71-72; Leonard, “The Adventist Rubicon,” 46; Michael W. Campbell, “Butler, George Ide and Lenth (Lockwood),” *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, (2014), 331.

⁹² George W. Amadon, diary entry January 14, 1875.

reflection. This fiery reaction was visually illustrated sometime later when he bought back all of the copies of his *Leadership* tract that he could find and burned the lot of them.⁹³ For this reason only two copies of his tract are currently known to exist today.⁹⁴

The 192-page *Testimony for the Church, No. 25* was sent to the press incrementally between January 15 and 25, 1875,⁹⁵ which meant that Ellen White wrote furiously for about three weeks.⁹⁶ Though the document did not include Ellen White's testimony to Littlejohn, the testimony to Butler was featured as well as James White's article on leadership that originally appeared in the *Signs of the Times*. Unlike White's "Earnest Appeal," which was printed in *Testimony, No. 23*, his article on "Leadership" was paginated along with the *Testimony*, giving the impression that, though not derived from a vision from the Lord, this article was as important as the rest of the contents. Such an inclusion surely gave White's article on leadership more visibility and authority even though Butler's *Leadership* retained official status.

A few weeks after the *Testimony* was published "letters of confession from Eld.

⁹³ George I. Butler to Frank E. Belden, March 14, 1907.

⁹⁴ J. B. Frisbie and J. Q. A. Haughey preserved the two extant copies of the tract that are currently known to exist. Both copies are located at CAR.

⁹⁵ The document was published between January 25 and February 4. George W. Amadon, diary entries January 15-25, 1875; "The Recent Testimonies," *RH*, February 4, 1875, 48. This is corrective of Arthur L. White who suggested that Ellen White was about to publish *Testimony, No. 25* and 26, in November 1874 (White, *The Progressive Years*, 464). In point of fact, *Testimony, No. 24* was the only one about to be published in November 1874. George Amadon "made up 1st form of Test. No. 24 & got it done" on December 3, 1874. George W. Amadon, diary entry December 3, 1874. It was not until after her January 3, 1875, vision that Ellen White even considered *Testimony, No. 25* let alone *No. 26*. The Review Office first received copy for *Testimony, No. 25* on January 15, 1875. George W. Amadon, diary entry January 15, 1875. *Testimony, No. 26* did not appear until very early March 1876. James White, "Special Notice," *RH*, March 9, 1876, 80; cf. "Testimony to the Church," *RH*, January 20, 1876, 24; J[ames] W[hite], "[Testimony to the Church, No. 26]," *RH*, February 10, 1876, 48.

⁹⁶ Cf. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*, 180.

Butler . . . were read to the Church.”⁹⁷ Five days later, Butler’s confession appeared in the *Review*. He began with a statement of assurance in regard to the *Testimonies*: “I believe the testimonies to be of the Lord,” he wrote with confidence. “And, however closely they may search me, I mean to receive them and profit by them.” Butler’s first item of confession relating to his doctrine on leadership, stated,

The testimony has referred to certain positions I have written out in an article entitled, “Leadership,” which has had a certain circulation. In this article, I ascribed to Bro. White the position of a leader in this work, and undertook to define the duties toward him as such of those composing this body, claiming that in “matters of expediency” connected with the cause his “judgment should be given the preference,” &c. But the testimony to me plainly states that my position on this subject is wrong in ascribing to one man such a position. I therefore wish all to understand that I hereby forever renounce the position taken in that article so far as it ascribes to any man such authority. I accept the teaching of this testimony upon this point unqualifiedly.

After apologizing for his theological mistakes in regard to leadership and authority, Butler also asked forgiveness for several other faults for which the *Testimony* reproved him.⁹⁸

In spite of his apology, Butler remained greatly upset with James White for opposing him on leadership for several months. As Butler later admitted, “Brother White and I had some pretty spicy correspondence after” Ellen White’s vision and *Testimony* on leadership.⁹⁹ One such letter came as a reply to White from Butler on March 29, 1875. Butler was “frank” and “free” in his letter to White. Since “Leadership is exploded” he made it clear to White that he felt like talking to him as he “would to other men.” “I had considerable hope,” he continued, “that I could labor with you in harmony and be a real

⁹⁷ George W. Amadon, diary entry February 20, 1875.

⁹⁸ Geo[rge] I. Butler, “A Confession,” *RH*, February 25, 1875, 70-71.

⁹⁹ George I. Butler to Frank E. Belden, March 14, 1907.

help to you and the cause. But the experience of the last few months has completely killed that hope out of me.” In Butler’s opinion, White knew “how to use the mental and the moral thumbscrew . . . more effectively than any man [he] ever knew.” It was, therefore, very clear that “peace and union” did not exist between the two men.¹⁰⁰

Butler believed that he had “miserably failed” during his administration. To make matters worse, White had apparently remarked that Butler was “nearly insane.” Due to this and other factors, Butler firmly upheld his resignation. His primary support came from the *Testimony*, which stated that he should “remove” himself “entirely from the cause of God” if he could not “change” certain phases within his character. “Here it is plainly stated,” Butler wrote, “that my defects are of such a serious nature that I better be out of the way unless they are changed.”¹⁰¹

The 1875 General Conference Session

The 1875 General Conference session opened on August 15. The topic of leadership was up for discussion and debate during the second day of the conference. Butler was the one to initiate the matter and turned in a resolution that stated:

Whereas, In the session of the General Conference held in the autumn of 1873, a

¹⁰⁰ George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875.

¹⁰¹ The full sentence reads: “If it is as you [Butler] think impossible for you to change this phase in your character [i.e., his doubting and critical nature], your best course would be to remove yourself for the time being entirely from the cause of God, and leave the course of others unobstructed from your defects of character” (White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25 [*Special*], 72). Rather than try to make positive changes, however, Butler believed that the *Testimony* had “aggravated” these shameful characteristics in his life. So, he believed the only thing he could honorably do was “to take this part of the testimony, and act upon it” (George I. Butler to James White, March 29, 1875). It is quite understandable that Butler reacted as he did. Ellen White’s statement, after all, could be viewed pessimistically. It was poorly crafted and could easily be misconstrued. For these reasons it was removed before the public version of *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25 was published. It could also, however, be read with a positive tone as the author intended. The word “if” indicated that everything was conditional, demonstrating the hope that positive changes would be made. What disappointed the Whites was that Butler did not even seem to try to refine his character after receiving the *Testimony*—he just gave up as soon as he heard these words read to him.

resolution was passed endorsing a tract entitled Leadership, written by Eld. Butler; and

Whereas, It has been shown that some of the sentiments contained in said tract were incorrect, therefore

Resolved, That the resolution above referred to be, and the same is hereby, rescinded.¹⁰²

Two important points must be made about this resolution. First, Butler alluded that it was Ellen White's vision (i.e., "it has been shown") that proved "some of the sentiments" in his tract "incorrect." Second, he wanted the *entire* tract rescinded rather than just the offensive portions.

Before the resolution came to a vote, both of these points were contested. James "White made very clear and forcible remarks on the subject," explaining that he had written out his own views on the subject "almost immediately" after Butler's *Leadership* was adopted in November 1873 and "before he knew that any objection was raised against the address referred to." In addition White suggested that his own article "set forth ably the principles of Leadership which, according to the Scriptures, must hold in the church of Christ."¹⁰³

Ellen White apparently supported her husband in these remarks as she also spoke on the issue of leadership. According to Butler, "Brother and Sister White, before the whole General Conference, and the Seventh-day [*sic*] Baptist delegate present, gave me about two hours of scoring and sharp lectures, I suppose for my particular benefit."¹⁰⁴ After the Whites concluded their remarks, the General Conference "moved to amend"

¹⁰² James White and U. Smith, "Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Session of the S. D. Adventist General Conference," *RH*, August 26, 1875, 59.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ George I. Butler to Irving Keck, May 17, 1905, Albion Fox Ballenger, Edward S. Ballenger, and Donald E. Mote Papers (087), Box 10, Folder 16, CAR.

Butler's resolution "by striking out its second and third clauses, and substituting in their place the following:—

Whereas, Further examination has shown that some of the sentiments contained in said tract were incorrect ; therefore,

Resolved, That the tract referred to be placed in the hands of a committee (said committee to be appointed by this Conference) to be so revised as to correspond with the better understanding which now exists on the subject of Leadership.¹⁰⁵

This amended resolution corrected the two points mentioned above. First, it was now specified that the flaws of Butler's *Leadership* were demonstrated on the basis of "further examination," which removed any allusion to Ellen White's vision. Second, the General Conference also decided it was not best to rescind the entirety of Butler's *Leadership* at this time, but rather wished it "revised as to correspond with" James White's article on the subject. James and Ellen White's counsels precipitated these amendments, which is significant for several reasons. First, the amendment clarified that a correct understanding of leadership could be obtained by a careful study of the Scriptures. Theology, therefore, should not be determined on the basis of contemporary visions, even if they were from the Lord. Second, the Seventh-day Adventist Church needed a policy on leadership. To simply eradicate Butler's entire essay, which did have some good points, would move the church backwards rather than forwards. Though it was not a perfect policy, it was still *a policy* and it was better to amend this document than to have no policy at all. Third, this amendment also shows the struggle and difficulty that Adventists faced as they wrestled with the topic of leadership. About a week before the General Conference (and several months after her January 3, 1875, vision), Ellen White had admitted that she could not "see why the principles of [Butler's] leadership

¹⁰⁵ White and Smith, "Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Session of the S. D. Adventist General Conference," *RH*, August 26, 1875, 59.

[did] not harmonize with [her] views [i.e., visions] the last twenty years.” As a result, she believed it best “to examine the matter more thoroughly and clearly” before simply eradicating the policy that was flawed in regard to the distribution of authority and the right of private judgment.¹⁰⁶ The General Conference delegates apparently agreed with Ellen White, believing it best to study the subject more carefully before making any rash decisions.

After the amended resolution was proposed, “it was carried” and then “unanimously adopted.” The delegates then adjourned until the third session was called later that day. The first item of business during this session of the General Conference was to appoint “U. Smith, S. Brownsberger, and J. H. Kellogg [as] a committee of three to revise the address on Leadership.” With that action, the matter rested for the time being.¹⁰⁷

D. M. Canright and the Resurrection of *Leadership*

The Leadership Controversy persisted throughout the remainder of 1875 and well into 1877. On March 15, 1877, D. M. Canright provided another response to “the leadership question” in an article, titled, “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are not in Harmony with the Body.” The two-part article was an explicit defense of James White *and* an implicit defense of Butler’s *Leadership*. Canright did not

¹⁰⁶ Ellen G. White to William C. White, August 8, 1875, LT 029, 1875. Ellen White admitted on one occasion that she did not always understand her own visions at first. In a private letter she wrote, “Often representations are given me which at first I do not understand. But after a time they are made plain by a repeated presentation of those things that I did not at first comprehend, in ways that make their meaning clear and unmistakable.” Ellen G. White to Sister Simpson, December 20, 1904, LT 329, 1904. What is striking is that despite her own vision in regard to the leadership question, Ellen White hoped that the issue would be settled (even in her own mind) on the basis of further Scriptural study.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

mince his words. In his opinion the Adventist Church only had *one* leader—James White. Though Ellen White had condemned one-person leadership in her *Testimony* to G. I. Butler two years earlier, Canright now unabashedly resurrected this understanding of ecclesiastical authority.

The article began with the problem: there have been murmurers against James and Ellen White since the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist movement and this attitude has led to disunity. These “little parties” of “disaffected ones” that “formed in opposition to the body, and have drawn off by themselves” were then challenged to a debate. Quoting from Isaiah 1:18, Canright enticed dissenters with the phrase: “Come, let us now reason together.”¹⁰⁸ After giving some of the “great and fundamental pillars” of the Adventist faith, he came to his primary point: leadership. Throughout this discussion Canright knowingly paraphrased Butler’s *Leadership* numerous times and used many of the same key words, such as “special” and “great.”¹⁰⁹

The opening sentence of his “proposition” on leadership states, “Whenever God has had a special work to do in the earth, he has always selected some *one* to begin that work, carry it on, and bring it to a successful termination.” From the outset, Canright advocated one-person leadership and stated his endorsement of this philosophy more strongly throughout the remainder of his essay. “Any important work, to be successful, must have *a* leader with recognized authority and proper ability,” he wrote. Like Butler, Canright also appealed to reason with examples from the cultural milieu:

What would our nation do without *a* president, without *some head*? Were all men left

¹⁰⁸ D. M. Canright, “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are not in Harmony with the Body,” *RH*, March 15, 1877, 84.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

every one to do what was right in his own eyes, confusion and anarchy would soon be the result. So generally is this fact felt that all nations without an exception, appoint themselves *some head*, either *a king*, emperor, president, or the like. What could we do in a war without *a commander-in-chief*, *a general* who should have absolute command *over all* the army? If every soldier were allowed to go by himself, to fight as he pleased and when he pleased, any army would soon be defeated. Now if order, union, and government, are so very necessary in human affairs, why not in the work of God?¹¹⁰

Canright's reliance on Butler's argumentation did not end with the statement; rather his entire article was essentially a mirror image of the philosophy promoted in *Leadership*. Not surprisingly, Canright presented a list of "great" men throughout the Bible and Christian history that a true leader would emulate. These men, in order of appearance, included: Noah, Moses, Ezra, John the Baptist, Martin Luther, and William Miller. Of all these men, Canright repeatedly used words and phrases such as: "no ordinary man," "of great mental strength," "[a leader] that God raised up," "the special agent of God," etc. All such words and phrases were clear echoes or quotations from Butler's *Leadership* essay.¹¹¹

In conclusion to the first part of his article, Canright provided a five-point summary. "1. There must be *a* leading mind in the work." Though "Christ was leader of his people," the great men of history "in *a* leading position in his work on earth" never usurped "the place of Christ." "2. This person must be *a* man of more than ordinary capacity, not *a* man of second or third rate ability. 3. He must be *a* man naturally constituted to be independent and to lead in his work. 4. He must be specially adapted to the peculiar work to be done." This leader must also be "chosen by the Lord." "5. There

¹¹⁰ Emphasis is mine. *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

is not a single case in all the history of God's work, from Adam down, where the Lord has had a special and great work to be done, in which this work has been commenced by *one man*" and if that leader were to apostatize, God would raise "up another man to take his place . . . and thus finish the work to be done at that time."¹¹²

The second half of Canright's article was an application of "these facts and principles" to the Seventh-day Adventist movement. He then reiterated some of fundamental beliefs of Adventism, reminding the "murmurers" that these beliefs that they also held were only taught by "Seventh-day Adventists." In Canright's opinion, this was "very strong" evidence that the Adventist movement was a special movement that God had "raised up." He then directed a question to the dissenters: "But stop, my brother, where did you get this present truth? You did not find it out, did you? I know that you did not, and you know it too. You know that I tell the truth when I say that there is not a Seventh-day Adventist in all this broad land but that has received these blessed truths through the very channel to which I have been pointing." As he continued, Canright eventually revealed "the very channel" of which he spoke. "Well, who started this [movement]?" he wrote. "Where is *the fountain head* of this stream, so far as human means are concerned?" With a witty tone, Canright replied, "You anticipate my answer, for you all know very well."¹¹³

Just in case the reader did not anticipate Canright's chosen leader, he made his case explicit as he drew his article to a close. As with Butler's presentation, the final

¹¹² Emphasis is mine. Ibid.

¹¹³ Emphasis is mine. D. M. Canright, "A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are not in Harmony with the Body," *RH*, April 12, 1877, 116.

“great” man to be listed was James White. “Suffice it to say, that all the Sabbath-keeping Adventists, from the start, looked to Brother White as the leading mind in the work.” In Canright’s opinion, White was the father of *all* Adventists because he started the work with the first Sabbatarian Adventist paper. No Adventist, therefore, could disavow the fact that they would not have “present truth” without the leadership of this one man. White was also the great organizer, which brought order and stability to the cause. In contrast to the unified organization that White introduced, Canright concluded his article on leadership with the following statement regarding renegade Adventists: “They set up a terrible cry of ‘popery’ and ‘one-man power.’ Some of them left our ranks entirely, and have done nothing but howl about it ever since. They have proved themselves zealous and able in only one direction, viz., to tear down and scatter.” With this conclusion, Canright’s point was clear: those who reject their one chosen leader bear the fruit of “confusion and ruin.” If the Advent movement was God’s movement, then He had selected only *one man* to lead it to victory.¹¹⁴

A stronger endorsement of *Leadership* could not be given. What seems surprising, perhaps, is that Canright could make these statements after Ellen White’s *Testimony* clearly denounced one-person leadership. Though this may seem curious, it was obviously not a radical idea in the 1870s. Canright parroted those within his cultural context, basing his leadership philosophy on Trait Theory as Butler and Littlejohn had done, though in different ways. Though he wrote this article as an attempt to resolve conflict, Canright’s article actually confused the situation further. Nevertheless, the Leadership Controversy was near its end as the General Conference prepared to finally

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 116-117.

rescind the disputed aspects of its policy on leadership.

The 1877 General Conference Session

The 1877 General Conference session commenced on September 20. Shortly before the meetings began, the Whites had “sent a dispatch” asking Littlejohn “to come” to the meetings. He responded quickly and simply, stating, “I will come.”¹¹⁵ Eight days of conference meetings passed, until finally, on September 28, 1877, the General Conference discussed the leadership question. J. H. Waggoner opened with prayer, which was followed by a presentation by “the committee on Resolutions.” The first three resolutions and an accompanying preamble were directly related to the Leadership Controversy. They read:

Resolved, That each year’s experience in this message confirms our faith that God has chosen Bro. and Sr. White to fill a leading position in this work; that we never felt the need of their counsel and experienced labors more than now; and that therefore we earnestly pray God to sustain them with strength and wisdom for their arduous labors . . .

Resolved, That we hereby express our deep gratitude to God for the harmony and power of the third angel’s message which has done so much for us. And

Whereas, During the experience of a quarter of a century of this work we have invariably seen those persons and parties who have separated themselves from us in opposition to the gift of prophecy which God has placed in the remnant church, go into divisions, confusion, or cease to accomplish anything in the work of the present truth; therefore

Resolved, That we hereby express our continued conviction that we are largely indebted to the gift of prophecy, as manifested through sister White, for the harmony and unity which this people enjoy.¹¹⁶

Following the vote to adopt these resolutions (among others), some “interesting remarks were made by Eld. D. M. Canright and others in reference to Resolutions 1, 2

¹¹⁵ Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, September 28, 1877, LT 019, 1877.

¹¹⁶ James White and A. B. Oyen, “Sixteenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, October 4, 1877, 105.

and 3.” Canright then “heartily approved of and indorsed them, and wished that an expression from the congregation might be taken in regard to them.” They quickly responded with “a rising vote . . . showing that the people were entirely in harmony and sympathy with the sentiments expressed in the resolutions.” Immediately after this, “the report of the committee appointed in the annual meeting of the Conference in 1875, to revise the tract on Leadership, was called for.” Unfortunately, Smith, Brownsberger, and Kellogg had made no revisions because they “had not had time to devote to this revision.” Smith then explained that “certain resolutions touching this question had been prepared to be submitted to this Conference” and asked for their endorsement. The two resolutions stated,

Resolved, That we rescind all that portion of the Address on Leadership passed in 1873, which teaches that the leadership of the body is confined to any one man.

Resolved, That the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience.

The General Conference then “accepted the report of the Committee, and unanimously adopted the resolutions.”¹¹⁷

With these resolutions, the Leadership Controversy essentially came to a close after four years of struggles. The Seventh-day Adventist Church finally updated its policy on leadership and broadened the locus of authority. One person could no longer legitimately hold the most power within the Adventist Church. Though the church did decentralize at this time, it is important to note that only “that portion” of *Leadership* that

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 106. This is corrective of Andrew Gordon Mustard, who suggested that *Leadership* was rescinded “by the General Conference session, in August 1875.” Mustard, “James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization,” 175.

gave utmost ecclesiastical authority to “one man” was rescinded. Since it was Butler’s primary purpose to demonstrate this point, it would appear that these resolutions essentially nixed the entire document. Such an assumption would not be entirely accurate, however. Butler’s *Leadership* had made some good points, most notably in recommending that James White was a trustworthy leader. Though all authority should not reside in his hands alone, White had demonstrated his faithfulness and commitment to the Adventist cause throughout the decades. He was a man to be trusted, not suspected of some sort of treason or tyranny. He was not perfect and could sometimes be harsh, yet this did not disqualify him from fulfilling the plans God had set before him. All of these aspects of *Leadership* remained valid and supported one vital principle of leadership that was not rescinded—love and respect. Leaders and followers, both, were to have a mutual love and respect for each other.

After one-person leadership was disavowed, James “White spoke of the pleasure of seeing Eld. W. H. Littlejohn at this meeting, and of the prospect of his once more being united” with Adventists “and laboring in harmony with” them. Littlejohn responded “that the resolutions just passed had cleared away the difficulties that had stood in the way of his active co-operation with the body for the past four years.” He then expressed his desire to “have the privilege of engaging actively in the work of spreading the truth again.” As he listened to Littlejohn’s confession, White quickly wrote out the following resolution and presented it to the General Conference: “*Resolved*, That this Conference invite Bro. Littlejohn to join us in the work in fellowship and in labor.” According to the General Conference minutes, “This was unanimously passed by a rising

vote of the whole congregation.”¹¹⁸

Conclusion

Due to conflicts between leaders in 1866-1873, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists officially adopted a monarchical policy of leadership and authority on November 17, 1873. James White had essentially fulfilled the highest position in the church since the 1840s, yet Butler’s *Leadership* made this concept official policy. This understanding of governance was natural for two primary reasons: first, the church had already operated upon this basis unofficially for more than 25 years, and second, people tend to centralize for protection when unity is threatened. Since this policy fit the mindset of Adventist leaders and provided a basis for restored union, Butler’s *Leadership* was initially received with great excitement.

Shortly after the policy was adopted James White began to react negatively to Butler’s view of leadership and authority. Around the same time, W. H. Littlejohn also spoke out against a monarchical view of governance. Though he accurately determined the theological problem with *Leadership*, his analysis of current events was skewed. Littlejohn began to assert that James White was not trustworthy and that he should be suspiciously watched. This perspective was neither a fair assessment of White, who was a proven leader, nor a safe theory to follow in regard to authority within the church. According to Littlejohn, every person should have the authority to critique his or her leader. By advocating such a view, he recommended a polar opposite perspective from that of Butler. Whereas Butler sought to centralize authority within one person, Littlejohn

¹¹⁸ White and Oyen, “Sixteenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, October 4, 1877, 106.

sought to centralize authority in every individual. In effect, both men advocated one-person leadership, though from opposite extremes. For Butler leadership was defined somewhat monarchically while for Littlejohn it was interpreted individualistically.

The Leadership Controversy grew in intensity until Ellen White's January 3, 1875, vision, which essentially caused an "explosion." Butler was shocked at this time to realize that Ellen White no longer supported his centralized concept of authority. He reacted quite negatively by resigning from his positions and separating his ministerial labor from the official church structure. As he did so, Adventists were able to observe two different leaders live out one of the perspectives of one-person leadership. Though motivated by different causes, Butler and Littlejohn both acted with extreme independence for a period of time.

As the topics of leadership and authority were considered further in 1876 and 1877, Adventists slowly began to realize that it was no longer wise to adhere to a monarchical view of church governance. This transition was not easy, however, as some leaders continued to uphold Butler's position on leadership even after Ellen White's testimony on "Leadership" was published. D. M. Canright, for example, continued to support one-person leadership and sought to convince Adventists that James White should continually hold this position. As a result, James White struggled throughout his remaining days and had to denounce this centralized view of authority several more times before his death.

Ellen White also wrestled with leadership throughout the 1870s. Though her January 3, 1875, vision affirmed that authority should not reside in the hands of one person, she still had questions about the proper definition of leadership. Other leaders,

such as Uriah Smith, Sydney Brownsberger, and J. H. Kellogg, also recognized this difficulty. Though it was determined that these three men should rewrite Butler's *Leadership* to correspond with James White's perspective, such a feat was never accomplished. Rather, Smith presented Seventh-day Adventists with a modified statement on authority—a view that coincided with Ellen White's perspective as defined in her testimony to Butler in 1875. This new statement was adopted as official policy in 1877, which broadened the locus of authority to some degree.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Impact of the Leadership Controversy on the Adventist Church

Though the 1877 General Conference session negated one-person leadership, several Adventists were still allured by the concept of centralized authority. As indicated previously, D. M. Canright essentially endorsed G. I. Butler's *Leadership* during the spring of 1877 in spite of Ellen White's repudiation of this concept in *Testimony, No. 25*. In addition to individuals, such as Canright, the church at Battle Creek also upheld one-person leadership longer than expected, waiting until 1880 to corporately correct the pledge it made to Butler's *Leadership* in 1873. While the first, third, and fourth resolutions remained virtually unchanged, the second resolution, and its statement about leadership, was significantly altered. Table 1 lists the titles of each pledge and compares the second resolution of the 1873 version with the revisions made in the 1880. The most important changes in this resolution are bolded for emphasis.

The changes to this pledge indicate that the Battle Creek church was finally ready to repudiate Butler's *Leadership*. The new pledge also provides an interpretation of the resolution adopted by the General Conference in 1877. Rather than limit the highest authority to the General Conference, the Battle Creek church also gave James and Ellen White a special authority within this sphere (i.e., "those whom we believe the Lord has

Table 1. Comparison between the 1873 and 1880 pledges on Leadership

The 1873 Pledge on Leadership ¹	The 1880 Pledge on Leadership ²
Pledge of the Church at Battle Creek, and others, to the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, Nov. 14-18, 1873	Pledge of the Church at Battle Creek, and Others, to the General Conference of S. D. Adventists
<p>2. We acknowledge the correctness of the principles set forth in the article written by Bro. Butler, entitled, “Leadership ;” principles which are sustained by reason and Scripture, and which are made binding in a practical manner on this people by the testimonies of the Spirit of the Lord to us ; and we pledge ourselves, with these principles thus clearly defined before us, to stand by, and stay up the hands of, those who are called to lead out, and bear responsibilities in this cause, and to bring ourselves into strict scriptural discipline in the work of the Lord. And every act of rebellion against these principles shall be promptly discountenanced, and immediately corrected, so far as in our power to correct it.</p>	<p>2. We acknowledge the correctness of the principles now entertained by S. D. Adventists on the subject of Leadership ; namely, that the General Conference, aided by the counsel of those whom we believe the Lord has chosen to lead out in this work from its very commencement, and by the spirit of prophecy graciously manifested among us, is the highest authority ordained by the Lord in his church, and that the action and advice of this authority, in all matters of expediency and discipline, should be received and respected by all this people. And we pledge ourselves, on these principles, to stand by and stay up the hands of those who are called to lead out and bear responsibilities in this cause, and to bring ourselves into strict Scriptural discipline in the work of the Lord. And every act of rebellion against these principles shall be promptly discountenanced and immediately corrected, so far as in our power to correct it.</p>

chosen to lead out in this work . . .” is an implicit reference to James and Ellen White).

James White was deeply distressed by Adventists that chose to continually

¹ Emphasis is mine. [Seventh-day Adventist Church of Battle Creek, MI], “Pledge of the Church at Battle Creek, and others, to the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, Nov. 14-18, 1873,” WDF 453 #3, CAR.

² Emphasis is mine. “Battle Creek,” *RH*, February 5, 1880, 89; cf. George W. Amadon, diary entry February 1, 1880.

support Butler's *Leadership* after Ellen White's testimony in 1875 and the General Conference statement of 1877. He was the man pressed into this supremely authoritative position and as a result of this pressure, the Leadership Controversy followed White to his grave. Despite the attempts of some, he continually and vigorously rejected this privilege by writing (and republishing) on the topic of one-person leadership several more times before his death in 1881. At least one article appeared in the *Review and Herald* in 1878,³ two more in 1880,⁴ and a final occurrence showed up in the first edition of White's second autobiography, *Life Sketches* (1880). In the latter publication, White admitted, "Some, taking extreme positions upon the subject of leadership, have been ready to acknowledge us [i.e., James White] as *the* leader of this people. This position, however, we [i.e., James White] have never for a moment accepted. Those who in all honesty took this position, did not clearly see the subject in all its bearings upon a people that might consent to be led, and upon *the one* who might accept the position of leader."⁵

Though some Adventists had monarchical leanings, the greater problem to persist in the Adventist Church in the 1800s was more analogous with the concept of oligarchy. In 1863 the Seventh-day Adventist Church officially organized the General Conference as the highest authority within the denomination and drafted a Constitution that defined its jurisdiction. The 1863 Constitution specified that "the officers shall hold their offices for the term of one year, and shall be elected at the regular meetings [i.e., the General

³ James White, "Leadership," *RH*, May 23, 1878, 164.

⁴ J[ames] W[hite], "Leadership," *RH*, May 13, 1880, 312; J[ames] W[hite], "Leadership," *RH*, June 17, 1880, 392.

⁵ Emphasis is mine. James White, *Life Sketches: Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors of Elder James White and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1880), 396-397. It is interesting to note that this chapter was removed from later printings of this book.

Conference in annual session].” These officers were elected as representatives and given authority to govern the church throughout their term in office. The three-member Executive Committee held the foremost position among these officers. According to Articles IV and V of the Constitution, this Committee directed the Treasurer in how to receive and disburse church monies, maintained “the general supervision of all ministerial labor,” and oversaw “the special supervision of all missionary labor . . . [with] the power to decide *where* such labor is needed, and *who* shall go as missionaries.”⁶

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is officially organized as a representative body and has been structured in this manner since 1863. In spite of this, it has struggled to *effectively function* in this manner at times. While Butler’s *Leadership* directed the Adventist Church toward a monarchical form of governance in 1873, the 1877 statement on authority enabled the church to continually flirt with oligarchy-like power.

While the 1863 Constitution inferred that the General Conference Executive Committee was the highest authority within the denomination, the 1877 statement on authority officially declared this to be the case. The resolution stated, “That the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, *as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction.*”⁷ While emphasizing that “the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people,” the voted resolution modified the phrase, “will of the body,” with the subsequent statement, “as

⁶ Emphasis is mine. Byington and Smith, “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1863, 205.

⁷ Emphasis is mine. White and Oyen, “Sixteenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, October 4, 1877, 106.

expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction.” As with Ellen White’s statement on authority in *Testimony, No. 25*, the 1877 resolution was written in a broad way in order to include the authority of the General Conference Executive Committee as well as General Conference sessions.

In spite of this, scholars have emphasized the 1877 resolution as an endorsement of only General Conference sessions as the ultimate authority.⁸ Once again, however, this limitation is problematic. Within one month of the 1877 General Conference session S. N. Haskell provided his stance of the new statement on authority within the context of the General Tract and Missionary Society. Partly quoting the 1877 resolution on authority, Haskell wrote, “The General Conference Committee has the supervision of this work, in common with every other branch of this cause, and this Committee, among S. D. Adventists, is *the highest authority under God upon earth.*”⁹ Haskell was not the only person to interpret the 1877 resolution on authority in this manner. In 1881 an article appeared in the *Signs of the Times and Review and Herald* that suggested those that “fill the offices . . . of the General Conference” held “the highest earthly authority amongst us.”¹⁰

Similarly, in 1886 R. M. Kilgore quoted Ellen White’s 1875 testimony to Butler as an authoritative source, affirming that “the General Conference [w]as the highest

⁸ Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 251-252; Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 72.

⁹ Emphasis is mine. S. N. Haskell, “General Tract and Missionary Society, Its Nature and Object,” *RH*, October 25, 1877, 132.

¹⁰ [J. H. Waggoner], “Our Position and Work,” *ST*, August 4, 1881, 342; J. H. Waggoner, “Our Position and Work,” *RH*, August 23, 1881, 139-140; cf. Byington and Smith, “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1863, 205.

authority.”¹¹ Based upon the context and historical background, it is evident that Kilgore referred to the authority of the Executive Committee rather than General Conference sessions. His article related to tithing, and according to the 1863 Constitution of the General Conference, it was the responsibility of the Executive Committee to direct the Treasurer of the General Conference in regard to receiving and distributing tithes and offerings.¹² With this information in mind, Kilgore provided the following hierarchy of church authority, from top to bottom: the General Conference, State Conferences, the local congregations, and individuals and families. Kilgore then stressed that those at the lowest level (i.e., individuals) were to give their tithes to the “common treasury in each church,” which eventually moved up to “the proper authority” in the General Conference, “whose duty it is to disburse the Lord’s money.”¹³ In light of the context and Constitution of the General Conference, Kilgore affirmed that the Executive Committee held the highest authority within the church, as it was their responsible to direct the Treasurer in how “to receive and disburse means.”¹⁴

The “Church Manual” of 1883 also granted the General Conference Executive Committee the highest authority.¹⁵ Rather than define the authority of General Conference sessions, the Manual firmly upheld the 1863 Constitution of the General

¹¹ R. M. Kilgore, “You Have Robbed Me,” *RH*, August 3, 1886, 482.

¹² Byington and Smith, “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1863, 205.

¹³ Kilgore, “You Have Robbed Me,” *RH*, August 3, 1886, 482.

¹⁴ Byington and Smith, “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1863, 205.

¹⁵ This “Church Manual” was published in the *Review and Herald*, but later rejected by Seventh-day Adventists because they believed it to be too creedal and a detractor from the Bible.

Conference. The Manual stated, “The body having the highest authority among Seventh-day Adventists, is styled The General Conference. It takes the supervision of the work in the whole field, both within and outside the territory covered by State Conferences. Its powers are distinctly defined in the Constitution of the General Conference.”¹⁶ Since the 1883 “Church Manual” cited the Constitution and referred to the General Conference in a broad way, it is evident that it included the authority of the General Conference Executive Committee.

Not surprisingly, the 1877 resolution on authority also referred to the authority of General Conference sessions. James White gave the clearest example of this in his address to those at the 1878 General Conference session, when he stated to the delegates, “Our people have chosen you to act. They acknowledge you to be the highest earthly authority. They confide much to you. They virtually say, Let the General Conference lay plans, and we will act the part God has assigned to us in their execution.”¹⁷ Based upon contemporary evidence, it is clear that the 1877 resolution upheld the General Conference Executive Committee as well as General Conference sessions as the ultimate earthly authority within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁸ This definition of authority impacted George Butler and Ellen White for the rest of their lives.

The Impact of the Leadership Controversy on G. I. Butler

¹⁶ W. H. L[ittlejohn], “The Church Manual,” *RH*, September 11, 1883, 586.

¹⁷ White, “Conference Address to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Convened at Battle Creek, Mich., March 1, 1878,” *RH*, March 14, 1878, 81.

¹⁸ This remains the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* ([Takoma Park, MD]: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1932), 9; General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 18th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 31.

During the 1880s Butler held a second term as president of the General Conference. His last three years in office were particularly controversial, as Ellen White explained in 1888, “Elder Butler . . . has been in the office three years too long, and now all humility and lowliness of mind have departed from him. He thinks his position gives him such power that his voice is infallible.”¹⁹ A short time later, she also wrote, “I am pained to the heart, for I have been shown that if our brethren had stood in their proper place, seeking counsel of God and trusting in God, they would not have placed Elder Butler in the place of God and Elder Butler’s judgment would not have been considered as the judgment of God.”²⁰

As a result of this type of behavior, several scholars have suggested that Butler never really gave up his philosophy described in *Leadership*, but rather applied it to himself in the 1880s. Barry D. Oliver, for example, has stated, “Butler did not modify his leadership style very much until well after he was voted out of the presidency at the 1888 General Conference session.”²¹ George R. Knight concurs with this analysis, stating, “It was easier for Butler to reject his ideas on the ‘great man’ theory of church leadership verbally than to actually stop practicing them.”²² Similarly, Schwarz and Greenleaf also suggest that, “During those years [i.e., the 1880s] it is doubtful that Butler ever relinquished his views of a strong presidency” as presented in *Leadership*.²³

It should be emphasized that these scholars have correctly identified the

¹⁹ Ellen G. White to Mary White, November 4, 1888, LT 082, 1888.

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Discernment of Truth*, MS 016, 1889.

²¹ Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure*, 63.

²² Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 73.

²³ Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 251.

problem—Butler did abuse his authority. This does not, however, mean that he justified his conduct on the basis of his leadership policy of 1873. *Leadership* was written in order to resolve a conflict between various leaders and James White. Within the document Butler never claimed authority for himself, or suggested that the General Conference president should possess the highest authority within the church. On the contrary, the highest authority resided in a gifted apostle specifically selected by God. In 1873, Butler claimed that James White fit this bill. If someone were to replace White on the basis of the principles in *Leadership*, it would also be necessary for this new leader to fit the criteria of a gifted apostle that was specifically appointed by God. Butler did not claim this position for himself and repeatedly rejected his *Leadership* tract and its philosophy after 1875.²⁴ Near the end of his life, Butler reaffirmed this rejection, stating, “It don’t put myself [*sic*] as an individual in a very flattering light in introducing a doctrine finally condemned by the testimony [of Ellen G. White] and the General Conference. But I assure you that I accepted this condemnation of the leadership doctrine with great satisfaction and fully believe the position taken by the testimony and the General Conference was the exact truth . . . I was in reality very glad to be corrected.”²⁵ By his own attestation, Butler admitted that the *Testimony* “settled the point in my mind” forever.²⁶

In all fairness to Butler, his attested and permanent rejection of *Leadership* must

²⁴ This became clear shortly after Ellen White’s testimony to Butler was written. At this time he confessed, “I therefore wish all to understand that I hereby forever renounce the position taken in that article [*Leadership*] so far as it ascribes to any man such authority. I accept the teaching of this testimony upon this point unqualifiedly.” Butler, “A Confession,” *RH*, February 25, 1875, 70.

²⁵ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

²⁶ George I. Butler to Frank E. Belden, March 14, 1907.

be given weighty consideration. Though it is true that he took too much power, a more persuasive cause for his actions is found in the 1863 Constitution of the General Conference, Ellen White's *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*, and the 1877 statement on authority made by the General Conference. These authoritative documents all affirm that the three-person General Conference Executive Committee was the ultimate earthly power in the church between the annual meetings. By *officially* centralizing authority within this small group of persons, it became difficult for Adventists to truly operate as a representative body between annual sessions of the General Conference. Though the officers and Executive Committee were elected in a democratic manner, they effectively functioned like an oligarchy throughout the 1880s and 1890s. This reality became more and more pronounced during these years, particularly because the General Conference Executive Committee had complete control of all missionary labor—determining *who* would go and *where* they would go. (Ellen White was particularly alarmed in 1891 when this highest authority chose her as a missionary to Australia).²⁷ Since the highest authority in the church remained in the hands of this small group of leaders, it was only natural for Butler, as the General Conference *president*, to assume the position of first among equals. Butler (as well as other General Conference presidents) did not need to operate upon his rejected policy on leadership since he could assume a prime role on the basis of official church policy—policy that supported an oligarchic definition of authority between the annual meetings. This reality is vital for understanding subsequent events in Seventh-day Adventist history and the development of Ellen G. White's view of leadership and authority.

²⁷ Allan G. Lindsay, "Australia," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, (2014), 625.

The Impact of the Leadership Controversy on Ellen G. White

In the early-mid 1880s the General Conference Executive Committee did officially decentralize slightly as it was expanded, first from three to five members in 1883,²⁸ and then from five to seven in 1886.²⁹ In spite of this, power primarily centralized in the 1880s and 1890s with the presidents assuming the authoritative position of first among equals.³⁰ As a result of Butler's second presidential term, which climaxed at the historic gathering at Minneapolis in 1888, Ellen White began to change her own view of leadership and authority.³¹ Her perspective grew with time and experience, particularly when she noticed that the locus of authority did not broaden as the church grew larger. By 1891 it was quite clear that she no longer considered a small group of persons to be the highest authority within the church.³²

Beginning in the mid-1870s, the topics of leadership and authority became wrapped up in the potent phrase, "the voice of God." In *Testimony for the Church, No. 24*, Ellen White emphasized that "God has invested his church with special authority and

²⁸ Geo[rge] I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference Proceedings: Twenty-Second Annual Session," *RH*, November 20, 1883, 733.

²⁹ Geo[rge] I. Butler and U. Smith, "General Conference Proceedings: Twenty-Fifth Annual Session," *RH*, December 7, 1886, 763.

³⁰ Cf. Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Prophet and the Presidents* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011), 58-205; Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 248-257.

³¹ Ross E. Winkle states, "By the time of the General Conference session of 1888, Ellen White's frustration with centralizing tendencies had reached a peak. This session marked a turning point in her attitude toward the authority of the General Conference." Ross E. Winkle, "Voice of God, General Conference as the," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, (2014), 1254.

³² Ellen G. White, Board and Council Meetings, MS 033, 1891; Ellen G. White, Diary/Regarding O. A. Olsen, MS 114, 1894; Ellen G. White, Concerning the Review and Herald, MS 057, 1895; Ellen G. White, To the General Conference & Our Publishing, MS 066, 1898; Ellen G. White to Ellet J. and Jessie Waggoner, August 26, 1898, LT 077, 1898; "General Conference Proceedings: Remarkable Occasion—Reproofs—Confessions—Repentance—Shouts of Victory," *GCDB*, February 24, 1899, 74.

power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising; for in thus doing he despises *the voice of God*.”³³ Though she hinted that the “special authority” within the church was like “the voice of God,” she did not identify this special authority within this document. A short time later, in *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*, Ellen White named this authority, writing, “*God has invested in his church [authority and influence] in the judgment and voice of the General Conference.*”³⁴ In this same document, she also declared that “*the voice*” of the General Conference was “*the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth.*”³⁵

Though Ellen White formalized all three of these statements during the Leadership Controversy, the latter two were written in direct response to Butler’s philosophy of one-person leadership. As Ross E. Winkle has observed, these statements from *Testimony for the Church, No. 25* are “Ellen White’s earliest statements on the General Conference as the ‘voice of God.’”³⁶ Since this concept originated during the Leadership Controversy, it is also evident that Ellen White connected “the voice of God” with the General Conference Executive Committee as well as General Conference sessions.³⁷

Interestingly, all of Ellen White’s subsequent uses of the phrase, “the voice of

³³ Emphasis is mine. Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 24* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1875), 125; White, 3T, 417. This phrase also became part of the book *Acts of the Apostles*. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 163-164.

³⁴ It is important to realize that both of these statements begin the same (i.e., “God has invested his church”) and include the key word “voice.”

³⁵ White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*, 43-44; cf. White, 3T, 492-493.

³⁶ Winkle, “Voice of God, General Conference as the,” 1253-1254.

³⁷ See the discussion on pages 138-141.

God,” were made in a negative manner with primary reference to the General Conference Executive Committee.³⁸ An analysis of these statements illustrates Ellen White’s explicit renouncement of her former view that this small group of persons was as “the voice of God.” In 1891 she began her lament, stating, “I was obliged to take the position that there was not the voice of God in the General Conference management and decisions . . . Many of the positions taken, going forth as the voice of the General Conference, have been the voice of *one, two, or three men* who were misleading the Conference.”³⁹ Sometime later, she specified, “The voice *from Battle Creek*, which was regarded as authority in telling how the work should be done, is no longer the voice of God.”⁴⁰ Ellen White also stated in 1895, “The voice of the General Conference has been represented as an authority to be heeded as the voice of the Holy Spirit. But when *the members of the G. C. Committee* become entangled in business affairs and financial perplexities, the sacred, elevated character of their work is in a great degree lost.”⁴¹

Since these statements indicate that Ellen White no longer considered a small group of persons to be “the voice of God,” it is evident that she eventually rejected her former claim as expressed to Butler in 1875. By the 1890s her view of ecclesiastical authority broadened. Whereas she realized that *one person* should not possess too much

³⁸ Winkle has recognized that Ellen White’s “references to the General Conference as the voice of God were directed at the leaders of the church in between General Conference sessions.” *Ibid.*, 1256.

³⁹ Emphasis is mine. Ellen G. White, Board and Council Meetings, MS 033, 1891.

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White to The Men Who Occupy Responsible Positions in the Work, July 1, 1896, LT 004, 1896.

⁴¹ Emphasis is mine. Ellen G. White, Relation to G. C. Committee to Business Interests, MS 033, 1895. During the following year, she made a similar statement about another small group of men at the General Conference, declaring, “Who can now feel sure that they are safe in respecting the voice of the General Conference Association?” Ellen G. White to Ole A. Olsen, May 31, 1896, LT 081, 1896.

power in the mid-1870s, she also recognized that it was unwise for *only a few persons* to have too much authority and control after 1888. In light of this new understanding, Ellen White progressively began to exhort Seventh-day Adventists to recognize this new perspective on leadership and authority, which resulted in some major ecclesiastical changes in 1901.

During the 1901 General Conference session, which is a watershed moment in the history of Seventh-day Adventist organization, Ellen White gave explicit and urgent calls to adopt her new perspective on leadership and authority. She made several points very strongly during the 1901 General Conference session. First, the oligarchical power in Battle Creek (i.e., the “narrow compass” or the “[Executive] Committee . . . [of] merely half a dozen”) must be reorganized to include more people. As she stated at a different time during these meetings, “Two or three voices are not to control everything in the whole field.” Second, the General Conference should include members from the educational and medical sectors of the church. Third, the locus of authority should “constantly broaden”—a principle of leadership that Ellen White stated was God’s desire.⁴² In summary, she explained, “That these men [in responsible positions] should stand in a sacred place, to be as the voice of God to the people, *as we once believed the General Conference to be,—that is past.* What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle.”⁴³

⁴²Ellen G. White, Talk/“I would prefer not to speak today . . .,” MS 043d, 1901 (cf. Ellen G. White, Talk/“I would prefer not to speak today . . .,” MS 043a, 1901; Ellen G. White, Talk/“I would prefer not to speak today . . .,” MS 043c, 1901); Ellen G. White, Talk/Regarding the Southern Work, MS 037, 1901.

⁴³ Emphasis is mine. “General Conference Proceedings: First Meeting, Tuesday, 9 a.m., April 2,” *GCDB*, April 3, 1901, 25.

In response to Ellen White's calls for reorganization, the Adventist Church did broaden the locus of authority by expanding the General Conference Executive Committee to 25 members.⁴⁴ More significantly, union conferences were created "as the constituent bodies of the General Conference." As Barry D. Oliver explains, this effectively decentralized much of the "decision-making from the General Conference administration to union conference executive committees."⁴⁵ Specifically, it allowed those "on the ground" to take care of their own missionary fields rather than allow the General Conference Executive Committee in Battle Creek to have complete control of all missionary work. Though other important changes were made in 1901, the establishment of union conferences enabled the Adventist Church to function as a representative body more effectively.

Ellen White wrote once more on the topic of church governance for the 1909 General Conference session. This statement denotes her final view regarding the topics of leadership and authority and highlights important contrasts from her perspective in the 1870s. She declared, "At times, when *a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God's work, I have said that I could no longer regard the voice of the General Conference, represented by these few men, as the voice of God.*" Once again, Ellen White admitted her perspective had changed. Whereas she once believed that "a small group of men" could represent "the voice of God," she again

⁴⁴ Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, 108.

⁴⁵ Barry D. Oliver, "General Conference Sessions of 1901 and 1903," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, (2014), 839.

affirmed that she could no longer regard this as true. This did not imply that an ultimate authority was removed from the Adventist Church, but rather indicates that her view on this point was redefined. She continued,

*But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field should not be respected. God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the 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.*⁴⁶

Unlike her previous statements, it is now *explicitly clear* that Ellen White considered General Conferences *sessions* to solitarily be the highest authority in the church. Her definition of “General Conference,” is firmly recognizable by the use of the indefinite article (“a General Conference”), her description of this body (“composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all part of the field”), her use of the phrase “the general body,” and her specific negation of oligarchic power (“a small group of men”). Rather than re-endorse her view of leadership in the 1870s, Ellen White completely changed it by broadening her concept of authority in the Adventist Church.

This interpretation is further supported by the fact that Ellen White’s declaration at the 1909 General Conference session was an explicit alteration to her testimony to Butler in 1875. Rather than write a completely new statement on the locus of authority, Ellen White chose to re-write the second, fourth, and fifth paragraphs of her testimony on “Leadership” found in *Testimony for the Church, No. 25*. Table 2 compares these two statements with underlined words showing the exact same wording in both documents,

⁴⁶ Emphasis is mine. Ellen G. White, Talk/The Spirit of Independence, MS 038a, 1909; Ellen G. White, 9T (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 1909), 260

the *italicized words* noting very similar wording or minor additions, and the **bolded words** highlighting significant changes or additions.

Table 2. Comparison between Ellen G. White’s 1875 and 1909 statements on leadership and authority

The 1875 Statement on Leadership and Authority ⁴⁷	The 1909 Statement on Leadership and Authority ⁴⁸
<p><u>I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.</u></p>	<p><u>I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body.</u></p> <p>At times, when a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God’s work, I have said that I could no longer regard the voice of the General Conference, represented by these few men, as the voice of God. But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field should not be respected. God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority. The error that some are in</p>
<p><i>But you greatly err in giving to one man’s</i></p>	<p><i>authority. The error that some are in</i></p>

⁴⁷ Emphasis is mine. White, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 25, 43-45; cf. White, 3T, 492-493.

⁴⁸ Emphasis is mine. White, *Talk/The Spirit of Independence*, MS 038a, 1909; White, 9T, 260.

Table 2—Continued

mind and judgment that authority and influence which God has invested in his church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference.

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.

When this power which God has placed in the church is accredited to one man, and he is invested with the authority to be judgment for other minds, then the true Bible order is changed. Satan's efforts upon such a man's mind will be the most subtle and sometimes overpowering, because through this mind he thinks he can affect many others. Your position on Leadership is correct if you give to the highest organized authority in the church what you have given to one man.

When this power, which God has placed in the church, is accredited wholly to one man, and he is invested with the authority to be judgment for other minds, then the true Bible order is changed. Satan's efforts upon such a man's mind would be most subtle and sometimes well-nigh overpowering, for the enemy would hope that through his mind he could affect many others. Let us give to the highest organized authority in the church that which we are prone to give to one man or to a small group of men.

Ellen White clearly wrestled with the principles of leadership throughout her lifetime. Rather than hold a stagnant view, her understanding grew considerably over time and with experience. Though she had affirmed that “the highest authority” in the church resided in the hands of the General Conference Executive Committee *as well as* General Conferences sessions in the 1870s, it became clearer after 1888 that she believed no one should surrender their private judgment to any one person *or a small group of persons*. Ellen White, therefore, rejected a monarchical form of ecclesiology in the 1870s and later disavowed an oligarchic model of church governance in the 1890s and 1900s. This was accomplished when she realized that it was safest to broaden the locus of authority in corresponding measure with the growth of the church. Her maturing view on

this topic is most noticeable when comparing her 1875 and 1909 statements. In 1875 she gave utmost authority to “*the General Conference,*” whereas by 1909 it was clear that only “*a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field*” should possess ultimate authority.

Ellen White never *explicitly* reaffirmed that the General Conference was “the voice of God”⁴⁹ after the 1870s. She became increasingly cautious of such a weighty phrase, clearly revoking her earlier endorsement that the Executive Committee of the General Conference was “the voice of God” on earth. When she rewrote her view of leadership and authority in 1909, she reaffirmed that “the General Conference, represented by . . . [a] few men, [was not] as the voice of God” *and* specifically abstained from using the phrase, “the voice of God” in relation to General Conference sessions. Numerous events in the 1880s and 1890s motivated her to use less weighty phrases (“be respected” and “have authority”) to describe the highest authority within the church. Ellen White was not so cautious in the 1870s, but as she continued to journey through life, her concept and expression of leadership and authority continued to broaden and refine as the Adventist message spread around the world.

Conclusion

Shortly before his 80th birthday, George Ide Butler sat down to reflect once more upon the Leadership Controversy of the 1870s. As he ruminated on the past, he wrote

⁴⁹ Some scholars suggest that Ellen White reaffirmed her belief that the General Conference is as the voice of God. For example, Winkle suggests that Ellen White “seems to have come full circle to her earlier high view of the authority of the General Conference.” Winkle, “Voice of God, General Conference as the,” 1256. The only support for this conclusion is derived from some statements in *Acts of the Apostles*, which were originally written in the 1870s. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163-164, 195-196. Though these statements were republished in 1911, they do not *explicitly* suggest that the General Conference is the voice of God.

down some of his thoughts to C. C. Crisler, stating, “I was grateful that the Leadership question had at last led us to much greater light than we had had before and made the way to a better understanding of the principles of church government than we had ever had in our lives before.”⁵⁰ Butler’s hindsight provides a valuable perspective. Between the 1840s and 1863, James White was essentially the one man to lead Sabbatarian Adventists. Due to this practicality, Adventists were essentially organized monarchically during this period, at least in the limited sense of one-person leadership. When they officially organized as a denomination in 1863, Seventh-day Adventists established the General Conference as the highest authority within their midst. Though this significant step enabled the church to move forward more practically with its mission, at least two major issues relating to leadership and authority were not addressed at this time: the authority of General Conference sessions and James White’s position within the Adventist Church.

First of all, the authority of the General Conference Executive Committee was clearly defined while the authority of General Conference sessions was merely inferred or assumed. In fact, the 1863 Constitution of the General Conference made few references to these annual meetings at all. This unbalanced emphasis allowed the three-person Executive Committee to assume the highest authority within the church between General Conference sessions each year. Since the Adventist Church was small in number and limited in its missionary outreach, this quasi-oligarchic arrangement was not really problematic in the 1860s and 1870s. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, however, this form of church governance began to cause major problems, primarily because this small group

⁵⁰ George I. Butler to Clarence C. Crisler, September 25, 1914.

of persons held the entire responsibility of deciding who would serve as a missionary and where they would go.

The second undefined matter regarding leadership and authority related to James White specifically, and was the primary challenge leaders confronted on these subjects in the 1860s and 1870s. Since one person governed Adventists quite closely between the 1840s and 1863, it became difficult for other leaders to know how to relate to White after denominational organization. Though the 1863 Constitution gave White no special status or authority within the church, several *Testimonies* from Ellen White indicated that he was to act as a “Counselor” and “reprover” among his brethren. Other leaders struggled to understand how they were to operate according to official policy while following the advice of a divinely selected “Counselor.” This situation appeared more and more paradoxical during the years following White’s first stroke.

James White was immediately unable to fill his leadership responsibilities when he received this major stroke on August 16, 1865. By necessity, others were required to promptly take his place. These leaders were not prepared to make such a quick transition and as they wrestled with church business matters it eventually became clear that people were backsliding spiritually and that the denomination was spiraling toward financial ruin. As White recovered, he realized that the church was in trouble and sought to guide others back toward spiritual and financial progress. White sought to fill his role as a “Counselor” and “reprover” during this time and met considerable resistance from other leaders. Since Ellen White supported her husband in his efforts, they both received much criticism from their closest friends.

G. I. Butler realized that there was a crisis among leaders and observed that

important questions relating to leadership and authority remained undefined. Since this caused great difficulties for Adventists, he worked to provide an adequate answer. He realized the paradox: church policy affirmed that the General Conference Executive Committee was the highest authority within the church between annual sessions while Ellen White's *Testimonies* affirmed that James White should act as "Counselor" for the Adventist Church—a role that seemed to suggest a position of ultimate ecclesiastical authority. Butler's *Leadership* essay was his response to this dilemma and provided the church with a definition of leadership and authority that seemed to make sense at the time. For these reasons it was initially received as "new light" and officially adopted as General Conference policy. This response, however, quickly met resistance as it placed White in the position of a divinely selected monarch. This policy also effectively moved the Adventist Church in a backward direction by reverting to the previous practice of leadership between the 1840s and 1863.

James White was probably the first to react against Butler and his new position on leadership and authority, with Wolcott Littlejohn raising his voice of protest about the same time. Throughout 1874 it became increasingly clear that a new controversy had developed and that Littlejohn would lead the revolt against *Leadership* and the man the document placed on the top rung of the church hierarchy. In spite of such resistance, most Adventists supported Butler's view, including Ellen White. She saw no one in any special danger for believing or accepting the principles described in *Leadership* for at least a full year, perhaps realizing the dangers first when she received her January 3, 1875, vision. This vision, however, did not answer all of Ellen White's questions about leadership and authority and she continued to search for a balanced perspective. Though she understood,

and spoke against the dangers of one-person leadership, she could not fully perceive how Butler's *Leadership* had contradicted her own testimonies on the subject, particularly in how they related to her husband—the man God had shown her should act as “Counselor” of the church. As a result, she continued to grow and develop throughout her lifetime, giving her final response to the Leadership Controversy of the 1870s in 1909, just six years before her death.

In spite of Ellen White's 1875 testimony to Butler, which explicitly renounced the concept of one-person leadership, many Adventists continued to support the doctrine. The Adventist Church did not rescind *Leadership* in 1875 or 1876 for this reason. After many more difficulties, including church trials, unkind letters, and personal remarks, the church finally rescinded the concept of one-person leadership in September 1877. In spite of this vote, however, several Adventists still believed that James White should possess utmost authority within the church. Though problems regarding leadership and authority persisted after 1877, Butler's *Leadership* prompted Adventists to move forward and search for a clearer articulation of leadership and authority that could be practically carried out within the denomination.

Though many lessons can be learned from the historical details of the 1860s and 1870s, one point should be emphasized by way of conclusion. The Whites were concerned at times during these years that the Adventist Church would die out. Though they did not believe that the success of the movement depended upon their own leadership, they did fear for “the permanency of the cause.” Would God let the church splinter and fall apart? It seemed that at many different intervals “the Cause” would come to nothing. As D. M. Canright poignantly observed during the midst of the Leadership

Controversy, “Our numbers are so few,⁵¹ and our strength so small that we cannot afford to waste our strength by divisions among those who ought to be the strong leading minds in this work. It is sad to think how much valuable time and talent has been lost to the work on this account.” With courage and hope, Canright continued, “We have the utmost confidence that the hand of God is guiding in this work and that it will be carried forward to success.”⁵² About 150 years have passed since Canright also disclosed his fears for the permanency of the cause as well as his faith in its eventual success. From today’s perspective, it is perhaps most significant to acknowledge that the Adventist Church did *continue, expand, and grow* throughout many more trials and difficulties. It seems evident, therefore, on the basis of historical reflection, that God’s leading hand did guide the church through the midst of crisis, time after time. Since new crises will arise, it is appropriate to remember Ellen White’s reaction at the very beginning of the Leadership Controversy. Though she still wrestled with questions about leadership, she had peace because she knew there was—and still is—a True Leader present in the Church. Therefore, she could state with confidence,

If there must come a crisis, let it come. God knows all about it. The work and cause are His. He will steer the ship Himself. We long and pray that we may be strengthened for duty and braced for any move from any source. If this work was ours we might well fear and faint, but it is not. God will take a worm, if necessary, and thresh mountains. He can use the weakest instruments to accomplish great results. My faith and confidence in God and this truth were never stronger than at the present time.⁵³

⁵¹ The denomination had about 18,000 members at this time. “Close of the Conference,” *RH*, August 26, 1875, 61.

⁵² Dudley M. Canright to Ellen G. White, August 4, 1875.

⁵³ Ellen G. White to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, November 11, 1874, LT 061, 1874.

APPENDIX A

G. I. Butler's *Leadership*

LEADERSHIP

[The following Essay was adopted by the General Conference, at Battle Creek, Mich., Nov. 14, 1873.]

THERE never was any great movement in this world without a leader ; and in the nature of things there cannot be. As nature bestows upon men a variety of gifts, it follows that some have clearer views than others of what best advances the interests of any cause. And the best good of all interested in any given object will be attained by intelligently following the counsels of those best qualified to guide. There never can be real union of counsel and action without the judgment of some person is regarded of importance and special weight. While the minds of men are so various and contradictory, and while the counsels of some would lead to destruction, success will be apt to attend that movement which closely follows the suggestions of those whom experience teaches give intelligent and judicious advice.

A true leader represents and embodies the views and will of those who follow his counsels. His success is their success. The difference between the true leader and the tyrant is this : While the latter exercises influence and authority to gratify his own wishes or caprice, the former labors for the good of those he represents, and to carry into effect their wishes.

Never can much be accomplished in any movement until those interested become settled in their minds that the one of their choice is worthy of their confidence and support. Confusion will mark their counsels, and their strength will be wasted in laboring to no purpose, or in opposite directions. Efficiency is the result of wise leadership. All, therefore, who are interested in the success of any cause are interested in the success of the ones they have chosen to lead out. They represent

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the united interests of all. And in supporting them they are really supporting their own cause.

An intelligent support of leaders is best obtained when confidence is founded on past faithfulness, and sufficient evidence of fitness, or by reliable evidence of God's special selection. And when all these are combined, the evidence in the case is overwhelming.

When plans are made, somebody must make them, and carry them into effect ; and it is self-evident to all that those should do this who give most evidence of fitness. And the success of all interested will most certainly be obtained by a careful attention to the counsel of such.

It is fully believed that the facts of history and the declarations of God's word show the truthfulness of the above principles. The Bible authorizes the existence of human governments. And what are governments but an application of these principles among mankind? What would an army be without a leader? What would a government be if all concerned in its administration were of equal authority? What would it accomplish if all were captains, equal in command? The whole economy of God, as brought to view in the Bible and in all his providential dealings with the race, recognizes this principle. There is not a single important movement spoken of in Scripture in which there was not some person chosen to lead out. Noah, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Jephthah, Samson, Gideon, Deborah, David, the different kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, and many other persons in the Old Testament might be mentioned as leaders in important movements, while John the Baptist and Christ's apostles furnish examples of similar leadership in the New. And in every great religious movement since their time, God's providence has plainly shown the fact of his selection of proper instruments to accomplish his work. We are free to grant that these have been weak, fallible men, with human infirmities. But this matters not so long as we

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have plain evidence that God chooses to work by such means.

An objection may be raised here that the spirit of the New Testament is against this idea because it is repeatedly stated that Christ is the head of the church, and because our Saviour says, "But be ye not called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth : for one is your Father which is in Heaven. Neither be ye called masters ; for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant ; and whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Matt. 23:8-12. We are as ready to grant the full force of these statements as any. But such a view of them should be taken as will harmonize with other scriptures and with Christ's own appointment.

There is a plain rebuke here to man-worship, and seeking for ourselves honors and titles from men, which is so natural to the human heart. Man is nothing, only as God honors him. And the one he honors is the one who will labor most, and sacrifice most, in his cause. It is not for us to seek place and position for our own aggrandizement. This we are forbidden to do. Christ is the head of all his people. His life must be our example. His Spirit must be our guide. He is the one we must follow. No man must pretend to take his place, or take honors to himself which belong to Christ.

But does it follow from this that there is no authority in the Christian church? that all are exactly upon a level so far as position is concerned? Has Christ forbidden the church to assign to those best qualified to guide and direct any office of authority or influence? Let his word decide this point. "And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples ; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he called apostles." Luke 6:13. When he sent them out, he gave them especial instructions and authority. As he closed his

charge to them, he said, “He that receiveth you receiveth me ; and he that receiveth me, receiveth Him that sent me.” Matt. 10:40.

The word apostle signifies “one sent with commands or a message.”—*Greenfield*. In the ministry of Christ, he saw fit to choose just twelve. But the office was not confined to just those persons originally chosen, for upon the apostasy of Judas, Matthias was set apart to fill the vacancy. “And the lot fell upon Matthias ; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Acts 1:26. Neither was the office confined to just twelve, for Paul and Barnabas are expressly called apostles. They were first solemnly set apart to the work for which God had called them. Acts 13:2. And as they went forward in this work, the inspired record says, “Which, when the *apostles*, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes and ran in among the people,” &c. Acts 14:14. Paul is many times called an apostle. Christ himself is also called an apostle. “Consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.[”] Heb. 3:1. And in the original, others are called so. “Yet I supposed it necessary to send unto you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow-soldier, but your *messenger*.” Phil. 2:25. The word messenger in the original is “*apostolos*,” the very word from which apostle is translated. Paul therefore called him an apostle. When Titus and the “brother whose praise was in all the churches,” and others, were sent to Corinth to attend to things there, Paul speaks of them as follows : “Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow-helper concerning you ; or our brethren be inquired of, they are the *messengers* of the churches, and the glory of Christ.” 2 Cor. 8:23. Read connection. In the Greek, the word messenger is the one from which the word *apostle* is always translated. Paul associates Silvanus and Timotheus with himself, in writing the first epistle to the Thessalonians, and expressly calls them apostles. “Nor of men sought we

glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have used authority [margin] as the apostles of Jesus Christ.” 1 Thess. 2:6.

From these plain facts, it will readily be seen there is no warrant for confining this office to just those twelve persons originally chosen. As the term signifies “one sent with a message,” it seems properly to refer to those specially raised up, and sent out by the providence or Spirit of God, to act a leading part in his work. It is evidently the highest office in the church, for in Paul’s enumeration of the gifts, he says, “And God hath set some in the church, *first* apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” 1 Cor. 12:28. When he says, “*first* apostles,” he must refer to authority or position. Neither is there any intimation that these were designed to continue only for a brief period. On the contrary, the connection plainly intimates they were designed to continue with the church. And in Eph. 4:11, Paul expressly states that apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists, and teachers, were placed in the church for the same object, and to continue the same length of time.

While we are therefore willing to freely admit that Christ is “head of the church,” we must also conclude that some men are placed higher in authority in the church than others. There seems to have been a special precedence existing even among the apostles themselves. Peter, James, and John, were often the special companions of the Saviour

himself, and shared most in his special counsels. And Paul, who reckoned himself not a wit behind the chiefest apostles, did, on a certain occasion, think it best to lay matters before these principal men. "Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of *reputation*, lest by any means I should run, or had

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run, in vain. . . . They who seemed to be somewhat, in conference added nothing to me. But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter ; (for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles ;) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship ; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." Gal. 2:1-9.

Some interesting facts are here stated bearing on this question. Paul, though a special instrument raised up by miracle, thought it advisable to consult with those highest in authority among the circumcision, lest he had "run in vain." But these "pillars" in the church, led by the same Spirit which led Paul, perceived that God, in his providence, had specially appointed and qualified him for his work among the Gentiles. God had given Peter a special position in the work among the Jews. He had all he could do there. So he raised up Paul for another special position. Here was no conflict. Each was to work in his special sphere. But some were higher in position than others, and that by God's appointment. God carries on his work upon the same general principles in all ages. And we have every reason to believe that he has raised up special instruments all the way down to the present time to carry on his work. Luther, Wesley, William Miller, and others, we believe were such. Yet Christ is head of his people at the same time. He works through these agents, and leads them to exert a strong influence upon others ; and thus, far more is accomplished for man's salvation than could be were none especially led by him.

But if there are those who still think no man is ever authorized to exert any authority in the Christian church, and that all stand upon a level, let such care-

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fully consider the following scriptures : "Obey them that have the *rule* over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief : for that is unprofitable for you." Heb. 13:17. The word in the Greek rendered *rule*, Greenfield defines to mean, "to lead the way, to be over," *i.e.*, ["]have authority over, be leader, chief ; to preside, govern, rule." Obedience is to be rendered to such, and submission. "Let the elders that *rule* well, be counted worthy of double honor," &c. 1 Tim. 5:17. Here the word rendered rule, Mr. Greenfield says means, to set over, to appoint with authority. In giving directions to Timothy and Titus, two gospel ministers, the apostle Paul defines their duties as follows : "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." 1 Tim. 5:20. "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, . . . preach the word ; be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke,

exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” 2 Tim. 4:1, 2. “Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.” “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” Titus 1:13, and 2:15. These scriptures are sufficient to show that there is authority placed upon some in the Christian church, if human language can show anything. Those who object to this must object to the Bible, for these passages are quoted from that book. This authority is not contrary to the leadership of Christ, but by his direct appointment, and can only be exercised by those who are appointed by his direction, and who live in harmony with his Spirit. When they cease to do this, none are under obligation to obey them.

While it is thus seen necessary, and in accordance with Christ’s appointment, that certain ones should exercise authority and influence in the church in ordinary times, there are occasions when God evidently designs to accomplish a special work, and to this end

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raises up special agencies to carry out his design. The natural tendency of humanity is downward, and during the six thousand years of man’s history while the great controversy with sin has been going on, there have been different epochs in which God has seen fit to make a special manifestation of his power for the purpose of causing his truth to take more effect upon the hearts of men. These epochs have been after long periods of backsliding and settling down in the public mind, until some of the great principles of God’s government were lost sight of. Then the Lord raised up agents, and prepared them to go forth and give the message to the people, which was necessary that his truth perish not from the earth. The preaching of Noah, the leading out of Israel by Moses, the work of Elijah, and several of the prophets, the preparing of the way by John the Baptist, the work of the apostles, and other reform movements since the Dark Ages, are illustrations of these special movements of God. These come in the time of religious declension, and are always unpopular. Through them, the loyalty of man to his Creator is tested. He shows by his conduct whether he loves the down-trodden truth of God most, or the approbation of the world.

The responsibility of leading out in such a work is great, not to say fearful. Nothing short of special instruction by the Spirit of God can qualify feeble man to do it. When God calls a person to this position, and the one called works with his counsel, it is no small thing to hinder him in his work. Doing so, really works against God, who has made him his agent. We must acknowledge this to be true, or deny that God ever does work by special agencies. In carrying forward such movements, perfect union among those in leading positions is most important to success. Without it, success is next to impossible. Satan and all his allies will do their utmost to hinder God’s special work, and in no way can he work more successfully than by hindering and discouraging those who have a

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leading part to act. These, being weak and fallible men, are exposed to his temptations, and can only overcome them by walking in the counsel of God. When they fully do this, God’s arm will support them, and those not willing to receive their testimony, or, who stand in

the way of their work, will certainly bring upon themselves the frown of God.

One illustration from the Bible will suffice. The case of Moses is in point, because we have a particular account of his life and trials, and because the apostle Paul informs us that the dealings of God with Israel under the leadership of Moses were examples or types for the admonition of those living in the last days. He was specially prepared for his ministry by his experience in exile where he learned humility and how to walk with God. In every instance when that people murmured against him (and they were many), it was counted as murmuring against God. Why? Simply because God had chosen him and instructed him. He chose to lead his mind, and talked with him. They had evidence of this, and yet in every trial they complained of Moses. I think there is not a single instance on record where the people complained directly of God, but only of his servant.

This principle is the same in all ages when we admit that God has chosen to raise up any special agent to accomplish his work. Even wicked Saul, when placed in his position by the providence of God, David dared not to harm. The Lord had placed him there. David had no right to injure him, though the prophet Samuel had anointed David himself to be king. The meekness and respect of David toward wicked Saul, because of his position, is not only one of the most beautiful traits of his character, but clearly shows our duty to respect God's appointments.

I now propose to come to our own cause, and apply these principles. We believe we have the truth of God for the last days—a special message of warning to the world, containing the most fearful threatening in the

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Bible, and the principles upon which a grand reform is based, preparatory to Christ's coming. God's down-trodden Sabbath and law must be vindicated by his people, and their majesty proclaimed. The great issue in the closing work turns upon these. The great apostasy which ruled for 1260 years has buried them in the dust. A partial reform in Christendom has not given them their proper position. The final struggle between God and Satan turns upon these. Is not the issue broad enough? important enough? It comes at the close of six thousand years of wickedness, and here the great controversy closes, with the destruction of all wicked men, and the eternal salvation of the righteous. Never in the history of the world was there a movement more important than this. It is clearly foretold in prophecy in many places. It is impossible for us to overestimate the greatness of it. It is the grand point of interest in all revelation. The coming of Christ, the destruction of the wicked, the salvation of the righteous, the purification of the earth, who can sense the magnitude of these events? We profess to be giving a special warning concerning these things. We also profess to believe, as a people, that God has connected with this movement the spirit of prophecy as he said he would with the remnant of the true church. Rev. 12:17. That he should do this is no marvel when we consider the importance of the work. It would be a marvel if he did not. God gives special light, then, to guide his people in this important crisis. And has not God raised up and qualified any agents to lead out in this work? Have no persons any special responsibilities laid upon them in such a time as this? When we reach the closing message of probation, the greatest of all movements, has he placed everybody upon a level, so far as responsibility or authority is concerned, and that contrary to his uniform course for six thousand years? Has God changed? or learned better by

experience? I leave others to answer.

I must now make a personal application of these re-

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marks ; for my subject and object make it necessary. While it is a fact that other men have acted a prominent part in this work more or less, it is well known to all that Elder James White and wife have exerted a leading influence from its rise. If it be true, as stated in the first part of this essay, that “an intelligent support of leaders is best obtained when confidence is founded on past faithfulness and of fitness for the position and on reliable evidence of God’s special selection,” then, indeed, we, as a people, have overwhelming evidence of their right to act in that capacity. We well know that none have labored with the devotion and earnestness in this cause that they have. Upwards of twenty-five years of faithful effort have settled that point forever. Their efforts began when believers were few and sacrifices great. Such a time tests the genuineness of faith.

As far as their fitness to plan and execute is concerned, the success of this cause thus far has demonstrated that. Never was there a cause, probably, that had more difficulties and obstacles to contend with than this. Foes without and foes within have contended against it. Rising, as it did, from the disappointment of 1844 and the disorganized condition of the Advent people, it has been no small thing to bring it to its present state of prosperity. The creation of our publishing and other institutions, and the bringing of them to their present magnitude, is a matter of wonder even to our enemies. We have been laying the foundation slowly, surely, for a great work. It is but just to say that in the accomplishment of these objects, the leadership of Eld. White and wife is incontestable. In every important movement, they have thus far led out. We, as a people, have found their counsels safe, judicious, and effective.

What has the Lord said to us in regard to Bro. White’s position especially? I will quote from various testimonies for the benefit of those interested on this point. “I saw that important moves would be made

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that would demand our influence to lead out.” “I was shown that he was raised up by the Lord and that he lives as a miracle of mercy—not for the purpose of gathering the burdens upon him again under which he has once fallen, but that the people of God might be benefited with his experience in advancing the general interests of the cause, and in connection with the work he has given me, and the burden he has laid upon me.”

“I was shown his position to the people of God was similar, in some respects, to that of Moses. There were murmurers against Moses when in adverse circumstances, and there have been murmurers against him. There has been no one in the ranks of Sabbath-keepers who would do as my husband has done.”

“God has given my husband especial qualifications, natural ability, and he selected him, and gave him an experience, to lead out his people in the advance work. There have been murmurers among Sabbath-keeping Adventists as was among ancient Israel.” It is also said that he should be a “counsellor” to this people. These extracts should be sufficient to prove beyond a doubt to all who have any real faith in this message and in the testimonies of the

Spirit of God connected with it, that a leading position in it has been given to him. The providence of God, the experience of our people, the evidence of successful management for twenty-five years of most trying labor, and the positive declarations of the testimonies of God's Spirit, should settle this question forever with every one who has a particle of faith in this message that he is called of the Lord to act as a leader among his people.

This conclusion is reasonable, consistent, and in harmony with God's appointment. His peculiar relation to the one through whom the Lord speaks to this people is such that we could not well conclude otherwise. There is one person among us who has visions which we admit are from Heaven. This fact throws upon her the unpleasant duty of reproving sins and wrongs in many

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cases. Her husband is the one whom the providence of God evidently designed should stand by her to back up her testimony and help her in the most important and unpleasant duty. By this close relationship, he has access to light and guidance that others could not have. This consideration points to the same conclusion that I have above expressed.

In view of these positions, what relation to him should those sustain who labor in the same cause? and how should we, as ministers and people, conduct ourselves to carry out the designs of God and labor in harmony with these positions. In short, what is our duty to a leader whom we believe God has appointed?

1. To believe his appointment suitable, otherwise God would never have made it.
2. To believe the person appointed, honest, conscientious, worthy of respect, and one with whom if we do right it will be possible to work in harmony, otherwise he would never have been appointed.
3. To treat him on all occasions with love and respect, and to take hold cheerfully to carry into effect his plans for the progress of the cause, unless they can be shown to conflict with right and the teachings of God's word. Otherwise, his being a leader would amount to nothing.
4. In all matters of expediency connected with the cause, to give his judgment the preference, and cheerfully endeavor to carry it out as fully as though it was our own ; for the moment we give our judgment the preference in those things in which God has called him to lead, we place ourselves in the position God has assigned to him.
5. To have a jealous interest for his reputation, knowing that when his reputation is injured, the cause in which he acts as leader is also affected.
6. To put aside a spirit of murmuring and complaint, to listen to his reproof candidly, and bear it with meekness, and honestly endeavor to give it that force it deserves ; for in murmuring or refusing to listen to re-

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proof, we virtually declare his judgment unworthy of our respect ; and we also disobey Scripture.

7. To try cheerfully to assist in counsel and action to the best of our ability, and to take those responsibilities in the cause which are assigned to us by competent authority, and to

yield a cordial and hearty support to such as are called to fill the responsible position of leader.

8. To frown down in ourselves or in others a spirit of criticism toward such as we believe God has appointed ; for if the plans and conduct of such are to be a constant subject of close criticism, it shows at once that suspicion exists, and that we fear they are unworthy of our confidence ; and yet we claim that God has appointed them.

9. To cheerfully admit his authority to reprove and rebuke according to the light God has given him, and we claim no right to call his exercise of it in question ; for if amenable to every one for this, it virtually destroys his right altogether, and shows that he has no more right to reprove than others. He must have room to exercise this right without question, so far as his course does not conflict with moral principle. And the duty of his brethren is to support him in it.

These positions may be called, by some, popery, man-worship, and surrendering our right of private judgment, &c. But I confidently believe that they are in perfect harmony with a sensible private judgment and with the word of God. Popery claims supreme control over men's consciences, and full authority to compel obedience to its dictates. Nothing of the kind is claimed in these principles.

Neither are they open to the charge of man-worship. They simply imply the carrying into effect the appointment God has made and which we acknowledge. There is no claim made that the one chosen as leader is infallible, or anything but a man of like passions with ourselves, and constantly exposed to temptations and sin, and in need of divine aid like ourselves at every

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step. But the conclusions reached, grow out of the *position* which we admit God has assigned him. Therefore, that position should be respected.

The right of private judgment and of personal accountability to God is not interfered with, but expressly guarded. No one is called upon to do things which violate his conscience in regard to right and wrong, or to make confessions which he does not believe are true.

Nor is there any interference with one's own private matters on the part of a leader authorized by these principles. Each is left perfectly free to act in these directions. But it does give the one acknowledged to be chosen of God to lead out in his cause the authority to fill that position ; and it demands of those who acknowledge it respect for that position. And why should not this be so? Has not God a right to call whom he chooses to lead out in his work? Should not all, when they identify themselves with it, recognize that appointment cheerfully, especially when they acknowledge the appointment to have been made? The right of private judgment is not interfered with by so doing, but the act of so doing is an exercise of it.

Popery is the extreme of absolutism. Man's accountability is destroyed by it. The other extreme, of laxity and confusion, is seen in some Protestant churches—no order, no authority, no discipline, but the prevailing spirit is debate and self-assertion. We want to find the happy mean, where true order may be secured.

I fully believe that many of our troubles in the past have arisen from a neglect of some one of these principles ; and it is not strange that these principles have been more or less

neglected. It would be strange had it been otherwise. Our circumstances have been peculiar. None of us had an experience in these things, but have had it to learn. We cannot wonder that men of ability, with the natural besetments of the human heart and with independence of character, should, with these principles measurably undefined, come from time

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to time in collision. I think the time has come when there should be a better understanding of the principles which should govern us in our mutual relations in reference to the position that God has assigned us. This is written in the hope of aiding in this. I look forward with eager interest to a point in this work when perfect union will exist among those whom God has called to leading positions, when we shall move on in perfect order and harmony in our several spheres of action, like a well-drilled army, each officer and private in his place, with the leaders of God's appointment guiding by their counsel, and Christ, our captain over all and above all, giving us the victory. Then indeed will God's people be "terrible as an army with banners."

Our great Southern rebellion serves as a good illustration. In the first stage of the war, there was no real head, no general to whom all looked with respect. The result was, divided counsels, laboring at cross-purposes, and slow progress. When Gen. Grant was appointed commander-in-chief, and the different corps were officered by those who would heed his counsels, there was union of effort, general success, and final victory.

What we most need is real union among leading men. This must be an intelligent union upon principle. We must put away distrust, draw together, shut the devil out of the camp by following the light God has given us, feel an interest for each other's reputation, and especially for those who stand in the forefront of the battle, cordially support the leaders God has appointed, and then victory will crown our efforts. Amen.

Geo. I. Butler

Battle Creek, Mich., Nov. 14, 1873.

We heartily concur in the sentiment of this essay.

John N. Andrews,
J. H. Waggoner,
U. Smith.

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