JAMES WHITE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ORGANIZATION, 1844-1881

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Date When Dissertation Completed: June 1987.
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The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church emerged from the Millerite movement of the 1840s. After the "Disappointment" of 1844 the unique features of Sabbatarian Adventism emerged—in particular, the seventh-day Sabbath and the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary—and were consolidated among scattered groups of believers by the end of 1848. This dissertation describes the development of SDA organization between 1844 and 1881, examines its theological and biblical foundations, and evaluates the influence of James White, the leading figure in promoting church order.

Chap. 1 presents the aims and purposes of the work, the methodology followed, the sources considered, and a biographical sketch of White. Chap. 2 examines the socio-political and religious milieu of North America in which Sabbatarian Adventism developed, especially the influence Millerite separatism might have had on SDA attitudes. Chap. 3 covers the post-Disappointment splintering of the Millerites into several bodies. Sabbatarian Adventist concerns in the years 1844 through 1849 centered on the consolidation of doctrine and the emergence of a sense of mission, both of which were prerequisites for organizational development.

Chap. 4 describes the emergence of SDA centralized church government during the years 1849-1863, culminating in the establishment of the SDA General Conference in the latter year. Concern for proper discipline, coping with false teachers, the matter of owning church property, and efficient execution of the church's mission gave rise to considerable debate before agreement was reached. After 1863, interest centered on the role and authority of church leaders.

Chap. 5 discusses the theological foundations of SDA polity; namely, the sense of unique mission and concern for doctrinal unity. Other factors in the church's organizational development included the use of biblical precedent by SDA pioneers in laying the foundations of church order, the influence of the organizational systems of other Protestant churches on the framers of SDA polity, and the impact of White's experience and personality on church government.

In conclusion, an examination is made of the implications of the decisions taken between 1844 and 1881 for contemporary organizational

issues in the SDA church. Centralized government remains essential for coordinating the mission of a world-wide church, maintaining unity, and lending weight to the church's sense of identity. Flexibility is also needed within these underlying considerations in order to meet changing social and cultural circumstances.