



THE PLACE OF AUTHORITY IN THE SDA CHURCH

**The Relationship Between Leadership and
Governance**

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MATTHEW 28:18-20

- Vs. 18- all authority given to Jesus
- Vs. 19f- effective witness of believers predicated upon accessing the authority of Jesus
 - Authority is never owned
 - Authority is only loaned
- Authority is given in trust to the church
 - The church (body of believers) is the steward of Christ's authority on earth

MATTHEW 18:18

- The delegation of authority for the purpose of governance as well as mission/ministry entrusts the church with the responsibility of making binding decisions.

CLARIFY DEFINITIONS

- *Authority*:
 - permission to exercise power
- *Authoritarian*:
 - one who exercises power without permission
- *Authoritative*:
 - having or proceeding from authority

THE 1901 GC SESSION

- The SDA Church built its governance structure on the assumption that the authority was vested in the body—not in leaders, thus a representative system of governance.
 - This was a hard fought struggle—centralized authority vs. distributed authority
 - Happened on the heels of the “Kingly Authority” period
- Caution must be exercised to avoid centralizing authority for the sake of expediency
- The weakening of the delegate voice through manipulation of process or failure to maintain the Representative Model moves us back toward Kingly Authority.

HUMAN TENDENCY TO CONSOLIDATE

- Babel
- Invitation for Gideon to become king
- Persistence of Israel's request for a king
- Progression of early church from distributed organization to centralized papacy
- Cry (1905-1930) from SDA's for pastors to be assigned to churches/districts
- General willingness of people to abdicate personal authority in favor of a central ruler

GOD'S CONSISTENT RESPONSE

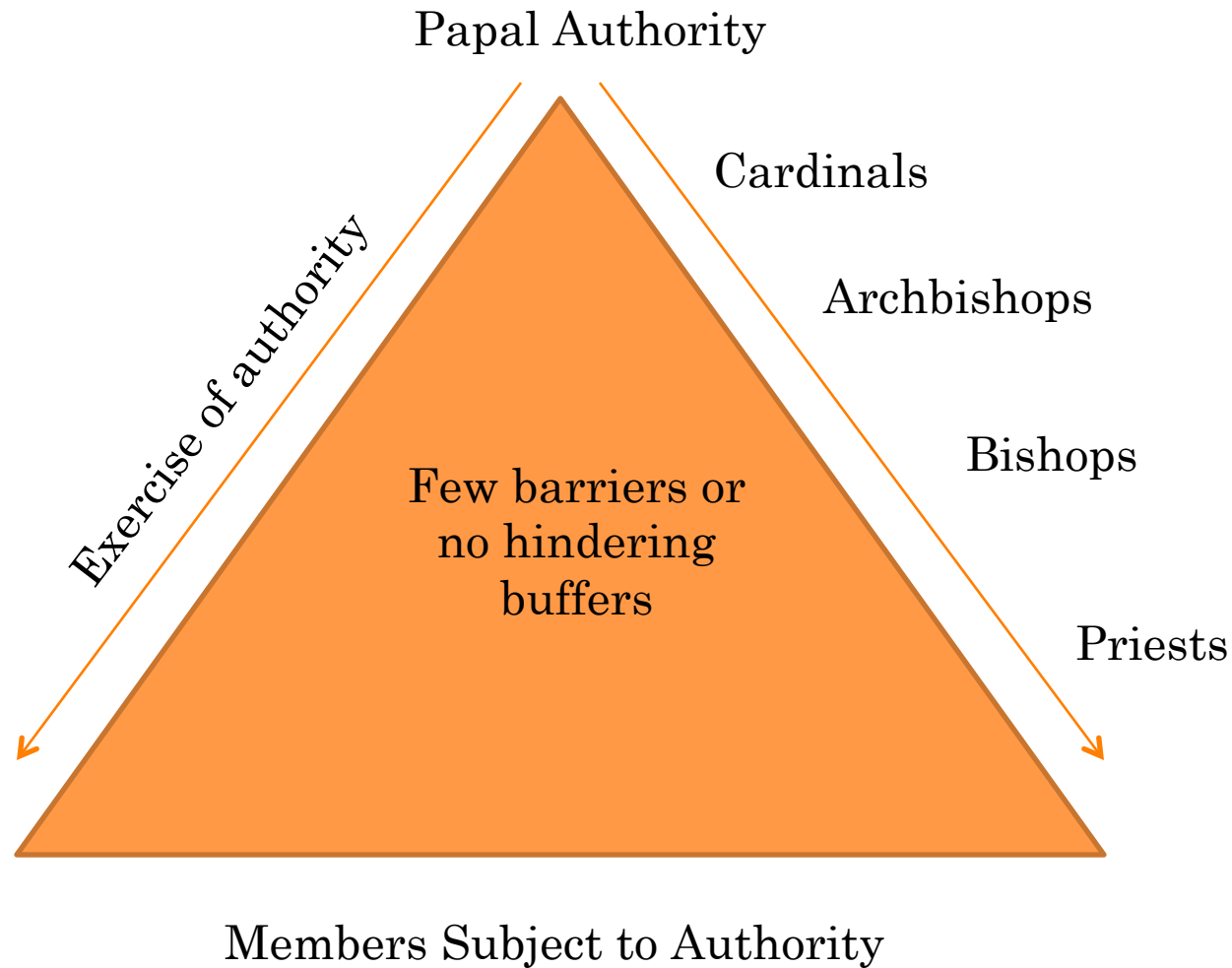
○ Decentralize

- Babel
- Confederacy of tribes under judges
- Repeated dispersal of tribes/Israel
- “Priesthood of all believers” in early church
- Diaspora in 1st century
- Catholic => Denominations (Reformation)
- Challenging efforts to re-empower laity in contemporary SDA pastor-centric culture

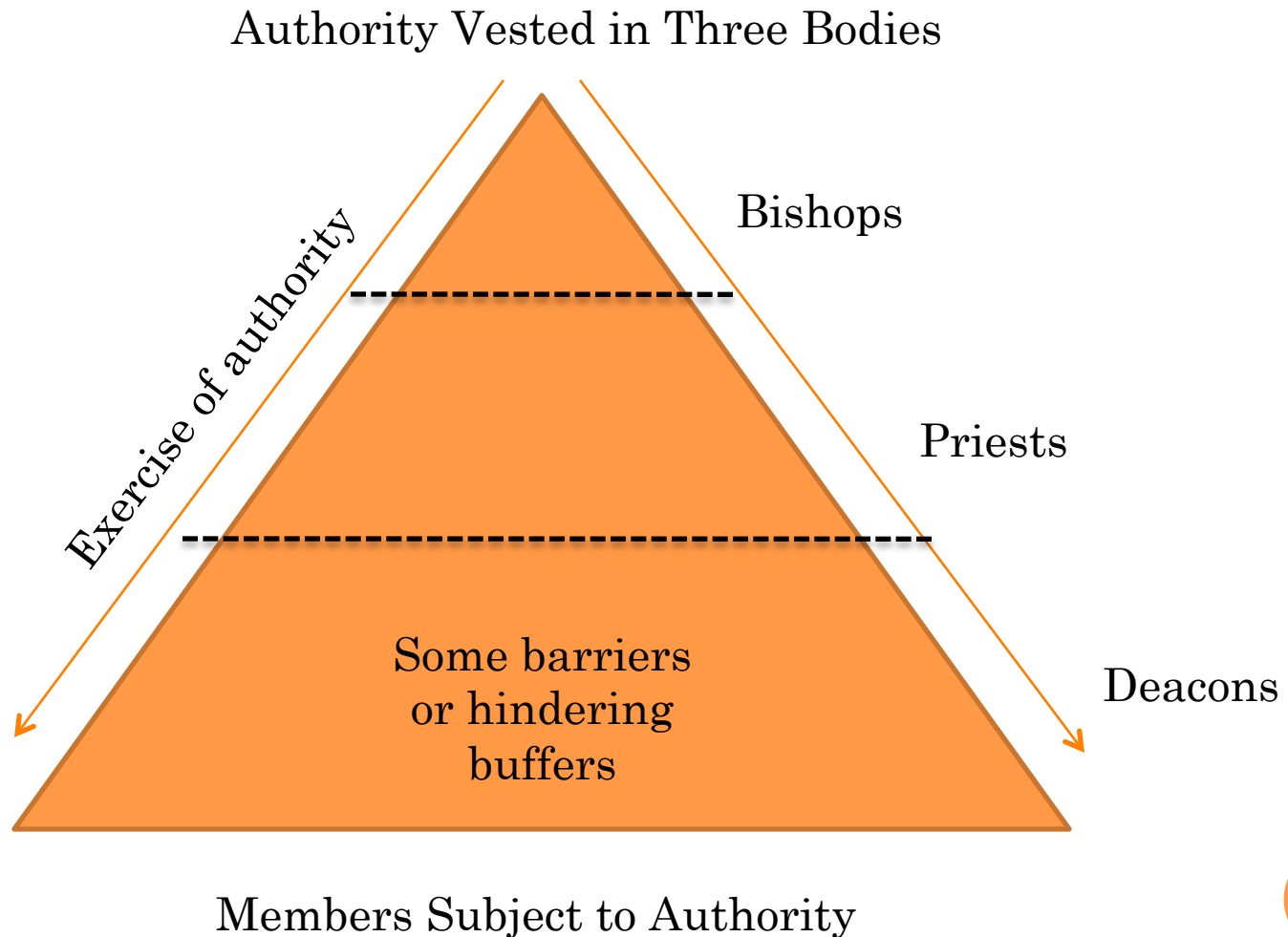
FORMS OF CHURCH GOVERNANCE

- Papal (ultimate authority vested in a person)
 - Authority flows down from a person
- Episcopal (authority vested in a group[s])
 - Authority flows down from groups
- Representative (authority vested in the body of believers)
 - SDA model
 - Authority flows up from the membership
- Independent (authority vested in independent local congregation—no central authority)

PAPAL MODEL



EPISCOPAL MODEL



REPRESENTATIVE MODEL

barriers or
hindering
buffers

delegation of authority

General Conference/Division
(authority limited to term)

Union
(authority limited to term)

Conference
(authority limited to term)

Local Church
(Authority vested in Collective Membership)

EROSION OF REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM

- Distance of Union, Division and GC from direct accountability with the membership
- Political maneuvering
- Expediency that avoids the cost and time necessary for representative process
- Natural tendency of people to avoid carrying responsibility/accountability that they can give to a leader
- Progressive impact of power on career leaders
- Abuse of power

GUARDING THE REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM

- In many parts of the world we are functioning with an amalgamation of episcopal and representative forms of governance
- Distance from direct accountability at higher levels creates career administrators who face low levels of accountability for representative behavior and exaggerated perceptions of personal power
- Reverse the centralization of the Presidential model via “vice-president” designations

GUARDING THE REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM

- Membership is generally unaware of the nature of authority in the church and the responsibility that rests upon them
- Vigilance must be maintained if we are to avoid serious erosion of our prevalent system of governance
- Guard against the emphasis of position and dominance over service (Isa 14:12-15; Eze 28:12-15; Matt 20:20-28; Phil 2:1-11; 1 Peter 5:1-5)

IMPACT ON MISSION

- If we are ever to re-invest ministry authority in the members of the church we must re-energize their understanding of the stewardship of authority that rests upon them
- Mental models of administrator (leaders) and member (followers) must be challenged.
 - Why? Followers wait for leaders. We are ALL called to lead within the context of our spiritual giftedness.