

Untangling what happened: A brief overview of — Our New Church Governing System

Exactly what happened at Utrecht in regard to changes in Adventist church government? What will be the ways in which the church will henceforth be governed, which will be different than in the past?

Repeatedly, the statement has been made that the General Conference did not seek for increased power in this entire changeover. Yet the facts indicate that, as a result of actions that gave final approval at the Spring Council and Utrecht Session, such a power grab did indeed occur.

Here is a brief overview of 27 of these changes. There are probably other significant ones. Trying to locate them all is not an easy task.

ITEMS WITHDRAWN PRIOR TO THE 1994 COUNCIL

One item which was not included was the Disfellowshipment paragraph. This item was leaked to the church by Pilgrims Rest in 1993, and enough complaints were registered with leadership that it was removed from the list of changes presented to

the Annual Council for approval (*Disfellowship Item Removed from 1995 Session Agenda [WM-592]*).

This item would have enabled local conference headquarters to disfellowship any targeted church member—over the heads of local church leaders and members, and regardless of their protests.

Such an item did actually exist, and twice we reprinted the official church press item which mentioned it (*Churchbeat, September 15, 1993; see WM-592*).

ITEMS REJECTED BY THE 1994 COUNCIL

Folkenberg had requested that the credentials for all executive officers of lower organizations be issued by the next higher organization. Instead, the council voted to continue on with the present policy, of permitting conferences and unions to issue credentials to their own officers—as does the GC to its officers.

ITEMS APPROVED BY THE ANNUAL COUNCIL

(but not sent on to Utrecht for approval)

Presidents: Worldwide Divisions and Unions, and North American Division Conferences—

Here is a brief overview of 27 of the changes made in recent months which present concern to many workers and members in the denomination,—for these revisions indicate a strong trend toward accumulation of authority at the General Conference level.

This is, indeed unfortunate, and should not have occurred. It is only by a balance of powers that our people can rectify problems and prevent doctrinal or organizational apostasy.

We do not claim completeness for this list of modifications. It is well-known that there were about 75 Constitution and bylaw changes, and 30 *Church Manual* alterations at the Session alone,—all apart from the modifications worked out at the two prior councils.

There may even be flaws in our presentation. It is difficult to obtain this information, and it is doubtful that the General Conference will authorize publication of a book detailing the extent of the power grab which it carried out so successfully.

We are sorry to have to bring you this report, yet we recognize that you, who are overseas members of the GC committee, are the only ones in positions of authority still able to withstand the trend, and work to reverse it. North America is now leading out in the growing apostasy.

Unfortunately, some of the changes noted here clearly reveal that it will no longer be possible for quinquennial Sessions to carry out the task. Henceforth the GC will control the selection of 75 percent of the delegates attending it. Pray that solutions will be found. —vf

1 - All officers of higher organizations are automatically *ex officio* members, with full voting rights, of the next lower organization. (*Approved by the 1994 Annual Council, without being sent on to the Session for its approval.*)

2 - Every lower level officer must be approved at the time of his appointment, by the leaders of the next higher level. (*Approved by the 1994 Annual Council, without being sent on to the Session for its approval.*)

ITEMS CHANGED AT THE 1994 COUNCIL

1 - Folkenberg wanted to be officially known as "chief executive officer." This was changed by the Annual Council to "first officer." CEO is a loaded phrase; it is used in the corporate world to indicate the top boss who tells everyone below him what to do, with no back talk permitted. Yet that was the title Folkenberg had requested. Although he was not given the flattering title, he was handed enough changes in the Constitution to ensure his supremacy, without the title.

ITEMS REJECTED BY THE SESSION

An item not approved at the Utrecht Session was the requirement that departmental leaders in the world headquarters are to be appointed by GC leadership, and not elected by a Session. It took a three-day battle to remove that one item, and the delegates were so exhausted that few other changes were made. Indeed, frequently the business meeting was closed early in the afternoon, so to give the delegates less to discuss, object, or modify preplanned changes.

ITEMS APPROVED BY THE SPRING COUNCIL

(but not sent on to Utrecht for approval)

Two items, which were found to be too controversial for even the 1994 Annual Council to consider, were carefully withdrawn,—and then presented to the 1995 Spring Council for its approval, and never later mentioned to the delegates attending the Session. These two items would have been rejected by the Annual Council, but were approved by Spring Council because it has a smaller, more exclusive number of leaders in attendance.

1 - Higher level organizations in the church will henceforth have more power to merge lower level organizations.

2 - Higher level organizations in the church will henceforth have increased authority to dissolve lower level organizations.

For example, a union can be merged or dissolved by a decision of an executive committee at the division or GC level.

These mergers or dissolutions can occur without any say-so or objection by the lower level organization being blotted out. It can even be done without giving their representatives a hearing!

(If only a constituency session can vote a union into existence, then only a constituency session should be able to vote a union out of existence.)

Before this, only a GC Session could vote out a union. But henceforth, a Division year-end meeting will have the authority to do it.

ITEMS APPROVED BY THE SESSION

Listed below are a number of items which were enacted at Utrecht. In some instances, minor changes were made. Included here are not only items approved by the Utrecht Session, but also the five items mentioned earlier, which were voted in by the 1994 Annual Council or 1995 Spring Council. All the preceding four items were Constitution and By-law changes. Some of the following changes involve modifications in the *Church Manual* or a partial re-writing of the Constitution or bylaw.

In the following listing, we will try to categorize the changes, according to which part of the organization is primarily affected by each item. All items not otherwise noted received final approval at the Utrecht Session. Here are 27 of the most important changes:

1 - CHURCH MANUAL CHANGES

CHANGES AFFECTING LOCAL CHURCHES

#1 - When a local church wants to discipline a member (for opposing lowered standards, doctrinal changes, Celebration worship patterns, etc.), the matter will have to be brought before the church board before it can be considered by the church members at a constituency meeting. (Previously, the church members could directly decide such matters.)

#2 - When discipline is meted out to a church member, it can be for as much as 12 months or longer. (Previously, it could not be more than 9 months.)

#3 - The nominating committee will henceforth be able to elect board members for two years, instead of only one, thus making it easier for them to become entrenched in authority.

#4 - It will be easier for conference offices to disband local churches.

#5 - Conference officers will henceforth automatically be voting members of local church boards.

#6 - Conference/mission officers will henceforth have the right to attend any local church business

meeting held within conference/mission territory.

#7 - The local church is required to secure counsel from the conference/mission officers on all major matters.

#8 - Instead of the local pastor being responsible for the group, henceforth only the conference or mission committee can approve the organization (or dissolution) of the company.

2 - CONSTITUTION AND BYLAW CHANGES

CHANGES AFFECTING THE ENTIRE CHURCH

#9 - Higher level organizations in the church will henceforth have more power to merge lower level organizations. (*Withdrawn from 1994 Annual Council, approved by 1995 Spring Council, and not submitted to the Utrecht Session.*)

#10 - Higher level organizations in the church will henceforth have increased authority to dissolve lower level organizations. (*Withdrawn from 1994 Annual Council, approved by 1995 Spring Council, and not submitted to the Utrecht Session.*)

#11 - All officers of higher organizations are automatically *ex officio* members, with full voting rights, of the next lower organization. (*Approved by the 1994 Annual Council, without being sent on to the Session for its approval.*)

#12 - Every lower level officer must be approved at the time of his appointment, by the leaders of the next higher level. (*Approved by the 1994 Annual Council, without being sent on to the Session for its approval.*)

#13 - Henceforth, only the GC auditors will be elected at a Session; all other auditors in the denomination will be appointed by the men whose books the auditors are supposed to be checking! If the delegates had not objected, not even the GC auditors would have been elected!

#14 - All nominations for office or membership

Prior to the Utrecht Session, we prepared a two-part compilation of quotations from the last part of *Testimonies to Ministers*. Those Spirit of Prophecy statements are incisive. They clearly identify the problem and warn the people of God to beware of ever again permitting the attempt to gain “kingly power” to occur.

You will find those quotations scattered all through pages 320 to 502 of that book.

As you may know, Ellen White personally directed in the 1901 Session reorganization, in order to eliminate that very problem. At Utrecht, 94 years later, her improvements were reversed.

on any executive committee in the denomination must be made by a nominating committee. They cannot be made by constituency delegates—on any level (local church, conference, union, division, institutional, or GC).

#15 - Only one name can be presented to the floor by a nominating committee for each position to be filled. Can you imagine only one man running for president of the United States? Yet that is the way we will be managing our church.

CHANGES AFFECTING THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

#16 - Folkenberg wanted to be officially known as “chief executive officer”; this was changed to “first officer.” (*Item changed at 1994 Annual Council.*)

#17 - GC workers are required to do as they are told by the executive committee at world headquarters.

#18 - The GC treasurer and secretary (the other two top leaders at world headquarters) are not permitted to present any matters to the GC executive committee, without having first presented the items to the president. Everyone reports to the president, for that is what he wanted.

#19 - The GC executive committee *quorum* (minimum number of members who must be present before a valid vote can be taken) has been reduced to 15.

#20 - Control by the GC president will also be extended to the leaders of every GC agency, such as the Review, Pacific Press, *Sabbath School Quarterly*, Home Study Institute, etc.

#21 - Henceforth, the GC departmental leaders can no longer be present or vote at GC executive committee meetings (yet their input at those meetings is vitally necessary).

CHANGES AFFECTING THE DIVISIONS

#22 - All division departmental leaders are to be hired on an approval basis of the division president and his committee; they are no longer to be elected by the Sessions.

CHANGES AFFECTING THE GC COMMITTEE AND COUNCILS

#23 - Henceforth only 2 laymen (per 500,000 members) will be appointed as members of the GC committee. The old Constitution permitted up to 50 percent of delegates to be administrators, and the other half “laypersons, teachers, and pastors.” Henceforth, only 42 of the 250 members will be laymen.

#24 - The number of GC committee members (the people who meet at Annual or Spring Councils) will be reduced. But those who are not *ex officio*

(that is, members because they hold a certain office) will be chosen by the Executive Committee or be recommended by the divisions. This gives the GC president far greater control over who can be on the GC committee.

#25 - Conference/mission presidents will only have voting rights at the councils—when the councils are held within their territory. But this will skew the vote in favor of North American conference presidents in eight of every ten council meetings.

This particular item is very significant! It enables the GC to control many of the councils. In every five-year span, only two councils are held outside America! Those are second and fourth Annual Councils. The other three Annual Councils, and the five Spring Councils will be held in America. Added to the 250 members attending those councils will be all conference presidents, and many institutional leaders (of colleges, publishing houses, hospitals).

CHANGES AFFECTING THE GC SESSIONS

#26 - Session delegates will henceforth be chosen by division leadership, instead of by unions. This removes the selection of delegates still farther from church membership—and places it in the hands of the GC. The divisions are just a step down, and their officers are closely obligated to the GC president for their positions. Only the Session delegates are able to hold the GC leaders accountable for their actions—yet henceforth they will primarily be selected by division leaders! Expect no further accountability required of world headquarters (unless the union presidents demand it at council meetings).

#27 - The number of Session delegates has been reduced (probably a good decision), and we are told that the number of laymen in attendance will be 25.6 percent; and the number of frontline, lower-level workers (pastors, etc.) will be 25.4 percent. That could be good also. Unfortunately, only division and GC leadership selects them.

Here is a partial summary of what is involved in the above 27 changes:

1 - The GC president will have increased authority over the other top GC leaders (the secretary and treasurer), as well as all other workers in the world headquarters. They, in turn, will have less say at the meetings where the decisions are made: The GC executive committee.

2 - Division presidents will also have greatly increased authority over workers in their offices.

3 - The officers of higher organizations will have full voice, vote, and influence at all lower organizational meetings.

4 - The officers of each higher organization will

have greater power to combine, disband, and take over lower level entities.

5 - The officers of local church boards will have more power on the local level, because they can more easily block actions which the membership wishes to initiate, and may be able to obtain a two-year term.

6 - Local church members can be disciplined for a longer period of time.

7 - More top officials and less laymen or pastors will be delegates to GC committee or Session meetings.

8 - It will be easier for leadership to predetermine the nominations and elections of officers.

As you can see from the above, the delegates attending the Utrecht Session were never presented with the full picture. If they had, they would have been able to more clearly see that a great shift in power and authority had been carefully planned in advance—and, step by step, was being carried out.

When it was thought necessary to do so, Utrecht business meetings were adjourned early, new items of business were ignored, motions for clarification were ignored, and items sent back to committee for change were at times returned with almost no change.

Henceforth, one man in the General Conference will have immense power on all levels. Either directly or indirectly through subordinates, he will be able to exercise far more control over subsidiary workers and organizations than any president in the history of the denomination.

The good work accomplished, under the direction of Ellen White, at the 1901 General Conference Session—has effectively been wiped out. We have returned to a “kingly power,” the very thing she wanted to rid the church of.

The changes not only grant more power to each next higher organization but those changes also tend to cluster power in the hands of the GC president.

On the local conference/mission level, the changes not only add union representatives to their business and constituency meetings,—but division and GC representatives are added as well.

At the top of the heap is the GC executive committee, which henceforth can meet with a *quorum* of as few as 15 members. Although having authority to make drastic decisions and changes in the denomination, yet most of its members are obligated to please the GC president.

Because of the changes, the GC will henceforth control the selection of an astonishing 74 percent of the total number of delegates to each future Session.

Think about it. What have we done to ourselves? How much longer will our people permit these trends in order to have “peace in our time”?

More WAYMARKS - from —

PILGRIMS REST

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