

The union conference is the “building block” of the General Conference—not the division. The division is the General Conference in a certain geographic area, and the union forms the connecting link between the General Conference and the local field. Eliminating unions would centralize authority in the General Conference more than under the present arrangement.

On that subject Ellen White made this interesting observation: “There is need of a most earnest, thorough work to be now carried forward in all our churches. We are now to understand whether all our printing plants and all our sanitariums are to be under the control of the General Conference. I answer, Nay. It has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences. The power vested in the conference is not to be centered in one man, or two men, or six men; there is to be a council of men over the separate division.”<sup>6</sup>

While decentralization provides a degree of local autonomy, a central thrust for the overall mission must be maintained. Without strong and autonomous local leadership no institution can properly function. But without strong central leadership no institution can be unified. The division of power is thus a problem every institution has to solve and involves two things: (1) the development of independent command at the lowest level possible, and (2) the development of an objective yardstick to measure performance in these local commands.<sup>7</sup>

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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1. Robert C. Worley, *Change in the Church*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, p. 27.
2. Arthur White, *The Early Elmshaven Years*, Review and Herald, 1981, pp. 70, 71.
3. GC Bulletin, 1901, p. 26.
4. Arthur White, p. 85.

5. GC Bulletin, 1901, p. 68.
6. MS. 26, 1903, p. 1.
7. Peter F. Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation*, New American Library, pp. 37–39.

## Church Should Support the Independent Press

by Bonnie Dwyer

Controversy surrounding the release of information to church members about Ellen White, Ron Graybill, and various officers involved with Davenport funds has drawn attention to the serious communication problems in the church. Thus the AAF task force model constitution with its section on freedom of information comes at an important time and provides a good basis for discussion of internal church communication.

In the United States, such a discussion must first acknowledge that we live in a society which holds freedom of speech sacred, and which by law seeks to encourage a marketplace of ideas. Expectations for free-flowing information in the church are established by these American traditions. Article 7 (Freedom of Information) holds as much importance for the task force constitution as the First Amendment does for the U.S. Constitution.

Whether or not any other structural changes proposed by the model constitution are made, Article 7 deserves to be included in every conference constitution. It makes three particularly important points: conferences shall recognize that information must be made available to church members, documents shall be available for public inspection, and all conference meetings (except executive sessions) shall be open to the public. This article would let sunshine into the denomination as never before, just as U.S. “sunshine” laws opened up government files to all citizens—not just to the press.

The proposals made by the task force for the establishment of a Board of Information

and a conference news publication at arms length from the conference administration are interesting, but establishing such a board and publication will require considerable money, and major changes in the current policies and organization of the church. In other words, it will take time and debate over current and future papers, careers, and empires.

There are other ways to encourage the dissemination of information that Article 7 is trying to achieve. Currently, membership lists are not generally available to Adventist, but non-official, organizations. Most independent organizations are barred from advertising in church papers, which makes it difficult to let church members know about other information sources. Thus, independent publications find it hard to achieve wide circulation within the church. Because there really is no way for a church member to reach all other members of the church outside of the official publications, church officers end up deciding what church members read.

One way for the denomination to encourage a plurality of voices would be to sell membership lists to interested publications and to allow independent organizations to advertise their journals within church papers, or, denominational publications and institutions could sell lists of subscribers and employees to publishers of independent publications. None of these steps would cost the denomination money, and would actually generate funds. More importantly, these actions would foster a marketplace of ideas within the church and allow individuals to decide what they wanted to read, rather than to have church officials decide.

In addition, publications need direct financial support; journalism is an expensive process because it is time-consuming and labor-intensive work. It is not just within Adventism that publications struggle. National opinion journals, which have the advantage of much larger audiences than the

number of members in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, fight for financial survival. Many have long since gone out of business, and virtually all those still publishing lose money regularly. Benefactors play a major role in those publications continuing to appear. William F. Buckley's fortune keeps *The National Review* going despite the fact that the magazine has lost money for the last 28 years. Within the church, *Spectrum's* advisory council makes an essential contribution to sustaining *Spectrum*. Other such systems need to be developed.

Furthermore, while the model constitution admirably seeks to spread expense among all church members, proposing the establishment of one conference news publication would still produce only one publication. A plurality of vigorous voices should be encouraged in order to discuss important issues facing the church. Perhaps the church could consider establishing a grant system similar to that of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Offering envelopes might have a category added called "media endowment fund" which members could designate as the destination for their donations. Such a fund could finance special publishing efforts, and might even be extended beyond the print media to encourage journalistic projects in video and audio tapes, or in specials for cable TV.

With open access to information within the denominational structure, the ability to advertise to church members via the mail, and financial grants to supplement income, Adventism's independent press could flourish as never before. As long as they provided services valued by members, official church journals would also remain healthy.

The task force is to be commended for setting forth methods to improve our communication system, but the conversation about how to achieve a better-informed church has just begun.

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## Top Down or Bottom-up?

by Michael Scofield

The General Conference, unions, and local conferences have created a number of committees and commissions on church structure since the Association of Adventist Forums created its Task Force on Church Structure. However, the focus of the Forum task force is distinct from many of these other committees. They assume that the present distribution of authority will continue to flow from the top down and therefore they explore how following the corporate model of organization might lead the church to be more efficient. The Forum task force, on the other hand, generally holds the view that church authority originates in the whole of the church membership; therefore it focuses on how a governmental model, concerned with the source, transfer, and legitimation of authority, might take the Adventist Church more representative.

According to a democratic governmental model, the will of the majority and the best reflection of many minds is given great importance. Perhaps it is therefore not surprising that the original name of the task force stressed lay involvement in the church. Although laymembers may now possess this authority in a theoretical sense, an increasing number feel that they are not actually able to exercise that authority. Many feel that leaders are not sufficiently accountable to the membership. (In my opinion, the conduct of church officials before and after recent financial scandals has exhibited this lack of accountability.)

The fundamental location for the transfer of authority—which was the main interest of the task force—occurs in the local conference, as specified by a constitution and the requirements of the *Church Manual*.

Thus, the task force worked hard to craft a model constitution which made the process of representative government actual and functional, rather than merely symbolic (as it is in the Adventist Church today).

Mechanisms of election, referendum, and recall; guarantees of information; checks and balances; and adjudicatory functions all help the average member influence the church, and make the leaders of the denomination more accountable to the membership. Greater accountability can cause stress. I suspect that the goals and values of the membership have diverged from those of Adventism of 50 or 80 years ago. Yet many of the metaphors and goals, and styles of management of most leaders, reflect the older, traditional values. Often those differences in values and goals are disguised in largely symbolic rites of representation. With more actual lay involvement, more stress and trauma may occur. Maturation is not always easy.

While unsettling, the turmoil produced by these new political tools can also be beneficial. Now, the church is facing the possibility of schism. We are perilously close to two Adventisms: the first a complex and well-developed network of legal corporations with a guaranteed income (tithe) and a leadership immune from accountability to the other Adventism, a fellowship of believers in local congregations which are, ultimately, the Body of Christ. The model constitution introduces mechanisms for more dialogue and communication between these two Adventist communities, thus reducing the seismic tensions which have been developing, at least in North America.

In significant contrast to the focus of the Forum task force, at least one other church structure committee (on which this author now serves) starts with some very different assumptions. It has tended, so far, to treat the processes of union, conference, and local church as part of a corporation, with

authority delegated from the top down. Beginning with that assumption, attempts are made to employ the tools of corporate management theory (Peter Drucker & such) to organize the work, delegate tasks, assign responsibilities, etc.

Such theories may be appropriate in limited situations, such as within the confines of a particular institution (a hospital, for example) where authority does genuinely flow down from the board of directors. But to apply such theory to the relationship between a conference and a local church is both impractical, and ecclesiologicaly improper. A departmental director, for example, in a local conference cannot command lay workers in the field. He does not sign their paycheck. In fact a departmental director does not have line authority and often lacks real authority over a local pastor. Here, one must ask where the incentive for doing anything in the life of the church should originate—at the conference office or the local church? Top-down, or bottom-up? In a volunteer organization, locally conceived and planned activities have a greater change of getting support.

The committee in question has totally ignored the mechanisms by which authority flows from the membership to the leadership. This is, to an extent, understandable,

because the committee is sponsored by a union and basic changes in the flow of authority might threaten the power of the union president and union conference committee. Hence, it is left to a task force sponsored by an independent group such as the Association of Adventist Forums, to attack the philosophical and practical problems of representation facing the Adventist Church.

Even if the recommendations of the Adventist Forums task force are accepted by a board consensus of informed and thoughtful members in North America, the great challenge is to implement the changes it recommends. The present structure and bureaucracy is well-entrenched. Few leaders will endorse new directions that will alter their patterns of behavior and accountability or even eliminate their own jobs. The membership and local pastors must start creating a more open church. It will not come instantly, but change must come, step-by-step. Let us hope that with publication of the task force report, fundamental change in the Adventist Church has already begun.

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#### CORRECTION

We wish to correct several errors in Eric Anderson's essay "The Bishops and Peace" (Vol. 14, No. 2), none of which were the author's fault. Fortunately, none of the errors misconstrued Anderson's own views on nuclear weapons. Two sentences were inadvertently truncated. The first of the six numbered statements on page 30 should have read: "Informed realists in foreign policy establishments *as well as* pacifists should oppose aiming to kill bystanders: indiscriminate threats paralyze the West, not the East." The second sentence on page 32 should have read: "Like President Reagan in the *MX* thicket, they call for 'an independent commission . . .'" Also, the first paragraph of the essay was unfortunately changed so that the Catholic bishops' debate over the words "halt" or "curb" was misreported and their choice of words was inadvertently labelled "brazen"—a charge Anderson did not make. Finally, the names of historian Eric Voegelin, author Lawrence Beilenson, and the World War I battle Passchendaele were misspelled.