

Public Statement on the Establishment of the General Conference Compliance Committee #2 „Teaching Creation/Origins“

Introduction

On August 23, 2018 the online service of the "ADVENTIST SPECTRUM"¹ published a list of five committees and their members, which were institutionalized in the context of the compliance initiative initiated by the GK. The committee #2 is to be dedicated to the observance of the guidelines of the world church leadership and the articles of faith, here about "The Creation" (#6) in Adventist organizations and teaching institutions.

This committee is one of five that deal with current, intensively discussed problems within the World Church of the SDA: Policy, creation/issues of origin, homosexuality, organization/institutions and ordination.

The aim of these committees is to identify and publish violations of the above mentioned guidelines and to name those organizations or persons within the church.

The IFSC-Process

Within the framework of the IFSC process (International Faith and Science Conference) initiated by the former president of the GC, Dr. Jan Paulsen, an unbiased, honest dialogue should be conducted within the world church on the topic of creation and evolution. Unfortunately, this process resulted in problematic changes to the faith article #6 "the Creation" of the SDA, which are theologically one-sided and unbalanced. Moreover, these alterations do not correspond to the breadth of content of what was discussed in the IFSC process itself. These changes were officially adopted at the GC in San Antonio in 2015.

From 2002 to 2014, I was allowed to actively participate in the IFSC process as a representative of both the Friedensau Adventist University and the Inter-European Division. As a result, I know many of the people involved in this committee. At the final conference of the IFSC 2014 in St. George/UT, I expressed my concerns about the changes of faith article #6. At this final conference, Ted Wilson, President of the GC, explicitly stated in his closing speech that all those who in the future teach or proclaim creation or issues of origin in another way as outlined in faith article, should either leave the corresponding Adventist institution on their own initiative or be denounced. (This phrase is not a part of the transcription of the speech.) For these colleagues, the work of this committee might be particularly relevant. This especially concerns those (academic) teachers who represent the theistic evolution. (I would like to emphasize vigorously that I do not consider theistic evolution as a valid and sound concept, neither from theological and philosophical nor from scientific reasons.)

Composition of the Committee

The above mentioned article in the ADVENTIST SPECTRUM lists the members of Committee #2:

Artur A. Steele, (chair), James L. Gibson, (secretary)
Kwabena Donkor, Chantal Klingbeil, Ronald Nalin, Suzanne Phillips, Karen J. Porter, Michael L. Ryan, Timothy G. Standish, John H. Thomas, Randall W. Younker
Legal Advisor: Jennifer Woods
Ex-Officio: Ted N.C. Wilson, G.T. Ng, Juan R. Prestol-Puesan.

Because many of my German brothers and sisters (and most likely administrators) will not know anything about these persons, I want to give some comments:

¹ <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2018/08/23/massive-oversight-committee-system-set-general-conference>

- Arthur Stele is one of the vice-presidents of the GC; he chairs Committee #3 as well, the other committees are also chaired by vice-presidents of the GC. Arthur Stele gave a lecture at the Creation Symposium in Friedensau in January 2013
- Jim Gibson (a personal friend of mine since 1985), Timothy Standish and Ronald Nalin work at the Geoscience Research Institute, which is subordinated to the GC. I hold their scientific honesty and competence in the highest possible esteem and I am absolutely sure they will never compromise even in the slightest manner to their scientific credibility. But there is a conflict regarding their loyalty to the GC
As far as I am aware, Robert Nalin is the only European in this committee
- Kwabena Donkor is an African brother and works with the Biblical Research Institute; which is subordinated to the GC as well, so the matter of loyalty appears here as well
- Suzanne Phillips is head of the Biology-Department at Loma Linda University; she is the only university representative in the natural sciences
- Randall W. Younker is an archeologist and teaches at Andrews University; he is the only other university representative
- Michael Ryan is head of the Faith & Science Council of the GC
- The other members of the committee are not known to me personally, but according to information from the Internet they are not (scientifically) trained professionals.

There is a lack of well-known personalities from the subjects of geology and biology within the North American, Adventist, academic community. A representative of La Sierra University is also missing, which is a considerable deficit as this university is more on the liberal side of Adventist universities.

Conclusion

A critical look at the selection of the members of the compliance committee #2 allows the following conclusions:

1. The selection of the members did not take place according to professional, but administrative or political aspects
2. There are only two university representatives on the committee, of whom only one is a natural scientist
3. Many members have no professional relation to the topic
4. Due to its selection, the GC already holds a dominant position, i.e. a top-down structure is promoted and the freedom of speech and opinion is prevented. This does not correspond to biblical principles.

Irrespective of the legal status of the committees and the significant negative effects of the compliance process as a whole, the following can be stated for this committee:

Due to the composition of its staff, the Committee is unable to make any assessments based exclusively on professional criteria. It can be seen that more administrative, but above all church-political aspects played a major role. In the assessment of incidents in which institutions or persons allegedly did not act in accordance with the requirements, the committees' judgment will therefore be based on inappropriate standards. This is unprofessional, unspiritual and contradicts our own standards, which are obligatory in our church worldwide.

In addition to the "Statement by the Presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany on the Documents of the Unity Oversight Committee of the General Conference"² of 5 September 2018, it is proposed to take the following measures to further strengthen the SDA in Europe and Germany:

- To send a further, permanent, scientifically trained representative of the Inter-European Division from the non-Spanish speaking region to the Faith & Science Council

² <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2018/09/07/german-unions-respond-gc%E2%80%99s-latest-documents-and-committee-creation>

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- To send a permanent representative of Friedensau Adventist University to the Faith & Science Council
- To improve the implementation of the IFSC in Europe, especially in Germany, to set up a branch of the Geoscience Research Institute at the Friedensau Adventist University.

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