

Statement in Opposition to Structure Study Commission Report—Albert C. Outler

Albert C. Outler (North Texas): Here are the demerits listed under seven heads without any development:

1. It is far too complex and cumbersome.
2. The scheme is excessively centralized. In it, as in the Roman Church before Vatican II, the basic model is the pyramid, power and program coming down from above and permeating the basic mass as far as promotion can manage that. This seems to me to be directly contrary to the most advanced and effective concept of management by objective in modern management theory.
3. This scheme would reduce the General Conference chiefly to a quadrennial assemblage for review, review of policies, programs and proposals from the Council on Ministries and the boards and agencies with the obvious alternative of taking those recommendations or of an occasional revolt and overthrow. This alters the prime function of the General Conference, and it seems to me would be a far-reaching and retrograde step.
4. The scheme, also, reduces the status and role of the Annual Conferences largely to one of reaction, accepting policies and programs from above, filling out quotas of various sorts, quotas having to do with rotation, sex, lay, clergy, ethnics, E.U.B.'s, youth, etc.
5. The scheme envisages three interlocking power complexes: the Council on Ministries, the Council on Finance and Administration, and the Council of Bishops. Each of these would be a power group controlled by an inner power group, that is to say their executive committees, and only the Council of Bishops would be composed of voting members who work full time in these particular jobs.

The other two would be policy making groups of elected persons serving voluntarily and on marginal time, and they would inevitably become dependent upon their staff. The Commission thinks that this would be a good thing. I think that it would be a bad thing. The obvious and inevitable result would be an even more completely staff-dominated church than we have now, for the Commission on Ministries and the C.F.A. would in turn tend to dominate the General Conference, it would tend to dominate the Annual Conferences and the local churches.
6. The scheme is governed by two operational principles that are valid enough in themselves under some circumstances, but which would almost surely work out badly in practice in these circumstances as they are envisaged in this report.

Number one, the quota system. There are so many categories and so few places, and yet not all the categories that are eligible and justified are specified and laid out. But there are so many categories and so few places to be filled comparatively speaking, the combinations of experience, expertise, and available time would be so rare that persons with all the requisite talents would wield undue influence in the typical quota-filled group.

Two, the rotation system. This would tend to inhibit the acquisition of significant experience and expertise, not only in the persons elected from annual and jurisdictional conferences—a layman this quadrennium, a laywoman next, an elder in full connection the next—but even in staff personnel as well. Few persons in their lifetime might expect to represent the whole church in any top quality role for longer than eight years. Many would have no more than a single quadrennium; most would have to find their glory in the sun in their annual and charge conferences, groups that had been sadly degraded in influence and honor.

7. As an overall consequence I would judge that this proposed structure would make The United Methodist Church the most centralized and "curialized" structure in Christendom bar none. (And I am as you know a veteran Roman Catholic watcher.)

And this in a church whose members are beginning to discover that they belong to a voluntary association, that has no really effective power to tax or to excommunicate; whose programs are invariably expensive and ideological often without being worth what they cost; and finally that the pyramid is no longer the most viable model of institutional organization in the modern world.

From this I draw an inference that does not even begin to approach a motion now, because my main concern is that this shall be discussed in this body as a whole before it is referred—referred to the committees or the Committee on Reference, or however it is referred.

My inference is that not because any of us is satisfied with the status quo, not anyone in this room I think, but because this particular structural reform would actually tend to reinforce the constrictive features in our present structures even with the best intent to open them up, and would not fulfill our own best intentions as a democratic church—that we ought, after full discussion, including the right of legislative committees to concur or not to concur, we should table this report and all its minutes and documentations, plus the full record of its discussion in the Conference and in the whole church, be referred to a reconstituted successor commission with a mandate that will include at the very least the commendation of a radically different approach to the problems of church structure and polity—namely structures as support systems and no more than support systems—governed by such principles as:

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| 1) Local initiative | 5) Enlistment of all available talent |
| 2) Subsidiarity | 6) Inclusiveness |
| 3) Decentralization | 7) Ecumenical outreach and cooperation |
| 4) Collegiality | 8) Etc. |