

DON'T BLAME THE CONSTITUTION!

The Queen famously described 1992 as an “annus horribilis”, which translates as “horrible year”. It had seen the separation of Prince Andrew and his wife, the Duchess of York; the divorce of Princess Anne from Captain Mark Phillips; the publication of “Diana: Her True Story”, which revealed many of the problems in her marriage to Prince Charles; and, to cap it all, a devastating fire at Windsor Castle.

What with COVID, Brexit, financial challenges, and the recent North England Conference employment tribunal findings, many church members may well be feeling that this has been our “annus horribilis”. In fact, many in the NEC may feel justified in saying they have had a “quadrennium horribilis”.

There are members who feel hurt, let down, angry and disillusioned by what they have seen, heard and experienced. For some there is a deep desire to understand what has happened, to make sense of what seems like chaos, and to pin the blame on someone or something.

This is completely natural and to be expected. However, on behalf of the many people who have worked very hard on the project, I would like to make a plea in favour of the proposed new BUC and NEC constitutions, and the proposed new Missions’ operating policies.

As regular as clockwork, it seems that when session times come around the constitution takes a battering. For many, the constitution discussion time is the only opportunity they have to express their frustrations, grievances and concerns. Already in the run up to the four sessions we have scheduled for later this year I have heard comments like, “the constitution isn’t fit for purpose”, or, “the constitution is way out of date”, or “we must revise the constitution.”

Well, revision of the constitution is an ongoing process. It is part of the normal work of the church, which is why we appoint standing constitution committees. You can see all of our BUC constitutions, going back to 1924, at: www.bucsession.org.uk/constitution. Over the years there have been constant revisions and changes as we seek to comply with the laws of our land as well as the model constitutions provided by the General Conferences. At every session these revisions are brought to the delegates to be approved.

Constitutions are the foundational documents of our church. They are a solid platform to build on. However, they cannot, nor are they intended to, answer every question and every challenge that we might face.

As I say in my various presentations about the new constitutions, whatever the wording, and whatever the proposed amendments, they will not solve our current problems. Most of the problems we face are human and relational, and addressing them will take a wide range of measures. These include an improvement in our governance structure and processes, but the constitution is only a small part of this.

I believe that the proposed new constitutions are part of the solution to our current problems, not part of the problem. There are so many benefits to the new documents that I believe they vastly outweigh any minor concerns we may have over certain wordings. These

benefits include: a closer harmony between us and the General Conference; the opportunity to hold a virtual session in any future emergency situation; and a strengthening of the position of the Executive Committee, making it even more clear that it is the Executive Committee which has the final authority over the church's operations at each level, not the officers.

Anyone reading the constitution, current or proposed, will see things that they would like to add or change. Everyone will have a different view as to what these things are and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve a complete consensus of opinion. It is therefore important that we focus on the higher purpose of the constitution, which is to provide stability, promote unity, and enable our union, conferences and missions to operate effectively in our respective regions.

So, whatever your current concerns and grievances, my plea is, "Don't blame the constitution!" We need a two-thirds majority at our union and conference sessions to get the new documents approved and we would really appreciate your help in making this happen.