

# Trying to Take Over 3ABN

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Three Angels' Broadcasting Network (commonly known as 3ABN) was blessed from the beginning of its work, in the mid-1980s, with several very wealthy sponsors who were on the board at its very start in 1986. Such prosperous donors and supporters have not only enabled it to rapidly expand into full-time satellite television broadcasting but, also very important, they have protected it from the encroachments of church leaders. In our church, those with money are listened to.

Unfortunately, church administrators tend to view success by independent groups as rivalry which needs to be taken over; controlled in one way or another; or, by words or acts of disapproval, separated from the membership. But, fortunately, 3ABN has had influential defenders.

A couple years ago, the General Conference was considering ways to shut 3ABN out of certain Russian-aimed telecasts. But men of wealth stepped in and the General Conference permitted it to continue.

3ABN has those supporters and defenders because it is careful not to speak negatively of the church or point out its sins. This opens to it many avenues of support.

However, Robert Folkenberg has had his eyes set on 3ABN. It is a plum he would like to pluck and place in the basket of General Conference holdings. But, since Danny Shelton can be hard-nosed about such matters and the influential continue to intercede, Folkenberg's current objective has been to achieve more limited control.

We all know the illustration of the camel that is able to get its nose under the edge of the tent. If not repulsed, he will move right on in! The bedouin know this, and rush over and bop the camel on its nose!

For example, in late 1992, Robert Folkenberg asked that Al McClure, president of the North American Division, be placed on the board of 3ABN. That may sound innocuous, but corporate boards are powerful and are easily swayed by the presence of seemingly "great men" on them. Christians have an almost unconscious tendency to yield to the wishes of church leaders, whether it be on a local church board, conference constituency meeting, or wherever.

On January 21, 1993, Shelton wrote Folkenberg and told him that the board had decided not to invite McClure to join it. That took some nerve, but

Shelton and his board members knew that additional encroachments would follow. At future board meetings, the NAD president could keep suggesting that this and that be done; and, to satisfy him, more and more control would be turned over to church leaders.

It is well to keep in mind that, while those of us who are not retired have to work for a living, church leaders have time to sit and plan how they can more conveniently manage the church. They view members as a bunch of children which need continual guidance and control.

On January 31, Folkenberg replied to Shelton's letter. *We have reprinted his interesting letter on page 5.* It contains implied threats. Why is it that church leaders cannot work with independent missionary groups without feeling they must dominate them?

In that letter, Folkenberg promised that, if what he had requested was going to be rejected, a great deal of "misunderstanding, pain and trauma" would come to 3ABN. Trauma means injury, wounds, cuts and gashes. This is strong language.

One of our correspondents, who has seen this remarkable letter with its strange wording, says "the 'negative 2 plus negative 10 equals negative 50,' in the second paragraph, is coded language. Two independent ministries had, by 1993, been eliminated. Ten more were to go, and eventually all of them would be reduced to rubble." Whether or not Folkenberg's strange wording meant that is not clear. But I would think that a General Conference president ought not to use enigmatic language preceding a threat.

One person wrote this: "This is a Mafia code or sign, and can be verified by the police or an attorney." Whether that is true, I have no idea; but Folkenberg's wording was indeed peculiar, coming as it did just before the hint of ensuing "trauma."

The most recent attempt at partial takeover came this year.

On Thursday evening, March 20, 1997, Robert Folkenberg met with the officers and most of the members of the 3ABN board. He recommended that the board of 3ABN enact certain changes, so there could be "increased cooperation."

Shortly afterward on April 7, and even before the full board had an opportunity to discuss and vote

on the matter, Folkenberg announced over the worldwide web, to church workers everywhere, that proposed changes had been recommended to 3ABN, which, when adopted, would greatly improve “unity” and help “interface independent ministries and the church constituencies.” Going over the internet, to thousands of church workers in this way, constituted real push and shove.

*His internet letter, dated April 7, is reprinted on page 6 of this present report.*

In that letter, Folkenberg says the General Conference is not trying to assume corporate control over 3ABN. If you will check into the history of independent ministries in our denomination which have been taken over, the control was generally accomplished in small steps. First, control their income and their output, place someone on the board, and gradually work toward 51 percent board membership.

When the full board of 3ABN met to consider Folkenberg’s requests, they were puzzled as to why he kept trying to deepen church control over an organization which had consistently gone out of its way never to offend church leadership.

They were willing to cooperate with church officials in every way, except that they wished to remain independent. Whatever church leaders might want to broadcast, in the way of music or messages, 3ABN was willing to transmit. They had regularly broadcast John Carter’s messages (*see our tracts on this subject*).

What were these most recent demands? A contract would be involved. In order for 3ABN to transmit church broadcasts in North America and overseas, they would have to sign an agreement giving church leaders significant control over what 3ABN could broadcast.

When one stops to consider the matter, there are two types of broadcasts involved here:

(1) The denomination would prepare certain features for broadcast. 3ABN would broadcast them.—but why should church leaders be concerned about this, since it was the church leaders who decided what was in those broadcasts?

(2) 3ABN broadcasts programs which it produces in its own studios.—But why should it need leadership approval to broadcast them? It never produces material offensive to church leaders—or does it? Sometimes there is a mention of obeying the laws of God. That might bother some leaders, as giving an appearance of legalism.

Yet, in spite of all this, a majority of the board members of 3ABN did go so far, at their March 20 meeting, as to favor a General Conference recommendation that church officials in each area around the world could prohibit 3ABN broadcasts they deemed

offensive. South Pacific Division officials at Cooranbong, Australia, would surely like that provision.

Each time a programming dispute occurred, a five-step issues-resolution process was to be set up, which would culminate in a three-person binding arbitration panel to settle the matter. One person would be from the division, one from 3ABN, and a third to be approved by both parties.

In a later report, Folkenberg specifically stated that several divisions had voted that an agreement was vital to building a long-term relationship with 3ABN. But what divisions voted this and who, in those divisions, did so is not mentioned. It seems that someone was doing some phoning to drum up support for the proposal. Yet such a recommendation was never approved by the Spring or Annual Council, nor by a General Conference Session! Matters which affect the worldwide church are to be taken to the Councils or Sessions, not arbitrated by Folkenberg on behalf of unknown divisions.

Lacking Council or Session approval, it is clear that we only have here something that Folkenberg wants.

To date, 3ABN has nicely cooperated with all church programming, and it is unlikely that either a Council or Session would vote to demand that 3ABN yield certain controls or be ousted from broadcasting for the denomination.

In order to better understand Robert Folkenberg’s concern to work toward an eventual takeover of 3ABN, it is well to keep in mind the unusual arrangement Robert Folkenberg has worked out with one of his closest friends: Ray Tetz. Folkenberg arranged for the General Conference to pay for, and equip, expensive additions to an already expensive General Conference television production studio. Then he arranged for Tetz to operate the studio—both as an employee of ADRA and as an independent contractor of the studio!! In this way, Tetz makes a very nice double income, using General Conference equipment.

Would it be possible that Folkenberg wants to either rule or ruin 3ABN; so, if he cannot take it over, he has an excuse to expand operations of the General Conference studio?

For much more on this cozy relationship, see pages 33-37 of our *Collision Course*. Here are a few excerpts from it:

“In addition to having received that [video studio] contract, he [Ray Tetz] receives a full 40-hour salary from the General Conference under the title, vice-president for public relations for ADRA. His primary duty in his capacity as PR man for ADRA—is operating the contract studio! This means he is

receiving a double salary—and the contract wages are far greater than those he routinely receives as a General Conference employee.

“All of the work done in that studio is billed to the General Conference by Tetz. —And what is the ‘studio’? It is none other than the General Conference video studio! All the equipment there is owned by the General Conference. All of it is maintained, repaired, and replaced at full cost to the General Conference. Yet, using General Conference video equipment and rooms, operating on their utilities expense, and doing it on company time—Tetz receives a sizeable profit.

“In addition to receiving his full salary as a General Conference executive,—he bills the General Conference in excess of \$150,000 a year to produce videos for our world headquarters! This is ‘cost-saving’? It is money wasting in the extreme.

“It would be relatively easy for the General Conference to hire an employee to manage video operations, as they used to—prior to Folkenberg’s election. But now they do it the expensive way: contracting it out to a middleman to do the job with their equipment and facilities. In addition, he does it on company time; that is, during his regular work hours as a General Conference employee.”—*Collision Course*, pp. 33-34.

A sample invoice, the name of Tetz’ firm name, plus more data are included in the book.

This information helps us better understand Folkenberg’s concern, to bring 3ABN under his control. Profits from that much larger television operation would be sizeable. He might be able to get Tetz to manage that contract also.

We know that Folkenberg appreciates extra income, because of the “Worthy Student Fund” debacle, through which money was secretly laundered through

the Columbia Union to provide him with extra perks, as soon as he was elected in 1990 until the project was uncovered and stopped by church leaders. (See *Collision Course*, pp. 25-28 for details of the “Worthy Student Fund” misappropriations. For more on ADRA, see *Collision Course*, pp. 22-25 and *The Donald Folkenberg Transactions*, pp. 7-8.)

Unfortunately, since the 1995 Session actions at Utrecht, which, at his request, granted so much authority to the president, there are few individuals in the world headquarters that dare oppose his plans (see our various studies on the Utrecht Session). Those at 3ABN would be wise to be cautious about any agreements with the General Conference.

On Tuesday, April 22, 1997, the board of 3ABN met to consider the Draft Agreement which Folkenberg had presented it with. They recognized that factors were involved which would initiate a slow process of subordination of the broadcasting firm to denominational headquarters.

That day the board voted to reject Folkenberg’s document, and a three-page letter was prepared which was sent to the General Conference president. Entitled, *A Statement of Commitment*, it sought to reassure the president that 3ABN would continue to please church leadership in every way possible, but that they could not be bound by an agreement. Here is part of their statement:

“Whereas 3ABN has already demonstrated the sincerity of its desire by its positive actions in support of the work of the church in the past, and

“Whereas 3ABN, its staff, its board, and many of its viewers and supporters perceive a serious potential threat to the continuing effectiveness and operation of the ministry of 3ABN by entering into any type of contractual agreement with the church . . . Accordingly,

## THE VOICE OF PROPHECY EXPERIENCE

In 1937, an evangelist in Los Angeles began broadcasting his messages regularly over the radio. About all that people had back then were their radios and newspapers, so Harold M.S. Richards, Sr., was gradually gaining success.

But church leaders were deeply upset, for his was an independent ministry. Matters continued like this for several years while Richards and his one-person staff worked in his garage, an aban-

doned chicken coup behind it.

Eventually Richards tired of the ongoing battle to stop his work; and, in 1937, he let church leaders have 51 percent control of his board. Immediately, the Voice of Prophecy was accepted as a church institution. The program went nationwide in 1942; and, in 1950, the staff moved into their beloved Glendale office building on East Chevy Chase Drive.

All went well for years. Then someone at the GC got the bright idea to toss all the broadcasting ministries into a Greek-style cluster of buildings in Newbury Park, in order to enhance

the church image. Both father and son Richards vigorously protested, but to no avail. Church leaders controlled the board.

That move cost the Voice of Prophecy the confidence of many supporters, and the Voice of Prophecy went into a slump from which it has never recovered. Many activities and services had to be dropped.

There is a lesson here for independent ministries. Give the leaders 51 percent of your board, and their decisions will henceforth dictate its activities.

“3ABN stands ready and available to dream, to discuss and to work with the church in such cooperative endeavors as the Spirit of God might inspire, and

“3ABN seeks the counsel of church constituency and leadership regarding all matters of common interest, whether of technical, theological or of some other nature that impacts upon our common objectives and goals, and

“3ABN seeks inspirational programming produced in keeping with commonly accepted traditional SDA standards by church supported entities for its viewing audience, . . .

Therefore, in keeping with this statement of intent, the 3ABN board reaffirms the authority of its president, Danny Shelton, to work with the representatives of the church in planning, coordinating and executing our common objectives.”—*Official 3ABN Board Action, April 22, 1997.*

In support of this action, and to demonstrate 3ABN’s willingness to cooperate as fully as possible with church leadership, the letter of one of their board members, dated April 16, was appended to the copy of the board action, which was sent to Elder Folkenberg. Here is the concluding portion, which reveals the strong concern of 3ABN to work as closely as possibly with church leadership:

“I would like to see our Board reaffirm our devotion to our Lord, restate our loyalty to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, reconfirm our sense of respect and support for Elder Folkenberg and his fellow officers at the helm, and redouble our efforts to do better than which the Lord has signally blessed thus far. Further, we would pledge to assist in any way possible the program and projects of the Corporate Church Body, motivated simply by the premise that God’s Will is their Will and our Will. The tie that binds us together is love, respect and common beliefs and objectives.”—*Letter by 3ABN Board Member, dated April 16, 1997.*

When Folkenberg received this board action and accompanying letter, he was very upset, and expressed his displeasure throughout the world field in a statement sent over the worldwide web on Monday, April 28.

It is remarkable that he would do this. And, frankly it is revealing.

He sent the April 7 letter to thousands of church workers, in order to push 3ABN into a corner so they would have to approve his requested contract.

He sent the April 28 letter to the same thousands, indicating his disgust with 3ABN for not doing what he told them to do!

This dictatorial spirit is not the best. Many centuries before, Peter wrote that church leaders should not lord it over God’s heritage, His little ones.

*This letter of April 28, 1997, is reprinted on pages 7 and 8 of this tract set.* In it, he tells all the world that 3ABN refuses to be “mutually supportive.” Folkenberg is using the internet to blacken the reputation of an independent ministry, when that group has bent as far over backward as it could to more than cooperate with the leaders of the church on all levels. I doubt that an organization could be more supportive of Adventist Church leaders.

Later in that letter, Folkenberg says that 3ABN is “denying the constituent authority of members in each country the right to be heard in an activity which directly affects their ability to fulfill their mission for which they are responsible.”

That is not true. 3ABN would have been helping the members fulfill their missionary objectives. The truth is that the members in the countries would have no say over agreements with 3ABN; it would be only the division officers which would raise objections to 3ABN programming; the church members would not be doing this.

Note carefully the final paragraph in that April 28 report to the world field: Folkenberg is predicting that he is going to obtain approval to enlarge his television studio in Maryland. Ray Tetz will soon be making even more money. The financial arrangement with Tetz is peculiar enough, that one cannot help wondering why Folkenberg is enriching his friends. Is Tetz giving him a monthly payback for the arrangement? In view of the fact that “Worthy Student Fund” laundering of money to Folkenberg’s family occurred in 1990 (until stopped by leaders which Utrecht placed as hirelings under Folkenberg), there is the very real possibility that kickbacks are occurring at their General Conference television studio.

Brethren, these things ought not to be! How can we expect God to pour out His Spirit in a final rain upon His people, when such abominations are tolerated in the highest ranks of the denomination?

Church members should arise and demand that changes be made! To have leaders who openly campaign for more power, and who are secretly receiving laundered money—is demoralizing to leadership on all levels, and news of it spreads.

Yet few will speak up. And when someone does, he is castigated as a troublemaker.

Ask the Old Testament prophets how much flowers and honey they presented to corrupt rulers. They reproved them! This is what we should do today.

Continued on the next tract

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