

Institute for Christian Teaching
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ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN THEOLOGY TEACHING

by

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ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN THEOLOGY TEACHING

Introduction

The concern for academic freedom is very old. Teachers in the past have been misunderstood and persecuted because of lack of academic freedom.¹ The modern terminology seems to have originated in Germany. Two words were used: Lehrfreiheit for the freedom to teach, and Lernfreiheit for the freedom to learn.² Within this secular concept, teachers involved in higher education have the right to research and to teach whatever they want. No limitation or restriction is conceived in their academic freedom. On the other hand, students are free to have access to all sources of knowledge, and to learn whatever they desire. In this secular view, neither the student nor the teacher has any commitment to beliefs or to any external organization.

In this unrestricted freedom of teaching, teachers of the secular university often challenge any former existing knowledge or accepted truth. In doing so, they usually present alternative solutions or new theories.

This practice has both a positive and a negative dimension. Through this procedure, the teacher can break new grounds and a more complete picture of truth is often unveiled. Errors of the past may be corrected and new truths disclosed. However, very often this academic freedom was--and still is--used for self-exaltation. By challenging theories or established truths, teachers often seek fame and glory. The more prominent the authority questioned or challenged, the greater the chances for making a name. This is part of the struggle often called "publish or perish". Sometimes no alternative solution is offered. By questioning established concepts or theories, they seek to attract attention to themselves. This was the trend of the past which is still present nowadays.

Should the theology teacher have a similar approach to the study of theology? What should be the motives of theological research? Does the theology teacher have commitments other than to his conscience and to truth? Should he be controlled or limited in his search for truth? How can he exercise his academic freedom in disclosing what he has found--or believes to have found--to his students? Should he have any concern in disclosing controversial issues? Are there other Christian concerns and biblical

¹Arthur F. Holmes, The Idea of a Christian College, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975-87), pp. 64-65.

²Ibid, p. 62.

imperatives that should limit his academic freedom in disclosing the results of his findings?

The main objective of this paper is to make an attempt to provide reasonable Christian answers to these important questions. In this attempt, special attention is given to finding a theological basis for the understanding of these delicate issues.

Theological Understanding of Academic Freedom

Freedom is a gift of God, given to man since creation. Created in God's image, man was given complete freedom in his actions. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen 2:16-17, NIV). Man was not limited in his freedom as to what he could do, but what he should do. The fact that he ate of the forbidden fruit indicates that he was totally free even to disobey. This first statement on freedom seems to imply responsibility rather than limitation. Ellen White states: "God had power to hold Adam back from touching the forbidden fruit; but had He done this, Satan would have been sustained in his charge against God's arbitrary rule. Man would not have been a free moral agent, but a mere machine."¹ Could it be that one of the reasons for the existence of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was to teach man a responsible freedom?

There is usually a risk in freedom. Whenever freedom is given, the risk exists of its misuse. God was fully aware of such a risk when he created man. God knew that man could use his freedom to say "no" to him. But there seems to exist no acceptable divine alternative to freedom. Dictatorship has always been proved an undesirable alternative to freedom. It is imposed only by force, which is incompatible with God's character. Therefore, God chose to take risks, and in his fore-knowledge He knew what the result would be. He even knew the price to be paid -- the death of Jesus. But he loved us too much to deprive us of what is one of the unquestionable aspects of His image in man.

As far as learning is concerned, the whole created world was presented to Adam and Eve as their textbook. Although sin had already entered the universe, God did not limit man's freedom of learning. The restriction regarding the tree of good and evil was limited only to its consumption. There is no indication that Adam and Eve were denied the right to approach, to examine, and to study all God's creation.

Genesis 2:15 is also an illuminating text. It states that the Lord put man in the garden of Eden "to till and to keep it" (RSV). In this double obligation there seems to exist two major implications: man was expected not only to explore what God had created, but also to preserve it. "Man had to use his physical and mental faculties to preserve the garden in the same perfect state in which he had received it".² Although God did not impose

¹Review and Herald, June 4, 1901, quoted by the Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary, 10 vls., Revised Edition (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 1:1084.

²SDABC, 1:224.

limitations on man regarding the exploration of His creation, God did impose responsibility in that man should "preserve" it.

After the first two recorded sins were committed by man, two major questions were asked by God. To Adam he asked "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). The implication of this question is that God has a special concern towards man. On the other hand, He asked Cain "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9). This second question seems to imply that God desires men to have also a special concern towards his fellowmen. Cain's answer--"Am I my brother's keeper?"--shows his lack of understanding of man's responsibility towards creation. If man was to be responsible for the use he made of the garden, how much more towards man, created in God's image, the chef d'oeuvre of his creation. There seems to be no doubt that it was God's intent that man could search and explore all that he has created, but in doing so, man has to keep in mind that his freedom has to be a responsible freedom towards creation, and above all, towards his fellow human beings.

If these theological premises are correct, it seems obvious that in the Christian perspective we should not talk of academic freedom as it is understood in the secular setting, but rather of a responsible academic freedom, because we are dealing with God's creation.¹ "Christian liberty is neither irresponsible license nor repressive bondage, and academic freedom in the Christian college must rest on this realization."²

The secular concept, as Holmes contends, is "undesirable for both educational and religious reasons."³ The Christian has a commitment not only towards truth, but also towards his fellowmen as individuals and towards the community of believers. In his commitment to find truth, he is also committed to the master of truth, who said of Himself "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and this master of truth is the Creator of everything. All His creation is part of His responsibility. Therefore, in this search for truth, the researcher has a reference point -- the revealed truth and the personified truth in the Word made flesh. As Copiz states, "God, the source of truth--the ultimate reality beyond whatever may hide Him--reveals Himself through Scriptures, nature, and impulses of the Holy Spirit, but especially through Jesus Christ, who is both the truth and the way to it."⁴

Responsible Academic Freedom Implies Human Obligations

To teach theology is a privilege loaded with responsibility. In his commitment to truth, the theology teacher faces three imperative obligations.

¹This paper had already been written when I had finally access to B. B. Beach article "Can a University Be Christian? -- A Look at Academic Freedom on the Adventist Campus", Adventist Review, March 2, 1989, pp. 19-24. Beach also places strong emphasis on responsible academic freedom.

²Holmes, p. 63.

³Ibid, p. 62.

⁴Pietro E. Copiz, "Some Reflections on the Christian Scholar Facing Research" Collonges-sous-Salève: Institute of Christian Teaching, 1989), p. 2.

In their order of importance we have: obligation towards truth, obligation towards the students, and obligation towards the church -- the community of believers.

Obligation towards Truth. To search for truth is more than a freedom, it is an obligation. This freedom is not negotiable. Ellen White asserts:

"The truths of the Bible are as pearls hidden. They must be searched, dug out by painstaking effort.... The illuminated soul sees a spiritual unity, one grand golden thread running through the whole, but it requires patience, thought, and prayer to trace out the precious golden thread. Sharp contentions over the Bible have led to investigation and revealed the precious jewels of truth."¹

One has the right to question the honesty of a theology teacher who nourishes perpetual doubts in his heart and refuses to open his mind and search for more light. In refusing to break new ground, he becomes collector of ready answers that rarely satisfy intelligent students who search for truth.

The reason for a continuous quest for truth is based on three major reasons:

a) Known truth is fragmentary, incomplete. Our knowledge of truth is incomplete (1 Cor 13:9-10, 12). There exist certainly some truths that have not yet been found, and "truth discovered is God's truth too",² because "all truth is God's truth."³ The effect of new found truth would be an addition to the other known truth.⁴

b) The knowledge of truth is progressive. Known truth may have been understood in a limited way and more light may be shed upon it. The effect would be an illumination of the subject.⁵

c) Examples of the past have shown that errors have often been held as truth. In His love towards fallen human beings, God has sometimes tolerated less than ideal practices and even allowed that His people make mistakes and hold errors as if they were truth. Sometimes, because of the hardness of human heart, He has even legislated on principles that were far from the ideal, waiting for a more mature faith in order to correct them.

¹Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, 1:20.

²Holmes, p. 63

³Frank E. Gaebelin, The Pattern of God's Truth (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954-68), p. vii and passim.

⁴A clear example is found in the sanctuary doctrine that has been understood plainly only since 1844.

⁵An example is found in the observation of the sabbath from 6 pm to 6 pm which was later illuminated by research of J. N. Andrews and corrected to sunset to sunset. For a clear picture of this issue, see Dalton D. Baldwin, "Openness for Renewal without Destructive Pluralism: the Dilemma of Doctrinal Dissent," Paper presented to the Institute of Christian Teaching (Lincoln, Nebraska: Institute of Christian Teaching, 1989), pp. 12-15.

In such cases, the discovery of truth has the effect of correcting, or even substituting for the former practice.¹

In the exercise of his academic freedom, the theology teacher should not face any restriction related to his search of truth. His freedom in this aspect should be total, and no human being should claim the right to interfere in his sacred duty. The search for truth has no boundaries.

Obligation towards the Student. The theology teacher in his academic freedom has to remember that he has an obligation towards all of his students. And if no restriction should be imposed in his search for truth, special care and consideration should be given to the teaching or to the transmission of discovered truth. This is especially true when one is dealing with interpretation of truth. In the field of teaching some restrictions should be considered.

The restrictions of such freedom must be understood within the framework of more important values than the academic freedom of a teacher, such as: the golden rule; Christ's injunction to love our neighbor as ourselves; and the Christian awareness that he is his brother's keeper. Whenever the exercise of academic freedom contributes to destroy the faith of a student, it no longer belongs to the realm of freedom. Christian freedom is responsible.

Irresponsible freedom may give birth to license and destruction. When freedom becomes destructive of human faith it has been misused and is no longer God's freedom.

The only destruction that should come out of academic freedom is the destruction of error. Truth has to prevail not only in its discovery but also in its implementation. The discovery of a new truth should not destroy all other truth which fills the heart of a person. The freedom according to God can never be destructive. It is to such cases that Jesus' words do apply, when He affirmed: "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Mat 18:6, NIV).

As stated above, professors in other fields of studies frequently challenge ancient methods and conclusions of the past, offering original alternatives mostly for the sake of fame or reputation. Such practices, which may be harmless in other fields, may be disastrous in the field of theology.

In fact, in most other fields, the student comes with few preconceived ideas and often without a former knowledge of the subjects. Eager to learn, they keep an open mind for all new ideas. Most of what the teacher teaches is new because very often the student has not a reference value in his past experience. Such is not the case with the theology student. He comes to the college or seminary not only with a baggage of established religious convictions but also eager to know more from the Bible and other theological disciplines. He aspires to strengthen and solidify his faith. It would be inhuman, even perverse to disappoint him, to inflict a blow to his faith. God forbid that such attitude should be exercised in the name of Christian academic freedom.

¹Two examples: circumcision at the time of Paul was eliminated for gentiles; divorce, which was legislated in the OT, was discarded by Jesus.

One may raise the question: should the teacher become an indoctrinator? Isn't it possible for a teacher to open the eyes of his students to some contradictory issues? Where is the freedom of the teacher to teach and the freedom of the student to learn?

It was pointed out before that there should be no restriction in the search for truth, but there should be restriction on the transmission of truth. This restriction should be observed in two aspects: maturity of the student and the content of the subject.

a) Maturity of the student. Any experienced theology teacher knows that most freshmen students majoring in theology have high spiritual expectations from the theology program and very little awareness of problems that exist in the theological field. Therefore, special attention should be given to those newcomers. Wisdom should compel teachers, as much as possible, to avoid controversial questions when dealing with freshmen.

To point out some contradictions of the Bible text, or even some errors on chronology or other areas, may shake the faith of some students on the inspiration of the Bible. Young students often come to college with wrong concepts on the inspiration of the Bible. If one should illustrate their concept of inspiration, probably it should be compared to a pyramid turned up-side-down. The basis of their faith is very vulnerable. If those students ever find an inaccuracy in the Bible, they may decide to throw everything away. The whole structure of their faith may easily collapse.

More mature students in their junior or senior years, however, have already acquired an awareness of some theological issues and would be less shocked when facing a controversial issue that may shake their faith.

Only time, patience and tact will allow the christian teacher to rotate this unstable pyramid of faith in the student's life and place it on solid basis. Love for the student and for his salvation should be more important than the teacher's concern to show revolutionary ideas and controversial points to students in this early stage of their formation. He is in fact in the stage where he needs milk and not solid food (1 Cor 3:1-2). The time of solid food will come later.

b) The kind of information. The second restriction that a theology teacher should take into consideration relates to the kind of information that he intends to share. The theological field offers to the intelligent teacher a real ocean of speculative questions. It is easy for him to ask questions. He can question established doctrines, ethical practices and even eschatological expectations. There is nothing wrong in questioning. But the responsible theology teacher should not question only for the sake of questioning. Responsible academic freedom should compel him to be constructive, avoiding anything that could confuse the mind of students, even of the more mature students, without having alternative answers to offer. Such procedure is incompatible with responsible Christian academic freedom.

Obligation towards the Church. The theology teacher has also an obligation towards the community of believers. As a believer, he does not stand alone. He is part of the body of Christ, in which harmony and unity are the utmost desire of Jesus. This body has been organized after careful study of the fundamental truths. To establish these truths, sincere and persevering research sustained by the action of the Holy Spirit has been at work for many years.

When new ground has been dug and new light has emerged, special attention should be given to this body of Christ. Wisdom will dictate a Christian attitude that would seek the analogy of faith in the community of believers. The church is the depository of truth and it remains as a reference point for any new truth. Responsible academic freedom should lead him to seek the opinion of others regarding any new light.

Academic Freedom and the Existing Tension Between Administrators and Scholars

A correct understanding of the doctrine of spiritual gifts shows that they are distributed by the discretion of the Holy Spirit. Man has no control upon them. A person may be granted one or more gifts. God needs specialists in all fields of His work. He needs administrators as well as in theologians. It is possible that some administrators are also theologians. However, such is not always the case. To postulate that administrators should also be competent theologians as Larson seems to imply,¹ is to disregard the implications of the doctrine of spiritual gifts.

The church needs administrators and theologians. Very often, however, a tension is perceived between some administrators and some scholars involved in the different areas of teaching. Because of the sensitivity of the theological areas, this tension is still greater between theology teachers and the Church administration. This tension has often been observed and commented on, but no clear solution has been found so far. It would be naive to expect a complete solution to this complex problem.

This tension has sometimes affected the view of some theology teachers. They seem to face a dilemma: remain faithful to truth and its investigation, and at the same time remain faithful to his commitment to the administration and the church. "Liberty without loyalty is not Christian, but loyalty without the liberty to think for oneself is not education", proclaims Holmes. He adds: "... loyalty without liberty is not Christian but legalistic".²

It has been stated above that there should be no limitation of the teacher's academic freedom in his search for truth, but a careful consideration should be given to the disclosing of a new found truth. However, this limitation should be a self-imposed limitation based on the teacher's awareness of the controversial content of the issue. If the teacher uses his academic freedom in a responsible way, he should be the one to determine if a subject should be treated and when it should be treated. This limitation should not come from the Church administration.

¹Ralph Larson, The Word Was Made Flesh (Cherry Valley: The Cherrystone Press, 1986), p. 6 affirms that "... until the mid-1950's much of the theological writing in our church papers was done by our church administrators, who accepted the responsibility of being competent in theology as part of their administrative duty. It would seem that they considered theology too important a matter to be entrusted to theologians. They may have been right."

²Holmes, p. 61.

In the context of the conflict between theologians and administrators regarding the doctrine of justification by faith discussed in the General Conference Session of 1888, Ellen White stated:

Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught hitherto. Away with these restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak. Let not any minister feel under bonds or be gagged by men's measurement.¹

Another factor of tension is the disagreement between scholars and administrators on the beliefs that are binding. Scholars seem to have a minimalistic view, reducing the binding beliefs to its minimum, while administrators, pushing in the opposite direction, try to hold a maximalistic view. In certain countries some push the issue so far as to impose details of Christian life that go far beyond being a fundamental belief of the church.² By saying this, it is not our intention to defend a dualistic position, where theology teachers should be perceived only by what they teach and not how they live. There is no place for pharisaic dualism.(Mat 23:2-4) in this area.

It is my conviction, however, that a clear understanding by the theology teachers and the church administrators of what responsible academic freedom implies, should contribute to ease such tension.

Theology teachers could avoid the use of academic freedom as an offensive weapon to fight Church administrators, claiming absolute rights to teach whatever they believe should be taught. They should also be cautious in using academic freedom as a defensive weapon, when they have intentionally or inadvertently violated the principles of responsible academic freedom. To sow seeds of controversy and confusion in the body of Christ without any concern for its consequences in the name of academic freedom is a rather questionable attitude.

On the other hand, administrators are expected to see academic freedom not as a threat to be counteracted by authoritative prerogatives and threats of employment termination. If some administrators have in the past perceived academic freedom as something which bears in itself the seal of the prince of darkness, they should re-examine their position and get a better insight of it.

There should be a joint effort to understand what responsible christian academic freedom really means. One could hardly conceive that one and the same thing could be both a blessing for the theology teacher and a curse for the administrator. Could one and the same thing be both a good and a bad

¹Manuscript 8a, 1888, quoted in A. V. Olson, Through Crisis to Victory, p. 273.

²Recently, while I was talking with an assistant treasurer at the Division level, he had to interrupt the conversation for forty minutes. When he came back, he explained that all this time he had spent trying to convince a newly arrived theology teacher coming from overseas that, either he shave his beard or risk being dismissed. This Division assistant treasurer repudiated such an idea, but he knew that unless he succeed in convincing the teacher, the college administration would act promptly against him.

thing at the same time? When asking a similar question, James left only the negative as a viable answer (Jam 3:11-12).¹

Therefore, a challenge is presented here for theology teachers and administrators to try to have a clearer understanding of responsible academic freedom. An open mind is expected of administrators when dealing with new-found light. On the other hand, scholars are expected to be cautious and conciliatory when presenting their research conclusions. If this ideal were reached, academic freedom, which has often been the cause of tension, would become the major factor to ease such tension.

An interesting step in this direction has been made by the General Conference in stating the new policy on academic freedom.² This policy presents a rather balanced view of the issue. Procedures have been established to allow free research as well as its presentation.

Avoiding the minimalist as well as the maximalist position, the General Conference policy presents the "Fundamental Beliefs" as the basic norm to which each teacher should abide. It is hoped that the criteria established will be followed with consistency by administrators. On the other hand, it is hoped that theology teachers will show their goodwill in following this policy, especially when facing controversial issues. In doing so, they will be exercising a responsible academic freedom which is the only one that could be called Christian.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to help theology teachers to reflect upon this crucial issue related to their sacred ministry. It is not an attempt to oppose or limit academic freedom, but it is a cry for responsible academic freedom, a cry for teachers to have major Christian concerns towards students and the community of believers.

It is also a cry against all abuses of authority of the Church administration as well as a cry against its attempt to hinder responsible academic freedom and to impose a maximalistic view of the fundamental doctrines.

Finally, it is a cry for more understanding, more efforts towards unity, the unity for which the One who is truth and the only way to truth prayed for (John 17:23). May this academic freedom used in the search for truth be understood and practiced in such a way that it becomes a blessing and a blessing only.

¹Referring to academic freedom in general, Roth affirms that it "... can be both constructive and destructive". Ariel A. Roth, "How to Invalidate the Bible--Unconsciously: Some Thoughts on Pluralism About Origins," Adventist Perspectives 2 (1988)2:23. We can hardly disagree with him if we consider academic freedom in general. Such will not the case if we refer to responsible christian academic freedom.

²See Appendix 2.

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APPENDIX I

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF THE THEOLOGY TEACHER

I have formulated these commandments in the apodictic style of negative commands just as the ten commandments. They present the major rights and concerns that each theology teacher is expected to have in the exercise of his sacred ministry.

1. Thou shalt not accept the known theological truth of the SDA church as the whole truth. (We know in part, we prophecy in part.)
2. Thou shalt not stop searching for more light that could illuminate known truth, correct erroneous concepts associated with known truth or establish a yet unknown truth. (Search and you shall find.)
3. Thou shalt not accept the known truth as unnegotiable. (Changes in the past have shown that changes may still exist.)¹
4. Thou shalt not confuse fundamental truth with its detailed aspects of its application.
5. Thou shalt not question established truth, thus creating doubts in the minds of students, without having a reasonable, proved alternative to offer them. (We are not messengers of doubt.)
6. Thou shalt not equate thine own conviction or interpretation with fundamental truth.
7. Thou shalt not spread a newly discovered controversial fact about a fundamental truth without having tested it with the whole truth and having examined it together with those that also love truth and are committed to it.
8. Thou shalt not hide newly discovered and tested truth for the sake of keeping your position or your job. (We must obey God rather than man.)
9. Thou shalt not have a closed mind to other's arguments while expecting from them an attentive ear to listen to your own arguments and reasons. (Thou shalt not do to others what thou doest not want others to do to thee. Keep an open mind to listen to other's arguments.)
10. Thou shalt not lose patience with those who are slow to grasp the truth that you have discovered or believe to have discovered. New truth takes time and patience before it can be accepted.

¹"There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation." (Ellen G. White, Counsels to Writers and Editors (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), p. 35.

APPENDIX II

GENERAL CONFERENCE VOTE ON THEOLOGICAL
ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Vote 104-87GN - Annual Council, October 11, 1987.

A STATEMENT ON THEOLOGICAL FREEDOM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Church and its Institutions

Freedom for the Seventh-day Adventist pastor/worker, hereinafter referred to as worker, is based on the theological premise that God values freedom and that without it there can be no love, truth, or justice. Love asks for affection and commitment to be given without constraint; the acceptance of truth requires a willing examination and reception of evidence and argument; justice demands respect for personal rights and freedom. The presence of these elements within the Church nurtures the spirit of unity for which our Lord prayed (John 17:21-23; cf Psalm 133).

Seventh-day Adventists have derived their distinctive world view from the Old and New Testaments. They believe that Biblical truth and freedom of conscience are vital issues in the great controversy between good and evil. By its very nature evil depends on deception and falsehood, and sometimes force, to maintain itself. Truth thrives best in a climate of freedom, persuasion, and a sincere desire to do God's will (John 7:17; Psalm 111:10).

Consequently, it is consistent with Adventist administrative practice to recognize the worker's privilege to study the Bible for himself in order to "prove all things" (1 Thess 5:21). It would be inconsistent for the Church to preach that truth and freedom cannot exist without each other and then to deny its workers the right to freely investigate all claims to truth. This means, therefore, that the Church will not obstruct the quest for truth but will encourage its workers and constituents to engage in serious study of the Scriptures and to appreciate the spiritual light they disclose (Psalm 119:130).

Although the worker is free to pursue his studies, he may not assume that his personal, limited perspective does not need the insights and corrective influence of the Church he serves. What he thinks to be truth may be regarded by the larger community of believers to be error. And workers and members are called upon to be in agreement on essential points "that there be no divisions" in the body of Christ (1 Cor 1:10).

Freedom for individual Christian grows out of his belonging to the community of Christ. No one is free in the Biblical sense who is out of relationship with God or others. Theological truth, therefore, is affirmed by community study and confirmation. One person may stimulate the community

to study a question, but only God's people and church as a whole can decide what is or is not true in the light of Scripture. No member or worker can ever serve as an infallible interpreter for anyone else.

Inasmuch as deceptive teachings, harmful to the eternal welfare of souls, may at times arrive from within the Church itself (cf Acts 20:20-31; 2 Peter 2:1), its only safety is to receive and to foster no new doctrine or interpretation without first submitting it to the judgment of experienced brethren, for "in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov 11:14).

Even a genuine insight into truth discovered by a worker may not be acceptable to the corporate body upon first exposure to it. If such a teaching is divisive, it should not be taught or preached until evaluated in the manner described above. The apostles themselves provide an example of this approach (cf Acts 15:2, 6; Gal 2:2). It would be an irresponsible use of a worker's freedom to press a viewpoint that would endanger the unity of the church body which is as much a part of truth itself as are the formulated statements of doctrine (see Phil 1:27; Rom 15:5,6).

Furthermore, workers should distinguish doctrines that cannot be compromised without destroying the gospel in the framework of the three angel's messages and other beliefs that are not church supported. An example of this distinction may be seen in the Jerusalem council's decision (Acts 15). The apostle Paul's concern was to establish the truth of Christian liberty in the gospel for the Gentiles. Once that principle was accepted by the Church, he was willing to make concessions on matters of less significance (Rom 14: 5-13) for the sake of unity. Allowing a principle or a new truth time to translate itself into the daily life of the Church shows respect for the integrity of the body of Christ.

But where shall the line be drawn between freedom and responsibility? An individual entering into employment with the Church is expected to assume the privilege of representing God's cause in a responsible and honorable manner. He is expected to expound the Word of God conscientiously and with Christian concern for the eternal welfare of the persons under his care. Such a privilege precludes the promotion of theological views contrary to the accepted position of the Church.

Should a worker violate this trust, the Church must move to maintain its own character (Acts 20: 28-31) inasmuch as the community of faith stands to be divided by the promulgation of divergent doctrinal views. The worker's privileges consequently stand in jeopardy. This is particularly so because the worker, being in the service of the church is accountable for the preservation of its order and unity (cf Mark 3:24, 25; Eph 4:1-3; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

In the interest of genuine progress in spiritual understanding (2 Peter 3:18), the Church will arrange for a worker's divergent views, if he believes them to be new light, to be examined by a competent committee. Listening to alternatives will always advance truth. Either the alternative will strengthen and enlarge upon the truth, or it will stand exposed as false, thereby confirming present positions.

To ensure fairness and mature assessment, therefore, the following guidelines are to be followed by the administrations concerned when dealing with a worker alleged to hold conflicting views on doctrine.

Guidelines for Assessing Divergent Views for the disciplining of
Dissidents: Churches, Conferences, K-12 Institutions, and
Nonacademic Institutions

The Church reserves the right to employ only those individuals who personally believe in and are committed to upholding the doctrinal tenets of the church as summarized in the document, "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists" (1980). Such individuals are issued special credentials by their respective church bodies identifying them as continuing workers in the Church.

As church members, employees continue to be subject to the conditions for church membership as stated in the Church Manual. This document also relates to employment as salaried workers.

It is understood that the disciplining of such a church employee who persists in propagating doctrinal views differing from those of the Church is viewed not as a violation of his freedom, but rather as a necessary protection of the Church's integrity and identity. There are corporate church rights as well as individual freedoms. The worker's privileges do not include the licence to express views that may injure or destroy the very community that supports and provides for him.

In spite of a careful process of screening and selection, there still may be occasions when a worker's theological views are brought under critical review. If a hearing is necessary, the following process is recommended:

1. Private Consultation Between the Church Executive Officer and the Worker. Consultation should be in a spirit of conciliation allowing the worker every opportunity to freely express his convictions in an open and honest manner. If this preliminary conversation indicates the individual is in advocacy of doctrinal views divergent from accepted Adventist theology and is unwilling to refrain from their recital, the chief executive officer shall refer the matter to the conference/institutional executive committee, which will then arrange for a select committee to review the situation with the worker.

At the time of consultation between the chief executive officer and the worker, the officer's perception of the point in question shall determine the administrative options that shall be pursued.

- a. If the worker voluntarily initiates a consultation and informs the chief executive officer of his theological uncertainties, and if his attitude is open to counsel without compulsion to promulgate his doubts and views, the following course of action is recommended:

- 1) The worker will continue to function at his post and will render a written report of his position before the end of six months.

- 2) If within that period the matter is satisfactorily resolved, no further action is necessary.

- 3) If the matter is not resolved, the executive committee of the conference/institution in which the worker is employed shall arrange for the hearing before a review committee. (See below for its composition and function).

b. If the worker actively promotes his divergent doctrinal opinions and his chief executive officer is obligated to initiate the consultation, the following course of action is recommended:

1) If the worker, at the discretion of the conference/institutional executive committee, shall either remain in his position with express instructions to refrain from private or public presentation of his views or shall be placed on administrative leave during the period of the hearing.

2) The executive committee of the conference/institution in which the worker is employed shall arrange for a hearing before a review committee. (See below for its composition and function).

2. The Review Committee - Its Composition and Function.

a. The Review Committee, including peers chosen by the conference/institution executive committee with the concurrence of the next higher organization, shall give hearing to and judgment upon the doctrinal issue.

b. The doctrinal views of the worker shall be submitted by him to the review committee in writing previous to the meeting. At the time of review he shall be available for discussion with the committee.

c. The review committee shall conduct its business with serious purpose, complete honesty, and scrupulous fairness. After a careful adjudication of the points at issue, it shall give a detailed, written report of the discussion with its recommendations to the conference/institutional executive committee. If agreement is not reached within the committee, a minority report shall also be included.

d. If the review committee finds that the views of the worker are compatible with the Fundamental Beliefs of the Church, no further action will be necessary. However, if the worker's theological position is at variance with Seventh-day Adventist doctrine, the review committee shall discuss its conclusions with the worker and advise him:

1) To restudy his theological position in the hope that this will eliminate his theological divergence.

2) To refrain from the promulgation of his divergent doctrinal views.

e. If the worker is unable to reconcile his theological views with the denominational positions and also feels constrained by his conscience to defend his views both privately and publicly, the review committee shall recommend to his executive committee that his credentials be withdrawn.

f. If the worker has discovered a new position that is accepted as valid by the review committee, his view shall be studied by the union conference officers (in the case of a division/General Conference institution, the officers of the division/General Conference) and, with appropriate recommendations, shall be referred to the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference for final disposition.

3. Provision for Appeal.

a. The dissenting worker may make an appeal and appearance before an appeal committee of seven members appointed by the union executive committee (or the division committee in the case of a division/General Conference institution). This committee shall be chaired by the union conference president or his designate and shall include the ministerial secretary of the union, two representatives named by the division/General Conference executive committee, the conference/institutional chief executive officer, and two of the worker's peers selected from among five names submitted by him.

b. Any recommendations of the union conference (division, if in a division institution) appeal committee shall be referred to the union conference (division) executive committee. The union conference (division) officers through their chief executive officer shall notify the worker of their collective decision.

c. Any recommendations of the union conference (division) executive committee shall be referred back to the conference/ institutional executive committee for final action on the worker's employment.

d. A last appeal may be made by the worker to the executive committee of the division of the General Conference in which he resides. Their decision shall be final and shall be communicated to the executive committee of the employee's conference/institution.

e. During the period of hearing, review, and appeal, the worker shall refrain from public discussion of the issues involved.

Document B

ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

All learning and all teaching take place within the framework of a world view of the nature of reality, man, knowledge, and values. Roots of the Christian university are found in a principle that has long undergirded the development of all higher education--the belief that the best education is attained when intellectual growth occurs within an environment in which Biblically based concepts are central to the aims of education. This is the goal of Seventh-day Adventist education.

In the Seventh-day Adventist college and university, as in any institution of higher learning, the principle of academic freedom has been central to establishing such aims. This principle reflects a belief in freedom as an essential right in a democratic society, but with a particular focus in an academic community. It is the guarantee that teachers and students will be able to carry on the functions of learning, research, and teaching with a minimum of restrictions. It applies to subjects within the professor's professional expertise within which there is a special need for freedom to pursue truth. It also applies to the atmosphere of open inquiry necessary in an academic community if learning is to be honest and thorough.

For the church college or university, academic freedom has an additional significance. It is more important that it is in the secular institution, not less, for it is essential to the well-being of the church itself. This places a responsibility on the Christian professor to be a self-disciplined,

responsible, and mature scholar, to investigate, teach, and publish within the area of his academic competence, without external restraint, but with a due regard for the character and aims of the institution which provides him with credentials, and with concern for the spiritual and the intellectual needs of his students.

Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities, therefore, subscribe to principles of academic freedom generally held important in higher education. These principles make possible the disciplined and creative pursuit of truth. They also recognize that freedoms are never absolute and that they imply commensurate responsibilities. The following principles of academic freedom are stated within the context of accountability, with special attention to limitations made necessary by the religious aims of a Christian institution.

The Freedoms

1. Freedom of Speech. While the right to private opinion is a part of the human heritage as creatures of God, in accepting employment at a Seventh-day Adventist college or university the teacher recognizes certain limits to expression of personal views.

As a member of a learned profession, he must recognize that the public will judge his profession by his utterances. Therefore, he will be accurate, respectful of the opinions of others, and will exercise appropriate restraint. He will make it clear when he does not speak for the institution. In expressing private views he will have in mind their effect on the reputation and goals of the institution.

2. Freedom of Research. The Christian scholar will undertake research within the context of his faith and from the perspective of Christian ethics. He is free to do responsible research with proper respect for public safety and decency.

3. Freedom to Teach. The teacher will conduct his professional activities and present his subject matter within the world view described in the opening paragraph of this document. As a specialist within a particular discipline, he is entitled to freedom in the classroom to discuss his subject honestly. However, he will not introduce into his teaching controversial matter unrelated to this subject. Academic freedom is freedom to pursue knowledge and truth in the area of the individual's specialty. It does not give licence to express controversial opinions on subjects outside that specialty nor does it protect the individual from being held accountable for his teaching.

Shared Responsibilities

Just as the need for academic freedom has a special significance in a church institution, so do the limitations placed on it reflect the special concerns of such an institution. The first responsibility of the teacher and leaders of the institution, and of the Church, is to seek for and to disseminate truth. The second responsibility is the obligation of teachers and leaders of the institution and the Church to counsel together when scholarly findings have a bearing on the message and mission of the Church.

The true scholar, humble in his quest for truth, will not refuse to listen to the findings and the advice of others. He recognizes that others also have discovered and are discovering truth. He will learn from them and actively seek their counsel regarding the expression of views inconsistent

with those generally taught by his Church, for his concern is for the harmony of the church community.

On the other hand, church leaders are expected to foster an atmosphere of Christian cordiality within which the scholar will not feel threatened if his findings differ from traditionally held views. Since the dynamic development of the church depends on the continuing study of dedicated scholars, the president, board of trustees, and Church leaders will protect the scholar, not only for his sake but also for the cause of truth and the welfare of the church.

The historic doctrinal position of the church has been defined by the General Conference in session and is published in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook under the title, "Fundamental Beliefs". It is expected that a teacher in one of the Church's educational institutions will not teach as truth what is contrary to those fundamental truths. Truth, they will remember, is not the only product of the crucible of controversy; disruption also results. The dedicated scholar will exercise discretion in presenting concepts which might threaten church unity and the effectiveness of church action.

Aside from the fundamental beliefs there are findings and interpretations in which differences of opinions occur within the church, but which do not affect one's relationship to it or to its message. When expressing such differences, a teacher will be fair in his presentation and will make his loyalty to the Church clear. He will attempt to differentiate between hypotheses and facts and between central and peripheral issues.

When questions arise dealing with matters of academic freedom, each university and college should have clearly stated procedures to follow in dealing with such grievances. Such procedures should include peer review, and appeal process, and a review by the board of trustees. Every possible care should be taken to insure that actions will be just and fair and will protect both the rights of the teacher and the integrity of the institution. The protection of both is not only a matter of justice but on a college or university campus it is also a matter of creating and protecting collegiality. It is also a protection against the disruptive, the servile, and the fraudulent.

Implementation

It is recommended that the above Statement on Academic Freedom be presented to each university/college faculty and board by its administration to be used as the basis for the preparation of the institution's academic freedom statement.

W O Coe, Chairman
Leo Ranzolin, Secretary
R L Dale, Editorial Secretary
Rowena J Moore, Recording Secretary

