

**STATEMENTS ON THEOLOGICAL AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Adopted by the 1987 Annual Council  
Executive Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists**

104-87GN A STATEMENT ON THEOLOGICAL AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

VOTED, To adopt a position paper consisting of two documents: A. A Statement on Theological Freedom and Accountability, and B. Academic Freedom in Seventh-day Adventist Institutions of Higher Learning, as follows:

Document A

**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; of 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 the 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 arise from within the Church itself (of Acts 20:29-31; 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 (of 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 between doctrines that cannot be comprised without destroying the gospel in the framework of the three angels' 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 (of 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 a 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 and 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 license 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 Chief 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 that 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 a 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) 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 than 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 his subject. Academic freedom is freedom to pursue knowledge and truth in the area of the individual's specialty. It does not give license 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, an 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 a basis for the preparation of the institution's academic freedom statement.

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