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Adventist Theology: A Shared Responsibility

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Abstract

The leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are very concerned about what they see as a growing diversity in doctrinal convictions among the members. This article explores some key principles regarding the responsibility of both the church's professional theologians and the denominational administrators. While the domain of theology is not restricted to professional theologians, they play an important role in the community of the believers as guides in the ongoing discovery of truth. It is to be expected that in a church with a world-wide presence theological diversity will inevitably develop, and that this may, at times, lead to doctrinal controversies. This has been the case in the past and is a challenge in the present. In recent times it appears that administrators have more and more considered it their task to resolve theological conflicts, to protect traditional views, and promote uniformity of belief. In doing so, they tend to make very limited use of the expertise of the academic theologians. However, theologians and administrators each have specific responsibilities and must cooperate, in mutual trust, in guiding the church on its theological journey.

On October 11, 2021, a combination of three presentations about "theological issues facing the church" were on the agenda of the executive committee of the General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists. Ten specific points were mentioned. The selection and content of these "theological issues" had been the work of a small committee of top church leaders. They were, besides GC president Ted N.C. Wilson: Artur E. Stele, Michael Ryan and Mark Finley. Stele is a theologian in his own right, but the other three have more limited theological training. Remarkably, no professional theologians from any of our universities were involved. The small committee consisted of administrative associates of the General Conference president, and the fact that this was an

important item on the Annual Council agenda indicated that this theological matter was prioritized as a vital *administrative* concern.[1]

In my remarks[2] I will focus in particular on the relationship between the work of the church's theologians and the task of the church's administrators. How do their assignments – or "ministries" if you prefer that term – interact or overlap? Whose primary responsibility are theological statements? Must the church look towards its professional theologians when it concerns theological developments and definitions of beliefs, or towards those who have been given the administrative task of "running" the church and of keeping it together? Before we get to these important questions, I want to briefly discuss a number of preliminary aspects.

1. "Faith Seeking Understanding"

One often hears about the differences and the distance between theologians and "ordinary" members. Admittedly, the professional theologians constitute a specific group of men and, increasingly, women, who have an advanced academic training in theology, often with a specialization in one of its subdisciplines. They are mostly employed as teachers in institutional programs to educate ministerial workers, in addition to others who simply have a personal interest in theology. In any case, theology is not the exclusive domain of professionals, but is a concern of all believers.

Perhaps the most famous definition of theology came from St. Augustine (354–430), to be later reiterated by Anselm of Canterbury (ca. 1033–1109). It consists of three Latin words: *Fides quaerens intellectum*, which means: "Faith seeking understanding." Theology begins with faith. Faith is the prerequisite to seeking understanding. Anselm stressed that we must believe the truths of faith, before we can begin to analyze them (Hopkins and Richardson 2000, 95–95; Gulley 2003, 73). He further clarified this point of departure with these words: "I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but rather, I believe in order that I may understand" (*Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam,*

[1] See Wahlen 2021. The sermon by the GC president on the Sabbath of the Annual Council of 2021 was also devoted to the theological challenges he believes the Adventist Church is confronted with.

[2] This was a keynote address at the European Theology Teachers' Convention held in Hungary from March 22–26, 2023.

sed credo ut intelligam). This applies to every believer – including every Adventist Christian – who searches for truth. Martin Luther (1483–1546) emphatically stated: "All of us are theologians; that is to say: every Christian is a theologian" (Luther 1883–2009, in van der Kooi and van den Brink, 2017, 5). As believers seek to explore the deeper meaning of their faith, "God's revelation brings change to the mind (knowledge) and transformation to the heart" (Gulley 2003, 163).

The importance of "faith seeking understanding" applies, of course, specifically to pastors, priests, chaplains, and other religious professionals. With the almost ubiquitous shortage of religious workers, the danger exists that pastors must often, first of all, concentrate on managerial tasks. However, it is essential that pastors provide *spiritual* leadership and help the people in their care to better understand what they confess to believe. In their book *The Pastor as a Public Theologian*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan emphasize that the pastor's task is to help a congregation to become what it is called to be (Vanhoozer and Strachan 2015, 21). Success in ministry, they point out, "is not determined by numbers (e.g., people, programs, dollars) but by the increase of the people's knowledge and love of God" (Vanhoozer and Strachan, 2015, 22). In order to perform his/her assignment as a God-given calling, the pastor must not only have a strong faith, but must also be theologically competent. Constant theological study is therefore a sacred duty for all pastors (ibid., 30).

Adventist theology is to a considerable extent rooted in nineteenth century American society, when common people, without any formal theological education, became powerful actors on the religious scene (Back cover of Hatch 1989). William Miller is a prominent example of this phenomenon. But despite his distaste for academic theology, his arguments betrayed rigorous thinking, and were at times quite sophisticated (Hatch 1989, 13, 136). Soon Adventists saw the importance of formal theological education. Early in the history of their movement a number of Bible teachers had already acquired academic degrees in theology and related disciplines. In 1881 Alexander McLearn, a clergyman with a Doctor of Divinity degree, joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Almost immediately he was employed as the head of the college that a few years earlier had been established in Battle Creek in Michigan. His short tenure was not a success, but the eagerness with which he was employed indicates that already at that early stage in Adventist educational history, academic credentials in theology were highly appreciated (Greenleaf 2005, 31).

From 1870 onwards the Adventist Church provided ministerial training to its prospective pastors, which, as the years passed, developed from short intensive courses into a complete four-year Bachelor of Arts degree (Becerra 1993). Some six decades later (in 1937) the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary opened its doors for advanced theological training in Washington, DC. Today, less than a century later, the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church operates dozens of universities and other institutions of higher learning, many of which offer graduate degrees in theology. These institutions employ hundreds of professional theologians, who have accepted the challenge of seeking a deeper understanding of the Adventist faith, in order to help nurture the faith of the twenty-million-plus Adventist believers, and to educate a constant stream of new ministers and other church workers. Already in the first decades of the church's existence several prominent church leaders were competent scholars, even though they were mostly autodidacts. Some examples were: Joseph Bates (Knight 2000, 68; Knight 2004), James White (Wheeler 2003, 217–218), J.N. Andrews (Valentine 2019, 446–472), Louis R. Conradi (Heinz 2013, 346–348), but more names could be added. As time went by, many theology teachers obtained doctoral degrees from non-Adventist institutions, and from the 1970s onward also from Andrews University and, in due time, from other Adventist universities.[3] And, thus, the church now has a substantial reservoir of professional theologians.

2. Theology? Why?

Before dealing with the relationship between the professional theologians and the administrators of the denomination, I want to briefly discuss some essential elements of the theological enterprise. Firstly, there is the question: Why do people embark on a theological study? The answers to this question may vary considerably. Some enroll in a theological course because they are convinced that they have been called by God to become a minister or a missionary. Others are eager to become a religion teacher, or a chaplain, or have another career plan for which an education in religious studies or theology would be required or be useful. But there are (many?) others whose (at least initial) goal is to find answers to very personal questions about their own faith

[3] See Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. https://www.adventistarchives.org/seventh-day-adventist-education-timeline.

or the meaning of life. But those who have other primary motivations for embarking on an academic study of theology, and for working as a professional theologian, will also not be able to separate their academic and professional interests and ambitions from their personal faith experience. As one studies the various facets of religious beliefs and theological topics, one does not only acquire knowledge, but one also hopes to be spiritually enriched.

How is Christian theology best described? I believe it is an imperfect attempt to put the mysteries of the divine revelation, as found in the Scriptures, in human words, in such a way that these words can be understood by the various publics that theologians address. Perhaps the most succinct definition that I have found thus far is from Brennan R. Hill, Paul Knitter and William Madges in their book *Faith, Religion and Theology*: "Christian theology is the process and the product of the conversation between the Christian tradition and our contemporary situation" (Hill, Knitter, and Madges 2016, 4). Later in their book, this definition is somewhat expanded: "Christian theology is the human activity of bringing a religious tradition into conversation with our contemporary situation in a mutually critical way, so as to deepen our understanding of, and commitment to, living out our faith in this situation as well as to transforming the world for the better" (Hill, Knitter, and Madges 2016, 293). In other words: theology deepens our faith, brings personal and social transformation and facilitates our spiritual journey (ibid., 293).

Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink, two Dutch systematic theologians at the Free University in Amsterdam, describe the task of theology as "clarifying human existence in the light of faith." It is not, they opine, for people who already know everything, but for curious people with many questions (Kooi and Brink 2017, 23). They go on to emphasize some things that do not just apply to the Reformed brand of theology that they represent, but very definitely also to Adventist theology. The theological project is never finished but is always work in progress. Human beings can never claim they have fully understood the divine revelation and have been able to fully explore the sources that are available to them. There is always something new to be discovered. In this journey of discovery, there must be a constant interaction between the old and the new. Fritz Guy, who served as a theology professor at Andrews University, and later at La Sierra University, reminds his Adventist colleagues, "Our ongoing theological task is not merely to recognize the original Adventist perspective, practice, and belief, but also to reflect

on their present meaning in the light of passing time and succeeding generations" (Guy 1999, 69). It may at times be necessary to reject earlier theological positions, as Ellen G. White pointed out: "Long-cherished opinion must not be regarded as infallible" (White 1892). But, generally speaking, "new truth does not discard old truth, but incorporates it into a more complete and adequate understanding" (Guy 1999, 75). Without a link to the past, "the 'new' has neither credibility nor meaning" (ibid., 103). "Being rooted in tradition", theologians are called to "direct their applications and innovative proposals to their own time and context" (Kooi and Brink 2017, 26).

3. A Community Enterprise

The theologian as an individual will benefit from his reflection on his faith, in that he will understand himself better, and his study will help him to relate more meaningfully to the world around him.[4] It is possible to be theologically active in isolation, or from a private interest and mere curiosity. However, most theologians – and this applies most certainly to Adventist theologians – engage in theology in a communal context, i.e., in the context of a local faith community or in an academic environment.

The Adventist expression "present truth" rests on the conviction that theological reflection has a dynamic quality. Guy refers to this concept of "present truth" as "the most important single element in the Adventist theological heritage". It means that particular elements of truth "may have particular relevance to, and meaning for, a particular time and place" (Guy, 81). That was true for the pioneers of the Adventist movement but is just as true today. As twenty-first century Adventist theologians we must accept the challenge to express this "present truth" in "language that must be broadly accessible" – also for those outside of our own faith tradition who are not familiar with the Adventist jargon (Kooi and Brink, 20). Roberto Badenas contributed a fascinating chapter to the *Festschrift* for Jan Paulsen, in which he revisited the expression "present truth". Concern for the "present truth" should not lead to the past and simply re-affirm the theology of the early generations of Adventist leaders and Bible students. To do so would be "a betrayal of the basic Adventist principle of present truth . . . Fidelity to the biblical text means that we cannot separate *truth* from *present*" (Badenas 2009, 211). Adventist theologians

[4] In these and other places, the use of male pronouns is general and refers to men and women.

must ask themselves: "How can we deal with truth in such a way that our whole lives will be penetrated by it; in a way that it deepens our sense of the transcendent, and at the same time gives us a clearer perception of our present reality and of our mission? How can we make truth *present*?" (Badenas 2009, 215). Truth does not change, according to Richard Rice, but our perception of it does. Good theology is, therefore, he says, creative and constructive and seeks to interpret the message of the Bible with the understanding that "our present experience may enable us to see things that have never been as fully appreciated before" (Rice 1989, 8, 9).

Theology is always impacted by the *Zeitgeist* and by the traditions of the community in which it developed. Like theologians in other denominations, Adventist theologians cannot, therefore, claim to be neutral scholars, doing their work without any assumptions, preconceptions, or historical and cultural baggage. Their work is, at least to a major extent, embedded in Adventist history and culture, its official doctrinal statements and ways of worship. They speak from "inside" rather than from "outside" their religious affiliation (Rice 1991, 77) and do so from a participatory perspective (Kooi and Brink, 3). The product of Adventist theological reflection is inevitably situated in the particular historical period in which we live and serve, and in the context of a particular Christian church (Hill, Knitter, and Madges 2016, 287).

Moreover, although Adventist theologians hope their work will also be of use to people in the wider world, they are, first of all, committed to serving the Adventist Community − to enrich and nurture the community's understanding of faith and to strengthen the witness of their faith. In order to be heard by the members of the Adventist community, they must be sufficiently in tune with the church to which they belong and be alert to the *sensus fidelium* (the community's general sense of faith) (Hill et al, 300, 301). Perhaps the term "loyalty" most suitably expresses the required underlying attitude of the theologian towards the faith community that he serves. It is a kind of loyalty that is not primarily based on employment, and on receiving a salary and having the future benefit of a pension, but on the calling to spiritually enrich the body of believers, and to do so to the best of one's intellectual abilities − motivated by a spirit of love and a sense of responsibility.

4. Tension and Dissent[5]

With these remarks in mind about the phenomenon of theology and about those who engage in it, I now want to proceed to the main question for this paper, which I stated in my introduction: How does the work of the theologians relate to the task of the church's administrators? How can they cooperate and support each other? And what can/must the church do when there is tension between those two categories, or when a level of dissent emerges, that causes severe problems and may even threaten the unity of the denomination?

Theological *diversity* − or even theological *polarization* − in the Adventist Church is a very present reality. In a 1994 *Ministry* article, the editor of this church journal argued that there are at least four streams in Adventism: Mainstream Adventism, Evangelical Adventism, Progressive Adventism and Historic Adventism (Newman 1994, 5, 27). A rather obscure website, but obviously developed by someone with a substantial knowledge of Adventism, suggests there are eight different modalities of Adventism, ranging from liberal and progressive to extreme and ultra-conservative (formeradventists.com, 2011). Andrews University professor Fernando Canale was spot-on when he wrote that Adventism may be administratively united, while it is theologically divided. He states: "What keeps us together is our worldwide solid administration" and not our theology (Canale 2004, 5). If these words were true in 2004, when they were written, they are certainly even more true two decades later. Theologians in the pulpit and in the classroom are often labeled as either "conservative" or "liberal" − but in reality the picture is not black and white, because there are many shades of grey in between.[6] It may be argued that the situation is not as alarming as it is often made out to be. I believe that a denomination as diverse as ours, with believers from so many ethnic and cultural backgrounds, must be expected to be diverse in its theology and practices (Bruinsma 2022, 26–29).

As already mentioned, theologians, just like all other church members, must realize that they themselves are part of the faith community they serve. This brings possibilities as well as responsibilities. They must be able to do

[5] For this section I depended on a few paragraphs of my article Bruinsma 2020, 85–102.

[6] For an instructive treatment of the theological diversity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, see Thompson 2009.

their work in freedom, yet at the same time they must respect certain boundaries. In his book *The Problem of Christianity,* first published in 1913, the American philosopher Josiah Royce (1855–1916) defined the concept of community in a way that is very helpful in this context. He says that a community is a group of people who are bound together by the memory of a shared past and the projection of common hopes for the future (quoted by Bracken 1970, 440). This applies very much to a faith community like that of the Seventh-day Adventists. In order to remain a community and to successfully pursue its goals, the faith community must organize itself as efficiently as possible. It must arrive at a broad consensus as to what it believes, and it must, inevitably, develop policies so that it can continue to operate as a community in the pursuit of its mission. This is a process that will never be complete and final. From time to time policies will need to be changed or refined. Likewise, theology always remains work in process, and this is also true of its doctrines, however "fundamental" they may be. They represent imperfect human attempts to put into human language what we presently understand of God's infinite revelation to us. As the preamble of the SDA *Fundamental Beliefs* indicates, even these twenty-eight fundamentals are not forever set in concrete, but may from time to time need to be revised.[7]

Does this mean that there must be space for diversity of opinion on certain issues, or even for conscientious dissent, while remaining a loyal member of the community? Certainly. But Raoul Dederen (1921–2016) voiced a clear warning. Listening to the voice of the community, he says, is not a sign of "sheepish, spineless neutralism."

> No, "it is rather a cast of mind that expresses itself in a succession of ways. First, it means the readiness to go beyond the privacy of one's own views and to open up to the persuasion of a broader vision. Next, it implies the willingness to reassess one's own position in the light of the church's decision. Third, it means a considerable reluctance to conclude right off that the church's decision is erroneous" (Dederen 1995, 8).

Yet, at the same time, the biblical view of authority is not one of dominating power and coercion, but of servanthood. "True authority can never be im-

[7] See "Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," https://www.adventist.org/beliefs.

posed: it only works when it is offered, chosen and freely adopted" (Kinnamon 1982, 201). Personal spiritual and moral development requires critical thinking and is not merely a matter of following conventions and of conformity to rules. "When morality is constrained by simply focusing on obedience to moral authorities, we risk not becoming free, choosing, responsible individuals" (Reuschling 2005, 67)." Gilbert Meilaender, a professor in Christian Ethics at the University of Valparaiso (Chili), makes an important point when he maintains that the authority of the church must be respected, because the church is addressed by the Lord. "But the believer is also addressed singly. That is, each believer is addressed not only by the Body of Christ, but also by the Head of that Body, the Lord Himself" (Meilaender 2007, 37).

There can be a tension between the necessity of respecting the authority of the church and listening to the voice of one's own conscience. While it is true that theologians must listen to the voice of the church, the church also has the obligation to listen to, and examine, the view of its theologians. "Even if found unacceptable in many respects" such an opinion may contain "a part of the truth, which can then be opened up in fuller and richer ways" (Meilaender 2007, 37). Johannes A. van der Ven (b. 1940), a retired Dutch professor in practical theology, is of the opinion that the church is always in need of reformation and that this reformation will never take place without conflict. "In fact," he maintains, "the reformation of the church depends on conflicts and their balanced treatment. Being without conflicts is often a sign of a low frequency and meager intensity of interactions between members in the church" (Ven 1996, 381). While it is true that a community cannot exist without a good measure of consensus about its goals and its self-identity, responsible dissent can have a healthy influence, and does not necessarily threaten the unity of the church. Dissent forces the community to re-assess its self-understanding. It is, therefore, important that the community creates channels for the expression of dissent (Bracken 1970, 446, 447). This is, I believe, a very important point that Adventist Church leadership should take to heart. If dissent cannot be articulated and divergent theological viewpoints cannot in freedom be expressed and discussed, it goes underground. As a result, what theologians say, write and teach in their official role may be quite different from what they actually have come to believe as a result of their study and reflection. But they remain silent or at are least very circumspect in their teaching and public speaking, for fear that their career may be in jeopardy.

5. When Disagreement Becomes Conflict

Accepting the teaching and governing authority of the church does not presuppose blind obedience. We must not forget that all people − theologians most definitely included − will be required to give an account to Christ for everything they have done (Blackby and Blackby 2001, 91). Did the great Reformer Martin Luther not model proper conscientious dissent for us when he said that his conscience was "captive to the Word of God," and that it is neither "safe nor salutary" to go against conscience? (Bradbury 2014, 33). Ellen White endorsed that principle when she wrote that political and ecclesial authorities sin against God, when they compel people to go against their consciences (White 1895). In other words: The General Conference and its leaders sin against God when they force people to accept things that go against their conscience.

Is there, however, a point when the distance between the official views of the church and those of the individual pastor/theologian increases to the point where the church must take measures to protect its identity and unity? Must we not agree that the church has the right to discipline theologians when they manifest a persistent lack of loyalty and no longer support the essential Adventist beliefs? The other side of the coin is, of course also true: No one is forced to remain a member of the church or continue to serve as a theologian who is connected to the church. The church is a voluntary community. If anyone feels he/she cannot in good conscience support the views and actions of the church, there may be no other option but to leave.

Having said that, I hasten to add that I believe the church must be extremely reluctant in disciplining dissenting voices, even if it considers particular theological views unacceptable or dangerous. Great long-term damage may be done, and much personal and corporate distress may result, if theological controversies are not handled with great care and with a great amount of patience, ensuring that political issues and power elements do not muddy the waters. Gilbert Valentine, emeritus-professor at La Sierra University and the author of a number of thought-provoking historical books, has recently depicted in a masterful way how the church, during the presidency of Robert Pierson, dealt with theologians who did not fit into the conservative pattern that was promoted by the General Conference leadership. Prominent theologians such as Earle Hilgert, Sakae Kubo, Edward Vick, Herold Weiss, and others fell victim to the purging actions that the church's top leaders considered

necessary (see Valentine 2022). Another example of administrative resistance against the reflection of scholars about an important Adventist belief was the commotion at La Sierra University when, in 2011, some of the teaching staff were accused of promoting theistic evolution (Olson 2011). This not only caused a bitter confrontation between church leaders and university authorities, but also proved to be a hurdle for full accreditation of the university by the civil educational authorities and the denominational accreditation agency (Wiley 2013).

Probably the most serious theological crisis in Adventism of the last half century was the controversy surrounding the theological proposals of Desmond Ford (1929–2019).[8] Whether or not we are sympathetic towards some, or all, of Ford's ideas, we should learn some important lessons from the (often political) way in which the Ford crisis was handled. Firing and defrocking Desmond Ford, and the resignation or firing of hundreds of pastors, did not stop the discussions, and many of the ideas that Ford promoted are still very much alive in spite of his removal.[9]

One might ask why the theology of Ford met with such fierce resistance, while in some other cases, which also involved crucial theological issues, the official reaction was much milder. Denying the doctrine of the Trinity (which is listed as number two of the *Fundamental Beliefs* of the Adventist Church) usually does not cause more than a few ripples in the theological pond. The reason may be that this doctrine has had a rather wobbly history in the Adventist past (Burt 2006, 125–139). I have at times commented that my church career would be in greater danger if I were seen smoking a cigar in public than if I were to deny the Trinity in my preaching and teaching.

British-born Graham Maxwell (1921–2010), who spent much of his theological career as professor at Loma Linda University, placed (what many believed was a one-sided) emphasis on the moral influence aspect of the atonement (Maxwell 1992). This did not get him into serious theological trouble. Richard Rice (b. 1944), a systematic theologian, who recently retired from the theology department of Loma Linda University, has been widely applauded but also

[8] For a somewhat hagiographic, but nonetheless informative and valuable, biography of Ford, see Hook, 2008. A concise summary of the issues at stake in the Ford controversy is found in Pfandl 2016; Ford 1979; Pontevreda 1998; Ford 2019.

[9] A careful study of the aftermath of this crisis is Ballis 1999.

much criticized for his support for the openness-of-God theology or so-called "open theism". It is clear that his approach to the doctrine of God differs in crucial ways from the traditional Adventist view. The church withdrew at a given moment his first book (Rice 1980; later reprinted as Rice 1985) on this topic from Adventist-sponsored circulation, but (to my knowledge) did not react when his books about *Open Theology* were published outside the church (Rice 2020). Apparently, touching on such issues as theistic evolution, the sanctuary and related topics, and the rejection of historicism as a model for apocalyptic interpretations, touch more ecclesial raw nerves than most other theological hot potatoes.

Many questions remain as to how the church community must deal with those who are seen as having become a threat to the well-being and unity of the church. How does the church determine, communicate, and, if need be, enforce the limits within which diversity of belief is acceptable, even enriching, but beyond which the fundamental identity of the Christian community is compromised? It seems that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has not yet found a fully satisfactory answer to that question. Compliance committees and statements by special commissions and by the (mostly uninformed) votes of thousands of delegates during quinquennial world congresses are not the solution. Perhaps one of the challenges for the administrators of the Adventist Church is to place a greater trust in the work of the theologians, and in the long-term role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the church in guarding the church's spiritual heritage and refining its reflection on biblical truth.

6. Some Conclusions

Looking into the future one can safely predict that it is unlikely that the theological polarization in the Adventist Church will any time soon diminish. We must hope that both the theologians and the administrators in the church, as well as the broader Adventist public, will find ways to become more tolerant of diverse opinions, and will become better in learning from each other and in dialoguing to increase mutual understanding. The degree of tension between church administrators and theologians depends a lot on the kind of administration − in particular at the highest level in the person of the General Conference president − that dominates in a given period. Presidents like Reuben R. Figuhr (1896−1983) and Jan Paulsen (b. 1935), were much more relaxed about theological diversity and renewal than, e.g., Robert Pierson (1911−1989)

and the current president, Ted N.C. Wilson (b. 1950). This has consequences for the type of men and women with whom they surrounded themselves, and for the attitude of many division administrators who did (and do) strive for a good working relationship with the higher church authorities.

Fear is a major element in the tensions that tend to exist between church administrators and theologians. Administrators often fear that theological controversies, in particular when these appear to criticize or reject aspects of traditional Adventist beliefs, or suggest major modifications of moral standpoints, will bring havoc to the church. They see it as their responsibility to protect the theological heritage of Adventism, and to silence alternative views which might bring discord. This may take on a more strident character when administrators have only limited theological competence. On the other hand, the professional theologians often fear restrictions in their academic freedom, and possible career repercussions when their reflections deviate from traditional church teachings. These fears, on the side of the administrators and as well as on the side of the theologians, are real. They cannot be ignored, and, to some extent at least, they are justified. We have historical examples to prove it. At times administrators have acted too heavy handedly. And at times theologians have acted irresponsibly. However, it is important that the two groups work together, and together explore where more freedom may reign and where boundaries must be clearly identified and respected.

In order to reduce tensions between administrators and theologians we must examine in what ways they can increase mutual trust, based on the fundamental conviction that both groups love their church and want to faithfully serve the community of the people of God. And, even more importantly, all must learn to place a deeper trust in God and must with patience expect Him to guide the community of believers, through His Spirit, towards a deeper understanding of "present truth" and to a greater appreciation of the different perspectives that study, history and culture bring to the exploration of the unending riches of God's revelation.

I repeat the words of Fritz Guy which I quoted earlier in this paper: "Our ongoing theological task is not merely to recognize the original Adventist perspective, practice, and belief, but also to reflect on their present meaning in the light of passing time and succeeding generations" (Guy, 69). This is the collective task for theologians and administrators. To accomplish this task, they must cooperate in an atmosphere of loving trust. Trusting each other,

they must get on with fulfilling their respective roles. It is important that both groups focus on their own role. Administrators should be reluctant to embark on theological matters, but widely consult theologians and make use of their expertise when preparing theological statements and dealing with theological controversies. Theologians must be aware of how their lectures or books might increase tensions or help build unity and trust. At times they may be so far in advance of the membership that they have lost the followers. Mutual trust and respect must characterize the interaction of administrators and theologians, as they remain committed to "seeking understanding" of their faith. This is what our church needs, as it puts forth its best efforts to sharing our "present truth" with the world.

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Zusammenfassung

Die Leiter der weltweiten Kirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten sind sehr besorgt über die ihrer Meinung nach zunehmende Vielfalt der Glaubensüberzeugungen der Mitglieder. In diesem Artikel werden einige Schlüsselprinzipien hinsichtlich der Verantwortung der Berufstheologen der Kirche und der kirchlichen Administratoren untersucht. Obwohl der Bereich der Theologie nicht auf Theologen im Lehrdienst beschränkt ist, spielen diese in der Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen eine wichtige Rolle als Wegweiser bei der beständigen Entdeckung der Wahrheit. Es ist zu erwarten, dass sich in einer weltweiten Kirche unweigerlich eine theologische Vielfalt entwickelt, die teilweise zu Lehrkontroversen führen kann. Dies war in der Vergangenheit der Fall und ist auch in der Gegenwart herausfordernd. In jüngster Zeit hat es den Anschein, dass Administratoren es zunehmend als ihre Aufgabe ansehen, theologische Konflikte zu lösen, traditionelle Ansichten zu schützen und die Einheitlichkeit des Glaubens zu fördern. Dabei greifen sie in der Regel nur in sehr geringem Maße auf den Sachverstand der akademischen Theologen zurück. Theologen und Administratoren haben jedoch jeweils spezifische Verantwortlichkeiten und müssen in gegenseitigem Vertrauen zusammenarbeiten, um die Kirche auf ihrem theologischen Weg zu begleiten.

Résumé

Les dirigeants de l'Église adventiste du septième jour sont très préoccupés par ce qu'ils considèrent comme une diversité croissante des convictions doctrinales parmi les membres. Cet article explore quelques principes clés concernant la responsabilité des théologiens qualifiés de l'Église et des administrateurs confessionnels. Bien que le domaine de la théologie ne soit pas réservé aux théologiens qualifiés, ceux-ci jouent un rôle important dans la communauté des croyants en tant que guides dans la découverte permanente de la vérité. On peut s'attendre à ce que, dans une Église présente dans le monde entier, la diversité théologique se développe inévitablement et qu'elle conduise parfois à des controverses doctrinales. Cela a été le cas dans le passé et constitue un défi aujourd'hui. Ces derniers temps, il semble que les administrateurs considèrent de plus en plus qu'il est de leur devoir de résoudre les conflits théologiques, de protéger les points de vue traditionnels et de promouvoir l'uniformité des croyances. Ce faisant, ils ont tendance à faire un usage très limité de l'expertise des théologiens universitaires. Cependant, les théologiens et les administrateurs ont chacun des responsabilités spécifiques et doivent coopérer, dans une confiance mutuelle, pour guider l'Eglise dans son cheminement théologique.

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