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Academic Freedom

THE title of this article implies a problem of definition—what do we mean by "academic freedom"? It is easy to find some bad definitions: "Academic freedom is the freedom of the professor to say anything he wishes," or "It is the freedom to agree or disagree—and if you disagree, the freedom to resign." While both of these definitions represent popular opinions in certain circles, neither of them is satisfactory. The first makes a mockery of freedom by turning it into license; the second really denies that freedom exists.

More serious attempts at definition have been made both by educational organizations and the courts. In 1953 the Association of American Universities issued the following:

A university must . . . be hospitable to an infinite variety of skills and viewpoints, relying upon open competition among them as the surest safeguard of truth. Its whole spirit requires investigation, criticism, and presentation of ideas in an atmosphere of freedom and mutual confidence. This is the real meaning of "academic freedom."

While there is no official legal definition of academic freedom, a judicial opinion was rendered in the case of *Kay v. Board of Higher Education of New York City* in 1940 at the time the court blocked the appointment of Bertrand Russell as professor of philosophy at City College. It defined academic freedom as "the freedom to do good and not to teach evil."¹

These definitions, profound as they are, nevertheless illustrate the problem of specific application to individual circumstances. It is often much easier to generalize on the nature of academic freedom than to determine where its boundaries lie in any given situation.

*The History of Academic Freedom*²

Academic freedom began with the founding of universities in the Middle Ages. The problem at that

time was to protect the rights of academic communities against the growing power of the towns in which they were located. The princes and popes who founded the universities granted special rights and immunities to both professors and students. This is reflected in the well-known tensions that existed between "the town and the gown." Remnants of these traditions may still be found in European universities. Some years ago when I enrolled as a student in a five-hundred-year-old university in Central Europe, I was informed that should I become legally involved, I had the right to demand that my case be tried, not in a municipal court, but before the rector of the university.

The Renaissance brought with it emphasis on individuality and the search for knowledge, rather than simply indoctrination from the past. Thus the basis was laid for academic freedom as an intellectual right as well as a legal one.

During the nineteenth century, especially in Germany, academic freedom began to be concerned also with freedom of political expression and action at a time when revolutionary politics was particularly characteristic of the German academic community, and professors were often under scrutiny from their local princes for their political opinions and utterances.

Academic freedom in Europe is still somewhat different from what it is in America. There it remains very much a right of the student as well as the teacher, a situation which is understandable in the light of the fact that the feeling of scholarly community within a university context remains particularly strong. *Lernfreiheit*, the freedom to learn, is mated with *Lehrfreiheit*, the freedom to teach. This is seen, for instance, in the complete freedom of students to attend or not to attend lectures and

in their freedom to give public expression during the lecture to their opinion of the professor's teaching. Frequently, students break out in applause in the midst of a lecture if they are pleased with what the teacher says, or they may show their dislike by a traditionally loud scuffing of their feet. These are two carefully cherished "academic freedoms." Similarly, freedom exists for professors not only in *what* they teach but *when* they teach it; also how they live. Within the loose context of the academic year the teacher may begin and close his lecturing when he wishes and cancel lectures if he prefers. He is maintained by the university as a scholar, and this is his primary responsibility. His private life and those of his students are almost entirely their own.

In America academic freedom developed with the evolution of the university as distinct from the college and particularly under the influence of the many American scholars who returned from graduate training in Germany during the last half of the nineteenth century. Here the movement for academic freedom developed quietly until World War I. During the years 1914-1917, while America stood officially apart from the conflict, tension was felt both in the academic community and the country at large because of varying European backgrounds, loyalties, and prejudices. This situation led in 1915 to the formation of the American Association of University Professors. One of its first actions was the formulation of a "Declaration on Academic Freedom and Tenure." This document has been revised several times and now stands in terms of the "1940 Statement of Principles." Its section on academic freedom reads as follows:

(a) The teacher is entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of his other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution.

(b) The teacher is entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing his subject, but he should be careful not to introduce into his teaching controversial matter which has no relation to his subject. Limitations of academic freedom

because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment.

(c) The college or university teacher is a citizen, a member of a learned profession, and an officer of an educational institution. When he speaks or writes as a citizen, he should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but his special position in the community imposes special obligations. As a man of learning and an educational officer, he should remember that the public may judge his profession and his institution by his utterances. Hence he should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that he is not an institutional spokesman.³

This AAUP statement naturally raises many questions. In regard to "controversial matter which has no relation to his subject," we may ask, What constitutes "controversial matter"? What are the limits of "relation to his subject"? In many places to discuss the issue of race is controversial, in other places it is not. In some contexts biology is considered to have no relation to theology, in others it is. Are the principles of the AAUP to be interpreted in terms of social, political, geographical, and religious variables?

It seems to me that the basic principle involved here is that of *freedom with responsibility*. Every freedom we enjoy in life carries with it a commensurate responsibility. The responsibilities of a professor can be delineated in terms of the purposes of a university.⁴

Purposes of a University

One of the purposes of a university is the transmission of knowledge and values to the next generation. In this we are involved not simply with indoctrination, but with the provision of a context in which the student himself may develop as a person in his own right. This inevitably demands that a professor be an exemplary teacher and citizen.

A second purpose of a university is to carry out a constant and critical re-examination of accepted knowledge and values to facilitate orderly change, development, and improvement in society. Here the responsibilities are particularly heavy. Thus mem-

The SDA teacher serving in an SDA school exercises in his service academic freedom within the framework of the appreciations, ideals, spirit, beliefs, and doctrines of the SDA Church, for as a member he has subscribed to its teachings and has accepted its doctrines. His attitude, loyalty, and professional ethics have relevance here. Each teacher in the classroom teaching and learning situation will express himself compatibly and in harmony with the special revelation for the Church as revealed through the Holy Bible and writings of Ellen G. White.

—The Editors

bers of an institution of higher education must provide an *informed* basis for their judgments; they must personify intellectual honesty; and they must be imbued with a profound concern for the well-being of the society they criticize.

A third purpose of a university is to present its teachers to the community at large as a group of experts who because they are experts deserve more than ordinary attention for their ideas. As our knowledge constantly grows, the importance of this public function of the university grows with it. Here a teacher stands under great responsibility to speak with competence on the question he is publicly accredited to discuss by his position as a professor. In this connection the AAUP Statement on Rights and Responsibilities of Universities and their Faculties (1953) has the following relevant words:

So long as an instructor's observations are scholarly and germane to his subject, his freedom of expression in his classroom should not be curbed. The university student should be exposed to competing opinions and beliefs in every field, so that he may learn to weigh them and gain maturity of judgment. Honest and skillful exposition of such opinions and beliefs is the duty of every instructor; and it is equally his privilege to express his own critical opinion and the reasons for holding it. In teaching, as in research, he is limited by the requirements of citizenship, of professional competence, and good taste. Having met these, he is entitled to all the protection the full resources of the university can provide.

Academic Freedom in an Adventist University

How do these rights and responsibilities involved in academic freedom apply in the context of an Adventist college or university? Both the AAUP and the accrediting associations have recognized that institutions having particular religious aims may justifiably place limitations on academic freedom. An example of this is the following paragraph from the *Revised Manual of Accrediting* issued by the North Central Association (Section II, page 11):

Since society permits and encourages certain groups such as religious organizations to found colleges that are intended to render services to a particular group, it is permissible and right for sponsors of such colleges to define appropriate limitations of instructional freedom.

This problem is particularly important for us, as our higher educational system has grown largely out of the elementary and the academy levels. While it is true that historically we did have a college before we had an academy, the practical fact is that most of our college and university teachers and administrators have had their professional nurture and gained their basic educational attitudes on the pre-college level where academic freedom is not generally involved. With this goes the fact that we Adventists constitute a largely homogeneous subculture in which the forces of conformity to a conservative pattern and code of life are frequently tremendous. This means that special responsibilities devolve on any group of Adventists who attempt to delineate the "appropriate limitations of instructional free-

Teachers should lead students to think, and clearly to understand the truth for themselves. It is not enough for the teacher to explain or for the student to believe; inquiry must be awakened, and the student must be drawn out to state the truth in his own language. . . .

Make no backward movements, but let your watchword be: "Advance." Our schools must rise to a much higher plane of action; broader views must be held; stronger faith and deeper piety must exist; the word of God must be made the root and branch of all wisdom and intellectual attainments.—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 154-157.

dom" countenanced by such a group as the North Central Association. What principles are relevant as guidelines for academic freedom in our Adventist context?

I should like to propose the following:

As we have seen, the limitations on freedom of expression in secular institutions derive from *responsibilities*—responsibilities to the society that creates and sustains the university. Similarly in an Adventist college or university the limitations placed on teachers derive from responsibilities toward that special society which created and sustains our institution, the Adventist people. As with any university faculty, these responsibilities are very similar to those we have to the public at large: (1) to transmit knowledge and values; (2) to criticize our society (that is, our Adventist subculture with a view to its improvement); (3) to stand as a body of responsible experts before our people. These responsibilities demand the same intellectual honesty, professional expertise, and commitment to the common good as they would in any public institution.

At the same time the *scope* of these limitations is determined to a large degree by the maturity of ourselves and of our students. An example of what I mean by maturity may be drawn from a situation that existed at one of the leading divinity schools two decades ago. One of its professors of theology was an avowed and enthusiastic atheist. It is told of him that he taught his course in Christian Theology from John Calvin's *Institutes*, declaring that he did so because in them he found the classic example of the absurdity of Christianity. This gentleman was not on that seminary faculty because its trustees wished to turn their students into atheists, but because they wanted them to meet realistically and come to terms honestly with that point of view. I am certainly not proposing that we should hire atheists to teach theology in our schools! But this extreme example does suggest that as we develop our program of higher education and as our students gain greater maturity, the limitations we justifiably impose on academic freedom in our colleges and universities may not

always be absolute. Particularly as we go forward with doctoral programs, the attainments of greater maturity both by our faculties and our students is one of our prime goals. We must give our students honest exposure and encourage them to evaluate teachings for themselves, providing with it all a clear and sympathetic orientation to our own Seventh-day Adventist point of view.

As pointed out by both the AAUP and the North-Central Association, whatever limitations we make on academic freedom because of our religious position "should be clearly stated in writing." This poses us with certain practical problems. Seventh-day Adventists do not have a formal creed. Some conservative religious schools have drawn up statements of belief or confessions of faith that each faculty member is required to sign either upon his appointment to the faculty or in some instances annually. This is felt to have the advantage of providing an objective norm for determining the doctrinal limits of academic freedom. Even in these cases, however, experience has shown that a confession of faith is still open to controversial interpretation. In one prominent conservative seminary recently, where the faculty were required to sign a statement of belief annually, they split bitterly over how it should be

understood. In the end the atmosphere engendered by such a document, together with the fact that these statements do not and cannot serve their intended purpose as regards academic freedom, would make them highly undesirable from the Adventist point of view.

It seems to me that what we need in the face of this situation is first a keener sense in our own thinking of what the basic tenets of Adventism are. Second, we must have a renewed sense of confidence in one another. Third, we need to remember that our first purpose is to provide a context under God in which men and women can develop as individuals. We as Christian educators are developing works of art—each one different—not bricks to fit into a monolithic wall. This can only be done with freedom of expression—*freedom with responsibility*.

REFERENCES

- ¹ K. J. Reynolds, "Academic Freedom: What It Is and What It Is Not," *L. L. University Magazine*, 51 (1964), 45.
² See R. P. Fuchs, "Academic Freedom—Its Basic Philosophy, Function, and History," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, XXVIII (1963), 431-446; K. J. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, pp. 44f.; "Some Observations on Academic Freedom," *The Journal of True Education* 27:4 (March, 1965), 16ff.
³ *AAUP Bulletin*, 49 (1963), 69ff.
⁴ In this analysis we are following T. I. Emerson and D. Haber, "Academic Freedom of the Faculty Member as Citizen," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, XXVIII (1963), 547, 549; cf. R. L. Hammill, "What Is a University?" *A.U. Focus*, 1:1 (Jan., 1965), 1-3.

Upgrading for Mathematics Teachers

The National Science Foundation has awarded a grant of \$29,670 to Andrews University for support of a summer institute in mathematics for secondary school teachers during the 1967 summer session. This institute is planned as the first of a sequence of four summer institutes designed to enable junior and senior high school (grades 7 to 12) mathematics teachers to complete most of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching with concentration in mathematics. All of the principal subject matter areas of high school mathematics as it now exists would be thoroughly covered in the sequence of institutes.

Each participant in the institute will receive a stipend not to exceed \$600 and an allowance not to exceed \$120 for each dependent up to a maximum of four. Each participant will also receive a travel allowance not to exceed four cents per mile for one round trip between the participant's home and Berrien Springs up to a maximum of \$80. Stipends and allowances are available for twenty-five par-

ticipants. Tuition and general fees will not be charged.

Two courses will be offered in the 1967 summer institute. R. A. Jorgensen, associate professor of mathematics and director of the institute, will teach Contemporary Mathematics for Secondary Teachers I, which will include an introduction to logic and set theory and an axiomatic development of the real number system. E. J. Specht, head of the mathematics department at Andrews University, will teach Contemporary Mathematics for Secondary Teachers II, which gives a development of Euclidean geometry.

Further information and official application forms for this summer's institute may be obtained by writing to

R. A. Jorgensen
Department of Mathematics
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104

Completed applications must be postmarked no later than February 15, 1967, to be guaranteed consideration.