Authority and Conscience\(^1\)
The Authority of the Denomination and the Freedom of the Pastor

Reinder Bruinsma

Abstract

The article firstly deals with church authority in general and with the way this is understood and functions in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. All church authority is delegated authority, and the church’s authority is always subject to God and the revelation in his Word. The Adventist governmental structure has not always sufficiently resisted authoritarian and hierarchical tendencies. The second part of this article focuses on the relationship between the pastor and his employing church entity. His freedom is limited, in terms of church policies and in expressing theologically unacceptable opinions. On the other hand, he cannot be expected to show blind obedience, and some forms of dissent can actually enrich the community. The pastor must listen to his conscience, but must in some cases expect to be disciplined. Any discipline requires great care, lest political elements and a denial of the right of critical thinking obscure the real issues.

1. Church Authority

Authority and compliance are topics that dominate much of recent Adventist discussion. Many are concerned about the manner in which authority functions within the denominational structure, and wonder whether the exercise of this authority is not too much “top-down” and has not acquired too many hierarchical features. Questions are asked about the legitimate spheres of au-

\(^1\) A previous French version of this paper is printed in \textit{SERVIR – Revue adventiste de théologie} 5, Autumn 2019, 41–55.
thority and about the extent and limits of authority in the various organizational echelons. There is rather widespread criticism with regard to current attempts of the “higher” organizations to enforce compliance with certain doctrinal positions and policies of the church. Church leaders claim that measures must be taken to ensure the unity of the worldwide church. Many, on the other hand, point to the positive aspects of diversity and demand space for the role of personal conscience in responding to doctrinal and policy issues.

This article will briefly explore the nature of authority in the Christian church—in particular in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. It will give attention to the question how the authority of the leaders and institutions of the church relates to the authority and freedom of the pastor and will zoom in on the tensions that develop when pastors disagree with specific things the denomination says or does, and expects of them.²

1.1 Authority

It should not surprise us that in the church, just as in society, authority and respect for authoritative speaking and acting has become increasingly problematic. Congregations and individuals no longer accept the word of pastors and other church leaders unchallenged. “The assumption that position guarantees respect is no longer valid” (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001, 18). In postmodern thinking institutional religion is mostly considered irrelevant and the metanarratives (including those of the church) which supposedly explain everything and proclaim one absolute Truth, which all must accept, are rejected. Postmodernity contends that personal autonomy is the path to truth for each individual. Whether authority is acquired and executed by use of power, through a claim to special expertise, or as the fruit of charisma—or by a combination of these factors—it faces serious challenges (Reuschling 2005, 65).

The Latin roots of the word “authority” – auctor and auctoritas – have the meaning of “invention, advice, influence, command.” In English, the word acquired, from the fourteenth century onwards, the connotation of “the right to rule or command, power to enforce obedience, power or right to command

² When referring to pastors or ministers in this article, I will use the male pronouns. It should be understood, however, that the ministerial force of the church also includes many female pastoral staff.
or act.”³ In various translations of Hebrews 12:2 (as e.g. in KJV and NIV), Christ is called the “author” of our faith. This does not primarily point to his power, and other translations translate the original word archegon more appropriately as pioneer (e.g. NRSV; see also Knight 2003, 223.225), or as the precursor.⁴ Perhaps our word initiator would be a good modern equivalent. In any case, it does not emphasize the power aspect. The two New Testament words that are most closely connected with the power aspect of authority are dunamis and exousia. Dunamis “suggests the inherent capacity of someone or something to carry something out” (Betz 1971a). Exousia, on the other hand, denotes “freedom of choice, the right or power to exercise authority;” it is “the power which may be displayed in the areas of legal, political social or moral affairs” (Betz 1971b).

Whatever shades of meaning these words may have, they do not convey the idea of authoritarian power, or of force and coercion. This has a direct impact on how authority should function in the church.

It is clear beyond dispute that Jesus established something entirely new in the authority which he conferred upon the church. Authority as a function of love and as an operation of the Spirit has no precedent in societies which existed in Old Testament times or in the Hellenistic world, nor does it appear in social ethics of ancient or modern times. (McKenzie 1964, 420)

Jesus created a new structure of authority, which is real, even though not all members and leaders in the church are aware of that. The unfortunate fact is that we always

face the danger that the structure of the church will take on the forms of secular society and that the church will employ means proper to secular society. When the Church becomes a power structure, unless that power be the power of love, it takes on a secular character. (McKenzie 1964, 421)

The well-known Anglican preacher, theologian and church leader John Stott (1921–2011) expressed this in these pertinent words:

⁴ As does the prestigious Dutch theologian F. W Grosheide, in his commentary: Grosheide 1966, 161.163.
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The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.5

The biblical model of the exercise of authority is not the secular CEO model. And “spiritual leaders do not try to satisfy the goals and ambitions of the people they lead but those of the God they serve” (Blackaby and Blackaby 2001, 10.18).

1.2 Power vs. Servanthood

God looks for servants. We see this already in God’s interaction with his people in Old Testament times. Isaiah paints a powerful picture of God’s decisive future intervention through his suffering Servant (chapter 53). We learn from Moses’ summary of the criteria for kingly leadership that a human leader should show the humility of a servant and not consider himself better than the people he serves (Deut. 17:20).

Christ is very clear about servanthood as the only acceptable model for leadership among his followers. He set the supreme example. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). During the last supper Jesus manifested his willingness to serve when he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:1–17). He told the twelve to imitate his example and said in this context: “Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). When there was an argument among the disciples about position and status in the Kingdom, Jesus minced no words and underlined that authority in his Kingdom should not reflect secular power structures. You know, he said, how it works in the world around you. But you must follow a different model: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve” (Matt. 20:25–28).

Robert Greenleaf (1904–1990) developed the theory of servant leadership while working in the world of business. His book Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness (Greenleaf 1977) has been very

influential in and outside the ecclesiastical world. There has been widespread acknowledgment that it reflects in many ways the leadership model that Christ taught and manifested. Hermann Hesse’s novel *The Journey to the East* (see the new edition: Hesse 2011), which first appeared in German in 1932, is a powerful story about the meaning of servant leadership, that perhaps captures the essence of servant leadership in a more powerful way than any academic book about leadership theories. As a group of people goes on a pilgrimage to the East, a man called Leo carries the bags and does all the chores. But later it becomes clear that he did far more than that. He also kept the group together with his presence and his songs (Ciulla 2004, 17).

I would suggest that there is a particular area that needs more thought, namely the nomenclature that is commonly used when we speak of persons in the church who have authority. The fact that they are called to be “servants” is often not reflected in the terminology by which they are described or by which they are addressed. Terms like “reverend” and the Dutch word “dominee” (derived from the Latin *dominus*, lord) are contrary to the concept of servanthood. The terms “minister” and “pastor” are much more appropriate. And there is much to be said for avoiding terms like “church office” or “church officer” (and equivalent words in other languages) when referring to functions in the church. This word “office” (from the Latin *officium*, an official task that carries a particular status) suggests to many that those who hold an “office” in the church have a ranking that is superior to other members.

The characteristic New Testament word for the work that is done in the church of Christ is *diakonia*—service (Brienen 2008, 17). Raoul Dederen (1925–2016) wrote, just prior to the General Conference session of 1995 in Utrecht (where the ministry of women in the church was one of the important agenda items):

> As an expression of the Spirit’s ministry among us, authority bears the characteristics of the supreme gift of grace, namely love. Like all functions of the church, the exercise of authority is a function of love, a *diakonia*, a service. (Dederen 1995, 9)

One element that should not be overlooked is that all authority in the church is “delegated authority.” This does not primarily mean that the “higher” decision making bodies receive their authority from the lower echelons in the denominational structure – and ultimately from the members of
the local church – as is (at least officially) the case in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Cf. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* [18th edition of 2010, 28–30]). It means first of all that all authority in the church is “delegated,” because it is God-given.

The fundamental biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers excludes a hierarchical structure of church governance in a denomination. It also mitigates against any hierarchical structure at the level of the local congregation. There is no New Testament justification for according the pastor a higher status than the elder and for making the elder more important than the deacon (Brienen 2008, 36). And it seems to me that speaking of “senior pastors” and “lead pastors” is rather dubious, since it does not just point to differences in the tasks that they perform but also carries the unfortunate suggestion of a hierarchy in status.

### 1.3 Organizational Structure

Although at first very hesitant in adopting any organizational structure, the leaders of the incipient Adventist movement soon recognized that some form of organization was needed.6

The church structure at the local level that was adopted was not the result of profound biblical and theological study, but rather a matter of borrowing, and somewhat adapting, patterns from the movement of the Christian Connexion, a small “restorationist” denomination to which several of the “pioneers” had belonged before becoming Adventists. And since American Protestantism in general was deeply influenced by Calvinism, it should come as no surprise to find that (like the Christian Connexion) the Adventist Church to a major extent followed the Calvinistic pattern of local church governance – i.e. through the three “offices” of minister, elder and deacon (Bruinsma 2009, 134–135). As far as the supra-local structure of church governance is concerned early Adventism copied the basic Methodist pattern of regional conferences and a General Conference (Mustard 1987, 32; Bruinsma 2009, 136–137). Unions and divisions were administrative levels that were added when

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6 For a concise and highly readable survey of the development of the Adventist organizational model, see Knight 2001. Other good resources are: Oliver 1989; Mustard 1987; Beach and Beach 1985.
the Adventist Church became a world-wide denomination (Knight 2001, 80–86; Chudley 2013, 18–20).

By and large this structure has served the church quite well and has, no doubt, been a major factor in the execution of its mission. After all, the mission of the church is a crucial reason for having an organization. However, in actual practice, the organizational structure of the church has also brought its challenges. The servant-character has often been obscured when a small group of individuals began to exercise “kingly power.” Except for the first General Conference president (John Byington), Ellen G. White, at one time or another, reproved all presidents of the church, whom she worked with during her long life, of abusing their authority (Moore 2013, 921–922).

Recently, critics have argued that the top denominational leadership is increasingly hierarchical in its thinking and in its interpretation and application of policies, and it has even been accused of following the Roman Catholic pattern of governance which the church traditionally so forcefully condemned (see e.g. Knight 2017a and 2017b). We do well to remember the words of Charles Bradford (former president of the North-American Division):

The various levels of church structure (conference, union, division, General Conference) derive their authority from local congregations. Their existence is made legitimate only by their relevance and service to the total fellowship. (Bradford 1979, 15)

I wholeheartedly agree with a Baptist scholar who suggested that it would be much better to speak of a “web” rather than of a “structure” of church governance. “Structure” has the connotation of being rigid and stiff, while the metaphor of a “web” may suggest a major degree of vulnerability, but also of flexibility and pliability, while with its stickiness it also “holds those who move and dwell upon it” (Pool 1997, 444–445).

Before moving on to the second part of this article, one further point must be mentioned. Keeping in mind that all authority in the church is God-given, we must recognize a difference in the weight of authority—not by accepting that the various levels of a denominational organization may have an intrinsically different degree of authority, but in the realization that God is the Source of all authority. “As Lord and King of all creation and history, He has the right to exercise authority over humanity.” (Kinnamon 1982, 201) He is the ultimate source of all church authority. Moreover, with other Christians, Adventists hold that God disclosed Himself in Jesus Christ, the living Word
and the Head of the church. In his love and grace God further spoke and speaks to us though the written Word, that witnesses supremely to Jesus Christ (Dederen 1995, 2). Therefore, the authority of the church is always subject to a far higher authority. The church must always know its subordinate place. It can never claim to be inerrant or infallible. It is the “body of Christ” in this world, but “it is not mystically fused with Christ.” “Christ stands over against it exercising his Lordship. It must listen in obedience and only then speak in the name of its Lord.” (Meilaender 2007, 37)

This recognition should help us in the interpretation of statements by Ellen White about the authority of a General Conference session. Whatever authority it has, it is always subject to an infinitely higher authority.

In the recent controversies about policy compliance it has been argued that individual opinions and decisions of “lower” denominational entities, must always be subject to the decisions of General Conference sessions, since this is the “highest authority that God has upon the earth” (White 1948a, 492). When this statement, that dates from 1875, is quoted, there is usually no mention of its context. Ellen White addressed these words to an employee who had refused to accept a particular church assignment (Chudley 2013, 27). And as we try to assess the weight of this statement we must not forget that, repeatedly, Ellen White strongly expressed her doubts about the ways in which the General Conference leadership at certain times was leading the church. She wrote in her diary in 1894 that the leadership of the General Conference had become “a strange voice” and that “God does not speak through them” (White, Manuscript 114, 1894). Many similar statements could be quoted. Nonetheless, in 1909 she once again emphasized the unique authority of a General Conference session:

> When in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body. (White 1948b, 260)

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7 For a fascinating study of Ellen White’s interaction with three General Conference presidents, see Valentine 2011.
Robert Pierson, the General Conference from 1966 to 1979, went even a step further and admonished the staff of the General Conference to remember that “we are daily, hourly, momentarily, a part of a group of leaders that constitute the highest authority of God on earth” (Pierson 1976).

In 1877, the General Conference during its session passed the following significant resolution:

Resolved, That the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting in its proper jurisdiction; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of the individual conscience. (Review and Herald, October 4, 1877, 106; italics added)

It is to be noted that in this statement it is clearly stated that a General Conference session must remain within its “proper jurisdiction” and that the individual conscience does not lose its significant role. Perhaps these conditions are not always sufficiently adhered to in recent times.

2. The Pastor – Role and Relationships
The almost 30,000 ministerial “workers” play an important role in the Adventist denomination (“Annual Statistical Report 2017,” 10). It is, however, difficult to state in a few words how they function in various parts of the world and how they relate to their conferences or unions in their daily activities, or to describe what degree of autonomy they have. It is no secret that there is a significant difference between the district pastor in a rural region in Africa or South America and the “senior” pastor of a university church in North America. But, according to church policy, they are all subject to the authority of their employing bodies—in most instances their local conferences. The Minister’s Manual emphasizes the subordinate status of the local pastor. In earlier versions of the Minister’s Manual the conference president was described as the “overseer” of the pastors in his conference. That rather hierarchical description is no longer found in the current edition. The statement that the conference president is, however, “largely dependent on pastors in carrying out the plans and policies of the conference” is retained. The pastor is required to strictly apply all church policies and closely adhere to the Church Manual (cf. Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual, 78).
The authority of the pastor is clearly quite limited, when seen from the perspective of the employing organization. He has, however, a significant degree of authority in his role in his local church(es). He “assumes principal leadership of the congregation” (Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual, 101). He is a primus inter pares among the elders and must instruct the church officers in their duties and plan with them for all lines of church work and activities. Under normal circumstances he chairs the church board. Ordained ministers can officiate at all rites and perform all official function of the church, while some restrictions apply to those holding other credentials (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, rev. edition, 2010, 33).

The various official documents of the church make it clear that the pastor is limited in his personal freedom. The language of previous editions of the Minister’s Manual expresses this more unequivocally than the 2009 edition does. In the earlier edition [1992] ministers are advised that “when you do become an employee and leader in the church, you accept a responsibility to the church that may curtail your personal freedom” (Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual, 64). Pastors must trust their leaders, consult with them and support them. “One right surrendered while in the employ of a denomination is the freedom to preach, print, or propagate views that contradict the official or accepted position of the church.” Furthermore, the pastor is told: “You do not have the right to discuss your personal studies in a way that will undermine the faith of any member” (ibid., 65). Although this wording is no longer there, this still expresses what is expected of the pastor.

2.1 Obedience or Dissent?
So, where does that leave the pastor who has some reservations regarding the way some of the Fundamental Beliefs of the church are formulated? And can the pastor follow his conscience when confronted with particular pastoral situations, or must he always go “by the book”? Can he, when he feels he has good reason to do so, deviate from the official church policy with regard to persons he is allowed to baptize or marry? Or with regard to the administering of church discipline? Is he free to openly declare that he disagrees with the decisions of the church regarding the ordination of female pastors?

A pastor must, like all other members, realize that he belongs to the faith community that he serves. 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 spot-on. 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 also very much to the faith community of Seventh-day Adventists. In order to remain a community and to be able to pursue its goals, the faith community must organize itself as efficiently as possible. It must arrive at a broad consensus as to what the community 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. Theology always remains work in process, and this is true of doctrines, however “fundamental” they may be. They are imperfect human attempts to put into human language what we understand of what the infinite God has revealed to us. As the preamble of the *Fundamental Beliefs* indicates, even these fundamentals are not forever set in concrete.\(^8\)

The question is (in the words of an official at the World Council of Churches): “Can Christian liberty under the Gospel be preserved by ecclesiastical structures for teaching and decision making?” (Kinnamon 1982, 196) Or, in my words: Is there space for diversity of opinion on certain issues and for conscientious dissent, while remaining a loyal member of the community? Raoul Dederen voiced a 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, as we have seen earlier, the biblical view of authority is not one of dominating power and coercion, but of servanthood. “True authority can never be imposed: it only works when it is offered, chosen and freely adopted” (Kinnamon 1982, 201). Personal moral development requires critical thinking and not merely following conventions and conformity to rules. “When morality is constrained by simply focusing on obedience to

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moral authorities, we risk not becoming free, choosing, responsible individuals.” (Reuschling 2005, 67)

Accepting the teaching and governing authority of the church does not presuppose blind obedience. We must not forget that all people – pastors most definitely included – will be required to give an account to Christ for everything they have done (Blackaby and Blackaby 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). Gilbert Meilaender, a professor in Christian Ethics at the University of Valparaiso, 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 the individual – *in casu* the pastor – must listen to the voice of the church, the church also has the obligation to listen to, and examine, the view of the individual believer/pastor. “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” (ibid., 35). Johannes A. van der Ven, a 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 writes,

> 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. (van der Ven 1996, 381)

While it is true that a community cannot exist without general 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).

There is a point when the tension between the official views of the church and those of the individual pastor rises to a point where the church must take measures to protect its identity and unity. The church has the right to discipline ministers when they manifest a persistent lack of loyalty and no longer support the essential Adventist beliefs.

The other side of the coin is: No one is forced to remain a member of the church or continue to serve as a pastor. 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.

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, and if necessary, enforce what is and what is not acceptable within the diversity of belief? It seems to me that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has not yet found a fully satisfactory answer to that question and I agree with those voices in the church that believe that establishing a system of compliance committees is certainly not a satisfactory reaction.

3. Conclusions
Currently we face some unfortunate controversies in the church and see a lamentable degree of polarization. No one should suggest that the issues that are at stake are not important. Allow me to make a few personal suggestions that I believe are worthy of consideration:

1. We must, in our discussions of where we differ, focus much more on the many points where we agree. We should not lose sight of the fact that, with all its diversity, the Adventist Church is still remarkably united, certainly when compared to many other faith communities.

2. It would also help if the church would be less selective in the selection of the theological and policy issues that are the focus of current compliance concerns. Why is doubt about the literal days of creation a greater concern than, for instance, a denial of Trinitarian doctrine? Why is “orthodoxy” with regard to homosexuality more vital than
maintaining a balanced biblical view of “Last Generation Theology” issues?

3. The church must be extremely careful in disciplining dissenting voices, even if it considers particular theological views to be unacceptable. Great 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 muddle the waters. Whatever we think, for instance of theological issues in the Ford-crisis, we should learn from the (often political) way in which this was handled. 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. Perhaps one of the challenges for the Adventist Church is how to display a greater trust in the long-term work of the Holy Spirit in guiding the church in the guarding and refining of its understanding of biblical truth.

4. There must be a greater awareness in some quarters of the church of the danger of hierarchical thinking, and a greater willingness to recognize cultural differences and, therefore, to allow for flexibility. Above all, in dealing with differences of opinion or dissent, the church must use its authority in ways that are characterized by a spirit of true servant leadership and love.

5. We should emphasize what Josiah Joyce stated as one of the conditions for the formation of a true community: all members must maintain a special love and loyalty to other members of the community and to the community as a whole (Bracken 1970, 440). This requires from members – pastors included – who disagree with their church about particular issues, a distinct sense of responsibility for the well-being of the community and great care – and sometimes reticence – in voicing their opinions.

6. Many issues could – over time – be solved, or at least diffused, if we would allow – corporately and individually – our thinking and interaction to be characterized not so much by being proven right but by being gracious. It would make a great difference in the church if we would

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9 A careful study of the aftermath of this crisis is: Ballis 1999.
always operate from the basic assumption that, whatever our differences of opinion, these differences do not make us into enemies, and that we all love our Lord and our church.

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Authority and Conscience


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Zusammenfassung


Résumé

L’article traite d’abord de l’autorité de l’Eglise en général et de la façon dont elle est comprise et fonctionne dans l’Église adventiste du septième jour. Toute autorité de l’Eglise est une autorité déléguée, et elle est toujours soumise à Dieu et à la révélation dans sa Parole. La structure gouvernementale adventiste n’a pas toujours suffisamment résisté aux tendances autoritaires et hiérarchiques. La deuxième partie de cet article se concentre sur la relation entre le pasteur et son entité Eglise employeuse. Sa liberté est limitée, en termes de politiques ecclésiastiques et d’expression d’opinions théologiquement inacceptables. D’un autre côté, on ne peut pas s’attendre à ce qu’il manifeste une obéissance aveugle, et certaines formes de dissidence peuvent réellement enrichir la communauté. Le pasteur doit écouter sa conscience, mais dans certains cas, il doit s’attendre à être repris. Toute discipline requiert un grand soin, de peur que des éléments politiques et un déni du droit à la pensée critique ne masquent les vrais problèmes.

Reinder Bruinsma, Ph.D., is the General Editor of Spes Christiana. He is a retired pastor and church administrator and author of several theological books in various languages. E-mail: reinder@bruinsmas.com