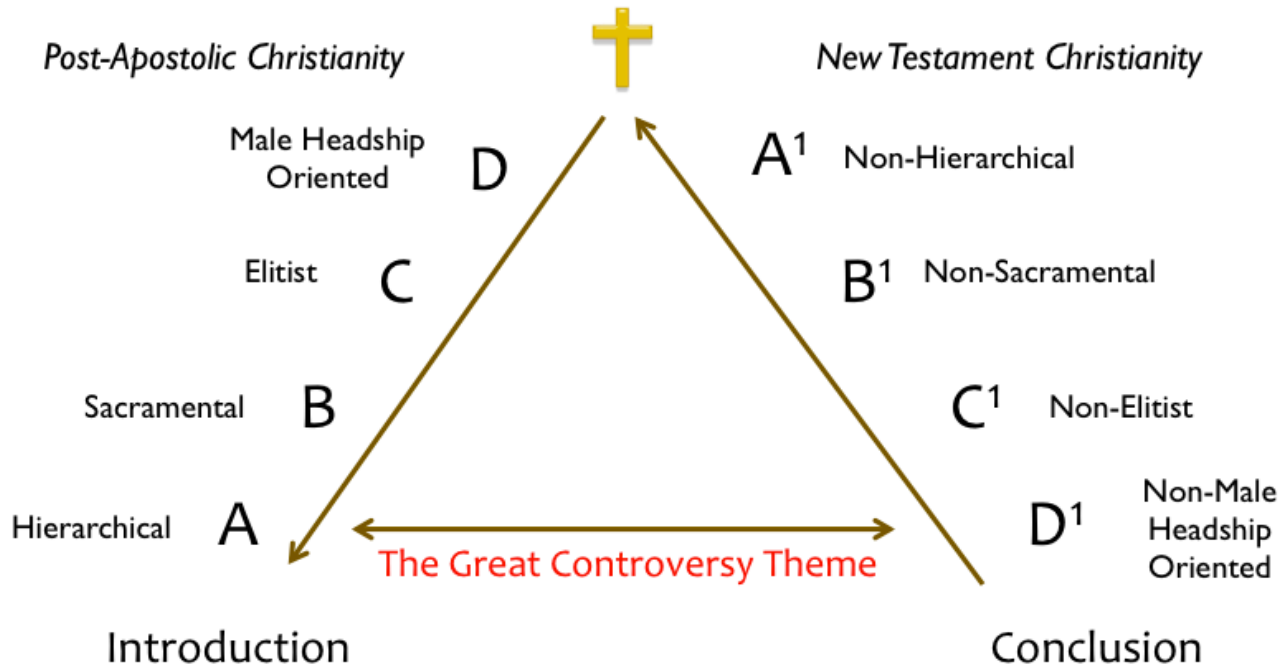


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# Authority of the Christian Leader<sup>1</sup>

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## The Structure of this Paper



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### Introduction

6 In order to thrive, every human society must establish its own organizational and  
7 authoritative structures. Eventually, if someone desires to know something about a particular  
8 nation, family, or association, they are most likely to inquire about the nature and use of its  
9 authority. Human groupings may thus be described as “dictatorial,” “authoritarian,”

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<sup>1</sup>At the very outset of this paper, I would like to state that I fully accept Ellen G. White’s inspiration and prophetic ministry in the Adventist Church. It was through reading the *Desire of Ages* that I fell in love with Jesus; through reading of the *Great Controversy*, I became acquainted with God’s purpose for humanity; and no other book has taught me more about salvation through Jesus Christ than *Steps to Christ*. In preparing this paper, however, I purposely avoided using Ellen White’s writings to support my conclusions. My insights, thus, are based on my understanding of Scripture’s message alone. This, I believe, is in agreement with Ellen White’s counsel that her writings should not be used to settle doctrinal debates when the Lord had not given her specific light on the matter. To my knowledge, Ellen White does not speak to the issue of women’s ordination. William Fagal reached similar conclusion when he wrote: “her statements neither support ordination for women nor explicitly forbid it. None of her writings deal directly with this issue.” *Ministry*, December 1988, 11.

1 “democratic,” “egalitarian,” “republican,” “laissez-faire,” and so on. Each of these designations  
2 reflects the way in which authority is used within a particular community.

3 While different from a nation, family, or association, the Church is also a human society  
4 that must have organizational/authoritative structures in order to disseminate its message  
5 and thus fulfill the Great Commission given to it by Christ.<sup>2</sup> Because of this, it is legitimate to  
6 inquire about the nature and use of authority within the community of believers.<sup>3</sup> Such  
7 inquiry is of vital importance, as much depends on the way authority is understood and  
8 exercised within the Church. Even such foundational Christian teachings as the nature of God  
9 and salvation are influenced by the way authority is defined.

10 Any discussion on the nature of Christian authority, however, tends to be muddied by  
11 our cultural context, as the way we view authority is shaped by the way in which authority is  
12 exercised within the society of which we are a part. For many people, the term “authority”  
13 carries few positive connotations. A simple class exercise proves the point. When I teach on  
14 the subject of ecclesiology, I sometimes flash the word “authority” on the screen and ask  
15 students to tell me what immediately comes to their minds. Invariably, I hear words such as  
16 “dominance,” “power,” “control,” “abuse,” “rule,” or “final decision making.” Then we check  
17 the dictionary definition of “authority” and, indeed, we find that the most prominent way in  
18 which authority is defined follows the same line of thinking, i.e., “the power or right to give  
19 orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience” or “the power to determine, adjudicate, or  
20 otherwise settle issues of disputes; jurisdiction, the right to control, command, or determine.”  
21 Authority defined as such demands submission, which is defined in the dictionary as “the  
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<sup>2</sup>For an excellent treatise on the Church and its divinely instituted origin, mission, and organizational structures, see Raoul Dederen, “Church,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 538-581.

<sup>3</sup>Dederen, 559-561.

1 action or fact of accepting or yielding to a superior force or to the will or authority of another  
2 person.” In my personal experience, I have yet to meet a person who likes to submit in such a  
3 manner. On the contrary, it almost seems as though we arrive in this world with an inborn  
4 tendency to resist this type of authority – just ask parents whose children have entered the  
5 teenage years or think about our inner reaction when we are flagged by an officer for  
6 speeding.

7           Very rarely do my students consider “authority” a positive thing in the life of a society.  
8 And yet, authoritative structures are essential, as they provide society with continuity,  
9 stability, safety and boundaries. Without some form of authority, no human society would or  
10 could exist; this includes the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is the combination of our  
11 sinful nature and the abuse of authority that causes us to develop negative attitudes towards  
12 authority. Unfortunately, all too often abuse, disguised by the addition of the adjective  
13 “spiritual,” happens in the church, the community Christ established to be different from any  
14 other human society on Earth.

15           In recent years, the issue of authority has received a fair amount of attention in  
16 Adventist circles. As we have experienced the delay of the Second Coming of Christ, we have  
17 become increasingly concerned with issues related to Gospel order, organization, ranking, and  
18 policy, all the while attempting to be faithful to Scripture. The nature of authority and its use  
19 has surfaced most prominently within the context of the discussion on women’s ordination.  
20 The most sensitive question raised in these debates is whether women can or should hold  
21 authoritative positions within the church structure. Should women be allowed to  
22 preach/teach or lead in the church? Would not ordination place them in headship positions  
23 over their male counterparts?

1 Responses to these questions vary. Some believe that women can never be placed in  
2 any position – be it pastor, theology professor, university or hospital president – that would  
3 situate them in authority over men. Others would allow women to fill leadership roles within  
4 the greater Adventist organization but not in the church. Accordingly, women must not be  
5 allowed to teach or preach in the church when men who are able to do so are present. Still  
6 others go so far as to allow women to preach in the church providing that they stand under  
7 the authority of an ordained male senior pastor. All of these positions have one common  
8 denominator: *the position of “spiritual headship” in the church must be limited to men alone.*  
9 Ordination is believed to raise a particularly gifted man to a position of spiritual headship in  
10 the church, and since the Bible speaks of male headship alone, the position of pastor (or senior  
11 pastor) is closed to women; no woman, it is believed, can have authority over any man.

12 Observing the debate for a number of years and listening carefully to both sides, I ask  
13 myself several questions: Are we certain that we truly understand what we mean when we  
14 use the word “authority”? Am I possibly making the false assumption that when I utter the  
15 word “authority,” you know exactly what I mean and vice versa? What informs the concept of  
16 authority that resides in our minds? Is it our culture (both secular and religious) or is it  
17 careful attention to the words of Jesus?

18 Like many good things in life, the concept of authority has its counterfeits. The  
19 purpose of this paper is to explore two opposing views of authority. This is necessary to tease  
20 out the essential elements of the New Testament view of authority and thus help us avoid the  
21 ecclesiological pitfalls – of which many of us may not be aware– that modern Christianity  
22 inherited from post-Apostolic Christianity and which are deeply ingrained in both Catholic  
23 and Protestant traditions. For this reason I will, first, explore the characteristics of a  
24 counterfeit kind of “authority” as it evolved in Christianity from the second century onward,

1 and which continues to be the foundation of both modern Roman Catholicism and Protestant  
2 fundamentalism<sup>4</sup>; second, I will explore the concept of authority flowing from the teachings of  
3 Jesus; and finally, I will provide a response to the counterfeit view of authority.

#### 4 **The Post-Apostolic Church and a Counterfeit View of Authority**

5 Faced with the death of its pioneers, the delay of the Second Coming, schism, the rise of  
6 heretical teaching, as well as persecution, the early post-Apostolic Christian Church searched  
7 for ways of maintaining its unity and defending itself against various heretical teachings.<sup>5</sup>  
8 Such a goal could be accomplished through providing the church with strong leadership.

9 Going beyond the Gospels and the writings of Paul, writers such as Ignatius (d.ca. 110-  
10 130AD), Irenaeus (d.ca. 202AD), Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225AD), Cyprian (d.ca. 258AD), and  
11 Augustine (354-430AD) gradually endowed Christian ministry with special authority, which  
12 was available only through the rite of ordination. The Christian ministry that emerged from  
13 this era was far removed from what we find in the pages of the New Testament; the authority  
14 of the ministry was (and continues to be) marked by the following characteristics:

15 **First (A), it was hierarchical;** i.e., conceived in terms of order, ranking, or chain of  
16 command. The church became divided into two classes of individuals – clergy and laity –  
17 separated from each other by the rite of ordination. At the head of the church was a  
18 monarchical (*mon* – one, *arche*-rule) bishop, surrounded and assisted by a group of elders as  
19 well as deacons, who were at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder.<sup>6</sup> The bishop – or the

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<sup>4</sup>For the sake of brevity, the following description will be limited only to the concept of authority that evolved within early post-Apostolic Christianity. In many ways, Fundamentalist Protestantism, especially those branches that come under the umbrella of Calvinism, tends to reflect the pre-Reformation understanding of authority. The question of the Fundamentalist Protestant understanding of authority, however, will be addressed in another study.

<sup>5</sup>Ralph Martin Novak, *Christianity and the Roman Empire* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 45.

<sup>6</sup>It is in the writings of the early Church writer Ignatius (d.ca. 110-130AD) that we encounter a strongly hierarchical ministry for the first time. Ignatius *Magnesian* 6.4 in *Early Christian Writings*, ed., Maxwell

1 senior pastor – was placed at the center of religious activity and was endowed with complete  
2 control over the affairs of the local church.<sup>7</sup> His duties included preaching, teaching,  
3 administration of the community, and money management. Without his presence, no  
4 Christian rite, such as baptism or the Lord’s Supper, could be conducted. Believing this  
5 system to be established by God, Christians were expected to submit to the decisions of their  
6 bishop-pastor.<sup>8</sup> The bishop-pastor’s position and prestige in the church was significantly  
7 strengthened by the doctrine of Apostolic Succession developed by Irenaeus, who taught that  
8 the twelve apostles passed on their leadership and teaching authority to the bishops.

9         This system of early church governance was largely modeled on the way in which the  
10 Roman Empire was governed.<sup>9</sup> While it was originally established for the sake of order and  
11 unity in the church, it eventually became an end in itself, to be protected and perpetuated at  
12 any cost. Such concentration of power in the church in the hands of the ordained elite led, of  
13 course, to the eventual establishment of the papacy. There is no need to elaborate here on the  
14 prophetic significance of this development.<sup>10</sup>

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Staniforth (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 88. Kenneth Osborne, *Priesthood, A History of Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 52.

<sup>7</sup>Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 100.

<sup>8</sup>Ignatius thus writes: “For your part, the becoming thing for you...[is] to show him [the bishop] every possible respect, having regards to the power God has conferred on him. . . . So for the honour of Him who loved us, propriety requires an obedience from you that is more than mere lip service.” Ignatius *Magnesians 3* in Staniforth, 87-88.

<sup>9</sup>Thus Novak writes: “Because essentially all of the cultures of the Graeco-Roman world were hierarchical and patriarchal, a gradual increase over time of the bishop’s authority might have been reasonably expected as the natural result of the local Christian communities adopting modes and structures of authority that paralleled the predominant cultural values.” Novak, 45; Will Durrant adds that “when Christianity conquered Rome the ecclesiastical structure of the pagan church . . . passed like maternal blood into the new religion, and captive Rome captured her conqueror.” *Caesar and Christ: The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 671-672; cf. Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), 185, 213; Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 134.

<sup>10</sup>For a detailed history of how the humble position of the pastor evolved into episcopal and papal offices, see Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996).

1           **Second (B), it was sacramental;** i.e., the spiritual life of the believers, and thus their  
2 salvation, in some way depended on their pastor. It was during this time that the Christian  
3 minister began to be referred to as a priest. The writers of this period came to the conclusion  
4 that the Old Testament priesthood was a type of Christian ministry.<sup>11</sup> An ordained Christian  
5 pastor, thus, became a mediator between God and other believers. This mediation was  
6 enabled through the rite of ordination when the pastor received a special seal – known as  
7 *dominicus character* - which enabled him to re-enact Christ’s sacrifice each time he celebrated  
8 the Lord’s Supper.<sup>12</sup> In such a system, the existence of the church itself depended upon the  
9 existence of the ordained ministry.<sup>13</sup> As with the previous point, the prophetic significance of  
10 this development cannot be overestimated and will be elaborated on below.

11           **Third (C), it was elitist;** i.e., divided into two classes of individuals, those ordained  
12 and those un-ordained. As mentioned above, it was gradually accepted that, through the rite  
13 of ordination, the minister became separated from the rest of the community. The laying-on-  
14 of-hands endowed the pastor with special authority from God and enabled him to provide  
15 spiritual and mediatorial leadership to the believers.<sup>14</sup> This teaching, first introduced by  
16 Tertullian, stated that there are two groups of people in the church: the ordained and the un-  
17 ordained, otherwise referred to as clergy and laity.<sup>15</sup> Only those who were ordained could

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<sup>11</sup>Frederick J. Cwiekowski, “Priesthood,” *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), 1049.

<sup>12</sup>Paul Josef Cordes, *Why Priests?: Answers Guided by the Teaching of Benedict XVI* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2010), 28-30.

<sup>13</sup>Thus, in the fourth century Jerome stated: “There can be no Christian community without its ministers.” Jerome *Dialogus contra Luciferanos* 21, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 6:331. It is not surprising, therefore, that Cyprian would famously exclaim *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside of the church there is no salvation). Cyprian *Epistle* 72.21 (*ANF* 5:384).

<sup>14</sup>This happened mainly through the work of Augustine, although already in the second century Tertullian wrote of an essential (or ontological) difference between the clergy and laity. Cf., Benedict J. Groeschel, *A Priest Forever* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1998), 185; Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 139.

<sup>15</sup>In his *Exhortation to Chastity*, he thus wrote: “It is the authority of the Church that instituted the distinction between clergy and laity [Lat.: *ordinem et plebem*] and the honor shown the ranks of the clergy made

1 provide spiritual leadership in the church. In line with this thinking, the church could not be  
2 conceived as egalitarian. It was not a community of equals in terms of leadership roles. This  
3 is clearly reflected in the documents of the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). *The*  
4 *Constitution on the Church* thus states:

5       The Church of Christ is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the  
6       same rights. It is a society of un-equals, not only because among the faithful some are  
7       clerics and some are laymen, but particularly because there is in the Church the power  
8       from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach, and govern, and to others  
9       not.<sup>16</sup>

10  
11 Through the act of ordination, therefore, an elite group of leaders was created in the church  
12 and only members of this elite could take the office of pastor in the church. As we shall see  
13 below, this view is contrary to the teachings of the New Testament.

14       **Fourth (D), it was oriented towards male headship in the church;** i.e., only men  
15 could fulfill headship roles in the church. Ever since its beginnings, the Christian Church has  
16 taught, and continues to teach, that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. However, faced  
17 with the reality of the physical absence of Christ on earth, the post-Apostolic Church felt it  
18 needed someone who could take His place, represent Him to believers and the world, and  
19 represent believers to God. Viewing themselves as separated for special ministry *via* the rite  
20 of ordination, early Christian ministers assumed the position of headship in the church *in*

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holy for God." Tertullian *Exhortation to Chastity* 7.3. Translation by Robert B. Eno, in *Teaching Authority in the Early Church* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984), 54-55; cf., *ANF* 4:54. The exact Latin phrase reads: *Differentiam inter ordinem et plebem constituit ecclesiae auctoritas et honor per ordinis consessum sanctificatus.* John Henry Hopkins, *The Church of Rome in Her Primitive Purity, Compared with the Church of Rome at Present Day* (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1839), 89. Note the parallels between the order of senators and plebs of the Roman Empire and this usage found in Tertullian. P. M. Gy, "Notes on the Early Terminology of Christian Priesthood," in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1957), 99.

<sup>16</sup>"Constitution on the Church," in J. Neuner and H. Roos, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1967), 219-220. Similar sentiments are expressed by Pius X in his 1906 encyclical *Vehementer Nos* 8. There the pope states: "The Church is essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow



1 *place of Christ*. This is the actual meaning of the widely used Latin phrase *in persona Christi*  
2 *Capitis* (in place of Christ the Head).<sup>17</sup> Another phrase, *Vicarius Filii Dei* (in place of the Son of  
3 God), expresses the same belief.

4         The acceptance of ministerial headship through the rite of ordination was  
5 accompanied by a developing theology of male headship in the church. The reasoning was  
6 very simple: in the New Testament, the relationship between Christ and the Church is  
7 represented in nuptial terms. Christ is represented as a bridegroom, a male, who marries His  
8 bride, the Church, a female. If the pastor serves his church *in persona Christi Capitis*, i.e., taking  
9 the role of headship in place of Christ, *he also must be a man*. It follows that the ordination rite  
10 is not a simple blessing but a conferral of headship powers and duties and, as such, it is a type  
11 of a marriage ceremony; *the church becomes the pastor's spouse*.<sup>18</sup> In short, through the rite of

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the Pastors." [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_x/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_11021906\\_vehementer-nos\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos_en.html)

<sup>17</sup>Reading the section dealing with the office of a priest in the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is particularly illuminating on this point. In it the authors clearly and concisely explain the need for human headship in the church. The particular portion dealing with a pastor's headship in the church is entitled "In the person of Christ the Head." *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori: Liguori Publications, 2004), 387-388.

<sup>18</sup>*Ceremonial of Bishops: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope John Paul II* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 33. See also Paul VI, *Inter Insigniores* (Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood) issued in 1976 in *From "Inter Insigniores" to "Ordinatio Sacerdotalis"* (Washington, D. C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 43-49. The imagery of marriage is clearly visible in the ceremony of Catholic episcopal ordination. The ordained bishop vows his fidelity to the church and receives the episcopal ring, which symbolizes his authority over the church. The bishop, thus, becomes the "husband" of the church. The symbolism of marriage is further accentuated by the use of the "marriage ring" and "the kiss of peace" within the ordination rite. One of the prayers used during ordination reads: "Receive this ring, the seal of your fidelity; adorned with undefiled faith, preserve unblemished the bride of God, the holy Church." Susan K. Wood, *Sacramental Orders* (Collegeville: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 2000), 53-55. In the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, a church manual for episcopal ordination, we also find this statement: "The *ring* is the symbol of the bishop's fidelity to and nuptial bond with the Church, his spouse, and he is to wear it always." 33. Megan McLaughlin further writes: "The bishop's marriage to his church [is] more than just a metaphor. . . . At least by the beginning of the tenth century, and probably before, it had acquired a mystical significance as well, which was derived from the ancient and influential allegory of Christ's marriage to the church." Megan McLaughlin, "The Bishop as Bridegroom: Marital Imagery and Clerical Celibacy in the Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries," in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, ed., Michael Frassetto (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 210. Conversely, when a Catholic woman takes her vows to become a nun, she becomes a Bride of Christ. Completed with marriage vows and a ring, her final investiture represents a marriage ceremony. E. Ann Matter, "Mystical Marriage," in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, ed., Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Eulama Literary Agency, 1999), 35.

1 ordination, the pastor assumes a headship position in the church.<sup>19</sup> All this means that  
2 women cannot be ordained as ministers in the church because they must remain in  
3 hierarchical submission to male pastors. This ancient theology is clearly expressed in John  
4 Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (*On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*) issued in  
5 1988, in which the late pope takes the biblical teaching of male headship in the home and  
6 applies it to the church.<sup>20</sup> As we shall see below, there are significant problems with applying  
7 male headship terminology to relationships within the church.

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### **Jesus on the Authority of the Christian Leader**

10 Does the evolution of Christian ministry into papal hierarchy, as documented above,  
11 mean that the church should be deprived of leadership and organization? Or that authoritative  
12 structure should not exist within the community of faith? By no means! In order to exist and  
13 disseminate its mission the church must have organization and leadership. Rather than  
14 modeling its organization upon secular structures of authority, as early post-Apostolic  
15 Christianity did, the church should first of all look to Jesus to search for ways in which  
16 authority in the church should be exercised. It is Christ who founded the church and He  
17 knows best what Christian authority is and how it should be exercised. Thus, His followers  
18 must take His teachings on authority seriously. *Other New Testament teachings related to the*  
19 *issue of authority, including difficult Pauline passages (eg., 1 Timothy 2:12) must thus be read*  
20 *through the prism of Jesus' understanding of the term rather than vice versa.* So what did Jesus  
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<sup>19</sup>Timothy M. Dolan, *Priests for the Third Millennium* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), 70-71; Sarah Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Chicago: Hillengrand Books, 2006), 90. Megan McLaughlin, "The Bishop as Bridegroom: Marital Imagery and Clerical Celibacy in the Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries," in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, ed. Michael Frassetto (New York: Garland Publications, 1998), 210-211.

<sup>20</sup>John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1988). See especially the section entitled "The Church – The Bride of Christ," 79-94.

1 have to say about authority?

2 In preparation for this presentation, I decided to once again re-read and think through  
3 the Gospel passages where Jesus speaks about authority.<sup>21</sup> His views are truly astounding.  
4 For most of us, immersed in hierarchically-oriented cultures, Jesus' message continues to be  
5 counterintuitive and difficult to comprehend, much less to accept. For this reason, we tend to  
6 gloss over the passages dealing with authority without much thought. And yet, these  
7 passages, if understood and applied, have the potential to revolutionize our personal and  
8 communal lives.

9 During His earthly ministry, Jesus' disciples had shown a tendency to be preoccupied  
10 with status and ranking in the kingdom of God. This is understandable, as their attitudes  
11 reflected the prevalent cultural and religious conceptions of authority. The Kingdom of God  
12 proclaimed by Jesus presented such a breathtakingly different understanding of Christian  
13 authority that it took the death of Jesus for the disciples to understand His teachings. Jesus'  
14 teachings on the authority of the Christian leader are most crisply articulated in a  
15 conversation that found its way into the three synoptic Gospels.<sup>22</sup>

16 The story is well known. Two of Jesus' disciples, John and James, approached Him with  
17 a request to be seated on His right and left in His Kingdom. It appears that they assumed that  
18 the Kingdom of Jesus would operate like other earthly institutions, their underlying desire  
19 was to have authority *over* others. Mark tells us that when the remaining ten disciples heard  
20 about it, they became very angry, not because they had a different idea of "authority," but  
21 because they themselves desired such power also. In response to this, Jesus gathered them  
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<sup>21</sup>Matt 18:1-4, 20:20-28, 23:8-11; Mark 9:33-36, 10:35-45; Luke 9:46-48, 22:24-27; John 13:1-17.

<sup>22</sup>Matt 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27.

1 together, and in simplest terms explained the operational rules of the Kingdom of God. His  
2 words are so striking that they must be quoted here:

3 “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them  
4 (*katakurieusin*), and their high officials exercise authority over them  
5 (*katexousiazousin*). Not so with you! Instead, whoever wants to become great among  
6 you must be your servant (*diakonos*), and whoever wants to be first must be slave  
7 (*doulos*) of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and  
8 to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45, NIV).

9  
10 In this concise passage, Jesus presents two models of authority. The first is the Roman  
11 idea of authority. In this model, the elite stand hierarchically over others. They have the  
12 power to make decisions and expect submission from those below them. Jesus clearly  
13 rejected this model of authority when He stated, “Not so with you!” Instead, He presented the  
14 disciples with a breathtakingly new model of authority, a thorough rejection, or reversal, of  
15 the hierarchical model with which they were familiar.

16 The concept of authority in Jesus’ Kingdom was to be governed by two words: servant  
17 (*diakonos*) and slave (*doulos*). From our modern perspective, these two words, often  
18 translated as “minister,” have lost much of their force. For a person familiar with ancient  
19 society and its institutions, however, Jesus’ words must have been appalling. So much so that  
20 the disciples were unable to understand Jesus’ words, and to the last moments of His life,  
21 during the Last Supper, they argued about “who is the greatest” (Luke 22:24). This is because,  
22 in the first century milieu, servants (*diakonoi*) and slaves (*douloi*) represented the lowest class  
23 of human beings, beings who had few rights, and whose job was to listen and fulfill the wishes  
24 of those whom they served. Among slaves “there [was] no place for one’s own will or  
25 initiative.”<sup>23</sup> “Ruling and not serving is proper to a man” believed ancient Greeks.<sup>24</sup> Thus,  
26 whatever the metaphors of servant and slave were meant to convey it certainly was not

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<sup>23</sup>Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “δουλος,” *TDNT* (1964), 2: 270, 261.

<sup>24</sup>Hermann W. Beyer, “διακονεω,” *TDNT* (1964), 2: 82.

1 exercising authority, spiritual or otherwise, over others (*katexousiazousin*) or having status in  
2 the community.

3         Why did Jesus use these two metaphors if he could have compared His disciples with  
4 other leadership groups in society? I believe that Jesus was keenly aware that His Kingdom  
5 would be doomed if the disciples incorporated into it the authority structures prevalent  
6 within contemporary society. For His mission to succeed, all “pecking order” in the church  
7 had to be abolished. Murray Harris grasped this well: “Jesus was teaching that greatness in  
8 the community of his followers is marked by humble, self-effacing servanthood or slavery,  
9 modeled on his own selfless devotion to the highest good of others.”<sup>25</sup> All this shows that  
10 Jesus certainly did not desire to abolish all authority in the church; He just radically redefined  
11 it and distanced it from the kind of “authority” that advocated submission to a higher  
12 authority. Instead, the church was to be a place where those who desired to follow His  
13 example were willing to serve in the lowest positions. In Philippians 2:5-7 Paul thus states,  
14 “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God . . .  
15 made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave (*doulou*).” *In the church of Jesus,*  
16 *therefore, it is not ordination to an office, a title, or a position that makes a leader, but the*  
17 *quality of a person’s life and his or her willingness to be the least of all.* Following His lead, the  
18 despised terms *diakonos* and *doulos* later became the quasi-technical descriptions of apostolic  
19 and ministerial leadership in the church.<sup>26</sup> Taking all of this into consideration, it is not  
20 surprising that to the question, “Who is the greatest? (Mark 9:33-35; Luke 9:46-48), Jesus

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<sup>25</sup>Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 102.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, 2 Corinthians 4:5 where Paul writes, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants (*doulos*) for Jesus sake.” See also 1 Corinthians 9:19. In Colossians 1:7 and 4:7, Paul uses the terms *doulos* and *diakonos* interchangeably.

1 answered: “For he who is the least among you all – he is the greatest” and “if anyone wants to  
2 be first, he must be the very last, and the servant (*diakonos*) of all.”

3 Two other terms, *exousia* and *dynamis*, are commonly translated as authority. *Exousia*  
4 appears to be related to Jesus’ teaching ministry and His ability to forgive sins (e.g., Matt 7:29;  
5 9:6; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32). The authority (*exousia*) that Jesus exercised, thus, brought words  
6 of life and healing to those who were willing to listen. *Dynamis* is usually associated with  
7 Jesus’ power to perform miracles and drive out demons (e.g., Luke 4:36; Luke 9:1). Nowhere  
8 in the Gospels do the terms *exousia* or *dynamis* appear to be associated with exercising any  
9 form of headship, or having authority, over others. Such thinking was simply not part of Jesus’  
10 worldview. It is *exousia* and *dynamis* that Jesus bestowed upon the entire community of  
11 believers, and it is these two terms that are often confused with a secular understanding of  
12 ministerial powers.

13 There is a unique usage of *exousia* in Matthew 28:18, “All authority in heaven and on  
14 earth has been given to me.” He does not hand over this authority to the disciples for it cannot  
15 be done. This is the absolute authority of the Almighty, Omniscient, Creator God. And how  
16 does the Almighty Creator God exercise His authority? Does He force His human subjects to  
17 be obedient? Does He take away their free will? In Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul provides an answer  
18 to the question of how God exercises His authority: “Follow God’s example, therefore, as  
19 dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up  
20 for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” The absolute authority of Christ, thus,  
21 represents a supreme example of love, servanthood, and self-sacrifice.

22 Thus, the concept of authority within New Testament Christianity, founded upon the  
23 words and actions of Jesus, does not represent any form of headship in terms of authority  
24 over others where submission is expected. Clearly, Jesus always allowed the exercise of free

1 will. Instead of exercising authority *over* others, His kind of authority can be expressed in  
2 terms of *servng* others. This he demonstrated most forcefully when He knelt to wash the  
3 disciples' feet and when He died on the cross, thus giving a supreme example of the true  
4 conception of Christian authority. Thus, the Christian rite of ordination, properly understood,  
5 is *ordination to slavery*; it is not going up in rank; it is not about status or having authority  
6 over others; *it is about being the least in the community of believers*. Only understood as such  
7 can the ministry in the church fulfill Christ's vision for leadership.

8         The early, post-Apostolic Christian Church soon forgot Jesus' words and introduced  
9 pagan concepts of authority into Christian practice. "Pecking order" was established where it  
10 did not belong, all in the name of protecting the church's unity and its teachings.<sup>27</sup> Modern  
11 Christianity, including Adventism, inherited these patterns of authority. It would serve us  
12 well to return to the words of Jesus and attempt to view ministry in the church through the  
13 prism of His teachings, rather than merely adding the adjective "spiritual" to foreign  
14 authoritative patterns. What, then, were the characteristics of the New Testament community  
15 of Jesus?

### 16                   **The New Testament Church: A Community Like No Other**

17           **First (A<sup>1</sup>), ministry in the New Testament church was non-hierarchical;** i.e., the  
18 organization of the church was not conceived in terms of a chain of command. There seems to  
19 be no doubt that, during His earthly ministry, Jesus endowed some of His followers with the  
20 special task of sharing in His mission of proclaiming God's Kingdom. They were chosen to be  
21 His representatives and were to continue His mission and to reproduce in their own lives the  
22 central characteristics of Jesus Himself, namely total commitment and service to God and to

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<sup>27</sup>For a history of these events, see my paper, "The Problem of Ordination," presented to TOSC in January 2013.

1 fellow human beings. Their witness, however, was not based on their position, rank, or status  
2 but on the mission they had received from Christ. Their special authority was based on the  
3 fact that they had been eyewitnesses to the presence of Jesus on earth. Thus, with the aid of  
4 the Holy Spirit, this authority entailed preserving and passing on a reliable and trustworthy  
5 account of Jesus life and teachings in a reliable and trustworthy manner. “On this basis . . .  
6 rested the special and unique respect accorded to the apostles within the Church.”<sup>28</sup> The  
7 written accounts of many of those eyewitnesses were eventually collected into the canon of  
8 the New Testament and thus their writings became normative for Christian believers and  
9 expressed in a well-accepted Protestant axiom *sola scriptura*. The New Testament, however,  
10 does not provide any evidence that the special position of expertise held by the twelve  
11 apostles within the community of faith was transferred to other leaders in the Church.

12         What we do see in the New Testament, however, is a community like no other. It is a  
13 community whose leaders eschewed any form of hierarchy that would place some above  
14 others. In fact, following Jesus’ example, the New Testament leaders proclaimed what we can  
15 only describe as a *reverse hierarchy*. Following the lead of Jesus, its leaders routinely referred  
16 to themselves as *doulos* and *diakonos* of both God and the church.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, in 1  
17 Corinthians 3:5, Paul writes: “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants  
18 (*diakonoî*), through whom you came to believe.” In 2 Corinthians 4:5, he emphatically  
19 declares: “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your  
20 slaves (*doulous*).”<sup>30</sup> We thus constantly find him lifting Christ and others up, while speaking of

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<sup>28</sup>Campenhausen, 79.

<sup>29</sup>While in ancient literature, both biblical and extra-biblical, these two terms normally have negative connotations, when used by Paul and applied to the followers of Christ, they acquire a new meaning signifying total commitment to Christ and to one another. Murray J. Harris *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 140-143.

<sup>30</sup>Other examples include Phil 1:1, Col 1:7, 23, 25; Titus 1:1. Harris, in his book, notes an interesting phenomenon that most translations avoid translating the word *doulos* with reference to ministerial leadership, invariably translating the word as “minister” or “servant.” He cites a general distaste for the concept of slavery



1 himself in unflattering terms such as “chief of sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). Elsewhere he writes:  
2 “...and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the  
3 apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle” (1 Cor 15:7-9). In 1 Corinthians 4:1  
4 Paul refers to himself and his co-workers as under-rowers (*hupēretas*). An image of an  
5 ancient Greek or Roman war galley with three banks of oars comes to mind. Paul places  
6 himself in the lowest place on a trireme: *he is under other rowers*.

7         While Paul was commissioned to proclaim the Gospel, to teach, exhort, and rebuke, it  
8 appears, therefore, that he purposefully desired to avoid positioning himself in a role above  
9 his fellow believers. Instead, and despite his special position as an Apostle of Christ, we see  
10 him wooing people to follow Christ, not through the authority of his “office,” but through the  
11 witness of his life.<sup>31</sup> “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1; 1 Cor  
12 4:16; Phil 3:17, 4:9; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:7). With a clear conscience, therefore, Paul was  
13 able to write to the Corinthians that when his young disciple Timothy visits them, he would  
14 “remind [them] of his [Paul’s] way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what [he taught]  
15 everywhere in every church” (1 Cor 4:17). *Thus, it was the way he lived his life, rather than his  
16 position, that resulted in Paul’s having genuine authority in the church.*

17         Within the context of being *slaves* in the church, the New Testament writers were  
18 remarkably egalitarian. Everyone could be a slave of the Lord! In Romans 12:11, Paul  
19 encouraged all believers to “serve the Lord as His slaves” (*tō kyriō douleuontes*). In Galatians  
20 5:13 he urged believers “to serve one another as slaves (*douete*) through love.” Every  
21 believer, thus, was to serve as a *doulos* of Christ and of each other.

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and a possibility of misunderstandings as the main reasons behind this phenomenon. Harris, 183-185. And yet, this was the very word Paul and his co-workers adopted as representing their leadership work in the church.

<sup>31</sup>It must be emphasized that the word “office” with reference to the leadership role in the church is not found in the Greek New Testament.

1           While all believers were called to be slaves of God and one another, this especially  
2 applied to leaders in the Christian community who, according to the teaching of Christ, were  
3 to consider themselves “the least of all,” and thus examples to those under their care. Peter  
4 echoed Jesus when he wrote to the leaders in the church: “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is  
5 under your care . . . not lording it over (*katakurieontes*)<sup>32</sup> those entrusted to you but being  
6 examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-5). This was the primary reason why Paul, James, and  
7 Peter often introduced themselves to their congregations as slaves (*douloi*) of Christ (Rom 1:1;  
8 Jam 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1). All this suggests that New Testament leadership was not about having  
9 “authority” over others, about having the “last word,” or having an “office.”<sup>33</sup> Instead, *it was*  
10 *all about having the attitude of Paul, Peter, and other leaders of the New Testament church, who*

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<sup>32</sup>Jesus uses exactly the same Greek word, *katakurieuosin*, in Mark 10:42.

<sup>33</sup>Sometimes 1 Timothy 2:12 and 5:17 are used to justify the continuance of a hierarchical understanding of authority in the church. In the former, Paul forbids women to exercise authority over a man. The word used for “authority” here is *hapax legomenon*, i.e., only used once in the Greek New Testament. A careful word study shows that in extra-biblical Greek literature of the first century, this was not a neutral word to express the concept of authority but was associated with an oppressive kind of hierarchical authority that left little room for the exercise of free will. On the basis of our study above, it becomes clear that no one in the church, *neither women nor men, should ever indulge in exercising this kind of power*, as it clearly represents a counterfeit view of authority. For an insightful discussion on the first century meaning of *authentēin*, see Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 200-201; cf., Carroll D. Osburn, “AYΘENTEΩ (1 Timothy 2:12),” *Restoration Quarterly* 25 (1982): 1-12. The authors of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, write on the issue of “usurping authority” in 1 Timothy 2:12: “The Scriptures exhort Christians to do everything decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:20). In the days of Paul, custom required that women be very much in the background. Therefore, if women believers had spoken out in public or otherwise made themselves prominent, these scriptural injunctions would have been violated and the cause of God would thus have suffered reproach.” (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 295-296. See also an excellent article, written on 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 and 1 Timothy 2:12, that was heartily endorsed by Uriah Smith: G. C. Tenney, “Woman’s Relation to the Cause of Christ,” *The Review and Herald*, May 24, 1892, 328-329. A statement in that article deserves to be quoted here: “It is manifestly illogical and unfair to give to any passage of Scripture an unqualified radical meaning that is at variance with the main tenor of the Bible, and directly in conflict with its plain teachings. The Bible may be reconciled in all its parts without going outside the lines of consistent interpretation. But great difficulty is likely to be experienced by those who interpret isolated passages in an independent light according to the ideas they happen to entertain upon them.” Tenney, 328.

In the latter passage (1 Tim 5:17), Paul states: “Let the elders who rule well be counted of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” The word “rule” is at the center of contention. However, the Greek *proestōtes*, often translated as “rule,” simply means “those who are standing before you.” It is a verb form of the noun *prostates*, which in ancient Greek was applied to those who were charged with protecting the community and helping it operate smoothly rather than ruling over it. For more details on the etymology of this word, see my article, “Phoebe, Was She an Early Church Leader?” *Ministry*, April 2013, 11-13.

1 led by the example of their devotion to their Lord and to each other. This was the bedrock of  
2 genuine Christian authority.<sup>34</sup>

3 Viewing church leadership from the above perspective, the overseers (*episcopēs* in 1  
4 Timothy 3:1) or elders (*presbyterous* in Titus 1:9) were indeed to be special persons: they  
5 were to be servants (*doulous*) of the Lord and the community; they were to lead by example  
6 rather than by the authority of their position; they were to have good names in the  
7 community; they were to have stable, monogamous marriages; they were to manage their  
8 households well; they were to be protectors of the community. One thing was quite certain,  
9 however: these slaves of the Lord did not have to be males.<sup>35</sup>

10 If ministry is to be understood as slavery to Christ and others, another passage must be

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<sup>34</sup>All this does not mean that there may not be an emergency situation in the life of the church during which there could arise a need for someone to temporarily take a direct, hierarchical, leadership role. In such situations, anyone possessing appropriate leadership gifting could take charge until order is restored. Events like this, however, are rare, and ordained pastors are not always the best-qualified persons to deal with emergency situations. Once resolution is reached, however, the life of the church should return to a communal way of dealing with problems. On the importance of the community in Paul's writings and a communal way of resolving conflict, see the excellent study by James M. Howard, *Paul, the Community and Progressive Sanctification: An Exploration in Community-Based Transformation Within Pauline Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

<sup>35</sup>This conclusion is strengthened by several considerations. First, in 1 Tim 3:1, Paul says, "if anyone" (*ei tis*) desires to be an overseer. *Tis* is a gender neutral indefinite pronoun. It simply means "anyone." In the NT, this is an inclusive term referring to both men and women. For example, in John 6:50 we find this passage: "But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone (*tis*) can eat and not die." It would be very strange to say that only men can eat bread and not die. Indeed, some translations, such as the KJV, translate *tis* as "a man" but we instantly think of humanity. This means that the NT often uses representative masculine language to speak of both men and women. E.g., Romans 12:1, "I urge you, brothers (*adelphoi* – masculine in Greek) . . . to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice." Would this mean that Rom 12:1-2 is written only for men? Obviously, this is not a correct interpretation. Second, "husband of one wife" could well refer to monogamy and sexual purity. If taken as it is written, we would not be able to have unmarried men or widowers as pastors. Yet Paul himself wrote that celibate persons can serve God better (1 Cor 7:32-35). Also, pastors would have to have children (that would exclude childless pastors). The real intent of the phrase seems to point to a person who is committed (faithful) to his one spouse. Thus, the "one woman man" phrase functions as an exclusion of polygamy and sexual promiscuity rather than indicating that a bishop must be a man. Finally, the phrase "husband of one wife" appears again in 1 Tim 3:12 with reference to deacons. The masculine word *diakonos* is used. If Paul did indeed speak in gender terms, it would mean that only men could be deacons. However, in Romans 16:1, Paul refers to Phoebe as a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. Most versions translate this word as "servant." The word is actually *diakonos*, the same masculine word used to describe a deacon as a husband of one wife in 1 Tim 3:12. This clearly shows that when Paul used the phrase "one woman man," he did not try to convey that only men could be bishops or deacons. If so, Romans 16:1 would not make any sense. I am fairly certain that the gender of a bishop or deacon was not on Paul's mind. If gender was truly important to him, we would have a clear statement in 1 Timothy or elsewhere, such as "a bishop must be a man."

1 highlighted. As stated above, Paul’s favorite description of his own ministry and that of his co-  
2 workers (such as Timothy) was “slave of the Lord” (*doulos Christou*).<sup>36</sup> We find others, such as  
3 Peter and James, also referring to themselves as “slaves of the Lord.”<sup>37</sup> The same wording, this  
4 time spoken by the Lord Himself, however, appears in Acts 2:18 where Peter quotes the  
5 prophet Joel: “Even on my slaves, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those  
6 days.” Most frequently, this passage is used to highlight the fact that the gift of prophecy was  
7 not limited to men. However, we also find in this verse the masculine *doulos* and the feminine  
8 *doulas*. In both cases, the pronoun *mou* (my) is added. Considering that, in other places in the  
9 New Testament, *doulos* is most often translated as “minister,” this passage could legitimately  
10 be translated as speaking of both “male ministers” and “female ministers,” who are God’s own.  
11 Is Peter making the point that, in the New Testament church, both males and females could  
12 *slave* the Lord equally? And that both, males and females, were to receive specific gifts of the  
13 Spirit that would enable them to fulfill their ministerial calling? Whatever interpretation we  
14 place on this particular passage, one thing is clear: the Holy Spirit is not concerned with the  
15 gender of the person upon whom He bestows His gifts. Should we be?

16 It is indeed tragic that soon after the disciples died, post-Apostolic Christianity  
17 abandoned the charismatic understanding of Christian ministry and, instead, incorporated a  
18 pagan understanding of authority.

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<sup>36</sup>Examples abound. Here are some of them: Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 4:7; Acts 20:19. Gordon D. Fee calculated the number of times the word *doulos* and its various forms appears in the Pauline writings. The results are impressive: Fee estimates that, altogether, words that are related to the noun *doulos* appear 59 times in Paul: 30 times as *doulos*; 2 times as *syndoulos* (co-slave); 17 times as *douleuō* (to perform duties of a slave); 4 times as *douleia* (slavery); and 6 times as *douloō* (to enslave). While at times the word slave is used with reference to the actual institution of slavery (a negative usage of the term), a significant majority refer to the ministry of Paul and others. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 62; cf., Harris, 20.

<sup>37</sup>James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1.

1           **Second (B<sup>1</sup>), ministry in the New Testament was not sacramental;** i.e., neither  
2 salvation nor the life of the community depended on the presence of ordained clergy. While  
3 the early post-Apostolic Church created a system where ordained clergy were essential to the  
4 existence of the church, we do not find such a requirement in the New Testament. From the  
5 New Testament point of view, it was Christ alone who was the mediator between God and  
6 humanity. Leadership in the New Testament, thus, fulfilled a purely functional role, i.e., its  
7 existence contributed to church order and the laying-on-of-hands simply acknowledged the  
8 gift of leadership already present in a person.

9           A sacramental view of ministry, of course, was prophetically significant, as the  
10 mediatorial work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary was replaced by the work of an earthly  
11 priest. In other words, *the early post-Apostolic church sewed back together the earthly*  
12 *sanctuary's curtain rent by the divine hand at the time of Jesus' death.* Consequently, every  
13 Catholic church on earth became a sanctuary with its own priest. This development clearly  
14 corresponded to the prophetic utterance of Daniel, "Yea, it magnified itself, even to the prince  
15 of the host; and it took away from him the continual burnt-offering, and the place of his  
16 sanctuary was cast down" (Daniel 8:11 ASV). It follows that any attempt to apply priestly  
17 language to the work of the ministry in the church takes away from the one unique priesthood  
18 of Christ and has direct, negative implications on the Adventist sanctuary message, which  
19 emphasizes that all have special access to the risen Christ without the need of spiritual  
20 mediators.

21           **Third (C<sup>1</sup>), ministry in the New Testament was not elitist;** i.e., the laying-on-of-  
22 hands did not create a spiritual elite in the church. The New Testament understanding was  
23 that functions, or roles, in the church were to be filled according to spiritual gifting.  
24 Ordination, thus, can be defined simply as "the action of the church to publicly recognize those

1 whom the Lord has called to and equipped for local and global church ministry.”<sup>38</sup>

2 Disagreements begin to appear when we ask the question: Who can serve in the church as  
3 ordained elders or pastors?

4 The church of God described in the pages of the New Testament was decidedly non-  
5 elitist. In His sayings, Jesus focused on the non-elite of the day and proclaimed them to be the  
6 children of God (Matt 5:3-8). In Matthew 23:8-13, he said to His followers: “But you are not to  
7 be called ‘Rabbi’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. . . . The greatest among  
8 you will be your servant” (Matthew 23:8-11). In modern terms we could paraphrase this  
9 saying as follows: “But you are not to be called “pastor,” “elder,” “professor,” or “doctor,” for  
10 you have only one Master and you are all brothers.” It is truly unfortunate that in Christian  
11 history the lowly term “pastor” has become a symbol of status.<sup>39</sup>

12 Paul’s favorite imagery for portraying the Christian community, i.e., the Body of Christ,  
13 represented a markedly non-elitist ecclesiology (1 Cor 12:12-31; Rom 12:1-8; Eph 1:22).  
14 Central to this imagery were unity of the Church and the Church’s vital relationship with its  
15 Head, Jesus Christ. Paul’s insistence that the church functioned like a human body served to  
16 remind believers that they were completely dependent upon Christ for their growth and life.  
17 While unity and the headship of Christ were Paul’s main concern, his discussion of the church  
18 as the body of Christ was framed within the context of spiritual gifting. The recipients of  
19 spiritual gifts were all who were part of the body of Christ, and the unity of the body of Christ  
20 depended on the presence, recognition, and use of these spiritual gifts (Eph 4:1-13). Any  
21 exclusive claim to these gifts was precluded, because their distribution was dependent upon  
22

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<sup>38</sup>Theology of Ordination Study Committee, *Consensus Statement on a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination*.

<sup>39</sup>The very reason why we are discussing women’s ordination testifies to the fact that today the role of the pastor in the church has lost its original meaning.

1 the Holy Spirit and not on the church (1 Cor 12:11). Any form of elitism was settled by Paul's  
2 masterful discussion on the mutual interdependence of believers who exhibited various  
3 spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:12-31). Furthermore, in none of the four listings of spiritual gifts  
4 (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11) was Paul exclusive in any way. Notably,  
5 in Romans 12:8, the gifts of teaching and leadership were tucked in among other, seemingly  
6 insignificant gifts. It would be ludicrous to claim, on the basis of this passage, that the gift of  
7 encouragement was lower on the scale of giftedness, while the gift of leadership was higher  
8 and thus could only be endowed upon a certain class of believers in the church. Certainly this  
9 could not have been Paul's intention.

10 Paul's use of the Body of Christ imagery helps us to understand the reality of the  
11 church and the way it should function. Within such a community, all solidarities of race, class,  
12 culture, and gender are replaced by an allegiance to Christ alone. The old way of relating is  
13 replaced by a new relatedness in Christ (Gal 3:28, 29). In this community, all people are equal  
14 members of the Body of Christ, because all have experienced the risen Christ and all are gifted  
15 with a variety of spiritual gifts of equal value (1 Cor 12), which are to be utilized for the  
16 benefit of believers and the world (Rom 12:1-8). Thus, we do not find a hierarchy where some  
17 people rank above others according to status; neither do we find a division between ordained  
18 clergy and laity. What we see is a new community, the Body of Christ, a New Creation (2 Cor  
19 5:17), where *all* relationships should hail back to the Garden of Eden. This is what the early  
20 post-Apostolic Church forgot soon after the death of the Apostles, introducing instead a notion  
21 of an un-equal society in which leadership in the church was restricted to ordained male  
22 clergy. *The Holy Spirit was thus quenched!*

23 *The reality is that if anything apart from commitment to Christ and His church, spiritual*  
24 *gifting, and maturity determine fitness for various functions in the church, then, whether we*

1 *intend it or not, we create an elitist community.* No pious designations attached to the “office”  
2 of pastor—such as “servant,” “spiritual authority,” “spiritual leadership,” or “spiritual  
3 headship”— can change this reality.

4 **Fourth (D<sup>1</sup>), the ministry in the New Testament church was not male headship**  
5 **oriented;** i.e, there was no room for male headship in the Body of Christ. While Scripture  
6 testifies that women were not restricted from leadership positions (Deborah, Phoebe, Junia,  
7 Lydia, Priscilla, Nympha), history witnesses to the fact that, from the second century onward,  
8 leadership and teaching positions in the church began to be restricted to men alone.<sup>40</sup> As  
9 outlined above, the main argument against women’s ordination in the Catholic Church today  
10 is that the pastor must be a male since he represents Christ, a male, to the community of  
11 believers. Male headship in the home is, thus, extended to relationships in the church.

12 There are significant problems with extending the idea of male headship beyond the  
13 home circle. Most importantly, such a concept of headship clearly replaces Christ’s spiritual  
14 headship of the church and endows selected individuals with Christ’s own authority. The New  
15 Testament is clear, however, that the only Head of the Church is Christ (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22;  
16 4:15; Col 1:18; 2:19).<sup>41</sup> When, in Ephesians 5:23, Paul states that “Christ is the Head of the  
17 Church” and “man is the head of the wife,” he does not say that man’s headship in the home in  
18 some way extends to relationships in the church. Paul’s meaning is clear: as a husband is the  
19 head of his wife, his bride, so Christ is the Head of the Church, His Bride.<sup>42</sup> In both cases, the  
20 nuptial language is clearly restricted to specific relationships: that between a husband and

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<sup>40</sup>For more information, see my paper, “The Problem of Ordination,” presented to TOSC in January 2013.

<sup>41</sup>The Pauline image of the church as the Body of Christ clearly conveys the idea that Christ is the only Head of the church of God.

<sup>42</sup>Of course male headship in the family must also be defined in non-hierarchical and self-sacrificial, rather than jurisdictional, terms. As Christ gave Himself up (or self-sacrificed Himself) for His bride, so husbands must self-sacrifice themselves for their wives and children.



1 wife and that between Christ and His church. It would be absurd to conclude that Paul meant  
2 to say that as Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church, so men in the Christian congregation are  
3 bridegrooms of women in the church. Neither is it scriptural to say that the pastor “marries”  
4 the church and becomes its head upon his ordination, just as Christ married His Bride and  
5 became its Head.

6         From this it follows that *any idea of headship in the church, be it male or female, apart*  
7 *from that of Christ, usurps the headship of Christ.* Thus, while we may legitimately speak of  
8 male headship in the Christian home, it is unscriptural to speak of any kind of headship in the  
9 church apart from that of Christ. While, within the greater context of mutual submission (Eph  
10 5:21), wives are indeed asked by Paul to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22),<sup>43</sup> nowhere in  
11 the New Testament do we find an injunction that believers are to submit to the headship of  
12 the ordained ministry; *the Church submits only to Christ!* It follows that when a pastor/elder  
13 and a church decide to operate according to the male headship principle, *this pastor/elder and*  
14 *his church are committing spiritual adultery, otherwise known as sacramentalism.*<sup>44</sup> For this  
15 reason, difficult Pauline passages, such as 1 Tim 2 and 3 and 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, can  
16 never be interpreted as teaching male headship in the church, but must be understood in light  
17 of Jesus’ statements on authority. No amount of tinkering with the text “according to the ideas  
18 they happen to entertain upon them,”<sup>45</sup> and adding the word ‘spiritual’ to headship, can  
19 change this reality. As noted above, sacramentalism is primarily a hallmark of Catholic  
20 Christianity, but it also exists within those Christian denominations that choose to replace the

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<sup>43</sup>It must be noted, at this point, that the word “submit” in Ephesians 5:22 in the Greek simply states “and wife to husbands.” The mutual submission of Ephesians 5:21, therefore, provides a greater context for understanding Paul’s message to husbands and wives. If so, then the husband’s love is also a form of submission. Common human experience shows that by loving someone, we also submit to them.

<sup>44</sup>This, of course, brings us back to the meaning of the twin expressions: *Vicarius Filii Dei* and *In persona Christi Capitis*. See footnote 17.

<sup>45</sup>G. C. Tenney, “Woman’s Relation to the Cause of Christ,” *The Review and Herald*, May 24, 1892, 328.

1 pope (also referred to as “Holy Father;” from the Latin *papa*) with a male figure of a  
2 pastor/elder. Christian communities that embrace female headship in addition to male  
3 headship follow the same pattern.

4           So I have a question: Can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, really afford to flirt with  
5 applying the male headship principle to the ordained pastor/elder? I believe that this  
6 principle is a seemingly innocuous Trojan horse that has the potential to destroy the very  
7 heart of Adventism. It is telling that Ellen G. White never once used 1 Timothy 2 or 3 and 1  
8 Corinthians 11 or 14 to support male headship in the church. The developments in early post-  
9 Apostolic Christianity, discussed in the first part of this paper, clearly show the dangers of  
10 extending the biblical notion of male headship in the home to male headship in the Church  
11 and must be avoided at all costs among true followers of Christ.

12  
13

### **Conclusion**

14           In conclusion, there can be no doubt that early Catholic Christianity incorporated  
15 various characteristics of the Old Testament priestly ministry into the theology and practice  
16 of Christian ministry. Christian ministry, thus, became hierarchical, sacramental, elitist, and  
17 oriented towards male headship. To a greater or lesser degree, most Christian communities,  
18 including Seventh-day Adventists, continue to perpetuate some of these characteristics in  
19 their communities.

20           All these characteristics, however, were fulfilled in Christ who, by virtue of being our  
21 Creator, stands over us and has no successors to His divine authority; who died sacramentally  
22 on the cross and thus became the sole provider of salvation; who, through His ministry on  
23 earth, made all humans equal in the eyes of God in terms of authority and endowed them with  
24 the gifts of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Gospel Commission; and who, through His

1 sacrificial death on the cross, became the sole Head of the Church, His Bride. *He shares His*  
2 *headship with no one!* Post-New Testament Christianity, unfortunately, denied *the sole*  
3 *headship of Christ in the church* and contributed to the integration of a counterfeit view of  
4 authority in church organization and, thus, to the birth of an apostate religion.

5 I began this paper with a discussion on the nature of authority. Our God, who is a God  
6 of order, created a world in which human beings, the crown of His creation, were to live  
7 according to the authoritative patterns that governed the universe prior to the creation of the  
8 Earth. Then sin entered the world. The way God exercised His authority was challenged and a  
9 counterfeit notion of authority was introduced. This is the notion of authority that the “prince  
10 of this world” taught the first couple; this is the notion of authority that forever darkened the  
11 human vision of God and His character. The precise reason why Christ, God incarnate, came to  
12 this Earth and founded a community like no other was to counteract the counterfeit notion of  
13 God’s authority. He accomplished it by His life of divine slavery (*douleia*) that ultimately led  
14 Him to the cross. Unfortunately, human beings, weakened by millennia of sin’s existence on  
15 this Earth, returned to the old patterns of thinking soon after the death of its pioneers.  
16 Notwithstanding our devotion to Scripture, we, Seventh-day Adventists, inherited these  
17 patterns of thinking that are so tenaciously (and tragically) ingrained in the Christian faith.

18 It is a common human experience to be attracted to those who exhibit genuine  
19 Christian authority and to be repelled by the attitudes of those who rely solely on the  
20 authority of their office. Ideally, genuine Christian authority and the authority of a  
21 representative function should be integrated. After all, there is nothing intrinsically wrong  
22 with people holding an office, even though it is not really a biblical concept. Neither, is there  
23 anything inherently wrong with the way our church is currently organized. However, while  
24 Jesus left us with no model of running the church, He was adamant that His church would not

1 resemble secular structures, where authority was organized according to a “pecking order.” Is  
2 it possible that our current discussions regarding women’s ordination are complicated by our  
3 misunderstanding or misuse of true Christian authority?

4 I am a third generation Adventist, grandson of a head elder, son of a  
5 pastor/administrator, and an ordained pastor myself. In all my years as a Seventh-day  
6 Adventist, rarely have I encountered the integration of true genuine Christian authority with  
7 the authority of an ordained pastor. Sadly, I often struggle with such integration myself.  
8 Some of the most authoritative persons in my life were not ordained ministers. The one I  
9 place above all others was an old Christian gentleman in Tasmania (where for a time I served  
10 as a pastor after receiving my PhD) who had only four classes of formal education and had  
11 only been ordained as a deacon. I recognized, accepted, and submitted to the true Christian  
12 authority he represented and learned more from him about slaving for Christ and others than  
13 from a lifetime of being an Adventist and all my theological education combined.  
14 Unfortunately, for too many of us, being an ordained pastor tends to be about having authority  
15 over others, status, ranking, and male headship, rather than being slaves for Christ and others.  
16 This, I believe, is the real reason why we are spending our time discussing the issue of  
17 ordination and who can be ordained.

18 Now, I understand that “slavery” has few positive connotations, as it implies no honor,  
19 no glory, no status, and no ranking. Nobody likes that; in fact, I am repulsed by the concept.  
20 And yet, this is the word that Christ used to describe Himself and His work; this is the word  
21 that the apostles used to describe themselves and their work as well as that of their co-  
22 workers, both men and women; this is what Christ is calling us – Adventist pastors, deacons,  
23 elders, presidents of divisions, conferences and unions – to be; not to have authority over  
24 people but rather over the task of fulfilling the Great Commission of Christ. Gospel order in

1 the church does not require hierarchical headship, spiritual or otherwise. For true Christian  
2 ministry is not about status, rank, gender, equality, rights, or having “spiritual authority” over  
3 others; *it is about being slaves of Christ and His people; not to rule over others but to be*  
4 *examples and, through the witness of our lives, to woo others to follow Christ.* No human laying-  
5 on-of-hands can provide this kind of authority; only the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s  
6 heart can! While all Christians are to be ministers, those who are set apart for special  
7 ministry, both men and women, are called to be chief examples of slavery to Christ and others.  
8 I am convinced that when we embrace this understanding of authority and ministry, Christ’s  
9 vision for His community will be fulfilled, revival and reformation will follow, and the problem  
10 of women’s ordination will disappear.

11           So I want to leave this short investigation of the nature of Christian authority with a  
12 question: Are we going to follow culture, both secular and religious, which has taught us a  
13 hierarchical and elitist understanding of authority? Or are we going to follow Christ, who said,  
14 “Not so with you!”?