

Summary of the TED Ordination Study Report to TOSC

6 January, 2014

The TED Ordination Study Report takes a broad view of ordination in the Bible and history, as proposed by the BRI letter to the divisions on May 1, 2012 (summarised in Appendix A). It is indeed our conviction, that the issue of a theology of ordination for the Seventh-day Adventist Church must be seen in the context of *a comprehensive view of ordination in the Bible and in church history*.

It is also our conviction, that the current issue of women's ordination in the Church can only be addressed by (a) applying appropriate *principles of biblical interpretation*, (b) in the context of a *comprehensive biblical theology of ordination*, and (c) by a *close reading of the Bible as a whole*, from beginning to end. It is only through the careful reading of the Word of God that the issue of ordination can be grasped under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The scope, structure, and extent of our Study can best be seen by a review of the full index, which is interactive and helps the reader to get to the desired section.

Regarding *the principles of biblical interpretation*, the TED Study follows the Rio Document (1986), which is provided in Appendix B. Some comments on the Rio Document, based on issues encountered in our Study, are presented in chapter 2.

The Study then considers *the content of the Bible as a whole* (chapter 3) and reviews the *history of Christian ordination* from the New Testament to the Seventh-day Adventist Church today (chapter 4). Based on these extensive and detailed studies, a *biblical theology of ordination* is sketched in chapter 5, and the implications of the study for *the biblical ideal of a gender-inclusive ministry* are outlined in chapter 6. The *recommendations for action* by the Seventh-day Adventist Church are given in chapters 7 and 8. A bibliography completes the Report.

Among other things, the Report concludes the following:

1. The triune God 'ordains' men and women through the Holy Spirit (as was the case of Ellen White) in the sense of 'appointing, equipping and sending' them for ministry in His service.

2. The public recognition of this divine act among the people of God can (but does not have to) be made by a ceremony that includes the laying on of hands.

3. The use of priestly 'ordination' in ancient Israel is not applicable in the New Testament.

4. While the New Testament speaks clearly on the divine calling and equipment by the Spirit of men and women for ministry, the few passages dealing with some kind of 'ordination ceremony' are inconclusive – they either describe actions of a temporary nature that cannot be connected with a defined church office (Acts 6:1-16; 13:1-3) or they do not define the context and purpose of the action (1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6).

5. There is no biblical passage that teaches an intrinsic gender-based male headship and female submission applicable to leadership roles at all times – the few passages that have been adduced to the contrary concern the ancient human customs of honour/shame relating to husband and wife in marriage or specific issues of unity and order in the social context of the early Christian congregations, primarily being based on the widely accepted, social practice of patriarchy. This is a human custom, not a divine order, but it needed to be respected in the social setting of early Christianity, in order to fulfil the common expectations of decency so that the gospel would be accepted by outsiders. Today, as we apply that same principle in contemporary egalitarian societies, the trustworthiness of the gospel is lost if the ministry fails to be gender-inclusive.

6. The New Testament demonstrates consistent openness to both men and women taking active part in the ministry which is included in the mission of God in the world. The only occasions for some limitation to such openness are culturally conditioned. Thus, if the culture in which the gospel is preached raises no hindrances to a gender-inclusive ministry, the church has no biblical right to maintain such human and temporary culture if it prevents the spreading of the gospel.

The study of ordination in church history after the completion of the New Testament reveals that 'ordination' was conceptually and terminologically taken from pagan Rome and merged with the priestly ordination in the Old Testament to produce the first preserved ordination ritual recorded in history, viz. Hippolytus' Roman order of ordination ca. 200 A.D. This outcome was prepared by Tertullian in the second century – a brilliant Roman lawyer converted to Christianity – and was later

1 further developed by Cyprian in the third century. Through Emperor Constantine's elevation of the
2 Christian church to the status of Roman state religion, the development of the Roman-Catholic
3 sacramental concept of 'ordination' continued. Women were initially ordained for ministry even in
4 the Roman-Catholic Church and continued for centuries, as new research has revealed. This openness
5 to women's ordination ended permanently in connection with the revival of Roman Law through the
6 rediscovery of the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* and the Gregorian reforms around 1200, when the doctrine of
7 the Transubstantiation of the emblems in the holy communion was strengthened as part of the
8 Church's growing battle for political power. Ordination became the rite that gave the Roman Catholic
9 Church control over the salvation of man distributed only by the Church.

10 The Protestant Reformation changed the concept of the church and the role of the clergy that
11 had developed in the Roman Catholic Church. Despite many new biblical insights, however, the
12 Reformation was channelled into various church structures to meet practical and political needs and
13 'ordination' remained a tool for safeguarding ecclesiastical (and even political) power. In the
14 Anglican Bible translation known as the King James Bible (1611), the originally loose and free
15 manner of speaking of the divine calling and appointment for ministry, which characterised the
16 biblical texts in the original languages, was streamlined and masked by the use of ecclesiastical
17 terminology intended to strengthen the claims of the Anglican Church regarding its priesthood. Many
18 different Hebrew and Greek words were translated by the term 'ordain', giving a distorted impression
19 of the biblical teaching on 'ordination'. In the movements that particularly influenced the early
20 Adventist pioneers, i.e. Baptism and Methodism, 'ordination' remained a concept that was determined
21 more by church tradition than the biblical word.

22 The earliest Sabbatarian Adventists had no agreed practice of ordination. Leaders who had
23 been ordained in their previous denominations continued to exert a powerful influence. Towards the
24 end of 1853 and early 1854, James and Ellen White argued strongly in favour of ordination and
25 organisation so that 'gospel order' would be established. Their argumentation was made with the
26 Bible as firm foundation. However, the practice of ordination that was developed by 1863 had roots in
27 the Christian Connection (where James White and probably Joseph Bates had been ordained) and in
28 the Baptist and Methodist church tradition. The Bible – as a rule conveyed by the King James Version
29 – was read with the bias of how ordination was understood and practised in the Restorationist, Baptist,
30 and Methodist camps. Later on, the development of Adventist ordination came under growing
31 influence from a more 'ritualistic' understanding that left traces in public church statements.

32 The TED Study gives major attention to Ellen White's view of women in ministry and
33 ordination. Our presentation is based here on the studies by Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon. Ellen White
34 was not ordained by imposition of hands in the Adventist Church, which is to be expected in a social
35 setting where it was not considered 'a woman's proper place' to be ordained for the pastoral ministry.
36 However, Ellen White claimed she was 'ordained by God' and she accepted church credentials as an
37 ordained minister, which proves that she accepted that her gender was not a hindrance for holding the
38 authority of an ordained minister in the Church. In her letter of 1901 on 'His helping hands', she
39 abolishes gender distinctions but lifts up the spirit of Christ as the decisive qualifying element for
40 ministry. She quoted Isaiah 61:6 and applied this prophecy regarding the Christian Church to men and
41 women: 'Ye shall be named priests of the Lord; men shall call you the ministers of our God'. She
42 recommended that women should serve as pastors and, in evangelising the big cities she even stated
43 that women should be set apart by prayer and imposition of hands as 'gospel ministers'.

44 In chapter 5 of our Study, we present a Biblical Theology of Ordination and explain
45 'ordination' in a broad sense as understood in the context of (a) God's Mission (the Great Controversy
46 and the Plan of Redemption as fulfilled in Revelation 21-22), (b) Christ's Mission, and (c) the
47 Church's Mission. Ordination includes the divine calling, the spiritual equipment for ministry, and a
48 full and integrated ministry to fulfil the mission of God. It is primarily a divine act. Therefore, in the
49 church, which is 'in the world but not of the world', the context of the priesthood of all believers gives
50 no warrant for human discriminations against women as equal participants in teaching, preaching, and
51 leadership.

52 On the basis of the entire study, the following recommendations are made to the Seventh-day
53 Adventist Church, in order to (a) strengthen the development towards a true priesthood of all
54 believers, to (b) foster a reduced ceremonial and ritual emphasis in ordination, and to (c) remove

1 hierarchic thinking and make ministry more efficient in all parts of the contemporary world, even in
2 egalitarian societies:

3 **1. Focus on the Mission of God and All Being Servants for the Salvation of the World.** The
4 entire matter of ordination should be seen and our terminology defined in the context of God's
5 purpose for the world as the Creator in Genesis 1-2 and the end-time vision of Revelation 21-22. This
6 view will revive the doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers and the inspired biblical theology of
7 mission, church, and service. It will give a theological foundation for activating all members in
8 integrated evangelism for mission, such as the Lord wants it.

9 **2. Remove the Current Distance between Clergy and Laity, and the Levels of Ordination.**
10 We recommend that the Church embraces truly biblical principles and frees itself from the continuing
11 dependence on 'Roman' practices, for example by:

12 (a) finding appropriate ways to visibly include the role of non-employed, non-clerical local
13 church leaders in the ordination ceremony (lay people are theologically included in the idea of the
14 church delegating authority to ordained pastors, and lay people participate in the conference/union
15 committee decisions to ordain a pastor);

16 (b) removing any idea of '(apostolic) succession' in regard to who 'ordains';

17 (c) removing the existing distance between clergy and laity, and the idea that the ordained
18 clergy forms a separate class of members who are elevated to a 'higher' or more 'consecrated' status
19 than other members of the priesthood of all believers;

20 (d) removing the levels of ordination between all the different 'servants/ministers' who work
21 in the church (globally and locally) and applying, rather, one concept of *servanthood under God* with
22 distinctions of duties and responsibilities which are documented in written credentials;

23 (e) removing the intricate differences between various levels of ministry, such as the licensed
24 and ordained minister, the licensed minister and the ordained local church elder, the pastor and the
25 local church elder, etc.;

26 (f) honestly admitting that there is no biblical command to ordain anyone by the imposition of
27 hands and that there is no consistent biblical instruction on how a leader is inducted to office in the
28 Christian church.

29 **3. An Inclusive Ministry.** The Church should allow for an inclusive and gender-neutral
30 ministry, which means that credentials will be granted to men and women on equal terms for all
31 offices which presently require ordination, i.e. the gospel minister, the elder, and the
32 deacon/deaconess. This means that the Church removes all gender distinctions in its *Working Policy*
33 related to the ministry and thus fulfils the full biblical intent of *Working Policy* BA 55 on 'Human
34 Relations'.

35 If this cannot be implemented across the world at the same time, the Church should allow it
36 where unions/divisions request permission to do so. This may mean that the world-wide recognition
37 of an ordination in one country may have to be reworded in the *Working Policy* to the effect that an
38 ordained minister's credentials are subject to the acceptance of a receiving division/union/conference.
39 (Already, even an ordained male pastor needs an approved service request from the receiving field in
40 order to be allowed to perform ministry in the Church.)

41 **4. Recommendation to the GC Session in 2015.** We propose that a recommendation be
42 brought to the General Conference Session in 2015, that it approves a revised policy in which unions,
43 whose constituency meetings in session have voted approval and whose division committee has voted
44 approval, be allowed to maintain an inclusive pastoral ministry which removes all gender distinctions
45 within the work of the church in that union territory.

46 **5. Theology and Practice of Ordination – Education of Members.** The Church should
47 continue its development of the biblical theology of ordination. Based on our study, we plead for
48 proceeding in considerably more detail than in the brief consensus statement now considered by the
49 Theology of Ordination Study Committee. This should be accompanied by an organised and
50 intentional attempt to educate members regarding the biblical rationale for ordination and what
51 Seventh-day Adventists believe about it in view of the teaching of the Bible, our only authority for
52 life and practice.

53 An on-going teaching of church members regarding the mission of God, the nature of the
54 Church and ordination is especially important for new members who come from Roman Catholic or
55 Orthodox backgrounds. The Roman Catholic Church has extensive catechetical teachings about

1 ‘Orders’, which is one of seven sacraments and lays the foundation for the priesthood and the right to
 2 determine a person’s salvation or condemnation. ‘Orders’ are part of even brief and popular Catholic
 3 Catechisms, but in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we say almost nothing about ordination. This
 4 deficit has generated bias and unwarranted local traditions that have determined members’ opinion on
 5 ordination both generally and regarding the specific issue of women’s ordination. The brief text on
 6 ordination in the *Working Policy* is hardly known by members and is even insufficient as it now
 7 stands.

8 **6. Consider the Best Terminology.** The Church should carefully consider the wisdom of
 9 using the term ‘ordination’, which is ambiguous and loaded with meanings from the Roman Catholic
 10 Church and various Protestant denominations that are not biblical and that are confusing our members
 11 who have come to us from other churches. Its origins in the pagan Roman empirical administration,
 12 its laws and idol worship, and in the false Christian theology introduced by Tertullian and Cyprian
 13 and others after them, make a Seventh-day Adventist hesitant and uncomfortable about this term. We
 14 recommend therefore that terms that are closer to the biblical terminology are introduced, such as
 15 ‘appoint’, ‘commission’, ‘dedicate’. If for traditional reasons, it is decided to keep ‘ordination’ as a
 16 technical term in denominational language, it should be acknowledged that each language in the world
 17 has ways of referring to the concept of ‘ordination’ that does not reflect the English ‘ordination’ or
 18 Latin *ordinatio*. For example, Greek Adventists use the common Greek term of *cheirotoneo*, which is
 19 found in Acts 14:23. Other options abound in various languages and the Church should acknowledge
 20 the wish of a union to choose better terms in the local language than ‘ordination’ or ‘ordain’.

21 **7. Remove Ritualistic and Consecrational Flavour.** Seeing how ‘ordination’ is treated in the
 22 New Testament – which is where we must find our guidance on the theology of Christian ministry –
 23 we recommend that the ritualistic and consecrational flavour of the act of ordination, its vague
 24 mixture of granting the Holy Spirit or gifts for ministry and ecclesiastical authority be radically toned
 25 done and removed from policy and practice. The emphasis should be on God’s appointment and our
 26 commitment to serve Him in His great mission of salvation.

27 **8. Make the Imposition of Hands Optional.** While an installation ceremony is a positive and
 28 needed feature in church life, we recommend that the imposition of hands be an optional part of the
 29 ceremony. In the New Testament, the apostles, servants/ministers, overseers/elders are nowhere
 30 ordained by imposition of hands in clear terms. For these functions, however, there is a clear biblical
 31 ground for talking about being ‘appointed’ or ‘commissioned’ by the Lord.

32 **9. Emphasis on God’s Blessing and Practical Aspects.** We recommend that the emphasis in
 33 the ceremony be placed on the *public recognition* of the ordinand, the *church’s confirmation* of the
 34 ordinand’s call from God and commitment to serve Christ and the Church, the *Church’s approval* of
 35 *the ordinand* as teacher, preacher and spiritual leader, and the invocation of *God’s blessing*.

36 **10. Review Who Is To Be Ordained in the Church.** A special study should be conducted
 37 regarding the biblical basis for applying ‘ordination’ to some offices and not others in the Church. All
 38 office holders in the Church are servants of God, but the Bible is not clearly teaching who is to be
 39 ‘ordained’ and who is not. All officials at local church level and in conferences, unions, and the
 40 General Conference can be introduced to their functions when they start. This is practical and
 41 encouraging, but the biblical basis for ordaining only the pastor, elder, deacon/deaconess is very
 42 scant.

43 **11. Separate Ordination from Election to an Organisational Office of Leadership.** A clearer
 44 distinction should be made between the *ordination* (i.e. the ordained minister’s credentials) and the
 45 *election* of leaders for regular church offices in missions, conferences, unions, divisions, and the
 46 General Conference. Ordination for the gospel ministry should be for the ministry of the word (Acts
 47 6:2) and not for administrative positions. If an ordained pastor is elected for a church office of
 48 organisational leadership, this is a different task from being a pastor (although some functions may
 49 overlap).

50 **12. Improve Ministerial Training, Education, Preparation for Ordination, and Clarify**
 51 **Processes, Requirements, and Qualifications.** We recommend that, based on the study we submit,
 52 the Church sharpens its processes and requirements for pastoral education and training, and develops
 53 better means by which the qualifications of an ordinand are examined, evaluated, and developed.