

GENERAL CONFERENCE

# THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION

STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT

JUNE 2014



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST  
CHURCH



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# THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION

STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT **JUNE 2014**

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SECTION I  
**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

# **INTRODUCTION AND GUIDELINES**

The Theology of Ordination Study Committee is the result of a request made from the floor by a delegate at the 2010 General Conference Session. The General Conference administration later took that request to the General Conference Administrative Committee for approval of the theology of ordination study process on September 20, 2011.

The objective of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee should be to carefully and prayerfully follow the terms of reference with an aim of reaching consensus on as many points as possible.

The Theology of Ordination Study Committee will provide for a committee membership with a broad base of perspectives to allow the Holy Spirit to help bring about consensus as much as possible.

Since this is to be a “study committee,” the normal “voting” process will not be used to place positions or representatives against each other. Rather, the study approach will provide opportunity for one consensus report on items accepted by consensus. For items on which it will be impossible to reach consensus, various reports should be prepared that present the different viewpoints and their appropriate responses. Through strong prayer sessions, study of the Bible, study of the Spirit of Prophecy, and the resulting careful discussion, the Theology of Ordination Study Committee should focus on solutions that would support the message, mission, and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In its study, the Theology of Ordination Study Committee will collaborate with the established division Biblical Research Committees (BRCs) and provide assistance to the BRCs with the comprehensive agenda to be reviewed. The Theology of Ordination Study Committee will receive reports from the division BRCs and can assign research papers and presentations to committee members and nonmembers to be reviewed by the Theology of Ordination Study Committee.

The Theology of Ordination Study Committee will meet approximately four times, concluding its work in June 2014. A steering committee of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee will provide supervision of the process. The work of the study committee will be to provide as much complete information on its assigned topic as is possible to be reviewed by General Conference administration in June 2014, and then the complete report provided to the General Conference Executive Committee to be reviewed and discussed at the 2014 Annual Council. The 2014 Annual Council will decide on any items to be referred to the 2015 General Conference Session.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

TERMS OF REFERENCE	AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY
<p><b>1.</b> Supervise the worldwide study of the theology of ordination and its implications, reviewing and analyzing data from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.</p>	<p><b>1.</b> Power to act.</p>
<p><b>2.</b> Review the history of the study of ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.</p>	<p><b>2.</b> Power to act.</p>
<p><b>3.</b> Develop a comprehensive agenda on the subject of theology of ordination and its implications for practices in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including the subject of ordination of women to the gospel ministry.</p>	<p><b>3.</b> Power to act.</p>
<p><b>4.</b> Receive (not later than December 31, 2013) and discuss reports from the division Biblical Research Committees concerning their division-wide studies and conclusions, ensuring that division Biblical Research Committees address the comprehensive study agenda.</p>	<p><b>4.</b> Power to act in consultation with division Biblical Research Committees.</p>
<p><b>5.</b> Request studies or solicit papers from committee members and/or non-members when further study is deemed necessary.</p>	<p><b>5.</b> Power to act.</p>
<p><b>6.</b> Develop a Seventh-day Adventist theology of ordination to recommend to the 2014 Annual Council for consideration.</p>	<p><b>6.</b> Power to act.</p>
<p><b>7.</b> Submit to the 2014 Annual Council, through General Conference administration, the full report of the worldwide study indicating areas of consensus and areas where consensus has not been obtained with respect to the theology of ordination and its implications for practices in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.</p>	<p><b>7.</b> Power to act.</p>
<p><b>8.</b> In areas of disagreement, focus on potential solutions that support the message, mission, and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.</p>	<p><b>8.</b> Recommend to the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) (GCC-S).</p>

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

STELE, ARTUR A., Chair

Mbwana, Geoffrey G., Vice-chair

Porter, Karen J., Secretary

Trim, Wendy, Recording Secretary

Arrais, Jonas

Arrais, Raquel C.

Batchelor, Doug

Bauer, Stephen

Beardsley-Hardy, Lisa M.

Bischoff, Fred

Bohr, Stephen

Brown, Gina S.

Brunt, John

Ceballos, Mario E.

Chang, Shirley

Clark, Chester V. III

Costa, Robert

Damsteegt, Laurel

Damsteegt, P. Gerard

Davidson, Jo Ann M.

Davidson, Richard M.

de Sousa, Elias B.

Diop, A. Ganoune

Donkor, Kwabena

Doss, Cheryl

Fagal, William A.

Finley, Mark A.

Fortin, Denis

Gothard, Doris M.

Haloviak-Valentine, Kendra

Hasel, Michael

Holmes, C. Raymond

Howard, James

Hucks, Willie

Jankiewicz, Darius

Kent, Anthony R.

King, Gregory A.

Knott, Esther

Knott, William M.

Koh, Linda Mei Lin

Kuntaraf, Kathleen K. H.

Mackintosh, Don

McLennan, Patty

Miller, Nicholas

Mills, Phillip

Moon, Jerry

Morris, Derek J.

Mueller, Ekkehardt F. R.

Nelson, Dwight K.

Nix, James R.

Oberg, Chris

Page, Janet

Page, Jerry N.

Paulson, Kevin

Peters, John

Pfandl, Gerhard

Poirier, Timothy L.

Prewitt, Eugene

Proffitt, Kathryn L.

Rafferty, James

Read, David C.

Reeve, Teresa

Reid, George

Roberts, Randall L.

Rodriguez, Angel M.

Scarone, Daniel

Silva, Sandra

Slikkers, Dolores E.

Small, Heather-Dawn K.

Sorke, Ingo

Timm, Alberto R.

Trim, David

Tutsch, Cindy

Veloso, Mario

Vin Cross, Tara

Wahlen, Clinton L.

Warden, Ivan Leigh

Zarska, Carol

## TWO REPRESENTATIVES ASSIGNED FROM EACH DIVISION

Coralie, Alain Mathema, Zacchaeus	<i>East-Central Africa Division</i>
Biaggi, Guillermo E. Zaitsev, Eugene	<i>Euro-Asia Division</i>
Henry, Elie Perez, Carmen	<i>Inter-American Division</i>
Hasel, Frank Magyarosi, Barna	<i>Inter-European Division</i>
Bietz, Gordon Pollard, Leslie N.	<i>North American Division</i>
Doh, Hyunsok John Higashide, Katsumi	<i>Northern Asia-Pacific Division</i>
Schmied Padilla, Lilian Siqueira, Reinaldo	<i>South American Division</i>
Musvosvi, Joel Ratsara, Paul S.	<i>Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division</i>
Christo, Gordon E. Tlau, Chawngdinpuii	<i>Southern Asia Division</i>
Gayoba, Francisco Sabuin, Richard	<i>Southern Asia-Pacific Division</i>
Oliver, Barry D. Roennfeldt, Ray	<i>South Pacific Division</i>
Barna, Jan Wiklander, Bertil A.	<i>Trans-European Division</i>
Bediako, Daniel K. Nwaomah, Sampson	<i>West-Central Africa Division</i>



## **EX OFFICIO**

Wilson, Ted N. C., President

Ng, G. T., Secretary

Lemon, Robert E., Treasurer

## **STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION STUDY COMMITTEE**

STELE, ARTUR A., Chair

Mbwana, Geoffrey G., Vice-chair

Porter, Karen J., Secretary

Damsteegt, P. Gerard

Davidson, Richard

Fagal, William A.

Rodriguez, Angel M.

SECTION II  
**HISTORY OF TOSC**

## SCOPE OF THE COMMITTEE

The Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) had a membership with a broad base of perspectives. The committee was comprised of 106 members, including a chair, vice-chair, and secretary; two representatives from each of the 13 world divisions; and 74 members from NAD representing all strata of the church. The committee also included lay members, pastors, and administrators, and many theologians from the major Seventh-day Adventist institutions of learning. Additionally, the three GC officers were *ex-officio* members of the committee.

A seven-member steering committee was appointed with the three committee officers, two members representing those opposing women's ordination, and two members representing those in favor of women's ordination.

Since this was a "study committee," the normal "voting" process was not used. Rather, the study approach resulted in one consensus report on the theology of ordination. On items about which it was impossible to reach consensus, various reports were prepared to present the different viewpoints and their appropriate responses. One significant achievement that has come about as part of this study process is the creation of a web page on the Archives, Statistics, and Research website for all of the papers and reports presented to TOSC as well as GC Session actions, GC Committee actions, Study Committee and Commission papers and reports, and other officially commissioned reports. This web page, for the first time, makes these historical documents available to the public.

## COMPLETED TASKS OF THE COMMITTEE

The TOSC met four times, with the final meeting having taken place June 2-4, 2014. At each meeting, significant time was spent in prayer and devotionals, turning thoughts to the One who has all the answers. At difficult junctures in the discussions, debates were stopped for a time of prayer. By refocusing thoughts and inviting the presence of the Holy Spirit, the tone of the meeting changed and a spirit of congeniality was felt.

Throughout this process small discussion groups were employed to give members a chance to express their convictions, ask questions, discuss topics, and hear the perspectives of others in a non-threatening environment.

### First Meeting, January 2013 (three days)

- Talked about how to deal with doctrinal issues in the Church and what ground rules to follow, while taking counsel from Scripture and the writings of Ellen White.

- Reviewed and affirmed the document entitled “Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods” which was voted at the 1986 Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro.
- Listened to the reading of papers on the history of ordination in early Christian history as well as in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- Spent significant time examining the actual theology of ordination itself—unrelated to gender. It was felt that this needed to be addressed before discussing the topic of women’s ordination.
- Discussed the ordination issue in small groups.

Following the first meeting, the steering committee appointed a writing committee, chaired by Geoffrey G. Mbwana, to create a consensus statement on the theology of ordination. A level of trust was created among the members of the writing group and a deep spirit of cooperation and a willingness to work together was exhibited.

### **Second Meeting, July 2013 (three days)**

- The first action at the second meeting was to vote the consensus statement on the theology of ordination.
- The committee then moved on to the topic of women’s ordination.
- There were several presentations on the history of women’s ordination in the Christian church from both viewpoints (pro and con).
- Hermeneutic principles were presented from each viewpoint, followed by presentations on 1 Timothy about how to apply these principles.
- An overview of women’s ordination was presented from both perspectives.
- The second meeting was the most intense with 16 papers presented and little time for small group discussion.

### **Third Meeting, January 2014 (five days)**

- This was a longer meeting with an additional two days.
- Reports and conclusions were shared on the issue of women’s ordination from all 13 division Biblical Research Committees.
- On one of the evenings, a panel of presenters responded to questions regarding their presentations at the previous meeting.
- Two presentations were made, one from each viewpoint, on 1 Timothy 3:2 (“husband of one wife”), with time for small group discussion on this subject.

- Position summary papers were presented from each side.
- The pro group gave an exegesis on 1 Corinthians 11.
- The con group gave a presentation on hermeneutics.
- Presentations from each group were given on the question of “Where will our position lead us?”
- Those holding the opposite view on women’s ordination to the gospel ministry made evaluations of these presentations.
- Small groups met to respond to the evaluations of positions, through the study of Genesis 1–3 and 1 Timothy 2 and 3, and to suggest ways to move forward.
- Friday evening vespers included a presentation, “Being Peacemakers,” by a local church group and a devotional by Artur A. Steele.
- On Sabbath, Mark A. Finley challenged the group in his Sabbath sermon on Acts to follow the method of the early church in settling difficult church questions, and the small groups met and addressed the challenge given by Pastor Finley.
- Small groups met again Sabbath afternoon to discuss the following key passages: 1 Corinthians 11, Galatians 3:26-28, and Joel 2:28-32.
- The meeting concluded with a challenge by Geoffrey G. Mbwana to build bridges and move forward together, united in Christ.

#### **Fourth Meeting June 2014 (three days)**

- Time was given for a presentation of a third position representing the views of those who held a more moderate or middle position.
- The majority of time during these meetings was spent in caucus groups, rather than plenary sessions, reviewing and refining the three summary position statements and way forward statements.
- Presentations of the Way Forward statements, from each of the three position caucus groups, were made to the full committee.
- A unanimous vote was taken to affirm that, in spite of the differences of opinion on the subject of women’s ordination, the members of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee are committed to the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as expressed through the 28 Fundamental Beliefs.

- A survey was taken asking each member to mark the position or positions that were most acceptable to them. The results of the survey are as follows:

<b>CONSENSUS VIEWS</b>			
<b>95 total votes; 1 voted for none</b>	Ordaining/Commissioning only qualified men to the office of pastor/minister throughout the world Church.	Each entity responsible for calling pastors/ministers be authorized to choose either to have only men as ordained pastors or to have both men and women as ordained pastors	Denominational leadership at a proper level be authorized to decide, based on biblical principles, whether such an adaptation [permission to ordain both men and women] may be appropriate for their area or region.
<b>First Choice</b>	32	40	22
<b>Second Choice</b>	0	12	19
<b>Third Choice</b>	2	0	0

- Ted N. C. Wilson thanked the committee for its work and outlined the process ahead of taking the report to the Executive Officers Meeting, PREXAD, Annual Council, and then to General Conference Session in 2015.
- The meeting closed with a prayer by G. T. Ng, Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



SECTION III  
**PRESENTATIONS ON  
THIS SUBJECT**



The following presentations from the TOSC meetings are available on the GC Archives, Statistics, and Research website.<sup>1</sup> Past research and all division Biblical Research Committee study reports and papers are also available on the GC Archives, Statistics, and Research website under the menu item Theology of Ordination.

## STATEMENTS

Consensus Statement on a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination

## JANUARY 2013 PAPERS

Dealing With Doctrinal Issues in the Church—Proposal for Ground Rules

*by Paul S. Ratsara and Richard M. Davidson*

The Proper Role of Ellen G. White's Writings in Resolving Church Controversies

*by William A. Fagal*

Ellen G. White on Biblical Hermeneutics

*by P. Gerard Damsteegt*

Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist History

*by David Trim*

The Problem of Ordination: Lessons From Early Christian History

*by Darius Jankiewicz*

Magisterial Reformers and Ordination

*by P. Gerard Damsteegt*

Towards a Theology of Ordination

*by Angel M. Rodriguez et al*

Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods

*by Annual Council 1986*

## JULY 2013 PAPERS

The Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Policy and Practice

*by David Trim*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.adventistarchives.org/gc-tosc#.U8qjz1aNj7S>

Women's Status and Ordination as Elders or Bishops in the Early Church, Reformation, and Post-Reformation Eras

*by P. Gerard Damsteegt*

The Ordination of Women in the American Church

*by Nicholas Miller*

The Ordination of Women in the American Church — Appendix

*by Nicholas Miller*

Trajectories of Women's Ordination in History

*by John W. Reeve*

Back to Creation: Toward a Consistent Adventist Creation-Fall-Re-Creation Hermeneutic

*by Jiri Moskala*

Paul, Woman, and the Ephesian Church: An Examination of 1 Timothy 2:8-15

*by Carl Cosaert*

Biblical Hermeneutics and Headship in First Corinthians

*by Edwin Reynolds*

Adam, Where are You?

*by Ingo Sorke*

Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3: Ontological Equality and Role Differentiation

*by Paul S. Ratsara and Daniel K. Bediako*

Women of the Old Testament: Women of Influence

*by Laurel Damsteegt*

Issues Relating to the Ordination of Women with Special Emphasis on 1 Peter 2:9, 10 and Galatians 3:28

*by Stephen Bohr*

Headship, Gender, and Ordination in the Writings of Ellen G. White

*by P. Gerard Damsteegt*

Ellen White, Women in Ministry and the Ordination of Women

*by Denis Fortin*

Ellen White, Ordination, and Authority

*by Jerry Moon*

Should Women Be Ordained as Pastors? Old Testament Considerations

by *Richard M. Davidson*

Shall the Church Ordain Women as Pastors? Thoughts Toward an Integrated NT Perspective

by *Teresa Reeve*

Authority of the Christian Leader

by *Darius Jankiewicz*

## **JANUARY 2014 PAPERS**

Hermeneutics: Interpreting Scripture on the Ordination of Women

by *P. Gerard Damsteegt, Edwin Reynolds, Gerhard Pfandl, Laurel Damsteegt, Eugene Prewitt*

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and the Ordination of Women to Pastoral Ministry

by *Teresa Reeve*

Leadership and Gender in the Ephesian Church: An Examination of 1 Timothy

by *Carl P. Cosaert*

Is “Husband of One Wife” in 1 Timothy 3:2 Gender-Specific?

by *Clinton L. Wahlen*

Restoration of the Image of God: Headship and Submission

by *John W. Peters*

My Personal Testimony: Some Pastoral Reflections

by *Dwight K. Nelson*

Evaluation of Egalitarian Papers

by *Gerhard S. Pfandl with Daniel K. Bediako, Steven Bohr, Laurel and P. Gerard Damsteegt, Jerry Moon, Paul S. Ratsara, Edwin Reynolds, Ingo Sorke, and Clinton L. Wahlen*

Evaluation of the Arguments Used by Those Opposing the Ordination of Women to the Ministry

by *Ángel M. Rodríguez*

Moving Forward in Unity

by *Barry D. Oliver*

Women In Ministry: What Should We Do Now?

by *C. Raymond Holmes*

## **JUNE 2014 PAPERS**

Position Summary #1

Position Summary #2

Position Summary #3

Way Forward Statement #1

Way Forward Statement #2

Way Forward Statement #3

## **PAPERS COMMISSIONED AND SUBMITTED BUT NOT PRESENTED**

Seventh-day Adventists On Women's Ordination: A Brief Historical Overview

*by Alberto R. Timm*



SECTION IV

**CONSENSUS STATEMENT  
ON THE THEOLOGY OF  
ORDINATION**

**RECOMMENDED, TO ADOPT THE DOCUMENT,  
“CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON A SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION,” WHICH  
READS AS FOLLOWS:**

In a world alienated from God, the Church is composed of those whom God has reconciled to Himself and to one another. Through the saving work of Christ they are united to Him by faith through baptism (Eph 4:4-6), thus becoming a royal priesthood whose mission is to “proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9, NKJV). Believers are given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20), called, and enabled through the power of the Spirit and the gifts He bestows on them to carry out the Gospel Commission (Matt 28:18-20).

While all believers are called to use their spiritual gifts for ministry, the Scriptures identify certain specific leadership positions that were accompanied by the Church’s public endorsement for persons who meet the biblical qualifications (Num 11:16, 17; Acts 6:1-6; 13:1-3; 14:23; 1 Tim 3:1-12; Titus 1:5-9). Several such endorsements are shown to involve “the laying-on of hands.” English versions of the Scriptures use the word *ordain* to translate many different Greek and Hebrew words having the basic idea of *select* or *appoint* that describe the placement of these persons in their respective offices. Over the course of Christian history the term ordination has acquired meanings beyond what these words originally implied. Against such a backdrop, Seventh-day Adventists understand *ordination*, in a biblical sense, as the action of the Church in publicly recognizing those whom the Lord has called and equipped for local and global Church ministry.

Aside from the unique role of the apostles, the New Testament identifies the following categories of ordained leaders: the elder/supervising elder (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim 3:2-7; 4:14; 2 Tim 4:1-5; 1 Pet 5:1) and the deacon (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-10). While most elders and deacons ministered in local settings, some elders were itinerant and supervised greater territory with multiple congregations, which may reflect the ministry of individuals such as Timothy and Titus (1 Tim 1:3,4; Titus 1:5).

In the act of ordination, the Church confers representative authority upon individuals for the specific work of ministry to which they are appointed (Acts 6:1-3; 13:1-3; 1 Tim 5:17; Titus 2:15). These may include representing the Church, proclaiming the gospel, administering the Lord’s Supper and baptism, planting and organizing churches, guiding and nurturing members, opposing false teachings, and providing general service to the congregation (cf. Acts 6:3; 20:28, 29; 1 Tim 3:2, 4, 5; 2 Tim 1:13, 14; 2:2; 4:5; Titus 1:5, 9). While ordination contributes to Church order, it neither conveys special qualities to the persons ordained nor

introduces a kingly hierarchy within the faith community. The biblical examples of ordination include the giving of a charge, the laying-on of hands, fasting and prayer, and committing those set apart to the grace of God (Deut 3:28; Acts 6:6; 14:26; 15:40).

Ordained individuals dedicate their talents to the Lord and to His Church for a lifetime of service. The foundational model of ordination is Jesus appointing the twelve apostles (Matt 10:14; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16), and the ultimate model of Christian ministry is the life and work of our Lord, who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:25-27; John 13:1-17).





SECTION V  
**POSITION SUMMARIES**

# POSITION SUMMARY #1 OUTLINE

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# POSITION SUMMARY #1

## SUMMARY STATEMENT

This document presents the biblical qualifications for ordination to the offices of elder/pastor/minister and examines whether women in ministry should function in these offices.

First it gives the fundamental reason why we understand from Scripture that only certain qualified men may occupy those offices. Next it discusses the principles of how to interpret the Bible and how to apply these principles to 1 Timothy 2 and 3, 1 Corinthians 11, Galatians 3, and Genesis 1 through 3. Then it shows biblical examples of ordination and its practice, the differences between offices and gifts, and the meaning of laying-on of hands; addresses ordination and authority, and ordination and the unity of the church; and offers a response to some arguments in favor of women's ordination.

## INTRODUCTION

God calls women to ministry. His service needs their labors, and He is honored when they devote their talents to ministering to the needs of others in His name. They are an essential part of the spiritual forces that Jesus Christ has deployed into the world to conquer for Him.

In both the first-century church and the early Adventist movement, women were important to the functioning and growth of the church. Female believers were called to significant roles in the ministry of Jesus: learning lessons from Him (Luke 10:39), providing financial means for advancing His ministry (Luke 8:3), and supplying moral encouragement during the crucial closing week (John 12:1-8), not least by their determined presence at the cross (Mark 15:40, 41; John 19:25). They were also His witnesses before and after His resurrection (Luke 8:1, 2; 24:9, 10). Jesus asked Mary Magdalene to carry the news to the other disciples (John 20:15-18) and, together with the other women who went to the tomb, she was among the first witnesses to His resurrection (Luke 24:2-10). Despite Jewish cultural sensitivities, Jesus invited women to fulfill these important tasks.

The Bible names other women who worked in local churches: Priscilla (Acts 18:1, 18, 26; 1 Cor 16:9; Rom 16:3), Phoebe (Rom 16:1; cf. 15:25-32), and Mary (16:6). Junia, with Andronicus, was “well-known to the apostles” (v. 7, ESV); Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis “worked hard in the Lord” (v. 12).<sup>1</sup> But there is no clear evidence that any of these women ever exercised a church leadership role. Their labors appear to have been supportive of the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the New King James Version.

work being carried forward by the apostles and other men whom God had called to lead His church. Every worker has an important role to fill, but it is God’s empowerment at work that makes no individual more important than another. Equality of service is not incompatible with different roles; we are all servants of Christ, and the glory belongs to God for the growth of the church and the abundant final harvest.

In the Advent movement, women such as Annie Smith, Ellen Lane, S. M. I. Henry, and Hetty Haskell filled important roles in publishing and evangelism, and many others served in conference positions and in various lines of local church work. Ellen G. White wrote that women “are recognized by God as being necessary to the work of the ministry.”<sup>2</sup> “A mistake is made when the burden of the work is left entirely upon the ministers.”<sup>3</sup> She explained that women “can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach.”<sup>4</sup> “Through the exercise of womanly tact and a wise use of their knowledge of Bible truth, they can remove difficulties that our brethren cannot meet.”<sup>5</sup> Further, she advocated that women who devote their full time and talents to ministry should be paid from the tithe.<sup>6</sup> It is clear, then, that White considered the participation of women in the work of the gospel to be not merely an option but a divine mandate, the neglect of which would result in diminished ministerial efficiency,<sup>7</sup> fewer converts,<sup>8</sup> and “great loss” to the cause,<sup>9</sup> compared to the fruitfulness of the combined gifts of men and women in ministry.

This document upholds the right and duty of women to serve God actively and fully in ministry of various kinds, in harmony with the Bible’s guidelines for church leadership. Those guidelines are not to be set aside or ignored. We are convinced that we can remain united as a world church only by remaining faithful to the Church’s long-standing biblical position.<sup>10</sup> Simply put, while the Bible and White’s writings encourage the active participation of women in the work of the church, in neither of these sources is there any clear support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. We believe the Bible is normative for all parts of the world; therefore we cannot support appeals to culture from various world divisions. While those who hold other positions have brought forward seemingly plausible arguments, we do

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2 GW 452.

3 DG 111.

4 WM 145.

5 Ev 491.

6 GW 452-453; Ev 492.

7 Ev 491.

8 *Ibid.*, 472.

9 *Ibid.*, 493.

10 “There is nothing to show early Adventists arguing for women’s right to baptize, to preside over the ordinances, to organize local churches—no evidence of any commitment to ordination.” David Trim, “The Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Policy and Practice, up to 1972,” 7, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/the-ordination-of-women-in-seventh-day-adventist-policy-and-practice.pdf>.

not find these arguments to be biblically well founded. This paper explains our own position and summarizes why we cannot accept the arguments of our friends who hold a different position.

## THREE REASONS FOR OUR POSITION

There are three vital reasons for the position we hold. First, the Bible seems quite clear on the matter of the ordination of women. Second, we believe that we should continue to have the Bible as our supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice. Third, if we are influenced by culture to depart from a biblical basis for our practice in this area, we are more likely to depart from Scripture in other areas.

### THE BIBLE CLEARLY SAYS THAT THE ELDER MUST BE “THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE” (1 TIM 3:2; TITUS 1:6)

This instruction was given in two different settings, so it cannot be just a response to a local problem that is not applicable elsewhere. Rather, it is instruction for the church at large for all time (1 Tim 3:15). Furthermore, in 1 Timothy this specification occurs just five verses after instruction restricting women from a certain teaching authority in the church (1 Tim 2:12). Since the church leader described in 3:2 must also be “able to teach,” the prohibition and the requirement seem to be related. Paul restricts the leadership of women in the church on the basis of Adam’s priority in Creation as well as the respective roles of Adam and Eve before and after the Fall (2:13, 14). This grounding of his instruction in the early chapters of Genesis indicates that the matter relates to God’s original plan for human beings and is not just His response to the sin problem. There is something fundamental here that we should not dismiss or ignore.

### THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE BIBLE-BASED IN ALL MATTERS OF FAITH AND PRACTICE

While the impetus to change our Church’s practice may appear to have arisen in the last 40 years or so, in fact it dates back to societal changes in America that began in the mid-19th century—changes that led many Protestant churches to begin ordaining women to the ministry during that period.<sup>11</sup> This campaign was decidedly rejected by the Advent move-

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<sup>11</sup> The women’s rights movement in America is usually traced to a conference held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. One of its resolutions called for women clergy. The first known ordained woman in America was Antoinette Louisa Brown, ordained to the Congregational ministry in 1853, and many others followed in many denominations (a partial list: 1853, First Congregational Church; 1863, Wesleyan Methodist Church; 1865, Salvation Army; 1888, Disciples of Christ Church; 1895, National Baptist Convention). Although our church papers discussed the role of women in worship, supporting the right of women to speak and participate in worship, not one article during Ellen White’s lifetime advocated the ordination of women as elders or pastors. Some articles explicitly rejected placing women in those roles. Our pioneers recognized that doing so was not biblical (see, e.g., D. T. Bourdeau, “Spiritual Gifts,” RH 21/1, Dec. 2, 1862: 6; [J. H. Waggoner,] SOT 4/48, Dec. 19, 1878: 380). In recent years, though, some Adventists have taken positions that align with what many other churches have done. The Adventist Church must now decide whether this really is new light that it should follow.

ment.<sup>12</sup> Our Church first took up the matter of ordaining women at the General Conference session in 1881 but declined to make a change. This did not mean Seventh-day Adventist women had no part in gospel work. Before 1881 as well as afterward, Adventist women were actively working for God in such areas as evangelism, medical missionary work, and welfare ministry. They gladly and enthusiastically functioned in these capacities without being ordained.

In Western society today, some within our ranks again feel pressure to be in step with the surrounding culture. We must speak meaningfully to the culture around us, but should this lead us to disregard biblical principles and the clear teaching of Scripture on the leadership of the church? Such a change, we believe, would have serious implications for our unity as a church. It could also have serious consequences for our evangelistic outreach as Bible-believing Christians who accept the Word of God “as the one infallible rule of faith and practice.”<sup>13</sup>

### **ALLOWING COMPETING METHODS FOR INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE BRINGS GREATER DISUNITY**

Seventh-day Adventists generally use the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. In 1986, the Annual Council of Seventh-day Adventists in Rio de Janeiro approved the Methods of Bible Study (MBS) document which outlines the components of the historical-grammatical method. It states that the student should “seek to grasp the simple, most obvious meaning of the biblical passage being studied” (4c). It further advises, “Recognize that the Bible is its own interpreter and that the meaning of words, texts, and passages is best determined by diligently comparing scripture with scripture” (4e). The principles of the historical-grammatical method as found in the MBS are not new; they have been used by Protestants since the time of the Reformation.<sup>14</sup>

Recently, the *NAD Theology of Ordination Report* introduced a new method of interpreting the Bible, which is described as a “principle-based, contextual, linguistic and historical-cultural” method or, for short, the “principle-based reading” of Scripture.<sup>15</sup> One of the principles on which this method is based is “the complete reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible in terms of its salvific message.” The report further states: “A plain and literal reading strategy would be sufficient to understand most of the Bible. Yet the committee believes that there are occasions when we should employ principle-based reading because the passage

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12 “This judgment that no women have been ordained with the sanction of the organized denomination runs contrary to the trend of much of the recent historiography on women’s ordination in Adventist history, which is written by proponents of ordaining women to gospel ministry. The sheer volume can seem impressive. However, this body of scholarship does not actually prove its case, due to a critical misunderstanding of what early Adventists supported when it came to the involvement of women in the church.” David Trim, “The Ordination of Women,” presented at the second session of TOSC, 4, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/the-ordination-of-women-in-seventh-day-adventist-policy-and-practice.pdf>.

13 Ellen G. White, “The Faith that Will Stand the Test,” RH, January 10, 1888, par. 11.

14 This section has been adapted from Gerhard Pfandl, “Evaluation of Egalitarian Papers” (presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24, 2013), 10-11, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/evaluation-of-egalitarian-papers.pdf>.

15 See *Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report* (Silver Spring, MD: North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013), 8; see also Kyoshin Ahn, “Hermeneutics and the Ordination of Women,” in NADTOSC Report, 25.

calls for an understanding of the historical and contextual setting.”<sup>16</sup> According to the MBS, whenever we interpret or exegete a text we need to take into consideration the context and historical circumstances. Adventists generally use this method when interpreting Scripture. So why is there a need for a new method? The differences between the two methods are twofold. In contrast to the historical-grammatical method, the “principle-based reading” of Scripture sees the Bible as reliable and trustworthy only in matters of salvation, and there is a strong emphasis on Scripture as culturally conditioned. In regard to the ordination of women, with the help of the “principle-based reading” method, all the texts used to support the church’s longstanding view are reinterpreted to allow for the ordination of women as elders and pastors/ministers.<sup>17</sup> In other words, a “principle-based reading” helps advance the effort to ordain women. However, it does so at the cost of reinterpreting Scripture in harmony with modern cultural preferences, which raises the issue of relating the Bible to culture.

## RELATING THE BIBLE TO CULTURE

Regarding cultural issues, the Bible itself provides us the key as to how to handle them. For example, while some Evangelical Christians would classify the Sabbath as a temporary, cultural institution, Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:11 show that it originated as part of God’s perfect plan for humanity and is therefore applicable in all cultures and for all time. Circumcision began with God’s command to Abraham. Like the presence of the temple, it was no guarantee of God’s favor without a right covenant relationship (Jer 4:4; cf. 21:10-12; 22:5). In fact, the time would come when God would treat the circumcised like the uncircumcised (Jer 9:25; cf. 1 Cor 7:18, 19). The New Testament teaches that baptism (John 3:3-8; Col 2:11-13) represents the reality symbolized by circumcision (Deut 30:6; 10:6)—a change of heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:7-11; Rom 2:28, 29). Unlike circumcision, baptism is for either gender. It symbolizes the believer being washed from sin, identifying with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and accepting Him as Savior (Rom 6). Furthermore, the command to baptize is given in a universal setting (“all nations,” Matt 28:19), indicating its applicability worldwide and throughout history. By contrast, circumcision was the sign of Jewish identity. In addition, such institutions as slavery and polygamy, though tolerated in Scripture, are never commanded there. Instead, based on Bible principles, these practices have subsequently been rejected by the church.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



## PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

### THE “BIBLE AND THE BIBLE ONLY” STANDARD OF INTERPRETATION

From the beginning, Seventh-day Adventists have maintained the motto, “the Bible and the Bible only.” On the interpretation of Scripture we are in harmony with the Protestant Reformers, who regarded the Bible as the final authority for doctrine and practice. The Bible claims that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17).

Ellen G. White affirms that “*the Bible must be our standard for every doctrine and practice*.... It is the word of the living God that is to decide all controversies.”<sup>18</sup> As the Bible is the standard for every practice, it does not leave us to wonder who should be ordained to the biblical leadership offices and whether women qualify for the offices of elder or minister.

**THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN FOR EVERYONE.** In studying the question of ordination, it is important to know the purpose and audience of the Bible. White writes, “The Bible was given for practical purposes.”<sup>19</sup> It “was written for the common people as well as for scholars, and is within the comprehension of all.”<sup>20</sup> The Bible “was designed for the common people, and the interpretation given by the common people, when aided by the Holy Spirit, accords best with the truth as it is in Jesus.”<sup>21</sup>

Surely the matter at hand, regarding leadership in the church and ordination for it, is included in these statements. The priesthood of all believers that Peter notes (1 Pet 2:9) implies full access to the Bible by all believers and a Spirit-guided ability to understand it.

**WE MUST TAKE THE BIBLE AS IT READS.** When opponents disputed with Jesus, He questioned them about the Scriptures: “What is written in the Law?” He asked. “How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26, NIV). Jesus pointed out that the way we read the Scriptures is important in understanding its truths. White expresses similar thoughts, showing how to determine whether to take a word, text, or passage literally or symbolically. “The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed.”<sup>22</sup> The MBS says, “Seek to grasp the simple, most obvious meaning of the biblical passage being studied.”<sup>23</sup>

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18 1888 44-45.

19 1SM 20.

20 RH, Jan. 27, 1885; CSW 23.

21 5T 331.

22 GC 599.

23 MBS, section 4c

### INTERPRETATION AND THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

Adventists interpret the Bible guided by their understanding of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12. In 1844 the Protestant churches in America rejected the first angel's message with its warning to prepare for the Second Advent. As a result of this rejection, Jesus directed Adventists to the second angel's message and made them aware that Babylon had fallen, indicating that the moral fall of the non-Adventist churches had become a reality.<sup>24</sup> Since 1844 when the churches rejected the present truth, there has been a rise of the historical-critical method of Bible study among Christians. Consequently, these fallen churches have departed progressively farther from the Word of God.<sup>25</sup>

One area of departure involves a campaign that arose for women clergy in America as part of the larger women's rights movement, starting in 1848, which we have noted already. These historical facts, as well as the counsel of Ellen G. White referred to above, should be a warning to Adventists to be very cautious about adopting teachings and practices from non-biblical sources. White warns, "Satan will use every advantage that he can obtain to cause souls to become beclouded and perplexed in regard to [1] *the work of the church*, in regard to [2] *the word of God*, and in regard to [3] *the words of warning which He has given through the testimonies of His Spirit*, to guard His little flock from the subtleties of the enemy."<sup>26</sup> The issue of women's ordination affects all three of these areas, endangering the mission of the Remnant Church. The seriousness of this matter is illustrated by the fact that all sides of the issue claim the support of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White for their views. This claim of equal validity has the effect of neutralizing these divinely inspired sources, leading us to think that we cannot look to them for solutions. However, as White reminds us, God's Word "is to decide all controversies."<sup>27</sup>

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24 EW 235, 237-240, 247; GC 381, 388-390.

25 Ibid., 273-274; GC 389.

26 SpT "B" Nos. 2, 9, emphasis and bracketed numerals added.

27 1888 45.

## APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION TO KEY TEXTS

### INTERPRETATION OF 1 TIMOTHY 2 AND 3

At the heart of the ordination debate lies Paul's gender-specific counsel of 1 Timothy 2 and 3. The apostle crisply states the purpose behind his counsel: "These things I write to you . . . that you may know how you ought to [Greek *dei*, "must"] conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:14, 15).

**1 TIMOTHY 2.** Paul begins 1 Timothy 2 by indicating that prayer is to be offered for all people. He gives several reasons: God is the Savior of all, He desires all people to be saved, and Christ gave Himself as a ransom for all (2:1-6; 4:10). This gender-inclusive language shows that elsewhere, when Paul discusses the respective roles of men and women, his use of the gender-specific terms "man" (*anēr*) and "woman" (*gynē*) is deliberate. Men are to lead out in prayer and worship (1 Tim 2:8); women are to submit to God's arrangement, whereby they are not to be placed over men as the teaching authority in the church (1 Tim 2:11, 12). These instructions are designed to promote harmony in worship by following God's order for the church.

The structure of 1 Timothy 2 and 3 includes clearly gender-specific sections: men (2:8), women (2:9-15), male elders (3:1-7), male deacons (3:8-10), women (3:11), male deacons (3:12, 13). Paul's mandate in 2:11 is gender-specific: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission." In Acts 22:2 and 2 Thessalonians 3:12, "silence" or "quietness" emphasizes respect and the humble pursuit of relational peace and harmony. Here and elsewhere in Paul's writings (1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:21; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5), "submission" sensibly governs male-female relations. In context it always takes place within the framework of divine authority and submission to God; it does not refer to an abusive subordination of all women to all men.

Paul then expands his mandate: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim 2:12). Rather than providing instruction just for a supposed isolated local situation (in Ephesus, where Timothy was working), Paul's wording ("I do not permit") underscores the universal nature of the apostle's mandate. This prohibition against women teaching does not target false teaching, as in 1 Timothy 6:3, which uses the specific term *heterodidaskaleō*, "teach something different." Throughout Paul's letters, teaching means positive instruction (1 Tim 3:2; 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2). Paul is not requiring complete silence. Women may pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:5) and engage in much-needed personal ministry (e.g., Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18:26). Thus, they are not prohibited from all teaching. They are also encouraged to bring up godly children (1 Tim 5:10, 14), and older women should instruct younger women (Titus 2:3-5).

Since the Greek phrase translated “to have authority over a man” (1 Tim 2:12) is used only once in the Bible, it cannot be defined by examining occurrences elsewhere. But the immediate context makes its meaning clear:

TEACHING AND LEARNING	SUBMISSION AND AUTHORITY
“Let a woman learn in silence	with all submission
And I do not permit a woman to teach	or to have authority over a man,
but to be in silence.”	

Sandwiching the prohibition of teaching and having authority over a man between two admonitions of silence clearly puts these phrases in relation to one another. Learning and not teaching are parallel counterparts, as are “submission” and not having “authority.” The logical complement of women learning is men teaching, and consequently the complement of submission to God’s plan for church order is for a woman not to have authority over a man by occupying the office of elder.

Paul bases key points of his instruction on information from Genesis 2 and 3, giving two reasons for male leadership in the church:

1. The order of creation: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13). By reaching back to Genesis 1 and 2, Paul bases his argument on a universal principle of creation, not culture or a concern for mission. While both man and woman were made in the image of God and thus are equal in nature (Gen 1:26, 27), Adam was created first (Gen 2:7, 18-24). It is the woman who is brought to the man (Gen 2:22) and, subsequently, the man is the one who is to initiate a new family entity (Gen 2:24). God presents Eve to Adam as a helper for him, not the other way around (Gen 2:18). The creation dynamics designed by God underline the distinctions between a man and a woman and, with these distinctions, a difference of roles.<sup>28</sup> Equality of personhood is never in question, nor is man ever given license to abuse his authority.
2. The nature of the deception: “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim 2:14). Genesis 3, in recounting the sad history of the Fall, describes the overthrow of selfless male leadership: the serpent talks to the woman as if she were the head and representative of the family; the woman accepts the role accorded her by the serpent.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, it was a questioning of the word of God—“Has

<sup>28</sup> 6T 236: “Under God, Adam was to stand at the head of the earthly family to maintain the principles of the heavenly family.”

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Con 13, 14, amplifying Genesis 3:5, includes the deeper issue of power among the temptations: the serpent claimed the prohibition “was given to keep them [Adam and Eve] in such a state of subordination that they should not obtain knowledge, which was power.”

God really said?” (Gen 3:1, NIV)—that led her into being deceived. The man’s activity and initiative had been the focus in Genesis 2, but now, in chapter 3, the woman takes the initiative. She *reasons* to a decision, takes of the forbidden fruit, eats it, and gives some of it to Adam (v. 6). In short, there is a total reversal of the principle of leadership based on the creation order. The man ate the fruit second, following the initiative and example of the woman. Paul points to the respective roles of men and women established at Creation and the consequences that followed the reversal of that leadership role as the scriptural basis for preserving male teaching authority in the church.

Significantly, Paul places the responsibility for the fall of humankind on Adam, not Eve (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:22), again confirming Adam’s leadership role. Several facts from Genesis already make this point: the realization of nakedness comes to the pair only after the man eats the fruit, God seeks out Adam (“Where are you?” in the Hebrew of Genesis 3:9 refers only to the man), and God holds the man primarily responsible as His questioning makes clear (vs. 10, 11). Adam’s role as head of the first home and spiritual leader of the human family is reaffirmed after the Fall (Gen 3:16). Even after the cross, these gender-specific stipulations remain intact: “the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph 5:23, 24). The fact that Paul bases this instruction on the relation of man and woman before the Fall shows its validity also for us today.

Paul’s instruction safeguards the family. Within the context of faith in Christ and submission to God’s will, a man is to have an important role as the spiritual leader of the home. His teaching and example are to have a positive influence; he must not be dictatorial, demeaning, or indulgent. That is why Paul insists that a man’s eligibility for church leadership be based on key character qualities and his successful spiritual leadership in the home (1 Tim 3:2-5). At a time when culture is fast redefining gender and challenging the very fabric of the family, the church would do well to follow the wise directives of the Word of God in the relations between men and women, as well as in all other matters of faith and practice.

**1 TIMOTHY 3.** Based on this understanding of Genesis, in 1 Timothy 3 Paul turns to the matter of elders. This was an important subject for him, and more especially for the church. Elsewhere Paul wrote to Titus that he “should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). Detailed instructions are given to Timothy and Titus as to the qualifications for the elder, who is God’s steward (Titus 1:7).

Regarding the historical background of these instructions, there is no evidence in the epistle itself or from first-century historical sources to think that the church situation Timothy faced in Ephesus was somehow unique or that 1 Timothy is primarily addressing a problem in the local church there. Unlike Paul’s other epistles, which are clearly addressed to individual

churches and their local situations, the epistles to Timothy and Titus are addressed to ministers. These men did not stay in one place to serve a single congregation only; Paul expected them to apply these instructions wherever churches were established (Titus 1:5). If any of Paul's epistles were meant as general instructions for the church at large, it is these—especially in view of indications Paul gave that his life might soon be cut short (2 Tim 4:6).

Throughout the discussion of church officers in 1 Timothy 3, Paul uses very specific language. He employs the technical terms “overseer” (*episkopos*) and “deacon” (*diakonos*). He also uses the words “man” and “woman” in their most specific sense of “husband” and “wife.” Thus, a clear progression can be seen in 1 Timothy 2 and 3 from general terms (“all people”) in 2:1-6 to more specific (“men” and “women”) in 2:8-15 to most specific (“husband of one wife”) in 3:2, 12 (cf. Titus 1:6). The overseer/elder “must be” (*dei... eimai*) the husband of one wife because he is responsible for the oversight of teaching and instruction in the word (3:2; Titus 1:7).

The use of the generic “anyone” (*tis*) in verse 1 does not negate the gender specification; rather, the gender specification “husband of one wife” limits who qualifies. First Timothy 3:1 speaks of an office (*episcopē*) to be occupied. The following verses reveal that only a man who meets special qualifications can fill that position. A woman does not meet the gender qualification and consequently cannot be ordained to the office of overseer or elder (terms Paul used interchangeably in Titus 1:5-9).<sup>30</sup> If Paul had meant to allow for women to be included among the elders, he could have specified both possibilities, as we see him doing extensively elsewhere in terms of the husband-wife relationship (1 Cor 7:1-16). Thus, “husband of one wife” means just what it says: that an elder must be a man who is married to one wife, as 56 of 61 English translations consulted (including the most recent) show.<sup>31</sup> The recognition of this masculine element by so many teams of translators through the years up to the present is eloquent testimony that on this point Paul is clear and unambiguous. Only four translations, intent on gender neutrality, depart from the widely agreed and established meaning of the phrase “husband of one wife.”

The qualifications given for the elder in 1 Timothy 3:2-5 focus on the *kind of person* he is at home, in the church, and in society. Paul points out that only those who meet the qualifications he sets forth should lead God's church. These qualifications are that a church leader, specifically an overseer or elder, is to be a faithful husband of one wife who gives evidence of successful leadership in his own family, which qualifies him to fulfill the leadership office in “the house of God,” the church (1 Tim 3:15), which is made up of many families. In addition, he is to be blameless, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, to

30 See Sorke, “Adam, Where Are You?” 31, 32, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/adam,-where-are-you.pdf>.

31 See Wahlen, “Is ‘Husband of One Wife’ in 1 Timothy 3:2 Gender-Specific?”, 29-30, 35-39.

exhort and convict by sound doctrine those who contradict, and to have a good reputation with outsiders, among other stated qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-7). It is obvious that not all qualify for the sacred calling of leading a church congregation, but only men who have a proven record of successful leadership in the home and have a high spiritual commitment and a godly moral lifestyle. A man's fitness for leadership in the church is based on how well he has managed his home. The mention of children at the end of verse 4 ("having his children in submission with all reverence") tells the church where to look for supporting evidence for the qualification in the first half of the verse ("one who rules his own house well"). This is important because "if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (v. 5).

It is true that we live in a less than ideal world. This causes us to elect elders who may not meet every ideal of the biblical qualifications. Some are less "temperate" than others; some engage in more or less "good behavior;" some are more or less "hospitable;" etc. These qualifications are measured in degrees. Where degrees are involved, it is not safe for us to draw arbitrary lines when Scripture has not given us guidance. But it is not so with the fundamental requirement of gender. Men are not more or less male. Gender is not measured in degrees. It is a clear, unambiguous requirement that gives us no room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

**IMPLICATIONS.** Although 1 Timothy 3:2 excludes women from the office of overseer or elder, nothing prevents them from continuing to serve the church in many different capacities, assuming they are willing to work in cooperation with the leadership authority that God has established for the church and not try to undermine it or call it into question. The biblical principle of godly male leadership in both the home and the church is to be carried out in loving service under the lordship of Christ "as is fitting in the Lord" (Col 3:18).

## RELATION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11

Another place where Paul touches on the relationship of men and women in the church is 1 Corinthians 11, where the context is division and disorder in the church. In the previous chapter, Paul asks the Corinthians to give no offense to the church of God (10:32), and he cites himself as a model (10:33-11:1).

Verse 3 establishes the principle: "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." In the sequence, Paul places the relationship of the man and woman between the headship of Christ over man and the headship of God (the Father) over Christ, indicating that it is just as valid as the other two headship relationships. Since neither of those other two relationships can be challenged, the relationship God has established between the sexes cannot be challenged either. In fact,

1 Corinthians 15:28 shows that the headship of God over Christ continues even in the new creation, far beyond the reign of sin.

Verses 4 and 5 point out that this principle applies to conduct in the church. Verses 7 through 9 provide the biblical and theological rationale for this principle: man “is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.” Paul is here pointing to the order and purpose in the creation of man and woman as the reason why man is the head of the woman and why the application of the principle is different for men than it is for women. The man was created first, for the glory of God, whereas the woman was created second, for the glory of the man, as “a helper comparable to him” (Gen 2:18). Thus, when women appear in God’s presence, they are to show their reverence for God differently: every man’s head is Christ, but the woman’s head is man, so the man should not cover his head, which represents Christ, but the woman ought to cover her head, as a symbol of her submission to the headship authority that God has established in the church. The text provides no evidence for a local, cultural reason for male headship. Although respect for authority may be expressed differently in Adam’s day, in Paul’s Corinth, or in today’s societies, wherever the principle is honored it will show respect towards God’s plan for leadership in the home and in the church.

Verse 10 adds an important fact to the rationale in verses 7 through 9—that the head covering is a symbol of authority: “For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head.” This clarifies what the issue is: that the woman is operating under someone else’s authority. The principle of submission to godly headship in the church remains valid, even if the outward symbol of a woman’s submission to this headship authority (a head covering) may be expressed differently in many cultures today.

Verses 11 and 12 warn against abuse of headship privileges, reminding the men that they are not independent of the women, but that just “as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.” This interdependency is different from the non-reciprocal relationship of male headship, and it clearly shows that Paul is not limiting his concern to husbands and wives within the home, but speaks of men and women in general since the husband does not come into existence through his wife, but a man comes into existence through his mother.

A few chapters later, Paul discusses disorderly conduct in the church. For the sake of those who wish to debate his instruction, he adds: “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (14:37, 38, ESV). Thus Paul excludes any basis for challenging his teaching.



## GALATIANS 3:26-29

Galatians 3:26-29 addresses the relationship between God and his people. Every verse focuses on this connection: “For you are all *sons of God* through faith in Christ Jesus (v. 26). For as many of you as were *baptized into Christ* have put on Christ (v. 27). There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all *one in Christ Jesus* (v. 28). And *if you are Christ’s*, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (v. 29).”<sup>32</sup>

Paul does not write that in Christ “man is no longer the head of the woman” or that “males and females can now serve as elders/overseers in the church.” Such statements would conflict with his own testimony in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-9. Paul’s point is clear: not ethnicity, economic circumstances, nor gender grants one person a privileged status over another before God.

Furthermore, the cross did not erase the functional distinctions that God established before sin. Man is still to fulfill the role of the father and husband and woman the role of the mother. The wife must still submit to the loving headship of her husband “in the Lord,” and husbands must still love their wives (Eph 5:22-25). There is no hint in Galatians 3:28 or its context to indicate that Paul was addressing roles in the home or in the church.

The context of Galatians 3 indicates that Paul was addressing the issues of justification, baptism into Christ, and the reception of the Spirit at the *beginning* of the Christian life, not offices or leadership positions in the church. If we wish to know what Paul had to say about qualifications for church leadership offices, we must go to the places where he addresses these specific issues in the pastoral epistles of 1 Timothy and Titus.

The NT passages on leadership and male-female relations within the church consistently indicate a God-appointed plan for qualified men to lead the church. As Ellen G. White states, “The Scriptures are plain upon the relations and rights of men and women.”<sup>33</sup>

## MALE-FEMALE EQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE IN GENESIS 1 AND 2

As we have seen, Paul establishes his understanding of leadership in the home and in the church based on the early chapters of Genesis. His interpretation reveals inspired insight into the meaning of these passages. Paul is not placing a construction on them that is foreign to their original setting. In God’s kingdom, the relationships among human beings are designed to reflect the relationships among the Godhead and among the angels, which are characterized by equality as well as functional differences.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> 1T 421.

<sup>34</sup> EW 167. For these functional differences, see Jerry Moon, “Ellen White, Ordination, and Authority” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24, 2013), 3-6, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/ellen-white,-ordination,-and-authority.pdf>; Damsteegt, “Headship, Gender, and Ordination in the Writings of Ellen G. White” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24, 2013), 10-14, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/headship,-gender,-and-ordination-in-the-writings-of-ellen-g.-white.pdf>.

**MALE-FEMALE EQUALITY IN GENESIS 1 AND 2.** The first chapters of the Bible present the divine design for the relationships between men and women. The first chapter of the book of Genesis reveals that *both male and female were created in the image of God*. The scriptural record states, “God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’ ... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:26, 27). They were commanded to be fruitful and multiply, to populate the earth and subdue it, and to exercise dominion over all living things (Gen 1:26-28).

This chapter shows that both male and female have a basic equality of nature, essence, or being, because both are created in the image of God. This view is in harmony with the plain teaching of the apostle Paul with regard to the equal value of men and women as heirs of salvation (Gal 3:26-29).<sup>35</sup>

Genesis 2 builds on Genesis 1, revealing a relationship between godly men and women that is derived from the way in which God created man first and then created the woman from the man. “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh’” (Gen 2:21-23). Ellen G. White comments on this event:

God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided “an help meet for him”—a helper corresponding to him—one who was fitted to be his companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation. “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it.” Ephesians 5:29. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one.”<sup>36</sup>

This statement shows that the woman is to stand by the man’s side as an equal—not to be inferior or superior, but equal to the man. White further adds, “The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For an exposition on Galatians 2:28, see Stephen Bohr, “A Study of 1 Peter 2:9, 10 and Galatians 3:28” (presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24, 2013), <http://www.adventistarchives.org/a-study-of-i-peter-2.9-10-and-galatians-3.28.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> PP 46.

<sup>37</sup> 3T 484.

The above statement on the importance of equality also introduces the concept that Adam and Eve have differences in function. The first White statement quoted above indicates that even in pre-Fall Eden, with no threat of physical harm, one of Adam's tasks was to protect his companion, who was "to be loved and protected by him."<sup>38</sup> Nowhere does it state that Eve must protect Adam. Knowing the future, God brought Eve to Adam because she was created for him and from him. This indicates an important distinction in roles between male and female.

**MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCE IN GENESIS 1 AND 2.** While Genesis 1 indicates that God made human beings physically different, as "male and female,"<sup>39</sup> the second chapter explains in detail how this creation, with functional differences, took place and the responsibilities given to the man before the woman was even created. It describes the formation of the man from the dust, (Gen 2:7), the garden God prepared and the responsibility He gave to the man "to tend and keep it" (2:15), the command concerning what he could eat (2:16), and the warning about the forbidden tree (2:17). After this God brought the animals and birds to Adam and gave him the responsibility to name them. "And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name" (2:19). As a result, Adam discovered his own need of a companion: "There was not found a helper corresponding to him" (2:20). So "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept, and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. From this rib the Lord God made a woman and brought her to the man" (2:21, 22), giving to Adam the privilege also of naming his companion: "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man," he said (2:23).

Based on this divinely-established relationship between Adam and Eve, God indicates also that in the marriage relationship the man is to take the initiative, leave his family, and be joined to his wife (Gen 2:24). At this time Eve considers Adam "her husband" (Gen 3:6). Ellen G. White interprets the term "husband" to mean "he is the house-band of the family, binding the members together, even as Christ is the head of the church and the Saviour of the mystical body [Eph 5:23]."<sup>40</sup> Thus the internal evidence within Genesis prior to Adam's fall reveals his leadership role and his responsibility toward the woman.

What type of relationship existed between the man and the woman at this time? Here we need to follow the important rule of interpretation by consulting the whole Bible to see if there are any other references indicating the relationship between the man and the woman in Genesis 2 before sin, because "the New Testament explains the Old."<sup>41</sup> We return to

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38 PP 46.

39 About their physical differences, Ellen White writes, "Eve was not quite as tall as Adam. Her head reached a little above his shoulders" (3SG 34).

40 AH 215.

41 Ev 578.

1 Corinthians 11, where Paul points out that Adam and Eve's relationship before the Fall was based on a headship/leadership principle that already existed within the Godhead. Within the context of faith, Paul wants believers to know that "the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3).

The New Testament brings out further evidence regarding these relationships. In 1 Timothy, referring to Genesis 2, Paul illustrates the leadership principle with the creation of the man. In connection with order in the church, "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), Paul writes that he does not permit women to teach or "to have authority [KJV: "to usurp authority"] over the man" (1 Tim 2:12), "for Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Tim 2:13).

The New Testament's explanation of the relationship between the man and the woman before sin clearly teaches that the man has been given the leadership function in the home and in the church. As headship and submission are principles in heaven (1 Cor 11:3), so on earth human beings have been created to reflect the image of God.

In the following statements White confirms Adam's role in the Garden of Eden: "Under God, Adam was to stand at the head of the earthly family, to maintain the principles of the heavenly family;"<sup>42</sup> "Adam was appointed by God to be monarch of the world, under the supervision of the Creator;"<sup>43</sup> "The Sabbath was committed to Adam, the father and representative of the whole human family;"<sup>44</sup> "Adam was lord in his beautiful domain."<sup>45</sup> Although both were given dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26, 27), the leadership in this relationship was given to Adam. "Adam was crowned king in Eden. To him was given dominion over every living thing that God had created. The Lord blessed Adam and Eve with intelligence such as He had not given to any other creature. He made Adam the rightful sovereign over all the works of His hands."<sup>46</sup> Co-equal leadership roles and titles for Adam and Eve are completely missing from the inspired writings. Adam alone is designated as the head.<sup>47</sup>

Both the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White present Adam as having the leadership role in terms of the man-woman relationship and even in terms of their dominion over the earth before the Fall. What do the inspired writings tell us about their relationship after the Fall?

### **RELATIONSHIP OF MAN AND WOMAN AFTER THE FALL IN GENESIS 3**

After the Fall, Adam's headship role became even more pronounced. It was only after

<sup>42</sup> CT 33; See also 6T 236.

<sup>43</sup> White, "Marriage in Galilee," BE Aug. 28, 1899 (cf. ST Apr. 29, 1875). See also RH Feb. 24, 1874.

<sup>44</sup> PP 48.

<sup>45</sup> FE 38.

<sup>46</sup> White, *Redemption; or the Temptation of Christ*, 7; also in 1BC 1082

<sup>47</sup> See John W. Peters, "Restoration of the Image of God: Headship and Submission" (presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Jan. 21-25, 2014), 9, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/restoration-of-the-image-of-god-headship-and-submission-john-peters.pdf>.

Adam, as leader, followed his wife in the path of disobedience and sinned that their eyes were opened and they realized their sinful condition and resulting nakedness (Gen 3:7). Next God came down to question Adam (not Eve) as the responsible leader (3:9-12). Then He addressed the woman (3:13). Finally God pronounced judgment on each party, beginning with the serpent and his ultimate defeat (3:14, 15). Adam received the death penalty, which consequently affected every living being (Rom 5:12). Then he was expelled from the Garden, his wife following him.

The Fall of Adam and Eve brought a change to their relationship. The punishment God put upon the woman was pain in childbirth and that “your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). Just as pain entered into the experience of childbirth as a result of sin, so we observe a change in the way the headship principle would function. Before the Fall, there was a harmonious relationship in which Eve gladly and willingly accepted Adam’s godly leadership, submitting without resentment or duress. However, once their relationship was broken and distorted by sin, it was necessary for God to enforce Adam’s role by way of command. The principle itself had not changed, but the woman must now accept his “rule over” her (Gen 3:16), although her new sin-borne desire was to rule over him (note the similar meaning of the terms in the close parallel a few verses later, in Gen 4:7).<sup>48</sup> The change was not in terms of two pre-Fall heads being reduced to one but in moving from a harmonious, willing cooperation with Adam’s leadership to a different relationship that would include tension within the human family between the two genders. As a result, harmony could only be preserved by the (now unnatural) submission of the woman to the man, since there can be only one head/leader in any relationship. Otherwise, there would be constant and open conflict over authority.

This authority within the home (as also within the family of faith) is given by God, but must never be demanded, used autocratically, or in an abusive manner. Rather, it should be expressed in loving care for the wife, “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph 5:25). That is the nature of headship authority as modeled by God and Christ (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:22, 33).

To Adam God said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife” and eaten from the forbidden tree, the earth will be cursed and you will die (Gen 3:17, 19). Comparing scripture with scripture, we notice that the New Testament also teaches that Adam, as the leader, was responsible for the entrance of sin into the human race, not Eve, despite her being the first to transgress God’s command. “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Ratsara and Daniel K. Bediako, “Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3: Ontological Equality and Role Differentiation” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24, 2013), <http://www.adventistarchives.org/man-and-woman-in-genesis-one-thru-three.pdf>.

came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Rom 5:18). Clearly, Paul’s contrasting of Adam’s role with that of Christ is rooted in the fact that Adam was the responsible leader. Even though Adam followed the leadership of his wife in disobedience, the Bible continues to honor Adam’s role as head of the human race and of his family.

In subsequent generations, following this divine design of headship, husbands occupied similar leadership roles. Ellen G. White writes, “In early times the father was the ruler and priest of his own family, and he exercised authority over his children . . . His descendants were taught to look up to him as their head, in both religious and secular matters.”<sup>49</sup> Abraham, representative of God’s truth and father of true believers, followed this divine pattern. White adds, “This patriarchal system of government Abraham endeavored to perpetuate, as it tended to preserve the knowledge of God.”<sup>50</sup> With Israel’s Exodus from Egypt, God established the nation of Israel as His kingdom on earth and appointed men to lead His people. From that time onward, we are introduced to the concept of ordination, which means installing qualified men for service in leadership offices so that they might guide God’s people under His direction.

## BIBLICAL ORDINATION

### OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament records instances of special appointments to leadership. Although recent translations of the Bible do not use the terms “ordain” or “ordination,” the concept is present throughout Scripture. Many, including Ellen G. White, have used this term to refer to these appointments to positions of authority among the people of God. While Moses (and later Joshua) carried the primary leadership responsibility in Israel, representing a unique combination of religious and civil leadership roles, the office within Israel most illustrative for our understanding of ordination is that of the priesthood. Unlike the civil leadership offices of judge and, later, king, the priest was responsible for leading Israel in worship and religious instruction. Therefore, the priest represents the closest parallel to the leadership offices of the NT church.<sup>51</sup> Shortly after the Exodus from Egypt, God selected Aaron and his sons to lead out in the religious services of the sanctuary. Through a special ceremony during which Moses

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<sup>49</sup> PP 141.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Throughout Scripture, prophets, both men and women, are raised up intermittently by God Himself to communicate His inspired word to the people. As messengers of the Lord, they did not hold an office as such, nor were they ordained by human hands. God called and sent them at particular times in the history of His people when there was need for more direct divine guidance. Similarly, in modern times, God raised up Ellen G. White as His messenger. According to the Ellen G. White Estate, while ministerial credentials were voted for her by the Michigan conference and, later, by the General Conference, “she was never ordained by human hands, nor did she ever perform a wedding, organize a church, or conduct a baptism” (DG 248). White, referring in 1911 to her own call to service, wrote the following: “In the city of Portland the Lord ordained me as His messenger, and here my first labors were given to the cause of present truth” (ibid., 252). The White Estate adds: “It will be recalled that Ellen White was given her first vision in December 1844, in Portland, Maine. Shortly thereafter she was prompted by the Lord to tell others what she had seen” (ibid.).

was to anoint them with oil, they were sanctified or set apart, and consecrated to occupy the office of priest (Exod 29:1-37; Lev 8). In addition, there were Levites who were set apart by the laying-on of hands (Num 8:10) and elders who fulfilled somewhat lesser roles as religious leaders.

In addition to these various leadership roles, the Old Testament identifies a number of women who were influential in Israel, including the prophetesses Miriam, Huldah, and Deborah (who also judged<sup>52</sup> the people), and Queen Esther. Although none of these women functioned in the office of priest or elder or were ordained, God used them powerfully, and they fulfilled vital roles at particular times in Israel's history.

## NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament mentions the setting apart or ordination of individuals in the appointment of the twelve apostles, the seven deacons, Paul and Barnabas, Timothy, and the elders and deacons. Here is the origin of the NT practice of ordination in the early Christian church. The NT writers used various Greek words for appointment. Some Bible versions translate them "ordain" while others use different words, but the idea of ordination, installation to a specific office, remains in the text (e.g., Mark 3:14; Titus 1:5).<sup>53</sup>

The first major step in the organization of the NT church was Jesus' ordination of the twelve apostles, mirroring the establishment of the OT church and its foundation of the twelve patriarchs, the sons of Jacob. Jesus showed the importance He placed on the apostles' ordination by praying all night prior to this momentous event. Then Jesus set apart the twelve apostles from the larger group of disciples. Ellen G. White wrote, "It was at the ordination of the Twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to carry on His work on the earth. Of this ordination the record says, 'He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto Him whom He would: and they came unto Him. And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach.' Mark 3:13, 14."<sup>54</sup> On this occasion "Christ appointed them as His representatives, and gave them their ordination charge, their commission."<sup>55</sup>

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52 "Deborah gave 'judgment' (Hebrew *mishpāt*) to the people privately when they came to her. When the text says that 'Deborah... was judging Israel at that time' (Judges 4:4), the Hebrew verb *shāphat*, 'to judge,' in this context does not mean 'to rule or govern,' but rather has the sense 'decide controversy, discriminate between persons in civil, political, domestic and religious questions.' That is evident because the next verse tells how she was 'judging': she 'used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah' and 'the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.' This is not a picture of public leadership like that of a king or queen, but private settling of disputes through both arbitration and judicial decisions. If we decide to take this as an example for today, we might see it as justification for women to serve as counselors and as civil judges. But the text of Scripture does not say that Deborah ruled over God's people." Laurel Damsteegt, "Women of Influence" (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Jan. 21-25, 2014), 14-15 (quoting Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 2004], 133 [emphasis is Grudem's]), <http://www.adventistarchives.org/women-of-the-old-testament.pdf>.

53 Edwin E. Reynolds and Clinton Wahlen, "The Minority Report," in the North American Division *Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report* (November 2013), 203, <http://static.squarespace.com/static/50d0e8e4b0ceb6af5fd33/t/527970c2e4b039a2e8329354/1383690434980/nad-ordination-14-minority.pdf>.

54 *Ibid.*, 18.

55 White, "The Regions Beyond," PUR Dec. 4, 1902.

Later, Jesus explained that it was He who chose these men for their specific function of leading out in establishing the NT church (John 15:16). Here it becomes clear that God's call comes first; then, after the individual responds, follows the appointment to a specific office. The apostles were selected, appointed, or ordained for a specific work of preaching, casting out demons, and healing (Matt 10:1, 7, 8).

Because Jesus often laid His hands on people for healing and blessings, it seems natural that He did so during the ordination of the Twelve. The Bible records a similar practice used in the setting apart of the Levites and Joshua (Num 8:10; 27:18). White confirmed that Jesus "gathered the little band close about Him, and kneeling in the midst of them, and laying His hands upon their heads, He offered a prayer dedicating them to His sacred work. Thus the Lord's disciples were *ordained* to the gospel ministry."<sup>56</sup>

The second major step in church organization took place with the ordination of the seven "deacons." To resolve tensions over equitable distribution of aid to the church's widows, at the apostles' instruction the believers chose seven men to oversee the matter and brought them "before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them." The ordination of these men by the apostles contributed to the unity and rapid growth of the church (Acts 6:1-7).

Although this passage does not explicitly name the office to which the seven were appointed, the Greek words used for "serve" (*diakoneō*, Acts 6:2) and "ministry" or "service" (*diakonia*, Acts 6:1, 4) have the same root as the word for "deacon" (*diakonos*). It appears that Luke, as a careful historian, avoided designating these men as "deacons" because the name for the office arose a little later. Paul spells out the qualifications for the ordained offices of both elder and deacon in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. The qualifications for elder are mentioned also in Titus 1:5-9.

In contrast to the apostles who were entrusted with "the ministry of the word," the seven deacons were ordained to care primarily for the material needs of the church.<sup>57</sup> According to White, this development in church organization was "in the order of God."<sup>58</sup> Although the seven were "ordained for the special work of looking after the needs of the poor," they were not prevented from "teaching the faith. On the contrary, they were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success."<sup>59</sup> The ordination of the deacons was similar to the ordination of the Levites (Num 8:9, 10). In both

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<sup>56</sup> DA 296, emphasis added.

<sup>57</sup> Since the "deacon" (*diakonos* in Greek) is to be the husband of one wife (1 Tim 3:12), Phoebe, though referred to as a *diakonos* (Rom 16:1), could not have served in this office. The word *diakonos* is used in the New Testament only rarely in the sense of "deacon" (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 12). Usually it has the more general meaning of "servant" (e.g., Matt 22:13; Mark 9:35; Rom 15:8, etc.), which is why in most translations of Romans 16:1 Phoebe is referred to as a "servant" of the church at Cenchrea.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 90.



cases it included the laying-on of hands, the congregation was involved, and those ordained were to serve on behalf of the congregation. Thus two basic offices were established in Jerusalem: apostle (and, later, elder) for the ministry of the word, and deacon for ministry to the material and practical needs of the church. White wrote that “the organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel.”<sup>60</sup>

The ordination of Barnabas and Paul took place in the church of Antioch, Syria. Here, as certain prophets and teachers ministered and fasted, the Holy Spirit spoke to them: “Now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” After “having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2, 3). These men were now “being sent out by the Holy Spirit” as missionaries (Acts 13:4).

White provides additional insights on the meaning of ordination in connection with the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas. Through ordination, “they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, being invested with full ecclesiastical authority.”<sup>61</sup> It was “a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of the gospel.”<sup>62</sup> Inasmuch as Paul and Barnabas “had already received their commission from God Himself,” the ceremony “added no new grace or virtual qualification. It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office and recognition of one’s authority in that office. By it the seal of the church was set upon the work of God.”<sup>63</sup> When “the ministers of the church of believers” put their hands on Paul and Barnabas, they “by that action, asked God to bestow His blessing upon the chosen apostles in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed.”<sup>64</sup> Paul considered “his formal ordination as marking the beginning of a new and important epoch in his lifework,” from which he “dated the beginning of his apostleship in the Christian church” to carry the gospel to the Gentiles, as Peter, James, and John had been appointed to preach Christ among the Jews.<sup>65</sup>

During their travels in Asia Minor, as Paul and Barnabas organized groups of believers into churches and “appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23). Here we observe that the organizational model of the Jerusalem church was being established in the “mission field.” Later, when Paul found disorderly behavior in some of the churches, he sent letters to his associates

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60 AA 91.

61 *Ibid.*, 161.

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*, 161-162.

64 *Ibid.*, 162.

65 *Ibid.*, 164-165.

Timothy and Titus with strict guidelines about the proper qualifications for elders and deacons with the goal to restore order in the churches and prevent problems from arising (1 Tim 3:1-14; Titus 1:5-9). Throughout the history of Christianity, almost all Christian churches have adhered to these qualifications.<sup>66</sup>

Paul's letters contain two references to Timothy's ordination (1 Tim 4:14, 2 Tim 1:6). From Timothy's involvement in Paul's mission it is clear that Timothy was not merely a local elder but functioned more in the role of an itinerant or traveling elder or minister, representing biblical Christianity to the newly established churches throughout the Roman Empire.

## OFFICES AND GIFTS

### THE GIFT OF PASTORING

In the New Testament there is no office of "pastor." In Ephesians 4:8, 11, 12, "pastor" is spoken of as a gift of ministry. Paul referred to this spiritual gift in his commission to the elders of the church in Ephesus. "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd [pastor] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The apostle Peter, who considered himself also an elder, referred to this gift in a similar way, stating, "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder...: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:1-3). Among the tasks of elders is the responsibility to shepherd, nurture, and protect church members. Unless one of their gifts is that of shepherding, they do not qualify for this office. However, this gift is not confined to the office of an elder or minister. The gift of shepherding or pastoring can be manifested by persons who work in other callings, professions, or ministries that are benefited by aspects of caring.

Ellen G. White used "pastor" and "pastors to the flock" in this way, as when she wrote that "responsibilities must be laid upon *the members of the church*. The missionary spirit should be awakened as never before, and workers should be appointed as needed, who will act as pastors to the flock, putting forth personal effort to bring the church up to that condition where spiritual life and activity will be seen in all her borders."<sup>67</sup>

This appears to be her meaning in her well-known statement about literature evangelists, that "it is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men

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<sup>66</sup> Damsteegt, P. Gerard, "Women's Status and Ordination as Elders or Bishops in the Early Church, Reformation and Post-Reformation Eras" (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July. 22-24, 2013), <http://www.adventistarchives.org/womens-status-and-ordination-as-elders-or-bishops-in-the-early-church.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> 5T 723, emphasis added.

and women, to become pastors to the flock of God.”<sup>68</sup> She was not calling on the Church to open the way for women to serve as ministers just as men do, since, a little further on in the same volume, she repeatedly urged “young men” to enter the ministry, with no mention that women were to do so as well.<sup>69</sup>

## NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH OFFICES AND THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

While spiritual gifts include pastoral care, this is not equivalent to the biblical office of elder that today is often referred to as “pastor.” In the New Testament we can distinguish between offices and gifts as follows: (1) Three church offices are mentioned: apostles (Acts 1:21-25), elders/overseers (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), and deacons (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 3:8-13). However, there are many gifts (1 Cor 12:8-11; 28-30; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11). Every believer has received at least one gift (1 Pet 4:10). (2) Those who occupy offices are ordained, appointed, or chosen based on explicit qualifications (Acts 6:3; 14:23; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). Gifts, however, are bestowed according to the will of the Holy Spirit without any stated qualifications (Eph 4:7; Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:11, 18, 28). (3) Though every believer has at least one gift, not every believer has an office (Eph 4:7; 1 Cor 12:7, 11; Rom 12:4). (4) An elder “cannot be a recent convert” (1 Tim 3:6), but gifts are bestowed independently of age or experience. (5) The offices of elder and deacon are limited to “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6),<sup>70</sup> whereas gifts are given to both men and women (Acts 21:9, 10; 1 Cor 11:5).<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, in the ordination debate, some Seventh-day Adventists are confusing the *gift* of pastoring with the *office* of elder/minister, contrary to the biblical pattern.

## ORDINATION AND THE LAYING-ON OF HANDS

The church should choose gifted individuals whose lifestyle fulfills the biblical qualifications for the office of elder or deacon. This should be done carefully, with much prayer and fasting, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the selections made. The ordination service appoints persons to these offices through the laying-on of hands by ordained church leaders—ministers or elders (2 Tim 1:6; 1 Tim 4:14). Although ordination of persons to the biblical leadership office of elder or deacon is accompanied by the laying-on of hands, not every instance of the laying-on of hands is equated with ordination to church office. In a well-known example,

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<sup>68</sup> 6T 322.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 411-416.

<sup>70</sup> Although Scripture does not mention an office of “deaconess,” the fact that Paul refers to “the women” while discussing the office of deacon (1 Tim 3:11) suggests that some women were given a role in the early church not unlike deaconesses today. Rather than being ordained to an official church office, they seem to have been designated to assist the deacons in their work, especially in relation to helping other women (21MR 97).

<sup>71</sup> This list is adapted from Harold W. Hoehner, “Can a Woman be a Pastor-Teacher?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50/4 (Dec. 2007): 763-764. See also Pfandl, “Evaluation of Egalitarian Papers,” 10-11, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/evaluation-of-egalitarian-papers.pdf>.

Ellen G. White wrote, “Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church.”<sup>72</sup>

Some have interpreted this to mean that women should be ordained to the gospel ministry. However, White does not speak about ordination but about setting these women apart for a particular work or ministry. They are part-time workers who are appointed “to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor.” This appointment does not make them church officers because, as White says, “in some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister.” The church leaders are advised to set them apart to this specific work “by prayer and laying on of hands.” The purpose of this ceremony is to recognize and enable “*another means* of strengthening and building up the church.”<sup>73</sup> This ceremony, then, is not ordination to one of the New Testament offices, but the laying-on of hands sets these women apart for a specific ministry that will strengthen the church.<sup>74</sup>

This example makes it clear that the laying-on of hands can be used to appoint church members to specific tasks or ministries, affirming the unique abilities, talents, or gifts God gave them, but should not be equated with ordination to the specific biblical leadership office of an elder or minister.

## ORDINATION AND AUTHORITY

Ordination functioned throughout biblical history as a means to set apart and appoint qualified men to a specific office of leadership. In this role they are responsible to promote God’s mission, protect the believers from false teachings, and preserve order and harmony in the church. What kind of authority is bestowed on them with the ordination to these offices of leadership?

### THE AUTHORITY OF MINISTERS

Today’s ministers who oversee and serve several churches can be compared to Timothy and Titus, whose gospel ministry was not confined to one church. Ministers who function as teachers of word and doctrine have a special place in God’s church on earth. Paul’s instruction to Timothy gives some idea of the authority entrusted to them: “Preach the word!...

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<sup>72</sup> White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” RH July 9, 1895.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., emphasis added. Another example sometimes referred to is the missionary physician, whom Ellen White said is to be “as sacredly set apart for his work as is the minister of the gospel” (Ev 546). In this case, however, she did not explicitly mention the laying-on of hands as part of the service, though she may have had this in mind. In any event, her statement makes it clear that such a service was not ordination to the gospel ministry.

<sup>74</sup> Ellen White wrote of women who, “although the hands of ordination have not been laid” on them, were “accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry” (GW 452).

Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Tim 4:2, 3). Titus was instructed to “set in order the things that are lacking,” and concerning those who subverted the faith, to “rebuke them sharply” (Titus 1:5, 13). He was to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine,” and “exhort the young men to be sober-minded,” among other things (2:1, 6). “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you” (2:15).

## THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS

The authority of elders is vested in the Scriptures and in the ordination of these men by the church. Paul told Titus that the elders must “be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict . . . whose mouths must be stopped” (Titus 1:9, 11). To Timothy Paul wrote, “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17). Because of the important role of the elder, Paul specified, “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses” (5:19). Peter wrote that the elders are the “overseers” of the flock, commanded to “shepherd” or “feed” the flock under the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:2, 4). In expounding on the authority of elders, Ellen G. White noted that they have the responsibility to educate or train members so they will use their talents and spiritual gifts,<sup>75</sup> the authority to make sure all members are proper stewards and support the church financially,<sup>76</sup> the duty to deal with erring members and look after weak and backsliding members to try to help them,<sup>77</sup> and the obligation to uphold the standards of the church and see that members respect its decisions.<sup>78</sup>

In the days of the Adventist pioneers, when, in spite of the example of many other denominations they followed Jesus’ model of leadership in the New Testament, the authority of the elders in the above areas became firmly established and the church grew rapidly.

## ORDINATION AND WORLDWIDE UNITY

An important part of Jesus’ last prayer for His disciples in John 17 concerns their future unity. He prayed that they might be “sanctified by the truth . . . that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us” (vs. 19, 21). Unity is based on union with Jesus and acceptance of His truth, which comes through hearing His words as revealed in Scripture (John 5:39; Rom 10:17). This unity is in itself a powerful witness, having as its purpose “that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). So a

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<sup>75</sup> White, “The Church Must Be Quickened,” RH Jan. 17, 1893.

<sup>76</sup> White, TM 306; SpT“A” Nos. 7, 21.

<sup>77</sup> White, “Elder Daniels and the Fresno Church,” *Pamphlet* 028; see also 5MR 447-448.

<sup>78</sup> White, 5MR 296; SpT“A” Nos. 1b, 24-25.

Bible-based unity is vital for carrying out the mission of the church.

From our early beginnings as Adventists, the importance of wisely selecting ministers has been impressed upon us by inspiration as being essential to our unity.<sup>79</sup> Although every one of us is called to share the “reason for the hope” that is in us (1 Pet 3:15), elders and ministers, who “labor in word and doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17) are especially charged to proclaim and teach the word of God accurately (2 Tim 2:15; Titus 1:9). They are set apart to their work through the rite of ordination, based on the call of God and recognition by the church regionally (Acts 13:3) in harmony with the church globally (Matt 28:18-20).<sup>80</sup> The gospel proclamation in the end time culminates in a worldwide, united people “who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev 14:12). Various proposals to regionalize the practice of ordination can endanger our organizational unity and open the door to the regionalization of church organization. It is not clear where this process of progressive regionalization would end. It is best for the church to stay united for its global witness to be most effective.

## A SUMMARY OF BIBLICAL ORDINATION

Ordination is a setting apart of men to a sacred office of leadership in the church. To qualify for such office, they need to meet the Bible qualifications. Jesus was the one who instituted this service when He established the NT church. In ordaining people today, it is important to remember that it is God who calls them to such office. And He calls only those who meet the qualifications that He has set forth in His word. The leaders of the local church should ordain men to the office of elder only after a careful examination, with prayer and fasting, to see whether the Bible qualifications for that office have been met.

Following the practice in the New Testament, those who participate in laying hands on those being ordained as local elders are to be ordained ministers or elders of the local church. Those who lead out in this service represent the church, not themselves. Before a person is appointed as a minister, ordained ministers also evaluate the candidate’s lifestyle and experience in the light of Bible qualifications. Upon a successful evaluation and clear evidence of the Holy Spirit in his ministry, life, and family, he too will be set apart through ordination, but this time for a wider ministry. In this ordination service, he will be invested with full ecclesiastical authority that includes, besides the work of a local elder, the training and oversight of several churches, baptizing of new believers, and the planting and organizing of new churches.

Beyond the local geographical region, this ordination authorizes the minister to serve the worldwide community of Seventh-day Adventists—an expression of our global unity. This is why ordination should not be implemented regionally. Allowing for regional auton-

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<sup>79</sup> See EW 97-104.

<sup>80</sup> LP 43.

omy may bring distrust and disunity into the world field where an “ordained minister” is allowed in one division but prohibited in another.

Paul indicates that each member receives from the Holy Spirit a gift for the good of the church (1 Cor 12:7) and for its unity (1 Cor 12:12-27). The gift received is not for boasting but “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:12, 13).

From these findings we conclude that women may fulfill many valuable service roles in the church in harmony with the spiritual gifts they have been given. However, the biblical qualifications for overseeing one or more churches as elders or ministers include the stipulation that those charged with caring for God’s church as His household must be “the husband of one wife.” At the present time of revival and reformation, as part of its divinely ordained mission, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to call people out of Babylon and back to the Bible as the Word of God and the rule of faith and practice. All the teachings of the remnant church of Bible prophecy must be established firmly on the Bible’s clear message, in preparation for the latter rain and the imminent return of Christ.

The Church’s strength lies in its obedience to the Bible. We should not be afraid to do what the Bible calls us to do, even if the surrounding culture does not approve. This is what we call others to do in connection with Sabbath observance, diet, and other matters, and we should be willing to do so on this matter as well. As we know, the time is fast approaching when a false day of worship will be enforced and Sabbath observance will become even more difficult. Could God be testing us now on lesser points in order to develop the lessons of faith needed to stand these more difficult tests in the future? God will honor faithfulness to Him and His Word. May He find us willing as individuals and as a church to stand for Him at a time when the world and even many Christians are becoming increasingly hostile to the vital, eternal truths of Scripture. Jesus encourages us, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10). Let us live so that we may hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:21).

## ANSWERS TO SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT ORDINATION<sup>81</sup>

### Does the priesthood of all believers permit women to be ordained as pastors?

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His

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<sup>81</sup> This section draws on Pfandl, “Evaluation of Egalitarian Papers,” <http://www.adventistarchives.org/evaluation-of-egalitarian-papers.pdf>.

marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

Although Peter calls Christians “a royal priesthood,” this does not mean that all adults and children, male and female, are serving as priests or ordained ministers. Just as God called ancient Israel a “kingdom of priests” yet established the priesthood of Aaron and his sons as the spiritual leaders, so in the Christian church the apostles and elders were established as leaders, and all of them were males.

Israel was a royal priesthood because every Israelite was a member of the covenant community and was expected to mediate the gospel to the world and prepare it for the arrival of the Messiah. In other words, the objective of God’s call to every member of Israel was to evangelize the world, and the priests and Levites were called upon to lead and teach the people how to do it. Similarly, all Christians are a royal priesthood, called to announce to the world what Jesus has done and that He is coming again, but it is the role of the elders/overseers to lead and teach the people how to do it. The “royal priesthood” concept upholds the leadership of elders and deacons, and it does not open the door for women to be ordained as elders/ministers.

#### **Was hierarchy abolished by Jesus and the Apostles?**

Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all” (Mark 10:42-44).

To say that the words of Jesus in Mark 10:43 constitutes a thorough rejection, or reversal, of the hierarchical model is misleading. Jesus condemned the selfish, self-seeking, or self-exalting use of authority, but He did not condemn an authority structure per se. When Jesus says, “But it shall not be so among you,” He is especially addressing the Twelve. Each of them desired to be “first” in the kingdom that they all expected the Lord to establish soon (Matt 18:1). They forgot that true greatness requires renouncing greatness as an objective in life. The Twelve were peers to one another in every sense of the word. Jesus warned them not to “lord it over” each other, not to seek the highest place or to exercise power over their peers. Yet the NT church was clearly structured with levels of authority (apostles, elders, deacons). Not everyone could be an apostle, elder, or deacon. Apostleship was a spiritual gift distributed by the Holy Spirit according to His will (1 Cor 12:3-11; 28-31). Elders and deacons were to be carefully chosen according to clear qualifications (1 Tim 2:10–3:13). Those holding an office had authority over others (1 Cor 16:15, 16; Heb 13:17; 1 Tim 5:17). Elders had authority in the church. Paul wrote to Titus, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you” (Titus 2:15).

So Jesus did not forbid the exercise of godly authority. He opposed the selfish exercise



of authority. The NT church was clearly organized with levels of authority. Not everyone was given the same authority, but each was to respect and submit to those of greater authority, and each was accountable for serving responsibly, in humility and love, those who were of lesser authority. Nevertheless, levels of authority point to a hierarchy.

### Does “head” in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 mean “source” rather than headship authority?

Paul begins his counsel by stating the biblical principle that “the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (v. 3).

The claim that headship is often understood as ruling power but that this is not normal in the Greek language is incorrect. Walter Bauer’s *Greek Lexicon* under the figurative use of *kephalē* (head) says that head “in the case of living beings” denotes “superior rank,” and cites examples of texts both within and outside of Scripture.<sup>82</sup> No reference is given for *kephalē* as source; in fact, in the latest edition of the Lexicon, “source” is explicitly rejected as a possible meaning for head.<sup>83</sup> Clearly the intent of the metaphorical use of “head” is to describe someone who holds superior rank as leader, master, ruler, authority figure, or other person of first status among others.

We need to understand “head” in 1 Corinthians 11 as it is used in the parallel expressions found in other Pauline passages, such as Ephesians 5:23: “For the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church.” The husband is certainly not the source of the wife, and it would be awkward to understand in the same context that Christ is the source of the church, since He is depicted not as Founder of the church but as its Savior, and the relationship is clearly defined in the next verse as one of submission to the head: “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5:24). Also, in Colossians 1:18, which declares Christ to be “the head of the body, the church,” the text explicitly states the purpose: so that “in all things He may have the preeminence.” The issue is one of rank, not of source.

The meaning of “head” in 1 Corinthians, then, is headship, not source. The leadership that Scripture points to as headship, and which was modeled by Christ, is a loving, nurturing, self-sacrificing leadership to which women voluntarily submit, as called for in Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 5:2, 3.

### Does mutual submission mean that there is no more male headship?

“Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” (Eph 5:21)—People have used this verse to show that husbands and wives need to submit to each other. The text, they say, calls on all

82 Frederick William Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, third edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 542.

83 *Ibid.*, citing Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Another Look at *Kephalē* in 1 Corinthians 11.3,” *NTS* 35 (1989): 503-11. See also, more recently, Fitzmyer, “*Kephalē* in 1 Corinthians 11:3,” *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 52-59, esp. 57: “Those who have claimed that ‘source’ is the meaning intended by Paul have offered no other argument than their claim that *kephalē* would not have meant ‘ruler, leader, one having authority over’ in Paul’s day. The evidence brought forth above shows that it was certainly possible for a Hellenistic Jewish writer such as Paul to use the word in that sense [“ruler”]. Hence, their argument has collapsed, and the traditional understanding has to be retained.”

of us to be subject to one another and not just women to their husbands. They conclude that there is no longer a male headship in the family and in the church.

When we read further in Ephesians we see three clusters of relationships that show how people need to relate to each other. First it deals with relations between husbands and wives (Eph 5:22-33), next between children and parents (Eph 6:1-4), and finally between slaves and masters (Eph 6:5-9). In this context, how does mutual submission work in each of these relations?

God does call on all of us to submit to one another, but doesn't ask us to submit to one another in the same ways. Nowhere in the Bible are husbands called on to obey their wives. Instead, husbands are asked to sacrifice themselves for their wives. The husband is also asked to serve as "the head of the wife," to whom the wife is asked to submit. Husbandship is headship, not dictatorship. As head, the husband is expected to be the family leader; but he is to lead in the way that Christ leads as "head of the church"—compassionately, graciously, justly, openly, honestly, responsibly, manfully. The wife is asked to submit herself to her husband "in everything"—not meanly or grudgingly, but gladly, wisely, nobly, "as to the Lord."

In Paul's next example children are required to obey their parents; parents are not asked to obey their children. The Bible calls for children to obey their parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Yet fathers are not to provoke their children. Slaves are called to obey their masters in everything, not as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart—as serving the Lord and not men. Masters are not expected to take orders from their slaves, yet masters are to treat their slaves justly and fairly, knowing that "your own Master also is in heaven."

The Bible requires not only wives but all of us to be in submission to one another. It asks us to do this in the only way it can possibly be done—with our eyes on Jesus. But it calls on us to be submissive in different ways, suitable to our different roles. The Bible asks husbands to shoulder the primary responsibility for family leadership, in imitation of the Lord. And it asks wives to be subject to their husbands, "as to the Lord."<sup>84</sup>

### **Can women be ordained because male leadership is an ideal, not an absolute?**

It is true that Jesus makes a distinction between the weights of various divine instructions. He told the Pharisees that despite being scrupulous about tithing they had neglected "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (Matt 23:23). But we must remember that He followed this by saying, "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." Just because a biblical command is not as foundational as others does not give us authority to alter it as if it were flexible, depending on the situation. The Bible has many examples of those of those who assumed that a command of God was flexible when it wasn't.

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84 Adapted from C. Mervyn Maxwell, "Mutual Submission: What is it?" *Adventists Affirm*, Fall 1987, 23-27.

Adam and Eve were punished for eating a piece of fruit—an act that certainly isn't wrong in most circumstances. Cain's offering was rejected due to a modification of what God asked him to use in worship, and Uzzah was punished merely for steadying the ark—both transgressions of commands not related to the moral law. Nadab and Abihu were punished when they offered a different fire from the one the Lord commanded to be used in the sanctuary—again only a command not found in God's moral law. Then there were Miriam and Korah—two people who challenged the leadership structure of God's people. Miriam challenged Moses' place of leadership and was punished by the Lord. Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and 250 leaders of Israel came to Moses asking for a higher place in the organizational ranks of the Levites. Nearly the entire congregation was on Korah's side, believing that he and his company should be allowed to serve as priests. What followed was a refusal to make an adaptation to the “functional, ecclesiastical norm” of the Aaronic priesthood, even though the people strongly believed it should be that way.

Are we really safe in this new interpretive method of biblical instruction in which some commands are considered absolute and others flexible? How are we to know which biblical commands are open to adaptation? What about tithing? The ordinances? Lifestyle teachings? Are they flexible, too? Should we give liberty to individual churches to baptize by sprinkling, use leavened bread in communion, or drink alcohol in moderation? Classifying biblical instruction in two different categories is a dangerous slippery slope.

### **If Adventists already adapt biblical instruction, should we not allow women to be ordained?**

Because Paul forbids women to teach and we as a church have women teachers, some see this as evidence that the Adventist Church already adapts non-essential divine commands. But the Bible does not prohibit women from all teaching. On the contrary, it mentions women involved in both teaching and prophesying, and Ellen G. White concurs by encouraging women to “address the crowd whenever you can” (Ev 473). Paul, therefore, could not have been giving an outright prohibition of teaching. In saying, “I do not permit a woman to teach *or to have authority over a man*” (1 Tim 2:12), he linked the prohibited teaching *with authority over men*. A few verses later, he directs that the official church office of elder must be held by a man who is “able to teach.” So the prohibition given to women was that they could not assume the teaching authority that belongs to the church elder. We needn't think that we have been “adapting” Paul's instruction when women are encouraged to teach or preach in various settings; they may do so as long as they are not exercising the authority that belongs to the ordained elder or minister.

**Does 1 Timothy 2:12-14 apply only to a local situation, not universally?**

Contrary to the claim that in these verses Paul addresses only a specific issue in Ephesus where women are influenced by false gnostic teachings, what Paul says in 1 Timothy 2 and 3 is clearly meant for the universal church, not just for the church in Ephesus. In chapter two he discusses the universality of Christian worship (2:1-15):

- a. Prayers for those in authority (2:1-3) should be made in all churches, not just in Ephesus.
- b. God wants all human beings saved (2:4-7), hence all churches should work for the salvation of souls, not just the church in Ephesus.
- c. The worship procedures (2:8-15) are for all churches, not just for Ephesus.

In chapter three, Paul discusses the prerequisites for Christian leaders in all churches, not just in Ephesus (3:1-13):

- a. The character of bishops (3:1-17) refers to bishops in all churches, not just in Ephesus.
- b. The character of deacons (3:8-13) refers to deacons in all churches, not just in Ephesus.

Thus to claim that 2:12-14 refers only to the local church is to ignore the context, which is clearly universal. The immediate context of verses 12-14 begins in verse 8 with the words, “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,” indicating that Paul is speaking to the universal church and not just to the local church in Ephesus. In verse 9, where Paul begins his admonition to women with the words, “in like manner also” (i.e., speaking to women everywhere), he addresses the issue of adornment and good works. The whole of chapter two is addressed to the universal church.

In the text, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man” (v. 12), the Greek word *didaskō* (teach) refers to sound instruction. It does not refer to false teaching, for which Paul uses the word *heterodidaskaleō* (teach something different, i.e., false doctrine) in 1 Timothy 1:3 and 6:3. Does Paul mean that women can never speak in church? Certainly not; he has women praying and prophesying (preaching?) in church (1 Cor 11:5). What is prohibited to women is the authoritative teaching that is part of the ecclesiastical office of minister/elder, which involves the exercise of spiritual authority. In other words, teaching in combination with having “authority over” refers to the authoritative teaching of the ordained minister/elder.

The fact that Paul addresses certain false teachings in his letter to Timothy does not mean that everything he says has meaning only for the local situation in Ephesus. For example, what he says in chapter 3 about elders and deacons is repeated in Titus 1, indicating

that his counsel is meant for all churches, not just for the Ephesians. Similarly, what Paul says about the apparel of women in 1 Timothy 2:9, 10 is also emphasized in 1 Peter 3, again showing its universal meaning, not just for the church in Ephesus.

**Does the Creation-Fall-Re-Creation motif establish full gender equality at the first advent that allows the ordination of women?**

The New Testament continues to teach the leadership of men in the home and church. This is especially clear from the writings of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Timothy 2 and 3, and Titus 1, in which to the end of his life he advocated male leadership in the Christian church. The above discussions on these passages show that the distinctions in function between male and female continue after Christ's First Advent without any provision for women to function as elders or ministers. Only an incorrect interpretation of the text would eliminate male leadership. The re-creation of humans to the pre-Fall condition, whatever that may entail, takes place at the Second Advent, not at the First Advent.

**Does religious liberty demand that we allow for women to be ordained?**

This understanding of the concept of "religious liberty" is not supported by the Bible. The church's loyalty must be to God and His Word, not to the varying individual convictions of its members. The Bible gives instructive examples of how church leadership is to relate to the individual convictions of its members. Though the whole congregation cried out for a change in leadership, Aaron's effort to honor their convictions with a golden calf was met with punishment. Though the people pleaded with Saul to accept an offering from the flock of the Amalekites, when he accepted the plan, God rejected him as king. Though the whole congregation was strongly convicted of the need for a change in organizational structure, Korah and those with him were denied their convictions. And though many were convicted that circumcision must be required of the Gentiles, the Jerusalem Council rejected their convictions in every case, stating that circumcision was *never* to be required of the Gentiles.

Using "freedom of conscience" to shape the Church's beliefs and practices, as seen in other churches, can pave the way for the promotion of homosexuality, academic freedom to teach evolution in Adventist schools, etc. These things, it will be rightly claimed, are for many just as much a matter of conscience as is the ordination of women. Even if it were not church members but civil authorities that required ordination as a matter of equality, it would not pay for the church to acquiesce. We must not be afraid to take a stand for Bible truth, even now.

While we observe the sincerity of many who try to keep the Church together while it is currently divided on the issue of women's ordination, we see no safety in opening the doors of ordination to women in direct contradiction to clear biblical commands. "God has placed

in His word no command which men may obey or disobey at will and not suffer the consequences.”<sup>85</sup>

Rather than simply allowing for everyone to do as they wish in regard to the ordination of women as ministers, the church should focus on opening a broader range of ministries to women. It should train godly women in ministry areas in which they can do a greater work than that of men. “The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and this will give them a power that will exceed that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their work is needed.”<sup>86</sup> The Church should also be giving far greater prominence to promoting the work of the Christian mother. And for those who are employed in ministry, we should compensate women in harmony with the importance of their work. We can do these worthwhile things now, but to make allowance for acting contrary to God’s Word can only result in loss to the church and to the cause of truth. May God help us to remain faithful to His Word while reaffirming and further developing the roles of women in ministry.

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85 PP 360

86 ChS 27



# POSITION SUMMARY #2

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## POSITION SUMMARY #2

### SUMMARY STATEMENT

Order in God's cosmic kingdom is based on the love that defines His very nature and expresses itself in service to God and others. In His love, He gave capacities and abilities to His intelligent creatures and, on the basis of their development and their loving service, specific responsibilities were assigned to them. Since God granted them freedom, they were not arbitrarily restricted in their development by being assigned a particular role to be exercised throughout eternity without the possibility of performing other roles. God did not arbitrarily limit them in their expression of loving service to others.

Adam and Eve were members of the cosmic kingdom of God. They were created in the image of God as equal. No one was placed under the authority of the other on the basis of gender or order of creation. Eve was not created to be by nature under Adam. It was only after the Fall that in order to preserve order at home she was under subjection to her husband. But this was restricted to the husband-wife relationship.

In Israel, leadership was primarily under the leadership of men. But this common practice should not blind us to the fact that God was interested in using women as leaders of His people. The common practice never became a law in Israel or a direct divine command. God wanted His people to understand that men and women should work together as equal in service to Him and to His people. He provided for His people male and female prophets (the highest and most "important" spiritual leaders in Israel) and a female judge, who was also a prophet, to hold the most important leadership role in Israel during the period of the judges. From the divine perspective, leadership among His people is not based on gender differentiations.

In the New Testament, the common pattern of male leadership is continued but the leadership of women becomes highly visible. Women could now occupy positions of leadership equal to those of men. They too received the gift of the Spirit that equipped them, as well as men, to build up the church. Since the gifts are gender inclusive, women who had the necessary gifts to function as deacons were appointed and ordained as such. This immediately reveals that although the qualifications for the offices of deacon and elder are gender specific they are not gender exclusive. Both male and female members of the church could function as elders and deacons as long as they had the appropriate gifts and the church acknowledged the divine calling. The fact that the New Testament does not explicitly mention female elders does not mean that they did not function as such. The qualification of elders and deacons are

very similar and we know that there were females deacons in the New Testament. There is enough biblical support for the church to proceed to ordain women to the ministry.

Ellen G. White, like the Bible, does not explicitly prohibit or affirm the ordination of women to the ministry. However, she has opened the door for women who are qualified to occupy in the church any position of leadership. She encouraged young women to study and develop their God-given gifts in order to be ready to serve the church in such positions.

The biblical evidence is clear: there is nothing spiritually, ethically, or morally wrong with ordaining women to the gospel ministry.

## INTRODUCTION

Aware of our high calling as Seventh-day Adventists, we eagerly anticipate the soon coming of our Lord Jesus. We passionately believe that “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”<sup>1</sup> This calls for a full commitment to the totality of the Scripture and to its unquestionable authority as the only source of faith and practice. Such convictions are indispensable to us as we examine the history of salvation as revealed to us in the Scripture in our search for God’s will on the question of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

As we address this subject, a proper understanding of God’s character, the great controversy between good and evil, and the plan of salvation will provide the interpretive framework. Consequently, in our examination of the biblical evidence for the ordination of women, we need to ask pertinent questions about God: *What is God’s view of women and how has He communicated it to us? What picture of God will come out of an interpretation in favor of the ordination of women? What picture of God will be painted by a denial of the possibility of women’s ordination?* We begin our study in sincerity of heart, with a prayer, and with willingness to listen to what the Spirit has to say to the church.

## BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

The need to begin our study with a brief discussion of hermeneutics arises out of the fact that the Bible does not explicitly command or forbid the ordination of women to ministry. Adventists who love the Lord and take the Scriptures seriously as the inspired Word of God have come to different conclusions using the same Bible on the same subject. Hence, these differences require reflection on how we interpret the Word of God (hermeneutics).

In 1986, at the General Conference Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Seventh-day Adventist leadership adopted a document on methods of biblical hermeneutics:

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1 GC 596

“Methods of Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods”<sup>2</sup> (MBS). Hermeneutics deals not only with understanding the Bible but also with the process of thinking about and evaluating biblical interpretation. Seventh-day Adventists agree that we should follow sound hermeneutical principles. Exegesis applies these principles to particular texts, and the exposition of these texts communicates God’s message from the text through preaching or teaching.

### **USE OF PROPER METHOD**

Putting different texts together and understanding their theological significance requires great awareness of the entire biblical teaching. The task must be done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit if we hope to understand the truth as the Spirit intended. In accordance with the Rio document, we accept the historical-grammatical method of interpreting the Bible as a proper tool for understanding it. Firmly accepting the Bible as the Word of God and rejecting methodologies that undermine its supernatural origin and message, we seek to follow and obey what it teaches. We desire to study it with a humble heart and teachable spirit, recognizing our human limitations in understanding all it has to say to us.

### **STUDY OF LANGUAGE, GRAMMAR, AND CONTEXT**

As the Rio document states, we also wish to follow faithful methods of Bible study to arrive at the true meaning of the text of the Bible. This requires the study of backgrounds: “In connection with the study of the biblical text, [we] explore the historical and cultural factors. Archaeology, anthropology, and history may contribute to understanding the meaning of the text.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, we must consider, as best we can, the original languages of the Bible books with help from grammar and syntax, the context of the passages, the literary genre of the books, and guidance from Ellen G. White where available. The context of the passage is its immediate context within the book and the whole Bible. In some cases the meaning of a passage is plain to the reader, but in many others its understanding requires careful and prayerful analysis. This would require the study of terminology, grammatical constructions, literary structure, its contextual setting, etc.

### **THEOLOGICAL FOCUS**

The Rio document alludes to such a theological approach to hermeneutics when it says,

The Scriptures were written for the practical purpose of revealing the will of God to the human family. However, in order for one not to misconstrue certain kinds of

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<sup>2</sup> This document was published in the *Adventist Review*, January 22, 1987, and is available online at <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study>. We will use its publication in George E. Reid, ed., *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 329-337.

<sup>3</sup> MBS, 333.

statements, it is important to recognize that they were addressed to peoples of Eastern cultures and expressed in their thought patterns.... The Scriptures record experiences and statements of persons whom God accepted but were not in harmony with the spiritual principles of the Bible as a whole—for example, incidents relating to the use of alcohol, to polygamy, divorce, and slavery. Although condemnation of such deeply ingrained social customs is not explicit, God did not necessarily endorse or approve all that He permitted and bore with in the lives of the patriarchs and [kings] in Israel... The spirit of the Scriptures is one of restoration. God works patiently to elevate fallen humanity from the depths of sin to the divine ideal.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, a theological approach to biblical, spiritual, and theological principles that highlights the unfolding of God's revelation is part of a faithful Adventist biblical hermeneutic. It is the narrative of salvation history: from God's creation ideal, through the fall of humankind, to a restoration through Christ to God's original ideal in the new earth. Adventists employ a distinctive approach in their Creation-Fall-Re-Creation theological method. Creation is a fundamental and overarching theological principle of Adventist teaching and serves as the basis for the theological formulations of our teachings. This is the case for our understanding of the cosmic conflict and for such teachings as abstinence from alcohol, vegetarianism, and the rejection of polygamy and slavery. This Adventist hermeneutic is reflected also in our name: we are Seventh-day (creation) Adventists (re-creation). The entire story of redemption is included. With this distinctive approach based in creation and re-creation, we are able to see the big picture of God's revelation, the unity of the Scriptures, and the ultimate intention of the biblical material as a whole (a canonical approach) in order to correctly discern the meaning of God's message. In this task we seek to uncover, guided by the Spirit, the loving character of our God as manifested in His Son and on the record of His self-revelation in the Scriptures.

### **USE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES**

Thus, sound hermeneutical principles provide a balanced and biblically informed understanding of the biblical text. If we tried to explain biblical truth only and simply by quoting Bible texts instead of finding and applying biblical principles provided by the larger context of the Bible itself, Adventists would not be able to support our positions against smoking or the use of drugs, or to promote vegetarianism.

A hermeneutic that takes seriously the biblical principles and that traces its roots back to creation is also consistent with our Adventist position against a homosexual lifestyle, because the biblical account of creation provides the fundamental reasoning for a total opposition to

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 335-336.

this lifestyle. Biblical teaching against homosexuality is rooted in the creation legislation, universal, is not temporal, never changed, and is valid in all times (see Gen 1:26-28; 2:22-24; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26, 27). It, too, is consistent with a biblical trajectory built on the pattern from creation through the fall to the re-creation.

### **TEXT, THEOLOGY, AND ORDINATION**

As suggested above, even though there is no explicit and direct biblical statement commanding to ordain women to ministry, neither is there any biblical hindrance to doing so. On the contrary, a careful textual and biblical-theological analysis points in the direction of fully including and affirming women in all ministry positions. This approach is used by all the parties involved in the discussion of the ordination of women to the ministry. In the absence of an explicit command we have to look for the biblical teaching on the relationship between man and woman. It is only by attentively listening to what the Bible teaches as well as to its theological emphasis that we can reach a sound conclusion.

### **ORDER IN GOD’S COSMIC KINGDOM**

The biblical emphasis on the ordained ministry is primarily about church order and as such it should reflect the principles of order that rule the cosmic kingdom of God. The mystery of the unity of the Godhead is for us an impenetrable mystery. We know that God is love and that the inter-Trinitarian relationships are a constant expression and outflow of that love. Beyond that we should humbly bow ourselves before Him in silence. Order as such characterizes God’s creation and is indispensable for it to function properly. Within His cosmic kingdom, order is simply the creation’s reflection of the love of God.

“The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character . . . To all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.”<sup>5</sup>

According to this quote, love is the foundation of the divine government. The character of God is the law that rules the universe. Second, the well-being of intelligent creatures is dependent on their subjection to God. God Himself is the center of order. Third, intelligent creatures express their love in service to God. Nothing is arbitrarily imposed on them but on the contrary, having been created free, the Creator only expects from them voluntary service.<sup>6</sup>

Through this law of service, God holds the universe together. It is this law of service out of love that rules among the angels. Ellen G. White suggests that positions of leadership among the angels were assigned to them on the basis of service.<sup>7</sup>

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5 PP 34.

6 See Ed 103.

7 SpTED 57.

We know that angels are assigned new responsibilities, which means that they were not created to fill a particular one without the possibility of new opportunities for service.<sup>8</sup> Since positions were assigned by God on the basis of service, the submission of angels to new angelic leaders was voluntary in the sense that they could understand why the Creator assigned to them their new roles of service. The submission to angelic leaders was in fact a submission to God. As time passed the functions would change as a result of God bestowing new honors to other angels. No one was limited to a particular role within the Kingdom of God. There was a harmonious order within which each intelligent creature could freely develop the potential God gave them without any predetermined and arbitrary restriction (for instance, who was created first; for sure not on the basis of gender).

## GOD, WOMEN, AND MEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Using our hermeneutical approach we will now proceed to study the role of women in the Bible beginning with the Old Testament. This is indispensable due to the fact that we do not have an explicit biblical command to ordain or not ordain women to the ministry.

### ADAM AND EVE BEFORE THE FALL

We go back to origins because there we find for the first time the divine understanding of the relationship between man and woman and what God expected from them. A reading of the text clearly indicates that they were created equal and that one was not placed under the authority of the other.

**CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.** “God created man [*ha’adam*, ‘humankind’] in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27)<sup>9</sup>. Both man and woman are made in the divine image, both are blessed, both share alike in the responsibility of procreation, both are to subdue the earth, both are to rule over the animal kingdom (Gen 1:26-28). Their nature is the same and under God they are to perform the same functions. Although the terms “male” and “female” do connote sexual (biological) and other differences, both man and woman are commanded equally and without any distinction to have dominion, not of one over the other, but both together over the rest of God’s creation. These verses explicitly and strongly indicate the absence of any hierarchy of men over women.

**THE PRIORITY OF ADAM.** That man is created first, before the woman, may suggest to some that Adam was to have authority over Eve, but contextually this is not the case (e.g. the animals were created before Adam). Rather, the entire account of Genesis 2 is written to

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, Gabriel was not a covering cherub, but was assigned that position after the fall of Lucifer. Ellen White describes Gabriel as “the angel who stands next in honor to the Son of God” (DA 99; see also 234). This was Lucifer’s position before his rebellion (cf. 4BC 1162; Conf 9; GC 495; 4BC 1143).

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

show that the creation of woman at the end of the narrative corresponds in importance to the creation of man at the beginning. Woman is created as the climax of the creation story. The movement in the text is from incompleteness to completeness. Adam's priority means that the creation of humans was not yet completed. We can clearly state that the Adam of Genesis 2 is the male of the Adam of Genesis 1 that was created in the image of God as male and female. The *'ādam* of Genesis 2 is the *hā'ādam* of Genesis 1 in the process of being created. This is contextually what the biblical writer is intending to communicate to us.

**ADAM AND THE LAW.** A reading of Genesis 2:16, 17 gives the impression that Adam received a specific command from God and that he was expected to inform Eve about it (i.e. he was her teacher). First, with respect to who was the teacher in the Garden of Eden, we only know that God and the angels were their instructors.<sup>10</sup> Second, it is logical to assume that as soon as Adam was created God needed to warn him against transgression.<sup>11</sup> Third, we know that God also told Eve that she should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>12</sup> God also instructed both of them in how to work and take care of the garden.<sup>13</sup> God gave specific instructions to both of them and made them accountable to Him. He treated them as equals.

**CREATED FROM ADAM'S RIB AND FOR HIM.** The derivation of Eve from Adam points to their equality. Using the raw material of the rib, God chose to aesthetically create a woman while Adam was asleep. Eve was created from Adam's side (not from his head or foot), to show that she was "to stand by his side as an equal"<sup>14</sup> (Gen 2:21, 22). Genesis 2 speaks directly to the question of the relative roles or functional relationship between the first man and woman: Eve was to be Adam's helper (*'ezer kenegdo*, Gen 2:18). The term *'ezer*, often translated "helper," in the original does not denote a subordinate helper or assistant, as the English term "helper" often implies. Used mostly of God (as in Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26; Ps 33:20; 70:4; 115:9-11), this relational term in Scripture simply points to a beneficial relationship. The term *kenegdo* literally means "like his counterpart," and thus the entire phrase *'ezer kenegdo* in Genesis 2 signifies no less than a benefactor who is his counterpart—an equal "partner" (Gen 2:18, 22, NEB) both in nature and function. Ellen G. White writes: "When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that *in all things she should be his equal*. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ed 20; PP 50.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. YI, February 27, 1902 par. 1.

<sup>12</sup> ST, October 8, 1894, pars. 2, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., par. 1.

<sup>14</sup> PP 47.

<sup>15</sup> 3T 484, emphasis added. Cf. PP 58: "In the creation God had made her the equal of Adam." That Ellen White implies functional (role) equality without hierarchy as well as ontological equality is clear from the next sentence, in which subjection/submission of wife to husband is introduced only after the Fall: "Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other." Such contrast makes clear that such role hierarchy involving headship/submission was not present before the Fall.



The creation of Adam and Eve was a unique act in which separation and reunification played an important role. Adam was created first and consequently his first social relationship was with the Creator, not with Eve. Wanting to give Eve the same privilege, God put Adam to sleep. Eve's first relationship was not with Adam but with God and then He brought her to Adam to initiate a wonderful relationship in union with each other and with the Creator. Separation is in their case followed by reunification. Eve is created *from* the rib of Adam and brought back *to* him. This is different from the way God created other phenomena. In such cases there was no reunification because something radically different was created (Gen 1:4, 7, 9; 2:7). The terminology "from" and "to" is used (1 Cor 11:8, 9) to indicate the equality of Adam and Eve as well as gender differentiation. She was to be a blessing to him as his equal.

**THE NAMING OF THE WOMAN.** When Adam receives the woman from the Creator he exclaims: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman [*iššab*], because she was taken out of Man [*iš*]" (2:23). We should pay careful attention to the language used here. Adam is not celebrating that Eve is now under his authority but that he has now a companion that corresponds to his own nature ("bone of my bones"). In fact, the act of naming in the Old Testament normally signifies the ability of discernment, i.e. he discerns her true identity (cf. Gen 16:13). Moreover, in Genesis 2:23 two "divine passives" are used. The first one, she "was taken from," indicates that it was God who performed the action. The second one, "she shall be called," indicates that after creating her God was the one who called her "Woman" ("This one is called [by the Lord] Woman").

**MARRIAGE.** The equality of Adam and Eve is expressed in the marriage formula: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh [*basar ekhad*]" (2:24). The relationship of Adam and Eve is upheld as the pattern for all future human marital relationships. It was expected in a patriarchal society that the woman would "cling/be joined" to her husband, and hence the force of this statement is that both man and woman are to "cling" to each other. Reciprocal "clinging" indicates the absence of the submission of one under the authority of the other. Likewise, in the context of the marriage covenant, the husband and wife become "one flesh" (*basar ekhad*). This expression indicates a oneness and intimacy in the total relationship of the whole person of the husband to the whole person of the wife, a harmony and union with each other in all things.

In short, Genesis 2, like Genesis 1, does not provide any evidence that could be used to support a pre-Fall subjection of the woman to the husband. They are rather presented as fully equal, with no hint of a different nature or functional hierarchy.

## MEN AND WOMEN AFTER THE FALL

**ADAM AND EVE.** The submission of the wife to the husband occurred after the Fall of Adam and Eve. “He [your husband] will rule [*mashal*] over you” (Gen 3:16). The Hebrew verb translated “will rule over you” (*mashal*) is not the same used for the human couple’s “rule/having dominion” (*radah*) over the animals (Gen 1:28), but points toward a leadership role that implies comforting, protecting, care and love. It is crucial to recognize that the loving leadership of Adam and submission of Eve comes *after the Fall*, introduced by God as a remedial measure to preserve unity and harmony in the marriage. This relationship is not a creation ordinance, but comes as the result of sin: “Sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by *submission on the part of the one or the other*.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, the loving leadership (*mashal*) role in Genesis 3:16 is limited to the *husband-wife relationship*, and therefore does not involve a general subordination of women to men or universal headship of men over women. In short, there are no impediments in Genesis 3 preventing woman from full and equal participation with man in any ministry to which God may call her and for which He may enable her.

**WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN ISRAEL.** Since the biblical text leaves open the possibility for woman to exercise leadership roles, there are numerous examples of women exercising the gift of leadership and ministry in the Old Testament. Among others we find Miriam, a noted prophet, leader of Israel alongside her brothers (Mic 6:4), and Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14-20; 2 Chr 34:22-28). It is Deborah, however, who deserves special consideration. In the book of Judges she is depicted as a military leader with the same authority as male generals, and a judge to whom other male Israelites turned for legal counsel and to settle court cases. It would be a mistake to consider Deborah as only a prophet who was temporarily given juridical powers. What is often overlooked is that very few prophets in the Old Testament are called judges and prophets. These two roles are ascribed to Moses (Exod 18:16) and Samuel (1 Sam 7:6, 15-17). This would suggest that she was the top leader of Israel at that time as prophet and judge. There is no question that the judges were leaders in pre-monarchical Israel (Judg 2:11-19) and that they also had judicial functions. At the moment of crisis, she was God’s instrument to deliver His people.<sup>17</sup> This was the work of the judges during the time of the judges (2:16). Guided by the Lord, she had authority over men as prophet and judge. Her leadership role is so impressive that when Barak hesitates and wants her to be on the battlefield with him, she points out that this would be against the traditional role of women and culturally damaging to Barak; he will experience shame. But he does not care because he wants the best

<sup>16</sup> PP 58 (emphasis added).

<sup>17</sup> Ellen White writes: “There was dwelling in Israel, a woman illustrious for her piety, and through her the Lord chose to deliver his people” (ST, June 16, 1881 par. 4).

leader of Israel to accompany him. By choosing Deborah as a leader in Israel, with authority over His people, God demonstrated that there is nothing morally or spiritually wrong with having a woman in top leadership roles among God's people.

In conclusion, the God of the Old Testament does not arbitrarily discriminate against humans on the basis of gender. Whenever He wanted to use a woman as a leader in Israel He would do it. This shows that the common pattern or practice of male leadership—followed everywhere in the ancient Near East and not only in Israel—was not for God the exclusive one. If we were to talk about divine ideals, this would be a clear one. The ideal was not for men to occupy the most significant leadership positions but for both men and women as equals to lead God's people. This ideal goes back to what God instituted in the Garden of Eden.

## GOD, WOMEN, AND MEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Our study of the New Testament will show that what we found in the Old Testament is equally valid for the New Testament. The Bible reveals a God who consistently loves, cares, and uses human beings, male and female, in any position of responsibility among His people. The common pattern of male leadership found in the New Testament, also present in the Old Testament, does not exclusively represent God's will for His people. We will examine the relationship of husband and wife and some of the most important passages on our topic in the New Testament, the nature of ministry, the gifts of the Spirit, and the qualifications for church leadership.

### HUSBANDS AND WIVES: HEADSHIP

The New Testament gives important instructions regarding the relationship between husbands and wives. In the epistles we find seven uses of the Greek word meaning “to submit” (*hypotassō*; 1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:21, 24; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5) in the context of man/woman (*anēr/gynē*) relationships. There is some ambiguity in the Greek language regarding *anēr/gynē* because the same words can mean either “man/woman” or “husband/wife.” However, a close look at each of these passages reveals that the context is consistently one of husband and wife relationships and not of men and women in general.

**EPHESIANS 5:21–33.** This is the foundational NT passage dealing with husband-wife relations, and the only one on this issue that contains both words “head” (*kephalē*) and “submit” (*hypotassō*). This is not about the unconditional obedience of the wife to the husband and much less about coerced submission. The reference to the husband being the “head” of the wife (v. 23) must be understood in relation to the nature of Christ's headship described in the same verse. In Paul's day, the Greek word for head (*kephalē*) could be used in a number of symbolic ways. Here it is not used of Christ's authority over the church but Christ as source

of life and nourishment for the rest of the body (cf. Eph 4:15, 16; Col 2:19). Husbands are to emulate the love of Christ as the “Savior” of the church. The husband is to love, nourish, and cherish her, just as Christ “gave Himself” for the church (vs. 25, 28). In marriage, love is the ultimate form of submission.

As was the case in Genesis, Ephesians 5 also makes clear that Paul’s counsel for husbands and wives cannot be extended to the relationship of men and women in general. Even though some may argue that the church is a family and thus the male headship in the family should be followed in the church, the apostle himself shows how the marriage relationship applies to the church. *Husband headship* in the home is not equated with *male headship* in the church. Rather, the only Husband/Head of the church is Christ, and all the church—including males—are His “bride,” equally submissive to Him (Eph 5:21-23).

**1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16.** Aside from Ephesians 5:23, the only other NT passage utilizing *kephalē* “head” in the context of man/woman relationships is 1 Corinthians 11:3. This passage is thematically and terminologically related to Ephesians 5:21-33, and focuses on wives submitting to the headship of their own husbands, and not the headship of men over women in general. While many arguments against the ordination of women have been built on Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians 11, a *plain reading* of this passage reveals that Paul is not speaking here about church leadership and authority, nor about ordination. Rather, the purpose of this passage is to instruct the Corinthians regarding the wearing or not wearing of head coverings when leading out in church gatherings, and giving his rationale for this instruction.

**Main Topic of the Passage.** In reality, Paul’s counsel in this passage stands in harmony with other passages of his letters where we see women exercising leadership in gospel ministry. In 1 Corinthians 11:4, 5, Paul identifies the main topic of the passage, and both men and women are pictured as participating and leading in worship by praying and prophesying (that is, counseling and instructing the gathered believers in the name of God; cf. 1 Cor 14:1-5, 29-33). Such leadership is here described in exactly the same terms for male and female with no suggestion of disapproval or of differentiation between the two, either in the type or level of leadership in which they engaged.

**Cultural Practice.** For many generations, Adventists have not understood this instruction to mean that women should wear head coverings while men should not during worship service. This has been considered to be a culturally specific instruction within a particular context. Such recognition by the church is not the result of setting aside the counsel of Scripture, but is done for the opposite reason—to be fully attentive and obedient to the fundamental cultural concerns revealed in the passage.

Paul explicitly states in verses 4-6 that his concern with relation to head coverings is the

question of bringing dishonor rather than honor upon one's head. Indeed, the concern about honor is further developed in verses 7-9, where Paul speaks of the woman as the glory of the man. It is to such perceptions that he returns in the concluding verses, appealing to what was generally considered "proper" for a woman, "natural" for a man, and generally practiced by the churches (vs. 13-16). The instructions of Paul that it is "shameful" for a woman to have her hair shaven (v. 6) must be understood against the high value given to honor in the contemporary Greco-Roman society. In this society a woman with head uncovered or shaven was in danger of being considered as an adulterer or a prostitute, and a woman who spoke in public in a casual setting to males who were not her husband was considered as seeking to seduce them.

**Use of the Term "Head"** (*kephalē*). Paul opens his argument regarding head coverings in verse 3 using a word picture, a metaphor, to speak to this honor/shame culture about what is "proper" and "shameful" for men and women to do in a public church setting. He uses the metaphor of the "head" to demonstrate that what an individual believer does with their physical head impacts also their metaphorical head. Thus a man's choice regarding the wearing of a head covering is not simply about his own freedom to choose, but impacts the honor with which others will view Christ, his head. Similarly, a woman's free choice regarding her head covering affects not only herself but also her husband/"head," and ultimately God, the absolute "head."

The word for head (*kephalē*) was used by Jews and Gentiles to convey a variety of ideas related to the place of the physical head in relation to the body, including that of prominence, of *representation* of the whole, of being the *first* or *source*. In this passage, Paul is focusing on the metaphorical idea of Adam as being the *first* created, and indeed the source from which the woman was created (vs. 8, 9). This usage makes perfect sense with verse 3, and indeed the best sense chronologically. It would then be saying that Christ was *first*, or *source*, in relation to man (encompassing all of humankind, as in Rom 4:8; Eph 4:13); that the man, Adam, was *first*, or *source*, in relation to his wife, Eve; and that God was first, or source, in relation to Christ (the *Messiah*) in sending Him to redeem humankind.

**Connection with Genesis.** In verses 7-9, Paul builds on the "head" metaphor by adding several reasons from Genesis 1-3 that women should be concerned about not dishonoring their husbands. Although, like the man, the woman was created in God's image, Paul focuses here on the fact that she has the additional privilege of being created to fulfill man's need and to be his glory. Paul goes to Genesis 2 and provides an excellent reading of it. He notices that in Genesis the woman is created from man—this is her immediate origin—and not man from woman. These are the facts. According to Paul, the woman came to enrich the man and in that sense she added honor/glory to him. She was created for the benefit of man, not man for her benefit, because he was created before she was created. For Paul and Genesis this is

the very foundation for gender differentiation. This argument is used by Paul to indicate that when a woman participates in worship she should cover her hair in order to give glory to God, not to man. When doing this she also avoids self-glorification because her hair is her glory (v. 15).

In first-century culture, it was traditionally understood that the woman's "glory," and especially her hair, should be covered in public in order to avoid bringing shame by immodestly displaying it to those outside her family. In such circumstances this would have been especially important in a worship service, to avoid distraction from giving glory and worship to God alone. Note that, following the summary of his instruction in verse 10, Paul balances his argumentation in verses 11-12 by making it clear that, ever since creation, it has been the woman whom God has placed first, as source, for it is she who has given birth to every man since Adam.

In summary, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 makes a clear distinction between male and female in the manner of dress, in harmony with Deuteronomy 22:5, and calls on wives to act in ways that do not dishonor their husbands. This passage is not about a prohibition of women serving in leadership roles, nor is it about a universal headship of men over women. Paul does not read back into Genesis 1-3 a principle never before noticed or expressed. He uses the passage to demonstrate that from the beginning the wife enriched the life of and brought honor to the husband and that this should continue to be the case during worship in the context of a fallen world. Paul is using the reference to creation as an explanation for his argument, not as the cause for a universal standard of relationship between men and women. There is nothing in the context that would support the idea that in church the elder is the head of the woman.

**1 TIMOTHY 2:9-14.** This is one of the most disputed passages in the women's ordination debate. Since our specific passage deals with questions related to women we will pay particular attention to what its immediate context (the Epistle to Timothy) says about them.

*Context.* A careful reading of 1 Timothy demonstrates that Paul's letter was written in response to false teachings that threatened to destroy the work of God in Ephesus. From the very outset of his letter, Paul charges Timothy to oppose the false teachers whose misguided doctrines were undermining the genuine work of the gospel (1:3). Instead of proclaiming the power of the Risen Christ that transforms human lives (cf. 1:5; 12-16), these individuals were proclaiming an exclusive gospel that consisted of nothing more than sensational ideas (cf. 1:3-4; Titus 1:14; 3:9). In the second half of the letter, Paul further describes the nature of the false teachings (4:1-5; 6:3-10) and contrasts them with the type of behavior that should characterize a life lived in harmony with the truth of the gospel. The letter then closes with an appeal to stand firm against false doctrine (6:20, 21).

The false teachings were also making extensive inroads among a number of the believing women. The extent to which the false teachings were negatively influencing them is indicated

in the prominent attention Paul gives to women in his discussions against false teachings. He is concerned with the conduct of women in worship (2:10-15), with widows (5:5, 6, 10, 11, 14), and with women who were going from house to house “saying things they should not” (5:13, EXB). The fact that Paul describes these women as “saying things they should not” suggests they were connected to some extent with the “certain persons” Timothy was charged to keep from teaching a “different doctrine” (1:3, ESV). The connection of these women with the false teachers can also be seen in that their desire not to marry and bear children (5:11-16) coincides with the false teachers’ advocacy of celibacy (4:1-3; 5:9, 10). It was the connection of these women with the false teachers and their heretical doctrines that lay at the heart of Paul’s prohibition.

***Learn in Silence and be Submissive.*** The context of the passage provides the reason for the statement that women are to learn in silence. Instead of listening to false teachers they are to be taught in church by those well-versed in Christian doctrine. As good students, women are expected to learn in silence, that is to say they are not to interfere with the teaching process. Besides that, they are to be submissive to the teacher and the Christian teachings.

***Women Forbidden to Teach.*** Women are forbidden to teach because of the influence the false teachings are having over them—an influence that may have not only affected their behavior, but that likely involved their promotion of the false teachings as well. *The women in Ephesus were not fit to teach not because they were women, but because they had been or were being deceived by the false teachers*—just as Eve had been deceived by the alluring words of the serpent (cf. 1 Tim 2:14; 2 Cor 11:3, 4). Under these circumstances, these women were in no position to teach; they first needed to become learners (2:11).

***To Have Authority Over.*** The verb *authentein* in 1 Timothy 2:12, translated “to have authority over,” does not refer to official teaching authority. Careful examination of the usage of the verb shows that “there is no first-century warrant for translating *authentein* as ‘to exercise authority.’”<sup>18</sup> This type of authority is usually expressed through the verbal form of the common Greek word that Paul uses elsewhere to refer to authority—*exousia* (e.g., Rom 9:21; 13:3; 2 Cor 13:10; 2 Thess 3:9). He instead uses the unusual verb *authentein*—only found here in the New Testament, but a term that also has negative connotations associated with it. It refers to a domineering or controlling form of behavior. This indicates that the problem in Ephesus was rooted in the domineering and controlling manner in which the women were teaching or, most probably, to their attitude toward those who were instructing them. Paul prohibits this inappropriate behavior in verse 12, and then explains the reason for the prohibition with a reference to the creation order in verse 13.

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<sup>18</sup> Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca M. Groothuis; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 216.

***Adam and Eve.*** It is important to notice that Paul does not explain what he means when he says, “For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman...” (vs. 13, 14). Consequently, different explanations have been given (e.g. Eve usurped Adam’s headship). But Paul is contrasting the priority of Adam in creation with Eve’s priority in sin in order to indicate that deception is not inevitable—Adam, although created first, was not deceived. Deception is in both cases associated with false teachers and if women stop listening to them they would not be deceived. This interpretation of the text within its immediate context is supported by 1 Corinthians 11:5, where Paul specifically acknowledges the right of women to pray or prophesy in church—activities that were not only done aloud but also included an element of public teaching.

Understood from this perspective, Paul’s prohibition is best seen as a temporary injunction specifically related to the false teachings that were troubling the believers in Ephesus. Like all of Scripture, the passage has universal authority for the church today. But to be faithful to Scripture, the passage must only be applied to *similar situations* within the church—situations where under the influence of false teachings the behavior of certain individuals, whether women or men, threaten to undermine the proclamation of the true gospel (Gal 1:7-9). The context indicates that this passage is not about the ordination of women to the ministry or about the headship of church elders over women. Neither is it about the headship of the husband over the wife.

## NATURE OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

**JESUS AND CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.** The nature of Christian ministry was unquestionably manifested and established by Jesus through His teaching ministry and sacrifice: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Self-giving service is the greatest expression of Christian ministry as manifested in the incarnation and death of the Son of God. He who was by nature divine became a servant to the point of giving His life for us (Phil 2:5-8). *His exaltation was based on His incommensurable service to others.* He also taught this to the disciples when He said to them: “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (10:42, 43).

Jesus’ theology of ministry is based on service, self-sacrifice, and humility, and not on a power struggle, rank, status, or gender. *Jesus was reestablishing in His church the divine principle of order that ruled over His cosmic kingdom before the origin of sin, namely divine love manifested in service to others.* Positions of leadership were then assigned on the basis of a life



of service and not on the basis of priority in creation or gender. Jesus does not qualify what He says on the basis of gender as if the service of females was always to be of an inferior nature than that of the males. Leadership positions, He says, are assigned to *all* on the basis of service.

**MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH.** Following the instructions of Jesus, the NT writers envisioned all ministry as service (*diakonia*) and applied the term to the service of all believers, both those who exercise leadership roles as well as those who fulfill other ministerial roles in the church (Rom 16:1; Phil 2:5-7; Col 1:7; 1 Pet 4:10). In his letters to the churches, Paul used the same words to describe his ministry and that of his co-workers, including female co-workers (Rom 16:3; 1 Thess 3:2). Together they were servants (*diakonos*) and slaves (*doulos*) of the gospel and of Christ (Col 1:7, 4:7, 12; Eph 6:21). The kind of authority exercised by Christian believers is thus different from that seen in the world at large. Rather than being conceived in terms of “ruling over,” or “having authority over” (Mark 10:42), the purpose of all Christian ministry is to encourage, empower, enable, and provide a vision “so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12, NIV) and its mission brought to completion. The biblical principles for exercising authority challenge every human culture in some ways. It is essential to acknowledge that culture has a powerful shaping influence on every person. Seventh-day Adventists believe that all ecclesiastical authority should be exercised in a spirit of humble service to God and His people (Matt 20:24-28; 1 Pet 5:1-4).

Throughout God’s Word, ministry is conceived as service, and as such it is the calling of every person who accepts Christ as Savior and Lord and becomes part of His body. All followers of Christ are called to represent Him to the world, to act on His behalf, and to minister to others according to their gifts (2 Cor 5:20; 1 Pet 4:10). Thus one does not find in the New Testament a distinction between spiritual ministry (or clergy) and a secular laity. Every follower of Christ is a minister or servant and is called to fulfill a ministry according to the will of the Holy Spirit.

## THE GIFTING OF THE SPIRIT

**THE SPIRIT FOR MEN AND WOMEN.** To establish order in the church on the basis of the cosmic order established by God, all church members—women and men—received at Pentecost the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus was the mission of the church inaugurated. Through the Spirit, Christ made provision for each believer to participate in His ministry. He continues to empower believers by providing them with spiritual gifts, the purpose of which is to edify and serve the Christian community and to facilitate its missionary endeavor (Rom 12:6-9; 1 Cor 12:6-11; Eph 4:7, 11-13). In giving loving service to one another and to the world, believers demonstrate their obedience to Jesus’s command (Matt 22:37-39; 28:18-20).

**GIFTS ARE GENDER INCLUSIVE.** The New Testament teaching on spiritual gifting indicates that the Holy Spirit bestows gifts upon all Christians regardless of race, gender, or social status. All believers receive some gifts for the edification of the Christian body and for mission and ministry in the world. This fact is evident in that all Christians (men and women) are given gifts and encouraged to desire “the best gifts” (1 Cor 12:7, 11, 31). Each follower of Christ, without exception, therefore has a special and unique contribution to make to the well-being and mission of the church. Since it is the Holy Spirit who both originates and sanctions all Christian ministries, the followers of Christ can expect to receive His calling and are encouraged to embrace the particular ministry to which they are called. Based on the prophetic words of Joel 2 and Peter’s reapplication to the events of Pentecost, Seventh-day Adventists consistently affirm that all spiritual gifts are gender inclusive, including gifts such as leadership, prophecy, evangelism, pastoral ministry, and teaching.

**MEMBERS AND MINISTERS: NO ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE.** Finally, the spiritual gifting of each member suggests that there cannot be any essential difference between members and ministers in the church. Any form of clericalism (i.e., the idea that there is a class division in the church where some possess a higher spiritual status than others) is foreign to the thought of the New Testament (1 Cor 12:22-25). Instead, every believer, under the guidance and leadership of the Holy Spirit, is called to fulfill a ministry according to his or her spiritual gifting (Acts 1:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4, 11). Any exclusive claim to these gifts or denial thereof based on race, social class, or gender is precluded because their distribution is determined by the will of the Holy Spirit and not by men (1 Cor 12:11).

In conclusion, Christian ministry is gender inclusive and positions of responsibilities are given on the basis of a divine call and a life of love manifested in service to God and to others. Adventists believe that “the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions” (Fundamental Beliefs, 17). However, the “priesthood of all believers” and the spiritual gifting of every believer does not rule out the idea that, in order for the church to carry out its mission effectively, some structure or organization is necessary (Acts 15:1-15; 1 Cor 14:33, 40). For this reason, the New Testament also supports the idea of specialized leadership ministries.

## **GIFTS AND OFFICES**

While Christ did not provide detailed information on how the church should be organized, He allowed the church, with the guidance of the Spirit and Scripture, to organize itself and find ways of best fulfilling its mission.

**GOD TAKES THE INITIATIVE.** The biblical witness is clear that to fulfill His mission on earth God chose some of His followers to serve and lead in the church according to the

spiritual gifting they received by the Holy Spirit (Rom 12:8; Eph 4:7, 11). In all cases of ministry God is the One who initiated the call, qualified them for their ministry, and through the church gave them authority to perform their duties and functions. In the Old Testament, these leaders included the Levites (Num 8:5-26), Aaron and his sons (Exod 28, 29), the 70 elders (Num 11:10-25), Joshua, judges, and the prophets of Israel.

As in the Old Testament, the New Testament also provides a variety of ways in which someone was appointed to an office or task. In all cases, the initiative for a call to any form of ministry resides with God. Those who gave their whole time to Christian service were entitled to material support by the Christian community (Matt 10:10; 1 Cor 9:3-14; 1 Tim 5:17, 18).

**THE TWELVE APOSTLES.** Among the leaders of early Christianity, the apostles played a special role. Jesus appointed these twelve men from larger groups of disciples (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16) to be apostles (Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16). He chose them as eyewitnesses of His ministry (Acts 1:21, 22) and gave them the ministry of faithfully proclaiming and interpreting His words and testimony, the gospel. After His death and ascension to heaven (Acts 2:1-4; Mark 3:13, 14; Matt 28:18-20), He entrusted to these individuals the exercise of authority in the church (cf. Matt 16:19; 18:18). As eyewitnesses, directly appointed by Christ, the apostles occupy a unique position in the church. As Paul says, they are, with the prophets, the foundation on which the church is built (Eph 2:20). Their ministry is unique and not replicable in the church. The appointment of the Twelve is considered to be the beginning of the Christian church and of Christian ministry. Later, after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples selected from among them another apostle, Matthias, to replace Judas. This appointment was also done in a spirit of prayer, and the casting of lots between Matthias and Joseph Barabbas was seen as the will of God (Acts 1:15-26). In the New Testament the term “apostle” is also used to designate what appear to be missionaries (e.g. Acts 14:14; 1 Cor 4:6, 9; 1 Thess 1:1, 2:6).

**SPECIALIZED GIFTS.** In early Christianity, we find various individuals called and endowed by God with certain gifts of the Holy Spirit that allowed them to function in specialized avenues of leadership. Referred to as apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph 4:11), these individuals acted as leaders who helped the young Christian church fulfill its mission more effectively. They were charged with preparing God’s people “for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12, NIV).

**BEGINNING OF APPOINTIVE LEADERS.** The beginning of appointive ministry roles in the church is recorded in Acts 6. When the apostles found themselves distracted from their mission by administrative issues, they asked the church to elect seven men to take over the daily distribution of food. Their selection by the assembly was completed by a prayer and the laying-on of hands, the first reference to this ceremony in the New Testament (Acts 6:1-6).

This event marks the beginning of a church-appointed ministry in distinction from a ministry appointed by Jesus or from others whose ministry depended only on a direct divine call (e.g., prophets and teachers). Both the apostles and the Seven were said to be doing service or ministry for the church: the apostles were doing the ministry of the Word while the Seven were doing the ministry of tables. This division of labor was not absolute, for the Holy Spirit used at least two of the seven, Stephen and Philip, to teach the gospel in a powerful way in subsequent chapters of Acts (6:8-10; 8:5, 36-40; 21:8).

Although the word “deacon” (*diakonos*) does not occur in the book of Acts, “elder” (*presbyteros*) appears several times, both accepting funds for distribution (11:30) and acting in a leadership role with the apostles (15:2-4, 22; 21:18). Paul and Barnabas were teachers in the church of Antioch and were also set apart for missionary work by prayer and laying-on of hands by their church (Acts 13:1-3). During their missionary journey, they appointed elders in the local churches they established (Acts 14:23). However, the New Testament speaks also of some appointments to various functions in less formal ways, such as Philip’s daughters and Agabus (Acts 21:8-10). The first clear evidence of a two-rank appointive ministry of deacons and elders is the salutation in Philippians 1:1, but the distinction is clearest in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Through God’s protective guidance and loving concern, patterns of ministry, fluid at first, were thus established in the early church.

**DEACONS AND ELDERS.** As indicated, the diaconate originated in the appointment of the Seven in Acts 6. It was probably a matter of time for the churches in different places to appoint their own deacons as officers in the church. Paul gives specific instructions on this matter (1 Tim 3:8-13). Also included among those who exercised gifts of leadership were the appointive leaders—elders/overseers and deacons—elected by the community and affirmed by the apostles. Recognizing the gift of leadership in these individuals, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit in their lives (Acts 6:3), the church chose them for the task of spiritual oversight, protection of the community (shepherding), teaching, and preaching (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 5:17).

Gifts and offices should not be drastically distinguished because elders were appointed to their office on the basis of having received gifts that qualified them for this specific position. For instance, among the gifts of the Spirit we find the one for pastor (*poimēn*; Eph 4:11) which is used as a synonym for elder/overseer (1 Pet 5:1-4; Acts 20:17, 28). The functions of elder and overseer are also synonymous with each other (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). The gift of teaching is also described as a responsibility of an elder/overseer (1 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:9). These roles (pastor/teacher, elder/overseer) were not clearly distinguished. The spiritual gifts of pastor/teacher, which are gender inclusive in the Adventist teaching of spiritual gifts, are thus equivalent with the appointed position of elder or overseer.

## LAYING-ON OF HANDS IN SCRIPTURE

The current practice of ordaining church leaders through the laying-on of hands ritual is largely based on the NT accounts of Acts 6:1-6 and 13:1-3. Scripture does not provide us with a detailed liturgical description or its theology, nor does it limit the use of this ritual to the installation of church leaders alone. Like many other Christian practices, however, the laying-on of hands has its roots in the Old Testament and Judaism.

**LAYING-ON OF HANDS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.** The rite occurs in the Old Testament in a variety of contexts, such as in blessings, sacrifices, or stoning for blasphemy (Gen 48:14; Lev 4:4; 24:14). Only two instances, however, can be interpreted as precursors of the NT rite of laying hands on leaders: (1) the induction of the Levites (Num 8:10) and (2) the commissioning of Joshua (Num 27:23). Both instances utilize the Hebrew phrase *samak yad* (literally, “pressing the hand/s upon”). The Levites were called to perform a special priestly service on behalf of the people. The ceremony of laying-on of hands involved the entire congregation of Israel and was done only once at the inauguration of their service (Num 8:10). There is no biblical evidence that any succeeding generations of Levites were ordained or that this event was to be repeated. It was a unique event.

The induction of Joshua (Num 27:23; Deut 34:9) came at a critical juncture in the history of Israel and carried significant symbolism. In the eyes of the people, he was now their shepherd and leader (Num 27:17), a man chosen by God to fulfill a critical task. It is important to note, however, that while the imposition of hands by Moses symbolically signified a bestowal of authority, God had already filled Joshua with all the spiritual gifts needed for the fulfillment of the task (Num 27:18). The laying-on of hands was a confirmation of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who grants wisdom for leadership, and a recognition of Joshua’s capacity to lead the nation of Israel, along with the reception of the authority to do so. This was also a unique event because before the time of the kings no other leader was anointed.

**LAYING-ON OF HANDS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.** As in the Old Testament, so also in the New Testament the laying-on of hands ritual was used in a variety of circumstances. Two phrases, *epitithein tas cheiras* and *epitheseos ton cheiron* (laying-on of hand/hands), are used more than 20 times to indicate such events as blessing, healing, or reception of the Holy Spirit at baptism (e.g., Matt 19:13-15; Mark 6:5; Acts 8:17; 9:17; 19:6). Only two unequivocal instances of the laying-on of hands relate directly to installing believers into leadership positions: the appointment of the Seven in Acts 6 and the “commending” of Barnabas and Saul “to the grace of God” in Acts 13:3, prior to their missionary journey (Acts 14:26).

In the case of the Seven in Acts 6, they were selected (vs. 3, 5) by the Christian community according to the necessary qualifications laid out by the apostles (“of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” v. 3). While they stood before the apostles, “they prayed and laid

hands on them” (v. 6). Unfortunately, it is not made clear who “they” were. These could have been the whole community, or it could have been only the apostles. If the church was following OT precedent of Num 8:10 (“the sons of Israel shall lay hands on the Levites”), this would support the first interpretation.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RITE.** Whether the apostles or the whole congregation laid hands on the Seven, the laying-on of hands did not sacramentally impart a gift they did not have before. They were already “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3) and thus had the necessary spiritual gifts to fulfill the ministry to which they were called. That is why they were chosen. The same interpretation is also valid for the commissioning of Barnabas and Paul. The gesture signified that in their new responsibilities the seven men and Barnabas and Paul had the full support, blessing, and affirmation of the church; their new ministry and authority to pursue it was exercised in the name of the church. By this ritual, these NT communities acknowledged the presence of the calling of the Holy Spirit and gave to the Seven, Barnabas, and Paul, and later to the other leaders in the church, the authorization to serve in their functions.

What, then, are the implications of our study of the laying-on of hands for the women’s ordination issue? At the very least it has to be said that the Church may legitimately and on the basis of Scripture choose to lay hands on those (or “ordain”) whom it recognizes as having received the call of God and the appropriate spiritual gifting for pastoral ministry, irrespective of gender. The fact that there is hardly any significant difference between gifts and offices (the gifts equip one for the office) indicates that considering gifts to be gender inclusive but not offices—thus excluding women from the offices—is not supported by the New Testament.

### **QUALIFICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP**

While leaders are expected to be more mature in Christian character, many of the qualifications for leadership ministry described in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 are, in reality, the same as those expected of all Christians. As we will see, these leadership qualifications are not gender exclusive. This biblical fact has often been overlooked because of the inclusive use in Scripture, as in many languages and societies even in modern times, of gendered (usually male) language to refer to both men and women. Paul’s list of qualifications for leadership framed in the masculine gender does not exclude women from serving in these ministries and offices any more than the masculine gender throughout the Ten Commandments and other OT laws (Exod 20; see esp. v. 17) exempts women from obedience.

**FEMALE DEACONS.** The New Testament mentions two specific offices in the Christian church, namely elders and deacons. As in the case of elders, deacons carried very important leadership responsibilities in the apostolic church. It is also important to observe that although

the qualifications for deaconate are gender specific, they are not gender exclusive (1 Tim 3:8-10, 12, 13). There is evidence, or at least hints, in the New Testament indicating that there were female deacons in the apostolic church (1 Tim 3:11; Rom 16:1). First, in the discussion of the qualifications for deaconate Paul inserts a brief list of qualifications for the “wives” of the deacons (1 Tim 3:11; NIV), which in Greek reads, “Women likewise dignified...” Paul appears to be referring here to women who were deacons. Second, a female deacon is explicitly mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:1: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant [*diakonos*] of the church which is at Cenchrea.” We have here the common elements of Greco-Roman epistolary commendations:<sup>19</sup> It includes the name of the person who is being commended (Phoebe), the relationship with the person (“our sister”), the status/role of the person (“a *diakonos* of the church in Cenchrea”), and a request (“receive her... and give her any help”).

Third, Ellen G. White supports the reading of these passages as referring to female deacons who were ordained through the laying-on of hands to that office. She writes,

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church.<sup>20</sup>

Church leaders, including her son W. C. White, interpreted this statement to mean that women could be ordained to the office of deaconate. Consequently they began to ordain women as deaconesses.<sup>21</sup> What was hinted at in the New Testament is made explicit through

19 See Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, Minneapolis, Min: Fortress Press, 2006), 941-942.

20 RH, July 9, 1895.

21 “A number of women were ordained as deaconesses during Ellen White’s Australian ministry. On August 10, 1895, the nominating committee at the Ashfield church in Sydney rendered its report, which was approved. The clerk’s minutes for that date state: ‘Immediately following the election, the officers were called to the front where Pastors Corliss and McCullagh set apart the elder, deacons, [and] deaconesses by prayer and the laying on of hands.’ Several years later, in the same church, W. C. White officiated at the ordination of the church officers. The minutes of the Ashfield church for January 7, 1900, state: ‘The previous Sabbath officers had been nominated and accepted for the current year, and today Elder White ordained and laid hands on the elders, deacon, and deaconesses—Adventist Review, Jan. 16, 1986.’ (“Exhibits Relating to the Ordination of Women,” a paper presented at the ministerial meeting at the 1990 General Conference session. Prepared by the White Estate staff).

Jerry Moon commented on the statement by Ellen White: “Three responses to this appeal are known. Shortly after this was written, the Ashfield church in Sydney, Australia, not far from where Ellen White was then working, held an ordination service for newly elected church officers. “Pastors Corliss and McCullagh of the Australian conference set apart the elder, deacons, [and] deaconesses by prayer and the laying on of hands.” (Minutes of the Ashfield SDA Church, Sydney, Australia, Aug. 10, 1895, cited by A. Patrick; cf. DG 249). Notice that identical terminology is used for all three offices. Another record from the same church five years later (1900) reports the ordination of two elders, one deacon, and two deaconesses. This time the officiating minister was W. C. White, whose diary corroborates the church records (see Patrick). A third example comes from early 1916, when E. E. Andross, then president of the Pacific Union Conference, officiated at a women’s ordination service and cited Ellen White’s 1895 Review article as his authority (DG 253-255). Both the internal evidence of Ellen White’s 1895 article and the responses of those close to her at the time—the Ashfield church; her son W. C. White; and E. E. Andross, president of the Pacific Union Conference during her Elmshaven years—confirm that Ellen White here approved the ordination of women to a role then associated with the office of deaconess in the local church” (Jerry Moon, “Ellen White, Ordination, and Authority,” [Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 2013], 33).

the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. This is clearly supported by Ellen G. White and led some of our pioneers to ordain female deacons. This finding, as we will see, is very significant.

**FEMALE ELDERS.** There is clear evidence indicating that even though the language used in listing the qualifications for eldership is gender specific (masculine), it is not gender exclusive. First, the preface to Paul's list of qualifications begins with the statement, "If anyone (Greek *tis*) aspires to a position of oversight (*episcopē*)..." not, "If a man (*anēr*) aspires..." (1 Tim 3:1). In Greek, *tis* is an indefinite pronoun that as such is not interested in defining gender. The use of this pronoun indicates that Paul is not interested in gender but that he is commending the office of an overseer as worthy of aspiration. This finds support in the fact that the apostle is primarily interested in the character of the overseer as a spiritual leader rather than in his duties. Therefore when Paul says "anyone" he means "anyone." This is the plain meaning of the text. It is true that the noun "elder" in Greek is masculine but this is also the case with the Greek term *diakonos*. Therefore even though both terms are gender specific they are not gender exclusive.

Second, the phrase "the husband of one wife" (literally "a one-woman man") does not mean that only a man can be an elder. The same phrase is used to refer to both deacons and elders (1 Tim 3:1, 12) and it is now clear that a woman can occupy the office of a deacon. Therefore, although the phrase is certainly gender specific it is not gender exclusive because there were female deacons. The emphasis of the phrase is on moral purity rather than on gender (cf. 5:9). Within a prevalent cultural context of temple prostitution, Paul uses masculine language to present sexual purity and monogamy as a qualification of deacons and elders whether they are men or women. Elders and deacons are to be sexually pure. Again, this instruction identifies a moral attribute that also qualifies women since Paul also teaches that a faithful elder-widow is a "wife of one husband" or "a one-man woman" (1 Tim 5:9, ESV).

Third, that elders are expected to manage their household well does not exclude women from this office. The same qualification is required from deacons (3:12) and as we saw a woman can function as a deacon. Women were expected to manage well their household too (5:14). We find a good example of this in the experience of Lydia (Acts 16:15). The main purpose of this requirement is to assure that the elder and deacon have good administrative experience. It is clear that none of the other qualifications for elders and deacons were intended to exclude women from these roles.

In brief, Paul uses gendered (male and female) language in specific situations to communicate principles that are relevant for men and women in leadership ministries. This indicates that even when the qualifications are phrased in gender-specific language, they are not gender exclusive, since they are the same for all Christians. Therefore, women can occupy the positions or offices of deacons and elders even if we do not find in the New Testament any woman



appointed as an elder in the church. The biblical text allows for this, indicating again that God does not discriminate against any human being. *Any person who has received and developed the required gifts of the Spirit can be used by Him in any position in the church.*

## CONCLUSION

Within the community of faith established by Jesus, leadership positions are not to be based on race, class, culture, or gender. The central element is allegiance to Christ alone and to the fulfillment of His mission in the world through a love that manifests itself in service. Paul intentionally dismantles all systems of ordering human relationships that are built on the inherited understandings of value based on racial or cultural origin, economic status, and gender and replaces these with a system of value built exclusively on the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to individual members of the body of Christ. The former ways of relating to each other are replaced by a new relatedness in Christ (Gal 3:28, 29; Col 3:11). God wants to restore on earth the same cosmic order that He established on earth in the beginning. In this community all have equal worth as members of the body of Christ because all have experienced the risen Christ. They all are gifted with a variety of spiritual gifts, including the gifts of ministry and leadership, which are to be used for the benefit of the believers, the global mission of the church, and for the holding of the offices of deacons and elders (Rom 12:1-8).

As this mission approaches its fulfillment, men and women in the persecuted end-time church are declared to have been made by Christ “kings and priests” to their God (Rev 5:10; cf. 1:6; 20:6; Exod 19:5, 6; 1 Pet 2:9, 10). This order of an inclusive priestly ministry to God in the church characterizes the book of Revelation as a whole (in fulfillment of Isa 61:6). Without gender-distinction, Christ has saved men and women (Rev 1:5, 6; 5:9, 10), called them to minister and proclaim the kingdom of God until He comes (14:6-13), and promised that they will rule the world with Him as priestly rulers (20:4-6). Thus, the “priesthood” of men and women is a characteristic of the remnant church.

## ELLEN G. WHITE AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Ellen G. White emphatically and repeatedly invited women to be trained and employed in various forms of ministry, and even to ordain some to these ministries. That she supported the involvement of women in various forms of ministry is well known and documented. Many publications have helped Adventists to be more conscious of her thoughts on this subject, and today women are involved in all forms of ministry in our church.

A careful consideration of White’s thought on the role of women in the church, taken in its 19th-century context, supports the case for the ordaining of women today. The perspective we draw from White’s writings encourages us to move ahead and stretch the boundaries of

our understanding of ministry and ordination, to step out in faith, and to respond to God's leading in the full participation of women in all aspects of ministry. Five simple words can best describe White's perspective on women in ministry and the ordination of women.

### **SILENCE**

Ellen G. White is completely silent regarding some key texts and concepts used to prevent women from serving in ministry. Anecdotes from White's ministry illustrate that 150 years ago women were not as involved in social or religious public life as they are today. In fact, it was sometimes inappropriate and indecent to see a woman speak in an assembly. And, based on a traditional reading of Paul's admonitions in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 or 1 Timothy 2:12, many objected to hearing women speak at religious meetings. However, White never commented on these two key texts. Her silence on these texts speaks volumes to the importance we should give them in our discussion of women in ministry today. Her male Adventist colleagues, however, did comment on these texts and sometimes used Galatians 3:28 to state that what Paul wrote about women not speaking in public was within a cultural context that does not have universal application today. They also referred to many of Paul's female co-workers to state the obvious conclusion that Paul was therefore not speaking against women in ministry. One of the clearest such responses came from G. C. Tenney, president of the Australian Conference, in 1892.

The difficulty with these texts is almost entirely chargeable to immature conclusions reached in regard to them. 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. Those who were brought up to believe it to be a shame for women to speak in meeting, look no further than these texts, and give them sweeping application. Critics of the Bible, critics of womankind, as well as women who are looking for an excuse for idleness, seize these passages in the same manner. By their misuse of these texts, many conscientious people are into a misconception of what Paul meant to teach.<sup>22</sup>

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22 G. C. Tenney, "Woman's Relation to the Cause of Christ," *RH*, May 24, 1892, pp. 328-329.

## INCLUSIVENESS

Ellen G. White believed in including women in all aspects of service and ministry. In 1893, even though some men did not feel comfortable with women serving in ministry alongside their husbands, and being fairly remunerated for this work, she argued, “This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it.” God is calling women to engage in ministry and in some instances they will “do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God.” Emphatically she stated, “There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry.”<sup>23</sup>

In 1879, she addressed a difficult situation in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, and stated, “It is not always men who are best adapted to the successful management of a church. If faithful women have more deep piety and true devotion than men, they could indeed by their prayers and their labors do more than men who are unconsecrated in heart and in life.”<sup>24</sup> In this inclusive statement, her understanding of ministry embraces management of a church, a ministry that women can receive.

In 1880 she invited young people to engage in literature evangelism because it can serve as a good education for “men and women to do pastoral labor.”<sup>25</sup> Twenty years later, in 1900, she again encouraged women to do ministry: “It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God.”<sup>26</sup> In 1887, while discussing the need to provide good education to Adventist youth in our schools, she exhorted administrators to do their best to train young women “with an education fitting them *for any position of trust*.”<sup>27</sup>

Although she was aware that in her day there would be limitations on what women could do or be employed for by the church, she did not limit the options available for women and never used the concept of male headship to limit women in ministry. If somehow Ellen White believed that there should be limits on ministry options for women, she had plenty of opportunities to clarify her thought. She never did. Instead, her encouragements to young women are consistently open ended and inclusive.

And what about ordination?

## VARIETY

She understood ordination to be for a variety of functions. A number of passages in her writings give us some significant illustration about what she understood ordination and the laying-on of hands to mean. Ellen G. White earnestly believed that the ordained pastoral ministry alone is not sufficient to fulfill God’s commission, but that God is calling Christians

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23 “The Laborer Is Worthy of His Hire,” Manuscript 43a, 1898, 5MR 324-327.

24 Ellen G. White to Brother Johnson, n.d. (Letter 33), 1879, 19MR 56.

25 4T 390.

26 6T 322.

27 FCE, 117-118 (emphasis added).

of all professions to dedicate their lives to God's service. She thus invited the church to branch out in its understanding of forms of ministry to include non-traditional roles beyond those of the ordained pastor, elder, and deacon we find in the New Testament, in order to meet the needs of the church. She even advocated ordaining people in these roles.

In 1908, to encourage the mission of Adventist medical institutions, White wrote that medical missionaries "should be as sacredly set apart for [this] work *as is the minister of the gospel*."<sup>28</sup> In a similar context, in 1895, she wrote a long article about the work of lay people in local churches. She counseled:

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. *They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.* In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. *This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor.*<sup>29</sup>

Here she counseled that God is leading the church in setting apart women for these forms of ministry.

In these two recommendations, White clearly had in mind a broader understanding of ordination than some in her day, and saw ordination as a form of affirmation serving a variety of functions and purposes. We do not find explicit biblical precedents for these two recommendations of ordination that she is advocating. This is probably because White did not understand ordination to be a form of sacrament limited only to certain gender-specific functions. From a mission perspective, it seems obvious that in her counsels, all these functions are gender inclusive.

## COMMISSIONING

In Ellen G. White's thought, ordination is the same as commissioning. These last two examples reflect a non-sacramental understanding of the laying-on of hands. Ordination is, first of all, a form of affirmation and commissioning to a task. In fact, it is accurate to say that in her writings ordination and commissioning equal the same thing.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Ev 546 (emphasis added).

29 "The Duty of the Minister and the People," RH, July 9, 1895 (emphasis added).

30 Very early in Seventh-day Adventist history, the leading pioneers of the movement felt concerned about the confusion and false teachings that were sometimes manifested among the small group of Sabbatarian Adventist believers. Following the example of New Testament apostles who had set apart elders to oversee local congregations against false teachings and to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, these early Adventist leaders selected promising men and set them apart with prayer and laying-on of hands. The criterion for their ordination was the "full proof" evidence "that they have received their commission from God". By ordaining them, the group of believers "would show the sanction of the church to their going forth as messengers to carry the most solemn message ever given to men" (EW, 100-101). The ordination of these early Adventist itinerant preachers served as a rite to authorize them to speak on behalf of the church and to preserve order in the emerging church. It is interesting to note that in this passage Ellen White does not use the word ordination, but rather refers to this rite as a setting apart and a commission. This indicates that she uses these words and concepts synonymously.

In 1873, John Tay joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and soon felt called by God to volunteer his time as a missionary in the South Pacific. In 1886, he landed on the island of Pitcairn, and succeeded by God's grace in converting the entire population. Not being an ordained minister, however, he did not feel authorized to baptize these converts. Ten years later, Ellen White commented on this event and had this to say.

It has been a great mistake that men go out, knowing they are children of God, like Brother Tay, [who] went to Pitcairn as a missionary to do work, [but] that man did not feel at liberty to baptize because he had not been ordained. *That is not any of God's arrangements; it is man's fixing.* When men go out with the burden of the work and to bring souls into the truth, those men are ordained of God, [even] if [they] never have a touch of ceremony of ordination. To say [they] shall not baptize when there is nobody else, [is wrong]. If there is a minister in reach, all right, then they should seek for the ordained minister to do the baptizing, but when the Lord works with a man to bring out a soul here and there, and they know not when the opportunity will come that these precious souls can be baptized, why he should not question about the matter, he should baptize these souls.<sup>31</sup>

It is instructive that White says that the idea that a lay person cannot perform a baptism in special circumstances because he is not an ordained minister “*is not any of God's arrangement; it is man's fixing.*” Perhaps some will say she overstated her response to what happened. There is nonetheless an aspect of her understanding of ordination that leads her to say this. Ordination by the church is viewed as an affirmation of God's prior spiritual ordination and commissioning to ministry. Human beings simply recognize what God has already blessed. In fact, in 1851, when she wrote about the ordination of the first Adventist ministers, she called this ceremony a commissioning, not an ordination. Forty-five years later, in 1896, she still had the same concept of ordination.

## MISSION

Ellen G. White believed we all have a part in the Adventist mission to the world. She urged the church to recognize God's call to men and women by the laying-on of hands to a variety of functions so that the mission of the church might be more diversified and complete. She was passionate about saving the lost, and she felt strongly that all Adventist men and women should be active in ministry. Adventist history is also informative on the practice of ordination. George Butler became president of the Iowa Conference in June 1865 but was ordained only in September 1867. Uriah Smith served as editor of the *Review and Herald* from

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31 “Remarks Concerning the Foreign Mission Work,” Manuscript 75, 1896 (emphasis added).

1855, and secretary of the General Conference from 1863. He was ordained in 1874. Through time, our understanding of ministry changed, and we began to ordain men who were not only evangelists. This was a way to recognize other gifts of ministry. We expanded our views of ministry to include more persons serving in a variety of ministries. Why should we not do the same for women? Isn't White still urging us to branch out in our forms of ministry to reach out to a lost world? She encouraged women to be active in many functions and ministries, and believed that with the proper education women could occupy "any position of trust."

White was willing to encourage women in her day, in a society and context in which women were not encouraged to be active in society, because she believed in a broad gender-inclusive ministry to warn a dying world of Christ's soon coming. If we are to follow her lead, ordination must be connected with mission and spreading the gospel, not with the establishment or preservation of an exclusive male ministry. To restrict what women can do in the church today to the same activities and limited functions the church allowed women to do in the 19th century is to miss the enduring validity of White's message. She encouraged progressive and innovative approaches to ministry and mission.

We must note that White was not interested in displacing men from the traditional roles they have held in the family, church, and society. She asked the church, however, to allow women to serve in the broad functions of gospel and pastoral ministry, and in any position of trust for which they are qualified, even including the management of the church. Thus she appealed to the church to include women with gifts of leadership, pastoral ministry, and teaching (all the same biblical functions occupied by pastors, teachers, elders, and overseers), and to ordain them for these positions, as men are ordained for the same positions.

## **APPOINTMENT TO OFFICES IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, appointment to offices and functions combines a number of the attributes we see in Scripture. Most appointments are done through a process of selection done by committees that the faith community appoints to make or recommend decisions for appointments. The authority to exercise these functions is thus granted at the moment the constitutive committees, boards, or assemblies make the decisions for appointments. Following a decision to appoint someone to an office or function by the respective church boards or conference/union executive committees, some officers are installed or ordained through a ceremony of prayer and laying-on of hands, as in the case of deacons, elders, and pastors. Other officers are appointed to their ministry or function simply by the vote of a committee or board (e.g., directors of departments; college and university presidents), and others by the vote of a general assembly of believers (e.g., Conference, Union, Division, and

General Conference). During the ordination of deacons, elders, and pastors, the ceremony of prayer and laying-on of hands is a confirmation or symbolic representation of a decision made prior to the ceremony to give them authority.

Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that ordination confers any spiritual power or status. The ceremony of laying-on of hands is a form of blessing in which the community recognizes the calling of God in the life of the individual. Through the laying-on of hands, the Church acts to grant representative authority for the exercise of the ministry of deacon/ deaconess, elder, or pastor.

## CONCLUSION

Our study has shown that even though there seems to be a biblical pattern of male leadership among God’s people, God was always willing to point to a better way—a way that would not exclude women from such important positions based on their gender. We believe that our most important task is “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15, NKJV), incorporating the Bible’s principles, and applying the Bible’s teachings to daily life. We do this sacred task shaped by the interpretive methods that emerge from the Word of God itself, rejecting extra-biblical agendas and social trends imposed upon the text. By careful, systematic study of the Word, comparing scripture with scripture, we arrive at the fullest understanding of its meaning, aided by the Spirit’s promised insight.

Our very name—Seventh-day Adventist—highlights our deep commitment to the Word that reveals Christ as Creator, as well as announcing our anticipation of the re-creative act by which He will “make all things new” (Rev 21:5, NKJV). From the Genesis account of Christ’s creation of man and woman we understand the essential equality for which He formed them and the mutuality for which He designed them. In the Apostle John’s vision of heaven, we glimpse the redeemed—without distinctions of rank, race, or gender—worshiping and following the Lamb “wherever He goes” (Rev 14:4).

The mission of God revealed in both the Old and New Testaments richly illustrates His willingness to use all persons—now divinely unclassified—to build up His kingdom and serve His people (Gal 3:28). Both men and women are called, gifted, and equipped by the Spirit for ministries that enact God’s mission to save lost humanity. No role serving God’s people is categorically excluded from any believer surrendered to Christ (cf. Joel 2:28, 29), for “one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor 12:11). Within such a community, distinctions of race, class, culture, or gender are rendered secondary to a central and primary allegiance to Christ alone and to His mission in the world. The biblical record is thus replete with instances of both men and women serv-

ing God's people as leaders, judges, witnesses, and prophets.

The clarity of God's ideal to empower women and men to service and ministry is an interpretive key that helps us correctly place difficult or unclear passages in historical context, including certain of Paul's counsels to specific NT congregations (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-13; 1 Cor 14:26-34). Headship authority in the church is reserved only for Christ, and it is the duty of His people to affirm in one another the gifts that He has sovereignly assigned. The laying-on of hands, or "ordination," conveys no special powers and implies no extra worth. With elegant simplicity, this affirmation manifests the agreement that ought always to exist between Jesus and His church (Matt 18:19).

Seventh-day Adventist history also amply testifies to the gifting of both men and women for service to God's people. Ellen G. White, who exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry, taught and urged that both men and women could and should function in all offices and roles within the body of Christ. Instructed by her emphatic call to service and inspired by her example, Adventist men and women continue to answer God's call to ministry as pastors, leaders, and teachers, humbly confident that by so doing they are being deeply obedient to God's will.

While we as Seventh-day Adventists agree on the equal value of women and men and their call to bear the image of God together, we recognize that other sincere Seventh-day Adventists may differ with us about the Bible's teaching on whom to ordain. We remind all believers of the obligation to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). To that end, we urge that decisions about the biblical understanding of the ordination of women to the ministry should not be made by majority vote. In cases where the Spirit has not created within the world church a consensus on the teaching of the Bible, a decision of a majority would result in the imposition of the religious views of the majority on others who sincerely believe that the Bible teaches the opposite (cf. Rom 14:5). In the setting of difference of opinions on a subject that is not part of the message and mission of the church, we reaffirm our constant unity in Christ and our commitment to the message and mission of the church (John 17:20-23).

## **ANSWERS TO SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT ORDINATION**

### **Does the priesthood of all believers allow for women to be ordained as pastors?**

First, although in the Old Testament women were excluded from the priesthood, the NT teaching of the priesthood of all believers includes both male and female believers. The Levitical law is now freed from tribal and ethnic limitations. It is true that although in the church all are "priests" not all are elders or deacons. Second, we should keep in mind that in



the Old Testament the use of tithe was exclusively used for the Levites and no other Israelite was to receive it—whether male or female. In the Christian church the law of tithing is freed from gender constraints. Now, as Ellen G. White indicated, “the tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be them men or women” (1MR 263). This is based on the fact that “it is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God” (6T 322). The priesthood of all believers does allow for women to be ordained as pastors.

### **Did Jesus establish a hierarchy that excluded women from ordained ministry?**

There is not a single verse in the gospels that even implies that such was the case. The specific criterion Jesus established for the assignment of leadership positions in the church was “whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:43). No one should dare to suggest that this command from Jesus was limited to the apostles. It has a universal application within the church in any epoch and any place. Any position of authority or leadership in the church is available to those who, under the influence of the Spirit (be they male or female), are true servants of Christ and of His church.

### **Does “head/headship” in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 mean “source?”**

The use of the Greek term *kephalē* clearly and unquestionably indicates that it can mean “source.” The fact that one Greek dictionary does not include this meaning does not mean anything. Other dictionaries include it.<sup>32</sup> Therefore both meanings are linguistically possible in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. The best possibility is “source” because that passage deals with the concept of source: “For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man.... For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man through the woman” (vs. 8, 12). Paul describes them in the passage as being interdependent (v. 11). The context of this passage does not support the idea that in the church a male church elder is the head of the woman.

### **Does the New Testament support the idea that women in church are under the headship of church elders?**

According to the New Testament the only head of the church is Christ. Ellen G. White writes, “Let it be seen that Christ, not the minister, is the head of the church.”<sup>33</sup> It is only at home, in the husband-wife relationship, that a man is described as the head of his wife (e.g. Eph 5:22, 23). This idea is never transferred to the relationship between elders and women in the church.

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<sup>32</sup> E.g. *TDNT*, 6:673; *NIDNTT*, 1:157. The meaning “source” is quite common in Greek literature; see Phillip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 117-137. He provides a list of Greek lexicons from the earliest to the present that establish the meaning “source” for *kephalē* (123, footnote 35).

<sup>33</sup> ST, January 27, 1890.

**Does 1 Timothy 2:12-14 apply only to a local situation in Ephesus?**

No. The passage has a universal application and is very instructive for us today. Paul is obviously addressing a local situation otherwise the order for women to be in silence would not only be universal but absolute. What we need to establish, after a careful study of the context of the passage, is its universal content. Several things are universal: (1) The church is expected to teach the message of salvation to all, men and women. (2) The teaching is to be done by people who are properly qualified. (3) Those who are students should not be allowed to teach or to question the authority of the instructor or the content of the teaching. Upsetting the teaching process is not to be tolerated. Otherwise we would have conflicts in the church. The church is a place of order.

**Does the fact that in the Bible leadership is primarily in the hands of men exclude women from ordination to the ministry?**

We have argued in this paper that this is not the case. There is not a single biblical passage in which a divine command is given permanently establishing that only the male members of the people of God should be ordained and occupy the highest positions of authority. The pattern of male leadership was very often altered by the Lord Himself by appointing some women to the highest positions of authority among His people (e.g. prophet and judge). In the New Testament this is much more visible and abundant (e.g. we find co-workers of Paul who are female; prophetesses; and with respect to church offices we find female deacons). In other words, the common practice of having male leaders was never officially instituted by the Lord through a divine command. Thus, He provided for us examples that we can follow in ordaining women to the ministry. In doing this we would not be violating a divine command because there is none.

**Should we ignore the question of religious liberty when dealing with this topic?**

In a sense it could be ignored because the deeper issue is a slightly different one. It surfaces when the possibility of deciding the biblical position through a majority vote is placed on the table. If this were to be done the question would no longer be whether we should ordain women or not but whether we should be loyal to Fundamental Belief # 1. The issue is a very complex and important one for those of us who have always upheld the message and mission of the church as summarized in our Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. Our message was established through the study of the Bible and the guidance of the Spirit through Ellen G. White. The result was the formulation of a consensus among God's people. No vote was needed because the Bible and the Spirit instructed the church. The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is a summary of the message and mission that the Lord gave to His church and it unifies us as a people. The question we now face is: What should we do with the topic of

the ordination of women to the ministry in the absence of a consensus based on the study of the Bible and the guidance of the Spirit? If we go for a majority vote we would have denied Fundamental Belief #1. Biblical truth would no longer be defined on the basis of the Bible alone but on the basis of what a majority believes that the Bible teaches on this topic. Then, the vote of the majority would be imposed on those who may have sincerely concluded that the Bible teaches something else (freedom of conscience?). We would have by de facto created an ecclesiastical magisterium (a majority of delegates to the Session) that would decide for the rest of the church whatever the Bible teaches on a particular topic and what the church should believe. The ordination of women to the ministry should remain what it has always been among us, namely a subject about which we have different opinions (like the question of the human nature of Christ). These different views have been tolerated by the church. There has never been a consensus on this topic and consequently it has never been raised to the level of a Fundamental Belief. This topic should not be solved at any cost.

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# POSITION SUMMARY #3

## INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church has spent significant time formally discussing the question of ordination to the pastoral ministry and its relationship to gender. After a year and a half, having completed its efforts and reaching a consensus on a general theology of ordination, the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) has not reached a consensus on the question of whether it is appropriate for women to fill the office of ordained minister. Despite using similar hermeneutical methods and appealing to Scripture rather than to human cultural norms, members of the Committee have reached widely divergent conclusions.

We are now faced with the question of how to move forward as a church, given the existing diversity on the underlying questions. What follows is an attempt to outline a way forward that takes seriously the main concerns identified thus far, while preserving the principle of the authority of Scripture and church unity.

The Bible calls every Christian to mutual submission, “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Eph 5:21).<sup>1</sup> By its very nature, mutual submission involves a certain sacrifice by all, for the greater good and unity of all. With the guidance of the Spirit, however, we believe that the central concerns within the various positions in the ordination discussion can be affirmed without sacrificing principle, while still maintaining the unity of the body of Christ.

We begin with a brief overview of our main theological principles, on which we build the justification for our proposal moving forward. These principles are set out in nine paragraphs below, with scriptural references to support the theological points.<sup>2</sup> The second and largest part of this paper outlines our proposal for moving forward, and includes a biblical-theological exposition, which demonstrates the scriptural foundations for a key point in our proposal. The final part of this paper draws conclusions from the biblical exegesis and applies them to our current situation.

## THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

During the course of the TOSC meetings, we heard many papers offering a variety of views on the questions of ordination to the gospel ministry. While we agreed with some points made by both groups, we found ourselves unable to fully commit to either because of

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> A fuller discussion of these and other scriptural references relevant to the moderate theological position can be found in “Minority Report on Ministry, Ordination, and Gender of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.” This is available online at [www.freedom-law.com](http://www.freedom-law.com).

differences on key points. Thus, we feel the need to set out our own statement of how we view the main biblical and theological issues on the ordination question.

### **NATURE OF THE TRINITY**

We believe that Christ is co-existent and co-equal with the Father and the Spirit from eternity. Thus, we do not believe in the eternal subordination of the Son, as some presenters opposed to women's ordination have proposed (Deut 6:4; Isa 9:6; Mic 5:2; Matt 28:19; John 8:58; John 17:24; Phil 2:6; Heb 1:8-12; 2 Cor. 13:14).

### **PRE-FALL ROLES FOR MAN AND WOMAN**

We believe there existed meaningful roles for men and women before the Fall that, while not hierarchical, did involve responsibilities for distinct, but complementary, servant-leadership roles. We do not believe in the idea of male headship prior to the Fall, insofar as that involved "authority over" Eve (Gen 2:15-25; 3:9, 16-20; 1 Cor 11:8; 15:22).

### **POST-FALL FAMILY HEADSHIP**

After the Fall, God instituted a male headship role in the family that, while loving, self-sacrificing, and service oriented, gives the male an oversight responsibility for his family that is of continuing validity (Gen 3:16; 18:12, 19; 1 Pet 3:1, 6; Eph 5:22-24).

### **MALE ECCLESIOLOGICAL LEADERSHIP**

We believe that there is a biblical model of male ecclesiological *leadership* that has validity across time and culture. We see this in Paul's invocation of the creation order and the Fall in discussing the office of elder, in the predominate fact of male institutional spiritual leadership in the Old Testament, in the actions of Christ when choosing twelve male disciples, and in the NT examples of apostles and elders (1 Tim 2:12, 13; Num 3:10, 38; Matt 27:55; Acts 1:21-23; Titus 1:6, 7).

### **CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH**

There is no basis, we believe, to suggest that men have a general *headship* in the church, exercising husbandly or paternal authority over women or anyone else. Only Christ is head in the church. His statement that we should "call no man... father" (Matt 23:9) was intended to prevent a human, paternal headship in the church (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22, 23).

### **GIFTS VERSUS OFFICES**

We see an important distinction between *spiritual gifts*, which are given by sovereign

action of the Holy Spirit, where gender considerations are not a biblical concern, and church *offices*, chosen by the church membership according to biblical qualifications, and where gender is mentioned, such as the office of elder (1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:11, 12; Acts 6:5-7; 1 Tim 2:12; 3:1, 2; Titus 1:6-8).

## **MALE SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH**

We believe that Paul's statements about a preferred role for a male in the office of elder (the equivalent of our ordained minister) are a functional, ecclesiastical norm meant to further church order, discipline, and mission. We view, however, the gender qualification of elder as one characteristic among many, and as not absolute over all the others. We do not think we should make this point of ecclesiastical order paramount over other more important doctrinal concerns, such as the mission and unity of the body of Christ (1 Tim 2:12-14; 3:1-7; 1 Cor 11:2-5; Titus 2:2-8).

## **THE ROLE OF TRAJECTORY ARGUMENTS**

We believe that positions based on trajectory arguments can be biblically valid. For example, while Scripture regulates slavery to restrain its evils, no Scripture asserts that slavery is part of a divinely created order or integral to the nature of humanity. However, unlike slavery, maleness as a qualification for the office of elder is derived from Paul's inspired understanding and teaching regarding the creation, human nature, the Fall, and the incarnation (Gen 1:27; Gal 3:28; Titus 2:9, 10; 1 Tim 2:12-14; 1 Cor 11:3-5).

## **HERMENEUTICAL CONCERNS**

We believe that the hermeneutical methods that some who support women's ordination use to exegete the New Testament gender texts could create problems in dealing with passages regarding sexual standards. Nevertheless, we believe the issue of maleness as one qualification for ordination is not in the category of moral absolutes, such as the Ten Commandments or consistent and oft-repeated biblical moral commands, including those dealing with sexual behavior (Exod 20:14; Lev 18:1-30; 20:10-21; Acts 15:28, 29; 1 Tim 2:12, 13; Rom 1:18-27; Gal 3:28).

## **A PROPOSED WAY FORWARD**

As a practical way forward, we propose that the world Church affirm three biblical principles as a basis for denominational policy on ministry, male and female roles, and the office of ordained minister. These are linked because, as TOSC discussions made clear, the three issues are interrelated. The first two principles build on arguments made by others in TOSC, but the final principle is our unique contribution. For that reason, it is set out at some length, including an exposition of its biblical basis.

### **EXPANSION OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN MINISTRY**

We believe that the best way forward is to start with and build on those things that all positions have in common. In TOSC, a consensus has emerged on the vital importance of empowering Adventist women everywhere, regardless of ordination, to greater involvement in a wide range of ministries. Initiatives both affirming women in ministry and supporting them with education and resources would begin to rectify our failure to do so over much of the last century, in disregard of prophetic counsel.<sup>3</sup>

### **MALE RESPONSIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE HOME**

We affirm the concept of male responsibility and spiritual leadership in the home. Most members of TOSC agree that, after the Fall and the entry of sin, men were given a special role of responsibility in the home. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Eph 5:23).

There is ongoing discussion over how to understand the extent and significance of this leadership role. There is a generally shared view, however, that married men have a responsibility to care for and support their families that has been overlooked and is being neglected in many parts of the world. This is an opportune moment to define this role with care, stressing that it should be a loving, self-sacrificing, servant-leadership like Christ’s. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph 5:25).

Such leadership in the home should never be used to oppress or abuse. Rather, all men should strive for the ideal of partnership and consensus decision-making, and should provide spiritual leadership within the family, rather than devolving this to their wives.

Wives should respect and encourage their husbands in this role of spiritual leadership and responsibility. The Church should provide for more education and training programs to help educate men in their roles as caregivers, fathers, and spiritual leaders, enabling them to learn better how to model the leadership of Christ in their families.

### **THE OFFICE OF ELDER, THE CRITERIA OF GENDER, AND THE DIVINE COMMAND/IDEAL DISTINCTION**

Now we come to the most challenging issue: the question of how to understand the roles of men and women in relation to the office of pastoral ministry. We do not believe that the headship of the man in the home extends without limits to the church. Such a position would imply a role of authority for all men in the church over all women. We simply do not find support for this in the Bible.

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., “If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work,” Ellen White wrote in 1879. “We should see many more converted to the truth. The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth.” (Ev 471-472; see also DA 568.)



Indeed, to the contrary, Christ commands that we “call no man father,” which we read as denying to any human a paternal role of authority in the church (Matt 23:9). Quite simply, the only “head” the Bible identifies in the church is Christ (Matt 23:10; Eph 5:23). For this reason, it would go against our Protestant, biblical heritage, we believe, to identify any merely human figure as fulfilling a headship role in the church.

Still, the Bible does identify more limited roles of leadership (of representative and delegated authority) to help provide order in the church, the primary one being the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1-7). One of the several stated criteria of that office is maleness (1 Tim 2:11-15; 3:1-7). This gender preference is not, in our view, an implementation of “male headship” in the church. The authority of the elder in the church is different both in kind and in extent from that of the father in the home. However, both leadership roles are based on similar principles, rooted in Creation and the Fall; this emerges from Paul’s discussions of leadership in home and church (1 Cor 11; 1 Tim 2).

Nevertheless, we are persuaded that the Bible teaches that the office of ordained minister (the functional equivalent of the New Testament office of elder),<sup>4</sup> with its gatekeeping responsibility in the church—overseeing the implementation of ecclesiastical standards and discipline in relation to all members—should ideally be carried out by men. This does not prevent a woman from preaching, teaching, and otherwise providing both spiritual counsel and leadership in a church setting. But maleness is a stated qualification for the office of ordained minister, and while an important quality (cf. 1 Tim 2: 11-14), it is only one among a number of qualifications. We see no basis in the text for treating this one qualification in an absolute fashion, or as outweighing all the other criteria combined.

This understanding of the relative importance of the gender criteria is based on the difference between 1) God’s absolute moral commands and eternal truths, and 2) His ideals<sup>5</sup> for organizing His people. The former include the Ten Commandments, the pillar doctrines of Christianity, and consistently articulated scriptural limits on personal moral behavior. The latter, we believe, deal with ritual, ceremonial, organizational, or legal practices and precepts, whose intention is to bring order to the community of believers, safeguard the identity of God’s people, and enhance the church’s mission. Such ideals are important, but because they have an ecclesiological function and a missional purpose, the Bible indicates that they can in certain circumstances be modified and adapted. This distinction between eternal commands or truths and ecclesiological ideals can provide, we believe, a key insight that can help the Church move forward in unity, if not uniformity, on this question.

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4 Cf. “Consensus Statement on a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination” (TOSC, voted July 23, 2013).

5 Using the word “ideal” to describe these continuing organizational norms does not mean to imply that any deviation from this standard will necessarily be inferior and secondary. The reality is that an ideal may be varied because specific circumstances mean that another approach may be better or even necessary for some period. Thus, the deviation from the ideal becomes itself a situational ideal, and accordingly should not be considered inferior or secondary. A profound example of this is the incarnation of Christ, which was a situational response to the non-ideal circumstances of the entrance of sin and the necessity of a redeemer.

When the adaptation of a divine ideal occurs in Scripture to meet local needs, foster mission, or promote unity it usually occurs in one of three ways:

- i. God Himself endorses the adaptation
- ii. A biblical prophet confirms it
- iii. The community of believers—the church—agrees upon this variation from the divine pattern

It is crucial to emphasize that adaptation in Scripture is not the norm, that it never applies to God’s absolute moral commands and eternal truths, and that He allows it only under certain circumstances. But within these limits, there are a number of instances in the Bible where God allows for the modification of His initial plans for the Israelites in relation to matters of leadership and/or gender, such as we are currently discussing. A brief review of a few examples of such adaptations would help us understand the important distinction between commands and ideals.

None of these episodes are directly analogous to the situation in which we currently find ourselves, and they should not be scrutinized for exact parallels with the ordination question. Rather, these stories all illustrate two simple, yet critical points. The first is that a distinction exists between God’s absolute moral commands and eternal truths on the one hand, and divine organizational and ecclesiastical norms on the other. The second point is that God at times allows for variations in these organizational ideals in response to the circumstances, needs, and even desires of His people. How this happens differs from case to case, and thus a review of a number of these stories is important to achieve a balanced overview of how this operates scripturally.

**A KING IN ISRAEL.** The Scripture makes it apparent that God’s ideal plan for the nation of Israel was not that of kingship (1 Sam 8:10-20). He wanted them to be led by a combination of prophets, judges, priests, and elders. Still, when the time came that Israel desired a king, God accommodated this desire, even though the choice was prompted by the surrounding society and culture. “The Lord answered [Samuel], ‘Listen to them and give them a king’” (1 Sam 8:23).

At that point, not only did the kingship become acceptable to God, the king himself became the Lord’s anointed, literally, when Samuel poured oil on Saul (1 Sam 10:1). Thereafter, kings were frequently anointed by prophets or high priests as a sign of divine appointment (1 Sam 16:13; 1 Kgs 1:39, 45; 2 Kgs 9:1-6; 2 Chr 23:11; cf. 1 Kgs 11:35-37).

The fact that the kingship was often a burden to Israel and that individual kings fell into sin did not change God's endorsement of the institution. Indeed, from then on, it became a mark of loyalty both to Israel and to God to accept and support the new king (e.g., "Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched" [1 Sam 10:26, NIV]). Those who did not support the new king are described in Holy Writ as "some troublemakers," who "despised him and brought him no gifts" (1 Sam 10:27, NIV).

This story of the king is instructive on a number of points. First, it shows that God is willing to vary His organizational ideal to accommodate cultural circumstances and the desires of His people, even when those desires caused the people to have "rejected" God and His will on a particular issue (1 Sam 8:7). Since God was not willing to reject His people for rejecting one of His organizational ideals, it should cause us to seriously reflect on how we relate to one another when there are differences in understanding such ideals.

Second, these new plans become just as much a part of His work and will, as had His original plan. The new leader is the Lord's anointed just as much as the previous leadership had been. Third, if individual Israelites opposed God's adaptation of His ideal, they were in danger of opposing God Himself.

As noted earlier, adaptation is not possible where a universal moral imperative or eternal truth is at stake. In the event that adaptation of the Ten Commandments, a core doctrine such as Creation or the Sanctuary, or clear and oft-repeated scriptural restrictions on personal moral behavior were proposed, then God's people should resist and if need be institute reformation. But the choice to alter Israel's leadership plan and go with a king did not justify such a response—just the contrary.

Some will note that already in the book of Deuteronomy God himself had made allowance for the variance of kingship (Deut 17:14-20). This passage does indeed talk about Israel having a king at some point in the future. But the language used indicates that this is not God's plan, but the people's. It was the people who would say, "I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me" (Deut 17:15).

God's prediction of the variance—His foresight of Israel's departure from the divine theocratic template—did not make it any less a variance from the ideal, as both the prediction and the fulfillment reveal. Deuteronomy notwithstanding, Samuel denounced the Israelites, declaring, "Your wickedness is great . . . in asking a king for yourselves"—and they accepted their guilt, confessing, "We have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves" (1 Sam 12:18, 19, NKJV). But God's response to the people, transmitted through Samuel, is striking: "Do not fear." Samuel reveals that, despite their departure from His ideal plan, "the Lord will not forsake His people" (1 Sam 12:20, 22, NKJV). God accepts even very significant variation in His organizational ideals, and we should not be quick to condemn others whom we view as departing from such ideals.

The Bible also reveals that not all variances need to be predicted or revealed by God ahead of time to be appropriate. Adaptations might come about in spontaneous response to circumstances and human requests. This unexpected adaptability is revealed by a story connected with the modification of God's laws of property inheritance.

**THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD.** In ancient Israel, sons were intended by divine law to inherit property, with a double portion going to the first-born son (Deut 21:15-17). But the four daughters of Zelophehad had no brothers and, once their father died, his name and property would be dissipated among the people. The daughters petitioned Moses that, in the absence of brothers, they be allowed to inherit property. Moses brought the case to the Lord, Who said that “the daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren” (Num 27:7).

Again, in this instance the Lord explicitly approves the adaptation, but He does it in response to a human need and a human request. There was nothing in the law prior to the daughters' entreaty that suggested adaptation or variation of the law was permissible. Rather, God modified His law, His civil statutes, at the request of not just important community leaders, but of young, unmarried girls in a highly patriarchal culture. The story thus indicates that there is an important role for the community of believers in adaptations of God's plans for ordering His people.

In addition, however, we also have a biblical story that shows the adaptation and variation of an ideal is possible without a recorded explicit divine command. This story is found in Judges 4 and 5, and concerns Deborah and Barak.

**DEBORAH AND BARAK.** The story of Deborah the Judge is often told in the context of the ordination discussion to prove that women can hold positions of spiritual institutional authority, similar to that of elder. But the story is more complicated than this, and actually helps illustrate the moral command/ideal dichotomy in the context of leadership and gender. Judges in ancient Israel had spiritual, legal, and military roles in the community.<sup>6</sup> These roles can be seen in the lives of Ehud—the assassin of Eglon, king of Moab—Gideon, and Jephthah (Judg 3, 6, 7, 11, 12).

Deborah “led” or “judged” Israel, and “held court” under a palm tree, where she decided the “disputes” of the Israelites (Judg 4:4, 5). Even though the Hebrew word used to describe Deborah as a judge is the same as is used for all the other judges, there are indications in the story that a female judge was a rare and unusual event. Deborah is the only woman recorded in the Bible to have been a judge of Israel.<sup>7</sup> This apparent pattern of exceptionality is support-

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<sup>6</sup> In ancient Israel, judges did not have purely civil roles. In a theocracy, those who carried out the role of judging were also intimately involved in religious matters, as seen in their role of keeping the people from spiritual corruption (Judg 2:16-19). Of course, Deborah's prophetic role only enhanced the spiritual aspect of her work.

<sup>7</sup> Some have considered Hulda the Prophetess to be a judge in Israel, but the Bible does not call her that. Rather, she is called a “prophetess,” *nabiah* in the Hebrew, which is a feminine form of *nabi*, which is a speaker or prophet. She gives counsel to King Josiah, but that counsel is a prophetic, spiritual message, and not any kind of legal decision that a judge would render (2 Kgs 22:14-20).

ed by Ellen White's comment that "in the absence of the usual magistrates, the people had sought to her [Deborah] for counsel and justice" (YRP 260).

Further, when it came time to mount a military campaign against Sisera and his army, rather than take command as most judges did, Deborah called on a warrior, Barak, to lead the troops. He was unwilling to assume the command unless she came along to support him at the battle. This she agreed to, but in a rebuke of his unwillingness to carry out his role as a man, she told him that the glory for the victory would go to a woman (Judg 4:9). The story of Deborah shows that women, when they played the role of judge, were expected to play a more limited role than that of a male judge. They were not ideally to be involved in or lead out in combat.

Deborah's role as judge and military escort was unusual, made necessary by circumstances including the failure of men to accept their expected roles. Thus, the Deborah story contains at the same time pointers towards the general biblical ideal of male spiritual institutional leadership, but also biblical evidence of its variability.

This story makes at least three important points about ideals and their exceptions. First, it suggests that certain leadership roles are meant to be filled by men. Second, it also shows, however, that certain circumstances may call for the involvement of women in positions they do not usually fill, including even attending and observing a battle. This ideal of women not playing combat roles is stretched further, and even broken, when the story ends with Jael killing the enemy general Sisera with a hammer and nail (Judg 4:21, 22). This act is subsequently praised in a hymn of Deborah, who rejoiced that the "most blessed of women be Jael" (Judg 5:24, NIV). Whether or not Jael was inspired, there is no doubt that Deborah was called of God to exercise spiritual authority.

Third, and finally, unlike the king in Israel and the daughters of Zelophehad, the story is silent regarding any divinely given directive regarding these exceptions and modifications. However, the Bible is clear that "the Lord routed Sisera" and that "God subdued" the enemies of His people (Judg 4:15, 23, NIV), demonstrating divine endorsement of the atypical leadership of Deborah and Barak. Thus, circumstances of national peril called for a response, which was then taken in light of the organizational and missional needs of God's people, and the response that varied from the divine ideal then received divine blessing. The narrative of the story itself, along with Deborah's hymn, reveals that the gender and leadership variants the story records were part of God's providential plan.

**KING DAVID AND THE MOABITE RESTRICTION.** The laws of purity and organization that God gave Israel could even be modified to allow a forbidden outsider to play the most powerful leadership roles in the land, as the reigns of David and Solomon and the genealogy of Jesus demonstrate.

Because the Moabites had seduced the Israelites into idolatry, God had commanded that a “Moabite shall not enter into the Assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation shall none belonging to them enter into the assembly of the Lord for ever” (Deut 23:3, ERV). This was relevant to David because his great-grandfather was Boaz, who married Ruth, the Moabite (Ruth 4:16-20), but had done so in defiance of a Mosaic prohibition that had been repeated by Joshua (Deut 7:3; Josh 23:12).

Under a strict application of the Levitical code, Boaz’s marriage to Ruth was illegitimate. She and her descendants should have been forbidden from playing any formal roles in the nation of Israel until ten generations had passed. This would have excluded David from being king. The entire book of Ruth, which we generally treat as a sort of pious love story, can be seen as an extended defense and legal argument as to why Ruth was really a Jewess, and no longer a Moabite.<sup>8</sup>

Her famous soliloquy, “where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16, NIV), takes on a whole new significance when this larger context is understood. So does the story of her redemption by Boaz, and their subsequent marriage. The argument is made in alternate ways: she is an Israelite because she left Moab and chose Israel and Israel’s God; she is an Israelite because she is redeemed by an act of sacrifice by Boaz, an act of grace which transfers rights and identity; finally, she is an Israelite because she marries a faithful, conscientious, law-abiding Israelite. Fittingly, the book ends with a short description of the genealogy of Ruth leading to David (Ruth 4:16-20).

Once one understands the truly spiritual nature of Jewish identity, all these arguments work. Obviously they worked in their historical context, as a majority of Israel and Judah accepted David as king. But an important point for our purposes is that none of these “exceptions” to the Mosaic prohibition can be found in the law itself! They were all created by the circumstances of the story, as Israel’s legal and spiritual expositors and leaders wrestled with the meaning of God’s laws and the *spirit behind them* in a particular concrete context.

God did not provide a shortcut. A prophet could have stated, “God has said this is okay,” or “We can make an exception for David.” If this had happened, the book of Ruth would not

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<sup>8</sup> That the purpose of the book of Ruth is to “promote the interests of David and his dynasty” is the position of a “large consensus” of modern interpreters: Robert Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 37. Further, a number of these have seen the central focus of the book as dealing with and making acceptable the identity of Ruth as a Moabite: see *ibid.*, 40-42; Murray Gow, *The Book of Ruth: Its Structure, Theme, and Purpose* (Leicester, UK: Appollos, 1992), 132-36 (Gow notes that both the Babylonian Talmud and the Midrash on Ruth reference ancient arguments made against David’s legitimacy based on his Moabite ancestry); Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary* (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd, 1997), 23-28.

have been needed. But it was needed, for as God's people seek to understand, apply, and adapt divine leadership ideals, God regularly guides through the sanctified prayer, Bible study, and discussion of the community of faith. It is notable that the decision to accept Ruth was taken by the elders of Bethlehem (Ruth 4:9, 11). The story shows how integrative and open God and His people were on matters of mission and organizational rules. The story of Ruth and Boaz is one of the Old Testament forerunners of Acts 15, where the community submitted lesser organizational ideals to more weighty and important issues of mission for God and His church.

**DAVID, THE SHOWBREAD, AND CHRIST.** Sometimes God even works through the reason and faith of individuals who find themselves in exceptional circumstances, as he did with David and the showbread (1 Sam 21:1-8). David's act in eating the showbread is one of the most famous examples of a divine ideal (in this case a ceremonial/ritual command) giving way to the larger spirit behind these laws. Fleeing from Saul, David in his haste to escape had left without sufficient provisions or weapons. Arriving in Nob, he asked Ahimelech the priest for bread to eat. Ahimelech said that the only available food was the showbread, which was reserved by the law for the priests (Lev 24:5-9).

Due to David's pressing circumstances, however, Ahimelech was willing to allow David and his men to eat the bread, as long as they were ritually clean from sexual relations (1 Sam 21:4). It is intriguing that Ahimelech was willing to break one ceremonial rule—non-priests eating the showbread—but desirous of keeping another rule—ritual purity from sexual relations.

This partial application is characteristic generally of individual and spontaneous human attempts to adapt and modify ritual or organizational laws to new or exceptional circumstances. One only alters the original as much as needed to deal with the exigent circumstance. It is evidence that the exception granted was a spontaneous human-devised alteration, and not one found in the original law itself or some other legislatively created standing law.

This nuanced caveat is what one would expect from a human agent engaged in ethical/legal reflection, thinking about how he would explain his conduct to others. "Well, I did give him the bread, but it was an emergency, and also I made sure he was ritually pure." The story ultimately shows that God's ritual and organizational ideals are expected to be applied in a common-sense manner by proper ecclesiastical leaders, such as Ahimelech, in a way that furthers the larger values, mission, and unity of the community.

Strikingly, too, that is how Christ understood the story, for the story of David and the showbread makes a notable appearance in the New Testament. Christ justified both David's acts as well as those of his disciples in the face of criticism from the Pharisees that his disciples did not keep the Sabbath properly because they plucked ears of corn to eat (Matt 12:3, 4; Mark 2:25, 26; Luke 6:3, 4).

While the context of the Pharisees' remarks is Sabbath observance, the Sabbath command itself was not an issue. There is nothing in that command or its application in the Torah that would forbid plucking corn to eat it on the Sabbath. Rather, it was the rules and traditions of the Pharisees and elders that had been constructed to safeguard the Sabbath that the disciples were accused of violating. Still, in responding to the Pharisees, Christ called upon a counter-example that did involve an undoubted law of the Torah: the limitation of showbread to the priests.

David was justified, Christ said, in eating the showbread, in violation of an explicit divine rule, to preserve life and health. So how much more are His disciples justified in eating corn on the Sabbath, which merely violates a man-made rule of the Pharisees? The important point for our purposes is that Christ ratified human ability to adapt and modify divine rules that provide ecclesiastical order in pursuit of higher principles of the preservation of life, health, or well-being of the community and its members.<sup>9</sup>

**THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL: DIFFERENCES OVER DIVINE IDEALS.** Circumcision was a vitally important act for every male Israelite. It was a sign of God's everlasting covenant with Abraham to be kept "for the generations to come;" in fact, those who were not circumcised were said to have "broken the covenant" (Gen 17:9-14). Moses's failure to circumcise his son was seen by God as so great a failure as to justify his death (Exod 4:24, 25). So essential was it to the Israelites' covenant with God that, after the prolonged and complete failure to circumcise male children during the 40 years in the wilderness, it was felt essential for Joshua to circumcise all the adult males of the children of Israel after crossing the Jordan River (Josh 5:1-7). Circumcision was considered essential to the identity of Israel as God's covenant people.

Understanding this background, it is not difficult to understand why some Jewish Christians argued, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1, Phillips). This strict requirement caused a great deal of dissension in the local churches at Antioch.

Ultimately the issue was referred to a council of leaders gathered in Jerusalem. Deliberating together, the church came to the conclusion that circumcision and other ceremonial provisions of the Old Testament were unnecessary for Gentile believers. They were to "abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:20). In light of the cross, and to preserve the unity and mission of the church, the Jerusalem Council, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, altered a divine organizational/identity marker that had been practiced by God's people for centuries.

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<sup>9</sup> The portion of the story where Christ discusses the activity of the priests in the temple is less relevant for our purposes. The priests were following the divine law in ministering on the Sabbath, and thus by definition were not defiling the Sabbath when they carried out that which was commanded by the Lord of the Sabbath. But in eating the showbread, David was not acting according to any explicit, written divine command.



Ellen G. White's comment on the prevailing attitude of the Jews is insightful: "The Jews could not believe that they ought to change the customs they had adopted under the special direction of God."<sup>10</sup> It was difficult for these Jewish Christians to allow for a variance in what they believed to be God's ideal for all believers. Yet in the end, the unity of the Christian church was preserved in the midst of diversity. Jewish Christians continued practicing Jewish customs while Gentile Christians did not feel compelled to adopt them. "The broad and far reaching decisions of the general council brought confidence into the ranks of the Gentile believers and the cause of God prospered."<sup>11</sup>

We do not believe that circumcision and ordination are the same kind of issue in all respects. Circumcision was an ethnic marker, instituted during the time of Abraham, that lost its central meaning when the borders of Israel became defined by those of spiritual Israel. Leadership and gender roles go back to Eden. That biblical model should, we believe, still be taken into account today. But Paul elsewhere indicates that organizational ideals, even "commands," of the Lord that are of continuing validity may be varied from. In 1 Corinthians 9:14, Paul acknowledges "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." Yet, in the next verse he says, "but I have made no use of these rights" (1 Cor 9:14, 15, ESV).

The command to support ministers from the tithe could be varied on an individual basis, Paul demonstrates, if the minister himself chooses to do so. This individual choice, however, did not do away with the general rule. Other organizational principles that affect the church more broadly must be agreed to more widely. We believe that the Jerusalem Council highlights four vitally important principles that should be taken into account whenever organizational guidelines of broad impact on the church, such as qualifications for ordination, are being applied or adapted by the church. These principles are:

First, an issue of church order and organization fracturing the unity of the church should be decided by a representative council of the church. Second, the decision, though taken collectively, may not require uniformity of action on the part of all, as the Jerusalem Council allowed Jews and Gentiles to approach circumcision and ritual differently. Third, the decision should foster both the unity and mission of the church within the framework of biblical principle. Fourth, the decision should foster unity, just as the NT church, composed of Jewish and Gentile believers, was united in Christ through the Holy Spirit on the eternal, unchanging truths of God's Word. They shared, as we should, an all-consuming desire to reach the world with the message of His grace. But they were not always united in the particulars of ecclesiastical practice. In Christ, however, they were able to live with these differences, and so should we.

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<sup>10</sup> AA 192

<sup>11</sup> AA 197

**IDEAL AND VARIATION IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE.** Ellen G. White showed a distinct awareness of the variable nature of organizational ideals. She was supportive of church order and the need for pastoral ordination, but she was very clear that such organizational rules should not stand in the way of the mission of the church. In 1896 she wrote about an un-ordained worker and his mistake in not being willing to baptize when no ordained pastor was available:

It has been a great mistake that men go out, knowing they are children of God, like Brother Tay, [who] went to Pitcairn as a missionary to do work, [but]... did not feel at liberty to baptize because he had not been ordained. That is not any of God's arrangements; it is man's fixing. When men go out with the burden of the work and to bring souls into the truth, those men are ordained of God, [even] if [they] never have a touch of ceremony of ordination. To say [they] shall not baptize when there is nobody else, [is wrong]. If there is a minister in reach, all right, then they should seek for the ordained minister to do the baptizing, but when the Lord works with a man to bring out a soul here and there, and they know not when the opportunity will come that these precious souls can be baptized, why he should not question about the matter, he should baptize these souls<sup>12</sup>.

In this single quotation we have both the acknowledgment of the ideal (“they should seek for the ordained minister to do the baptizing”) and the variation or adaptations (“to say they shall not baptize when there is nobody else, is wrong”). White’s clear and urgent overriding concern was for the ministry and mission of the Church. Organizational guidelines have their place, but should give way when they impede mission.

In another instance, White described how an apparently clear statement of her own regarding school order and restrictions should be set aside based on “reason from common sense.” She met with a group of parents and educators who were considering starting a kindergarten. Some of these conscientious Adventist believers opposed it, as they had read her counsel regarding not sending children to school until they were eight or ten years old.<sup>13</sup>

White’s response is quite instructive. She acknowledged her earlier statements about students and age, but said that rather than being left loosely supervised, it would be much better for the young children to be in a well-run Adventist school. She explained her response in terms of a wider principle, one that should command our attention: “God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> MS 75, Nov. 12, 1896, pp. 1-2

<sup>13</sup> “Parents should be the only teachers of their children until they have reached eight or ten years of age... . The only schoolroom for children from eight to ten years of age should be in the open air” (CE 8).

<sup>14</sup> 3SM 217

Here again White demonstrates her ability to distinguish between God's moral imperatives—His divine commands—and divine ideals, which are subject to adaptation. The divine ideal of the parents teaching their children for the first eight to ten years does not forbid, under some circumstances, those children attending school. Neither did it forbid the church to start a kindergarten. For parents in other circumstances, the ideal continued to be that they instruct their children till eight or ten. It is surely instructive that White was very comfortable living in a denomination that could take into account local circumstances when applying these ideals.

**DETERMINING WHEN TO VARY THE DIVINE PATTERN.** We believe that the biblical examples we have discussed collectively show that any decision to adapt the divine organizational or ecclesiastical norms ought not to be taken individually, unilaterally, or rashly. Rather, the church should engage in such application and adaptation collectively, carefully, and deliberately, guided by those who have been duly appointed to exercise servant-leadership of God's people. While none of the illustrations discussed above on their own would justify a modification of the qualifications for elder, we believe that the collective principles embodied in them support such an outcome.

Three of the stories—the king in Israel, Deborah, and David's Moabite heritage—show God's willingness to allow, and even endorse, deviation from leadership norms in the organization of His people. Two of the stories—the daughters of Zelophehad and Deborah—show again an adjustment of regular rules and practices in connection with gender. Another story—that of David and the showbread—shows God's willingness to allow the adjustment of organizational and ritual norms based on need and pressing circumstances without a special word from the Lord or a prophet. At least two of the stories—Deborah and David and the showbread—show that a deviation or modification can happen without it doing away with the underlying general rule: the variation does not become the "new norm." Finally, the Jerusalem Council provides the primary model for how variation and modification should most frequently and properly happen in the era of the church, though the story of Ruth is also relevant here.

How then, can we today know when God has allowed the community to adapt or modify an ideal? When we see that the Holy Spirit has led God's duly authorized servant-leaders of the religious community to move forward on the basis of good order and process; when there has been a collective study of the Scriptures; and when a decision is made by those duly chosen to represent the community to make changes in organizational, ecclesiological, or leadership issues; then we risk opposing God if we continue to openly and disruptively work against what the community of believers has, with proper order and procedure, so decided.

Stories such as the sons of Aaron and the use of common fire in the sanctuary, and Uzzah's presumption in steadying the ark reveal that individual decisions made haphazardly and based on personal preference to vary ritual or ceremonial commands are presumptuous and can incur divine wrath (Lev 10:1, 2; 2 Sam 6:6-8, 1 Chr 13:9-11). We do not today have a Moses, a Urim and Thummim, or an Ark with the special presence of God to speak to us directly and approve our variance of an organizational norm. God today can verify adaptations of his non-moral organizational ideals by the way in which He speaks and acts through His people when they pray and study together: as they did at Jerusalem (Acts 15), as early Adventists did in "Bible conferences," and as we do when representatives of the world Church gather in a General Conference Session.

## APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

As the above examples show, God in His love and grace accommodates His divine ideal throughout Scripture and salvation history. Again, this reasoning does not apply to universal moral commands or truths. None of the examples set out above—whether the king in Israel, or inheritance laws, or Deborah and Barak, or David and the showbread, or the Jerusalem Council, or Ellen G. White's counsel on the age of children attending school—involved variations or deviations from God's moral laws, whether it be the Ten Commandments or prohibitions against sexual immorality such as adultery or homosexuality. Careful and limited modifications of God's organizational, ritual, or ecclesiastical ideals create no precedent for any attempt to vary or adapt God's moral laws.

But God's organizational ideals are somewhat different. They should not be lightly or cavalierly disregarded. But neither should they be allowed to hinder the mission of God's church. These types of standards are created to further God's primary desires of the unity of His church and for His people to be focused on their divinely appointed role as instruments in God's mission of seeking and saving the lost (Matt 18:10-12, Luke 19:10, Matt 28:18-20). Organizational and ritual norms, even those that point to abiding principles, are sometimes adapted to further these ultimate goals of salvation.

In the family, where the responsibility of male leadership applies most directly, the father may be dead, absent, spiritually uncommitted, or otherwise irresponsible, so that the wife must assume the role of spiritual leader. In a local church, the men who are available, even if committed Adventists, may lack some or all of the qualifications or gifts for the office of local elder.

Would it be wise to place a male in the office of elder if he had only one or two of the listed qualifications, when there were women available with most of the qualifications, but were simply not male? It is possible to extrapolate from such a hypothetical situation on a

local scale to the larger world Church. The reality of demographics within certain cultures is such that the divine ideal regarding gender and leadership may stand in the way of the mission and unity of the Church if maleness becomes the sole criterion or absolute ideal of leadership. Accordingly, the world Church could develop a comprehensive position on ordination that would allow for the proper authorities in a region or area (such as a conference, union, or division) to be given the freedom to seek the Holy Spirit's leading in applying and adapting the divine pattern to their local situation.

Many who adhere to the biblical ideal of male spiritual leadership will agree that sometimes women may need to assume the role of spiritual leader or elder in the absence of qualified men. Thus, they do not view the prohibition of women leading out as being based on sacramental concerns—that women somehow cannot make efficacious ecclesiastical rituals or rites (e.g., the position of the Roman Catholic Church). There are those who would typically limit this exception to very extreme cases. But the fact that nearly everyone agrees that women *can* carry a primary role of spiritual leadership *under certain circumstances* (e.g. as currently is happening in China) is significant. The key, of course, is how those circumstances are understood and defined.

We propose that the world Church acknowledge the general ideal of male leadership in the office of ordained minister, but that it also allow for women to be ordained, where local circumstances may make that ideal difficult or impractical to implement, to further the unity and mission of the Church. The Church should also recognize that biblical principles of religious liberty mean local organizational units and regions should be able to deal with their cultures in applying these principles in ways that will most effectively advance the gospel mission of the Church in their fields.

Such an approach, mutually agreed upon, prayerfully and carefully thought through, and appropriately carried out, would leave our hermeneutics and theology uncompromised. It would affirm the Jerusalem Council's principles of unity and interdependence in Church decisions being taken together, even when allowing for diversity. It would take seriously what Paul says about the ideal for church leadership. But it would recognize the missional nature and flexibility of that principle: that it is not one of the Ten Commandments, nor an issue of salvation, nor a doctrinal pillar identified by our pioneers.

Some may interpret and apply these organizational ideals differently than others, but under biblical principles of mutual Christian liberty we should grant tolerance and forbearance to each other (Gal 2:3-5). Under these same principles of freedom, no organizational unit or employee should be required either to support or to promote ordained female pastoral leadership should they conscientiously object to it. If the united community of believers agrees both to affirm a divine organizational and ecclesiastical ideal, yet also to allow its ad-

aptation for the sake of mission and unity, then church members should accept the mutually agreed diversity that will result. We should respect views with which we disagree, “submitting [ourselves] one to another in the fear of God,” and “forbearing each other and forgiving one another” (Eph 5:21, Col 3:13). As Ellen G. White wrote:

Let us all remember that we are not dealing with ideal men, but with real men of God’s appointment, men precisely like ourselves, men who fall into the same errors that we do, men of like ambitions and infirmities. No man has been made a master, to rule the mind and conscience of a fellow-being. Let us be very careful how we deal with God’s blood-bought heritage . . . . Of us He says, Ye “are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” This relationship we should recognize. If we are bound up with Christ, we shall constantly manifest Christlike sympathy and forbearance toward those who are striving with all their God-given ability to bear their burdens, even as we endeavor to bear our appointed burdens.<sup>15</sup>

A final issue that needs addressing is that of the 1984 allowance for women to be ordained as local elders. A rollback on this point would be extremely destructive to the Church and its unity, and is inconsistent both with the interpretation of Scripture set out above and with a conservative reading of the New Testament. The position of elder, as it is currently carried out in most local Seventh-day Adventist congregations, is in practice more akin to the biblical office of deacon—a role that most people agree the Bible permits women to hold. In Adventist ecclesiological practice, it is the ordained minister who more closely fills the biblical position of “elder.”<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, this is not a call to compromise biblical beliefs. Rather, it is an appeal to listen to the Bible itself on how it applies its various standards and teachings. It is an appeal to unite in Christ on divine, unchangeable truths, applied in the spirit of God’s Word, and to focus on the mission of reaching lost people for the Kingdom. It is also an invitation to follow the biblical principles of charity, mutual submission, and Christian freedom within the Church on matters that are not salvific or pillars of the faith, for the sake of the mission, integrity, and unity of the body of Christ.

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<sup>15</sup> TM 495

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 4. Although at times the local elder may carry out some of the functions of the New Testament elder, we believe that we could deal with the core of Paul’s teaching on the ideal of men leading out in providing spiritual accountability and discipline for other men by recommending a guideline such as the following: “In those instances where a head elder is a woman, there should be a male co- or vice-elder who can handle those circumstances where the head elder needs to lead out in the ecclesiastical discipline of a man.”



SECTION VI

**WAY FORWARD  
STATEMENTS**



## WAY FORWARD STATEMENT #1

To remain faithful to Scripture, to reaffirm and further promote women in ministry, and to preserve Bible-based unity in the Church, we recommend the following for consideration by the General Conference in full session: (1) Reaffirm and encourage, with public recognition and licensure, women whom God has called to gospel work; (2) Provide enhanced access to educational opportunities for women in gospel work and ensure fair and just treatment upon their placement in ministry; (3) Promote the greater development of various lines of ministry for women, according to their spiritual gifts, including but not limited to personal and public evangelism, teaching, preaching, ministering to families, counseling, medical missionary work, departmental leadership, etc. While increasing opportunities for women in ministry, we also recommend that the Church (4) Retain the scriptural practice of ordaining/commissioning only qualified men to the office of pastor/minister throughout the world church in harmony with the consistent example of Christ, the apostles, and the Adventist pioneers; and (5) Return to the biblical practice of electing and ordaining only men to the office of local elder throughout the world Church, while providing for women to serve as un-ordained church leaders under certain circumstances.

### SUPPORT AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- God calls women to both full- and part-time ministry (DG 20, 110; Ev 472). The lines of service in which women may work are broad and far-reaching (Exod 15:20; Judg 4, 5; Acts 9:36, 39; Rom 16:1-12; Titus 2:3-5; 9T 128-129; ChS 68). For its mission, the Church must make full use of the indispensable role of women in the ministry of the Church. Women “can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their work is needed” (ChS 27). The Church should issue an appropriate license with equitable compensation to qualified women “although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon” them (MS 22, 1892; Ev 491-493; 12MR 160; GW 452).
- Although both men and women are called to various lines of ministry, the Bible consistently assigns the office of local elder or pastor/minister to faithful men who satisfy the scriptural requirements. See the examples of Jesus and the early church as well as Paul’s instruction (Mark 3:14; Acts 1:21-26; 6:3; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). This assignment, rather than being based on culture, is grounded by Paul in the male spiritual leadership role established at Creation and reaffirmed after the Fall (1 Tim 2:13, 14; 1 Cor 11:3, 8, 9). While spiritual gifts include pastoral care, this is not equivalent to the biblical office of elder that is today often referred to as “pastor.”

- Ordination involves a call from God (Acts 13:2) and recognition by the church regionally (Acts 13:3) in harmony with the church globally (LP 43). Ordination to the office of pastor/minister (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:1-9) grants full ecclesiastical authority to establish new churches, ordain local elders, baptize converts, and lead out in the ordinances of the church in cooperation with the local conference (AA 160). In certain circumstances, a woman may serve as a local church leader (CM 75, 76) without being ordained as an elder (19MR 56).
- Allowing regionally established beliefs or qualifications for ordination would fracture the church, create confusion and disunity, and set a dangerous precedent. It would remove an important protection from non-biblical cultural influences (see AA 95-96) and move the church toward becoming an association of national churches instead of a united world church.
- Global church unity can be preserved only by yielding to the “plain” and “obvious meaning” of Scripture (GC 268, 599, 521, 54), rejecting “higher criticism” (Ed 227) or other methods of Bible study that give the reader authority over the divinely inspired text (2 Tim 3:16; Luke 24:27).
- Jesus is our example of servant leadership. His life expresses the loving authority and submission that exist in God’s family in heaven and on earth (1 Cor 11:3; 15:28; Matt 6:10).

## THE WAY FORWARD #2

Aware of our high calling as Seventh-day Adventists, we eagerly anticipate the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We passionately believe that “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms” (GC 596). The scriptural affirmation that God shows no partiality (Gen 1, 2; Gal 3:26-28; Col 3:11-17; 1 Peter 2:8-10; Acts 10:34) and the urgency of our mission (Matt 28:18-20; Matt 24:14; Rev 14:6-12) drive us to include all believers, both men and women, in using the gifts God has given them and appropriately affirm them in their ministry. God created men and women in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28) and, although this ideal was disrupted by sin, Christ restored the ideal, and in the New Testament we see both men and women ministering. God works continuously to complete this restoration. We see the restoration of this ideal in: (1) Paul’s affirmation of the restoration of equality (Gal 3; Eph 2:14-22; cf. Rev 5:10); (2) participation of women in the ministry of the early church (Luke 8:1-3; Rom 16:1, 2, 7; Acts 18:2, 26); and, (3) the Spirit’s working in the ministry of women in the church today.

The recently adopted consensus statement on ordination declares, “Ordination is an act of commissioning that acknowledges God’s call, sets the individual apart, and appoints the person to serve the church in a special capacity.” Furthermore, it is an invocation of “God’s blessing upon those chosen to the work of ministry.” This understanding of ordination is consistent whether we ordain a deacon or deaconess, an elder, or a pastor.

Throughout Adventist history we have often faced theological and ecclesiastical issues that have caused differences among us. Despite vigorous debate at times, we have remained united as one body under Christ pursuing our unique God-given mission. “We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christ-like forbearance” (11MR 266).

Fundamental Belief #14 on “Unity in the Body of Christ” states that “distinctions of race, culture, learning, nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another. We are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.” On the basis of this Fundamental Belief, the General Conference has established policies regulating responsibilities within the Church including employment practices recognizing women in leadership roles (see GC Working Policy BA-60). These policies reflect our convictions on the doctrine of spiritual gifts: that the Holy Spirit calls both men and women to service and that all spiritual gifts are gender inclusive (1 Cor

12:11; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:17-21). The Church has taken action to allow for the ordination of deaconesses and female elders and the commissioning of female pastors. Although these church policies and practices are implemented differently throughout the world, the Church has remained a unified, worldwide organization pressing together in mission and message.

Following the Bible and the counsel of Ellen G. White, the Church acknowledges the need to adapt its practices to the needs of the people it seeks to reach. Regional diversity in the practice of women's ordination will ensure that no entity will be compelled to do so against the will of its constituency. As in other matters, faithfulness to Scripture and mutual respect for one another are essential for the unity of the Church.

Therefore, because we accept the Bible's call to give witness to God's impartiality and believe that disunity and fragmentation will be the inevitable result of enforcing only one perspective in all regions, we propose that:

- Each entity responsible for calling pastors be authorized to choose either to have only men as ordained pastors or to have both men and women as ordained pastors. [This choice will be protected by guarantees in the relevant documents of each union, division and the General Conference, so that no entity can be directed against its will to adopt a position other than the one to which the collective conscience of its constituency points.]
- The union, at which organizational level decisions for ordination have historically been made in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, be enabled by its division to make the decision as to whether to approve the ordination of both men and women to gospel ministry.

We hereby rededicate our lives to God and pledge allegiance to His Word as we fulfill the Great Commission the Lord has entrusted to His Church. *Maranatha*. Come, Lord Jesus.

## THE WAY FORWARD #3

1. We affirm the need to provide more opportunities and resources everywhere in the world, regardless of ordination, for women in ministry and leadership, including preaching, evangelizing, Bible work, and teaching at all levels of education (Num 11:29; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:4, 6-18; 6T 322; RH, December 19, 1878; WM 145; Ev 471; see Deborah, Hulda, Anna, Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary,” Priscilla, the daughters of Philip, Phoebe, and others [Judg 4-5; 2 Kgs; 2 Chr 34; Luke 2:36-38; Matt 28:1-7; Acts 18:2, 3, 18, 26, 21:9; Rom 16:1-4, 1 Cor 16:19; DA 568; AH 204]).
2. We affirm the need to educate all members on the loving, humble, self-sacrificing, servant-leadership role that men since the Fall have been called to as spiritual heads in their homes (Gen 18:19; Eph 5:21-23; 1 Peter 3:7).
3. We affirm that Christ is the only head of the church (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18).
4. We affirm the biblical pattern of male leadership, under the headship of Christ, in the office of the ordained minister (1 Tim 2:12-14; 3:1-5; Titus 1:5, 6). However, we do not see this pattern as a moral absolute or universal divine command, or of sacramental or salvific significance. Although based on important aspects of human nature, it is primarily meant to promote order in the church and further its mission.<sup>1</sup> Based on a wide range of biblical precedents, we acknowledge that, in certain circumstances, God permits divine patterns for ecclesiastical organization to be adapted or modified in order to promote the mission, unity, and welfare of the church (1 Sam 8:10-23; Judg 4; 1 Sam 21:1-8; 1 Cor 9:19-22). This is in contrast to absolute moral commands and eternal truths, which can never be humanly abrogated or adapted.

In light of the priority of mission, the importance of church unity, and the principles of Christian liberty, we recommend that denominational leadership at a proper level be authorized to decide, based on biblical principles, whether such an adaptation may be appropriate for their area or region.<sup>2</sup> It would take a collective decision by the worldwide church to authorize the principle of regional diversity of practice (15MR 130). Also based on principles of Christian freedom, no pastor, church employee, organizational unit, or local church shall be required or compelled to support such diversity (Rom 14; Gal 5:13;

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<sup>1</sup> In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul has a lengthy set of instructions concerning the public worship service at Corinth, including that women keep silent. He sums up all those instructions in terms of church order, not as absolute commands. “But all things should be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40, ESV).

<sup>2</sup> The Acts 15 council did not demand uniformity of practice on the church even though circumcision was not to be forced on Gentiles. Thus Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3), but not Titus (Gal 2:3). It is significant that one party in the Acts 15 dispute saw circumcision as an absolute moral and salvific issue, while the majority of the council did not.

8T 236). Such regional adaptations, wherever they are allowed, should not negate the general pattern of male-ordained leadership as understood and practiced by the world Church.

General Conference administration, along with the leadership of its world divisions, would need to carefully consider the implementation of this proposal, given our historical and current view of ordination as “a sacred calling, not for one local field alone but for the world church (WP L 45 05).



SECTION VII

**VOTE OF AFFIRMATION  
AND COMMITMENT**



**VOTED,** TO AFFIRM THAT IN SPITE OF THE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ON THE SUBJECT OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION, THE MEMBERS OF THE THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION STUDY COMMITTEE ARE COMMITTED TO THE MESSAGE AND MISSION OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, AS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE 28 FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS.

