

# **POSITION SUMMARY #2**

# POSITION SUMMARY #2 OUTLINE

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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 that expresses itself in service to God and to 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 assigning them 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 the 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 NT, 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 NT 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 NT. 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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<sup>1</sup> GC 596

“Methods of Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods”<sup>2</sup> (MBSC). 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 statements,

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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> MBSC, 333.

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 our 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 be not 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 consistent also with our Adventist position against a homosexual lifestyle, because the biblical account of creation provides the fundamental reasoning for a total opposition to this lifestyle. Biblical teaching against homosexuality is rooted in the creation legislation, is

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

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 itself 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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<sup>5</sup> PP 34.

<sup>6</sup> See Ed 103.

<sup>7</sup> *Special Testimonies on Education*, 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 (like 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 OT. This is indispensable due to the fact that we do not have an explicit biblical command to ordain or not to 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 women 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). 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 show that the creation of woman at the end of the narrative corresponds in importance to the

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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).

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>9</sup> Second, it is logical to assume that as soon as Adam was created God needed to warn him against transgression.<sup>10</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>11</sup> God also instructed both of them in how to work and take care of the garden.<sup>12</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>13</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 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>14</sup>

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9 Ed 20; PP 50.

10 Cf. YI, February 27, 1902 par. 1.

11 ST, October 8, 1894, pars. 2, 3.

12 Ibid., par. 1.

13 PP 47.

14 3T 484, emphasis supplied. 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 to 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 OT 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 a 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>15</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 OT. 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>16</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 leader of

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<sup>15</sup> PP 58 (italics added).

<sup>16</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).

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 OT 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 NT will show that what we found in the OT is equally valid for the NT. 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 male pattern of leadership found in the NT, also present in the OT, 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 NT, 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 of 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” (5:14). The fact that Paul describes these women as “sayings 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). 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>17</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 a 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>17</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, Ill.: 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 10:40). 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 female were always to be of an inferior nature than that of the males. Leadership position, He says, are assigned to *all* on the basis of service.

*Ministry in the Church.* Following the instructions of Jesus, the New Testament 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 (*diakonoi*) 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) 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 NT 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 NT (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 spir-

itual 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 OT, 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 OT, the NT 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 NT 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 (Ephesians 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).

*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 NT (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 NT 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 officer 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 (shepherd), 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 OT and Judaism.

*Laying-on of Hands in the OT.* The rite occurs in the OT in a variety of contexts, such as in blessings, in sacrifices, or in 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 NT.* As in the OT, so also in the NT 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 the “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 already were “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 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 NT.

## 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 NT 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 NT 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>18</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 deacon 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>19</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>20</sup> What was hinted at in the NT is made explicit through the prophet-

18 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.

19 RH, July 9, 1895.

20 “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, 1886.’” (“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).

ic 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 on 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 5:2, 9).

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 the deacon have good administrative experience. It is clear that none of the other qualifications for deacons and elder 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 NT 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 WHITE AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Ellen 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 Ellen 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 Ellen 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 Ellen White's perspective on women in ministry and the ordination of women.

## **SILENCE**

Ellen White is completely silent regarding some key texts and concepts used to prevent women from serving in ministry. Anecdotes from Ellen 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, Ellen 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>21</sup>*

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

## INCLUSIVENESS

Ellen 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>22</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>23</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>24</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>25</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>26</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 White earnestly believed that the ordained pastoral ministry alone is not sufficient to fulfill God’s commission, that God is calling Christians of

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

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

24 4T 390.

25 6T 322.

26 FCE, 117-118 (emphasis added).

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 NT, 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, Ellen White wrote that medical missionaries "should be as sacredly set apart for [this] work as is the minister of the gospel."<sup>27</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>28</sup>

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

In these two recommendations, Ellen 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 Ellen 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 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>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ev 546 (emphasis added).

<sup>28</sup> "The Duty of the Minister and the People," RH, July 9, 1895 (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> 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>30</sup>*

It is instructive that Ellen 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 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 1855,

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<sup>30</sup> “Remarks Concerning the Foreign Mission Work,” Manuscript 75, 1896 (emphasis added).

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 Ellen 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."

Ellen 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 Ellen 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 to 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 a 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), 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). 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—worshipping 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 OT 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 OT 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 them 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. Others dictionaries include it.<sup>31</sup> Therefore both meanings are linguistically possible in 1 Cor 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 (vv. 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 NT support the idea that women in church are under the headship of church elders?**

According to the NT 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>32</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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31 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, Mich.: 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).

32 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 NT 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 E. 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.