

SHOULD WOMEN  
BE ORDAINED  
AS GOSPEL MINISTERS?  
A BIBLICAL RESPONSE

by

Bernard E. Seton Ph.D.

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## SHOULD WOMEN BE ORDAINED AS GOSPEL MINISTERS?

A Biblical - Historical Response

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### I. AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, with good reason, prides itself on the Biblicity of its beliefs. Its origins are rooted in a meticulous study of Scripture in an endeavor to fashion its teachings in harmony with Biblical instruction, seeking to hold fast to the declaration: "The Bible and the Bible only."

This simple reminder has deep significance for the subject that lies before us: "Should Women be Ordained as Gospel Ministers?" It admonishes us to seek the answer to that continuing question in a study of the Scriptures for, beyond doubt, the Lord of the Church will have expressed His

infallible will on so important a question in the Book which He Himself has inspired.

We need not analyse each page of Holy Writ in our search for truth on this topic, but we should scan both Testaments in order to grasp the inspired pattern for ministry, and then apply our findings to a consideration of the still unresolved issue: Should the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on the verge of the twenty-first century, ordain women to the Gospel Ministry?

#### The Biblical Pattern

The Creator, Who always uses the best means for the end He has in view, saw it was good, indeed, very good to make man first. He therefore "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen.2:17). At an early stage in his existence that man was given responsibility: "the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). But even that wide-ranging charge did not completely satisfy the need which the Creator had implanted in man's being. For Adam "there was not found an help meet", that is "suitable", "for him"(Gen.2:20). This implied no lack of foresight on the Creator's part. Rather, the Lord had first allowed the man to become aware of his need for a partner. When that requirement had been met, God "caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, . . . and he took one of his ribs," and from that bone "made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (vs.21,22). Adam's response justified that further creative act. In gratitude he delightedly exclaimed: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen.2:23). By a play upon words the Hebrew original suggests the close connection between the two newly-created

beings: 'ish' = man; 'ishah' = woman. This is, with surprising similarity, reflected in our English translation by the words man and woman.

This inspired record is indispensable for a correct understanding of the Godhead's total intention for men and women, not only in the context of marriage, but also in general relationships, and especially in that of ministry. Eve was not a replica of Adam: though similar, she was created for a different and closely-related purpose. Each was given a full-time occupation. Adam was made to be the head and priest of the family. His partner had a full-time role as wife and mother, as co-worker with her husband in fulfilling the Lord's design for the human family that was about to be founded.

We need to remember that our God is not subject to human limitations. He sees the end from the beginning (Isa.48:3-7), and His survey takes in all relevant factors in any given situation. He therefore does not need to hesitate or improvise: there "is no play of passing shadows" with Him (Jas.1:17 N.E.B.). The pattern He set in Eden remains His pattern today. The roles of men and women remain basically unchanged, though there are minor variations arising from the ebb and flow of human history, from advances in knowledge of which the Lord has always been knowledgeable beforehand, and from the development of deeper understanding of the distinctive contributions that each half of humanity can and should make to human progress and to the fulfillment of Divinity's purpose for His human creatures.

But the foregoing relates to the ideal, the divinely ordained partnership--which we call marriage--between two different but similar human beings who together can fulfill the Creator's plan for populating our globe with citizen candidates for His everlasting kingdom, who also provide for the governance of His church.

For Christians, moreover, the Old Testament has by no means been the only source of instruction. The Lord Who had counselled Adam both in and out of Eden, guided Abraham, Moses, Aaron and their successors in respect of priesthood through the remainder of humanity's first four thousand years; then, He Himself was "found in fashion as a man" (Phil.2:8) and inaugurated a different ministry. The Old Testament priesthood was retired. Its place was taken by the New Testament apostleship established by "God manifest in the flesh" through His ordination of the Twelve, "that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:12-19 and parallels--Matt.10:1-6; Luke 6:13-16). His instruction was well received, and put into practice, and faithfully transmitted to succeeding generations of Christians. After His ascension the Master's representatives elected Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26), and thus preserved the corps of twelve male disciples who were henceforth more generally known as apostles--"those who are sent" (from the Greek apostello, "I send")--to distinguish them from the growing number of believers, both men and women, who then inherited the earlier title, "disciples" or "learners", those who were being taught or trained.

#### The Post-Biblical Pattern

Since that far-off day, and until recent times, the main body of the Christian Church has chosen to follow the Old and New Testament archetype of an all-male ministry. That design has thus served the Church for well-nigh two thousand years. It has faithfully and fruitfully seen the Body of Christ through recurring decades of agonizing persecutions as well as periods of peace and prosperity, and has provided the foundation for an ever-enlarging multi-nationed Church until there are few if any corners on our globe that do not hold Christian companies who enrich the moral core



that all stable societies need. Most of those groups number large numbers of women among their memberships, and women's names shine brightly on the honor rolls of those who serve their churches with distinction, often under extremely adverse circumstances, and without ordination.

The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, have seen the formation of feminist movements which, in the beginning, were largely secular in character. These have exerted an influence on Christian women's organizations, leading some to promote the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. Their efforts have met with considerable success, and several denominations have been practising female ordination for one or more decades. Nevertheless, some deliberately resist the trend, while others hesitate, tetering on the brink of decision--to ordain or not to ordain? The Seventh-day Adventist Church is now included in the latter group, and this present series of studies aims to help the Church find an answer to the insistent question.

This paper is written to express the conviction that the ordination of women as gospel ministers is contrary to the Divine intent conveyed through Scripture. It recognizes that the centuries in which the Bible was written were largely male oriented--though the hand that rocked the cradle even then played a large part in ruling the world!--and that this tradition still influences some aspects of Christian thought, even in our own day. But those who believe in the inspiration of the Bible must also agree that the God Who indited its contents is quite capable of insuring that the Book, in its detail and in its entirety, does convey the Lord's will on so vital a matter as the nature of the human ministers through whom He elects to guide and sustain His people in every age. We therefore turn to examine a few of the principal passages that lead many earnest Christians, of both sexes, to support the policy that still restricts ministerial ordination

to qualified male members of their churches.

## II. EXPOSITION

### Old Testament Priesthood

The pattern for male priesthood was set just outside of Eden where the first couple's sin had led to their expulsion from the Garden and to their offering the first animal sacrifice. From that solemn occasion Adam found himself to be not only the first penitent but also the first priest. For many centuries thereafter the eldest male in God-fearing families served as priest in his community. "In the earliest times every man was priest of his own household. In the days of Abraham, the priesthood was regarded as the birthright of the eldest son. Now [during the Exodus], instead of the first-born of all Israel, the Lord accepted the tribe of Levi for the work of the sanctuary. By this signal honor he manifested his approval of their fidelity, both in adhering to his service and executing his judgments when Israel apostatized in the worship of the golden calf. The priesthood, however, was restricted to the family of Aaron. Aaron and his sons alone were permitted to minister before the Lord; the rest of the tribe were intrusted with the charge of the tabernacle and its furniture, and they were to attend upon the priests in their ministration, but they were not to sacrifice, to burn incense, or to see the holy things till they were covered." <sup>1</sup>

Such meticulous instruction caused Moses no surprise. At Horeb he had gazed upon the burning bush and had heard the Lord declare: "... . the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex.3:5). In the months and years that followed he received many other directives and promises from the Almighty, including those recorded in Exodus 19:5,6: "ye shall be a pecu-

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<sup>1</sup>Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 350



liar treasure unto me above all people: . . . ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." That declaration did not consecrate all Israelites, irrespective of age or sex, as members of the priestly class. Such a course would have established an army of generals, with no privates or non-commissioned officers, and would have nullified the very purpose of priesthood. Indeed, Moses himself was never admitted to the priesthood, or, as we would say--was never formally ordained; yet he undoubtedly did a greater work and was demonstrably nearer to God than was his ordained brother, Aaron! From that angle he is a shining example of a most effective ministry exercised without the benefit of ordination. But, let it be remembered, there was only one Moses!

It was Aaron and his male descendants who were set apart from their fellow Israelites for service "in the priest's office" (Ex.28:1). This led to the first specific ordination ceremony (Lev. 8:1-36), and provided the model for male priesthood from the days of the Exodus into early New Testament times. That continuing body was set aside to foster the religious life of Israel, to speak for the Lord to His people, and to present the people's needs to Him. A millenium and a half (1471 B.C. to A.D.27) of divinely supported male ministry is not lightly to be set aside some three thousand four hundred years later (B.C.1471-A.D.1988) because of considerations that lack scriptural support.

#### New Testament Ministry

The incarnate Son of God, Who had originally instructed Moses concerning the Hebrew priesthood, acknowledged the earlier pattern of priestly service and societal mores into which He was born in Palestine, and made no attempt to destroy its basic structure during His brief earthly ministry,

although He knew of the impending end of the Mosaic system, soon to be signalled by the rending of the Temple veil (Matt.27:51). That Christly reticence did not stem from fear. He was too bold and truth-loving for that! Besides, as we have just noted, it was He who gave Moses the original male ministerial pattern in the Levitical priesthood, and at no time has He disavowed that design. Rather, by His choice of twelve men to be His disciples (Matt.10:1-6; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:13-16) He quietly effected the change from the Old Testament priesthood to Christian apostleship and established the ministerial pattern for the New Testament church from the days of its infancy. As the Hebrew nation was built upon the twelve tribes of Israel who stemmed from Jacob's twelve sons, so was Christ's church to be built upon the foundation of His twelve apostles (Eph.2:19-22), all of whom were men.

There is no scriptural way of escape from this New Testament design for it stands foursquare upon the writings that have been given by inspiration of God (2 Tim.3:16). Some verses that may, upon a cursory glance, appear to contradict that declaration prove, upon closer study, to offer no tenable support for the ordination of women to gospel ministry. A sampling of such passages will be considered later in this study. At this juncture we would only observe that ministerial endorsement of males only rests on almost six thousand years of Biblically-endorsed authority--from Creation to our own late twentieth-century day. Such is not lightly swept away by reasonings that are basically secular and unscriptural.

Seventh-day Adventists, who derive their modes of worship and service from Eden, from Sinai, from the Psalms, and right on into the New Testament experiences cannot afford to neglect, to minimize, or distort those Biblical models. Centuries of divinely-approved experience in worship establish essential modes that are as valid for twentieth-century Christians as they were for believers in Old and New Testament times. This core

conviction needs to be firmly grasped by present-day worshippers, for we are subjected to many reverence-eroding influences. Hosts of believers have lost their sense of the numinous; they pay scant attention to the awesome holiness of the God Whom they worship; they are de-sensitized to the majesty of the Eternal. Such are in danger of attempting (with no authentic hope of success) to create Him in their imperfect image, and, enjoying some apparent success in their misdirected endeavors, show but shallow concern for fine-tuned reverence toward Him before Whom myriads of angels consistently veil their faces (cp. Isa.6:1-4).

Attitudes such as these inevitably breed a careless approach to the Most High. Some of us may therefore need to stop in our tracks and deliberately devote time to seeing "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," with His train filling the temple (Isa.6:1). Such a glimpse of the ineffable glory of God can be salutary, telling us first to put off our shoes from our feet for the place whereon we stand has become holy ground (cp.Ex.3:5). When we obey, we shall want, sotto voce at first, to join in the Trisagion, that seraphic "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa.6:3). This will undoubtedly lead us to examine more carefully our concepts of the Almighty, the Eternal.

Our reference to Isaiah reminds us that his vision was directly related to his ordination and that we need to share in that vision as we consider the question of ministry. The young prophet was called for a specific mission: "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" He was timidly reluctant to respond to the divine invitation, having already declared: "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . ." Yet, having received the call, he accepted it, responding, under deep conviction, "Here am I: send me." (Isa. 6:8,5,8)

The more clearly we perceive God, the more reluctant we shall be to

tamper with any of His directives, no matter how long ago they were given. This is cogent to our topic, for the One Who directed the formation of a male ministry in both Old and New Testament times was well able to see into the future and to choose language that would suit every age."Above the distractions of the earth He sits enthroned; all things are open to His divine survey; and from His great and calm eternity He orders that which His providence sees best."<sup>1</sup> He knew what was coming to His church and could couch His instruction in terms that would always be appropriate. Specifically, if He had wished to see ordained female ministry established in the church, He could have authorized its formation at a suitable stage in the church's long history. That He has not done so is strong reason for not attempting an unauthorized formation now.

We need conscientious care in handling the question of Biblical inspiration and its relation to present-day situations. We are tempted to dismiss instruction that goes against the grain of our desires, denying its relevance, attributing it to mores of a bygone age that have little or no authority in our own "enlightened" late twentieth-century situations. We need wisdom to reject the transitory while retaining that which is of permanent value. To that end we may need to review, refine and deepen our concepts of ministerial ordination, and to ensure that they remain faithful to Biblical authority. We should strive for a wise amalgam of Old Testament priesthood and New Testament apostleship.

#### The Apostolic Pattern

As Christians our lives are largely molded by New Testament instruction, though we are frequently reminded of our Old Testament heritage. This leads us to accept the older record but to pay closer attention to the Four Gospels

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, "The Ministry of Healing", p. 417.



and their progeny--the twenty-three books that follow. It is to them that we now turn, believing that they preserve what is most relevant in the Old Testament while adding fresh instruction from the Master Teacher and His faithful and inspired apostles.

If there is one person above all others who has been the champion of women's rights, it is our Lord Jesus Christ. Single-handedly, and often against the then contemporary grain of masculine disregard for women's needs, He championed the equality of women with men. By His miraculous birth, by His obedient childhood, by His thirty hidden years in Nazareth when His mother played such a large part in His formation, by His compassionate ministry both before and after His baptism, by His gentleness, by His deep understanding of women's needs where they differed from those of men, and by His constant respect for their sterling qualities and distinctive contributions to human welfare--by His life of loving concern right up to that fateful Friday afternoon on the cross when He appointed John the Beloved to be the guardian of His own sorrowing mother--by such tender care He revealed Himself as the Champion of what our century calls "women's rights"--though His list of those rights and ours might not be identical. We are not surprised, therefore, to read of the large number of women who faithfully followed Him. Yet, He made no move to recruit any of them into a feminine equivalent of the twelve male disciples or into the subsequent apostleship. And this, we have no difficulty in accepting, was in no way due to the slightest trace of male chauvinism. No reverent student of the New Testament would ever accuse our Saviour of being tainted by such a human weakness! He was inaugurating a ministry whose imprint would be placed not only on temporal history, but also on that which would reach into eternity.



When the Saviour returned to His Father's home His followers continued the pattern of their Master's ministry, and included in the ranks of the infant Church a host of fine Christian women who made invaluable contributions to the growing Christian community. Their names appear principally in the book of Acts and in Paul's letter to the Romans. In those pages we meet Mary the Master's mother (Acts 1:14), Tabitha of Joppa (9:36), Mary the mother of John Mark (12:12), Lois the grandmother and Eunice the mother of Timothy, Lydia who cared for Paul and Silas after their cruel flogging in Philippi, the group in Berea and Athens who responded to the ministries of Paul and Barnabas, "chief women", "honorable women", and Damaris; Priscilla of Corinth (Acts 1:14; 9:36; 12:12; 2 Tim.1:5; Acts 16:40; 17: 4,12,34; 18:2,18), the Mary of Romans 16:6 who expended much care on Paul and his companions in Rome, the Christian women workers Tryphena and Tryphosa who may have been sisters (or even twins!), Persis (or, possibly, "a Persian lady"), the mother of Rufus who seems to have taken Paul into her family circle, Julia and an unnamed sister of Nereus, and Olympas who brings the partial and intriguing list to a close (Rom.16:12,13,15). Beyond doubt, these godly women were commendably active in benevolent service in the Roman empire's capital city, yet not one of them is introduced as a minister. Their Christian service was of such a caliber that their names are indelibly inscribed on the New Testament honor roll, but there is no hint that any one of them was ever ordained, neither is there any Scriptural record of agitation for such ordination.

#### The Post-Apostolic Scene

The successors to Peter, James, and John were dedicated to following the New Testament pattern that had guided their predecessors. This led them to honor and safeguard Christian womanhood and to give their sisters wide fields of service while continuing their Master's practice of

ordaining only an all-male ministry. "In its first few centuries, within the Church which it had called into being Christianity had not only drawn the sting of slavery, given dignity to labour, and abolished beggary. It had also elevated the status of women and given new worth to childhood." <sup>1</sup>

When monasticism arose in Egypt during the late third century A.D. it soon inspired the founding of nunneries where women could also practice asceticism and devote their energies to spiritual pursuits and compassionate service for needy humanity. Conventual life provided an approved channel for their spiritual gifts and social skills. Many abbesses and nuns were exceedingly capable and gifted women, bearing heavy spiritual and administrative responsibilities, but neither they nor their male counterparts, abbots or monks, were routinely ordained. This did not prevent either group from rendering invaluable compassionate and spiritual service to the distressed, the diseased and the destitute in the centuries that preceded our modern hospital systems. In addition, their ideals and their service did much to raise womanhood in society's esteem throughout the Middle Ages into modern times.

The Renaissance, with its interest in wider fields of scholarship, also encouraged women to play a larger part in the scholarly world. Many

aristocratic women became first-class scholars, especially in the realm of linguistics and literature. But there was no significant overflow into the professions of pastors or preachers. New religious movements were born of the new learning but few, if any, promoted ordination for women. Significant support had to await the closing decades of the

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, (New York, Harper Brothers, 1953; Preface xiii - xxvii; pp. 3-1477; Index, pp. 1479-1516). pp. 248,249. See also pp. 333,431,432.

nineteenth century. Effective promotion, bringing some global recognition, is the product of twentieth-century movements for women's liberation. This is noteworthy for it points to a non-religious ancestry for much of today's agitation for the appointment of female ministers.

It seems incredible that the Christian Church, with its claim for Divine guidance, has had to wait for well-nigh two thousand years before discovering what almost six thousand years of God-fearing worship had allegedly failed to perceive--that the Lord Whom we adore has always intended that women, as well as men, should be pastors or priests, apostles or ministers. The wheels of God may grind slowly, but do they really turn as reluctantly as that? Is it not more probable that our Maker never intended women to enter the ranks of an ordained ministry? If He had, would He not have expressed His intention long ago and have clearly recorded His will in His Word, the Bible? The formulation of that simple question brings a simple answer: the Master, ever mindful of and sympathetic to the needs of women, and aware of their potential in His service, took no steps to inaugurate female ministry during His lifetime. Neither did His immediate followers, the authors of the New Testament canon, they who would have been responsive to any suggestion that came from His lips. On the contrary, they took pains to record the progress of the far-flung male ministry that followed their Master's ascension. He Who foresaw His own return in glory, Who inspired His followers to record the four Gospels, the twenty-eight action-packed chapters of The Acts of the Apostles and the twenty epistles that follow--that Holy One gave the Church no instruction to ordain women to the ministry, not in New Testament times nor through the succeeding centuries covered by so much Biblical prophecy.

Neither did Peter advocate the ordination of women to priesthood. When he addressed the "elect" (1 Peter 1:2) and then described them as

"a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (or, 'a people for God's own possession'), he was, consciously or otherwise, remembering the Lord's promise to Israel, conveyed by Moses at the foot of Mt. Sinai: "Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: . . . And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex.19:5,6). This expresses what the Creator intended . . . all His people--both men and women--to be in respect of spiritual caliber, but, as we well know, they rarely reached their high potential. Neither did the Lord's vision make each Israelitish man a functional royal priest. Rather, He wished to inspire His people to be consistently holy. To that end He appointed men of the tribe of Levi to render Him full-time service as priests, instructing and encouraging the other eleven tribes also to reach the high standards He had set for them.

Peter's message, echoed in Revelation 1:6, assures Christians that by faith in the Mediator each believer, man or woman, boy or girl, can come directly to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help him or her in time of need. At the center of that plan for salvation there is no sex distinction. In respect of salvation, all are one in Christ Jesus! This generous provision, however, does not make each Christian a professional ordained priest. It simply guarantees equal spiritual benefits for all believers by salvation from sin. Beyond that, the distinction between the functions and privileges of each sex remain as the Creator intended them to be from the beginning of creation.



### Historical Conditioning

As we dip into Scripture and church history to discover what they tell us about our topic, we are soon faced with the question of Historical Conditioning--the concept that divine imperatives are subject to human interpretation that is itself conditioned by the ebb and flow of human history, by changes in human morality, and by humanity's interpretation of the Creator's intentions concerning His creatures' lives. It questions the degree to which present-day God-fearers are bound by earlier expressions of divine counsel as given in a Bible whose canon was closed almost two thousand years ago.

At this juncture we should remember that the Church is still the child of those far-off days. Indeed, the church's ancestry has not changed and could not change since the first century A.D. It is still "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph.2:20), and there is no need to insert new foundation stones into such a well-constructed building! Neither does one remove stones from such a structure! Rejection of previously-given directives or the invention of new ones is a dangerous practice for Christians. Both acts open the door for repudiation of any advice or counsel that runs contrary to natural propensities or individual or collective codes of conduct. It tends to elevate human desire above divinely-given standards and thereby leaves humanity free to establish its own morality. Bible believing Christians will want to be extremely careful before accepting any custom that is not clearly based on Biblical counsel, for that counsel continues to provide adequate guidelines for all aspects of our religious observances today. We need to guard against the temptation to disregard past standards in order to satisfy present desires!



At the same time we need to distinguish between Biblical standards that are subject to changes caused by the passage of time and those that are of permanent validity on this earth. The Bible, reflecting the spirit of the times in which its individual books were written, does contain some regulations that are specifically addressed to the local conditions that obtained at the time when a particular counsel was delivered. A ready illustration follows immediately after the recording of the Decalogue in the twentieth chapter of Exodus. Chapter 21 opens with laws concerning the treatment of slaves held by the Hebrews (vs.1-6), and follows with regulations regarding a daughter who has been sold into slavery (vs.7 and 8). It is apparent that the Ten Commandments given in chapter 20 are of lasting value and application, while the slavery issue in chapter 21 has little that is literally relevant in the greater part of twentieth-century society.

It is also important to recognize that ministerial ordination is not subject to the historical conditioning that applies to the acceptance or rejection of slavery and other contentious issues. Christ's ordination of the Twelve sets a pattern that reaches into eternity. This is forcefully confirmed by the swift election of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot among the apostles (Acts 1:15-26). The young Church was concerned to maintain its Master's pattern of twelve male appointies and, after prayer, (vs.21-25), elected Matthias to fill the vacant post (v.26). The apostles recognized him as being qualified for that honor by being among "those men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us" (Acts 1:21,22). They, therefore, after prayer (v.24), cast lots and accepted the result, immediately numbering Matthias with the eleven apostles (v.26) "to be a witness with us of his resurrection"(v.22). Although little more is heard or known of Matthias, this election--unless

Paul be seen as taking his place--leads to the everlasting inclusion of Matthias among "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" whose names are inscribed on the foundation stones of the wall of "the holy city of Jerusalem" which the Revelator saw "descending out of heaven from God" (Rev.21:14,10; cp. Eph.2:20). The eternal seal is thus set on the twelve male apostles and that ensures the durability of the pattern of their appointment. Their ordination to Christian ministry is immortalized. It will be the subject of remembrance and appreciation throughout eternity: it will inspire the redeemed for ever!

It is, then, incongruous, in the face of this Biblical tableau that reaches beyond the close of human history, to suggest that we now have authority to insert the concept of an ordained female ministry into the ongoing record. Such a suggestion contradicts four thousand years of Old Testament priesthood and the entire New Testament pattern of apostleship with its divinely inaugurated male ministry firmly fixed in eternity! An attempt to modify our Lord's design imputes an intent that Christ Himself never suggested.

Because of the frequency with which Galatians chapter 3, verses 26-29 is used in discussions concerning women's liberation and/or ordination we should analyze those verses more closely. The passage reads:

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Paul's concern in these verses has little if any connection with our topic. His primary reference is to <sup>the</sup>/attempt to obtain salvation by law-keeping versus the Divine assurance of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus along. He was writing to refute those who were insisting that the

Galatian Christians were obligated to observe the ceremonial laws which may be conveniently covered by the term "Levitical". These, insisted the legalist, must be observed by Gentile Christians as well as by Jewish believers. Not so, responded Paul. Those regulations were given by God to guide His people in Old Testament times, until Christ came and gave His deeper and wider interpretation of "law" (Matt.5:17-48). The spirit of our Lord's ministry has superseded the earlier narrow legal approach, and has abolished racial ("Jew and Greek"), social ("bond nor free") and sexual ("male nor female") differences, and has opened the way for all humanity to benefit from His redemption--irrespective of national, social, or sexual status.

In a wider context, Paul's reference to "law" covers all that is embraced in a 'salvation-by-works' religion, be it of Jewish, or Christian, or of any other religious origin. We are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), and are therefore "heirs according to the promise" (v.29). But, we should clearly note, apart from the question of redemption, we retain our sexual distinctions here below. Specifically, a Christian man remains a male, a Christian woman remains a female. But both enjoy equal status in respect of salvation. All are "one in Christ Jesus". That is the simple yet profound message of Galatians 3:28. The verse should not be distorted into support for the abolition of sexual distinctions or callings in human beings, male or female, for that is not Paul's intent. Neither is it the Creator's!

But, say many, other churches are ordaining women! And we would reply: "Since when has the Seventh-day Adventist Church been told to imitate other religious organizations, many of whom pay scant attention to the binding authority of the inspired Word and follow unbiblical practices which we consistently reject?" Adventists should not stand pusillanimously aside and allow current pressures to move the Church into an unscriptural

stand. We who subscribe to the seven-day creation week and observe the seventh-day Sabbath as its memorial, who support and practise the Levitical laws regarding clean and unclean meats, who place much emphasis on the wilderness tabernacle and its symbolic services and their relation to Christ's ministry, both earthly and heavenly, and on His passion, His heavenly priesthood, His judgeship, His soon return and glorious appearing--we who have been preaching these and related topics for much more than a century--we, above all people on the face of this earth, ought to remain faithful to the undeniable millenia-old Biblical model of an all-male ministry that has been ordained by God and which possesses an eternal validity! Neither the Old nor the New Testament presents any other pattern. We, who depend so much on scriptural authority and take so much pride in our thorough-going biblicity, ought to abide by the inspired model and not be seduced into following such an unbiblical custom as the ordination of women! If further encouragement is needed, we should recall that Ellen G. White consistently declined to be ordained as a minister. This should surely suffice to turn faithful, orthodox Seventh-day Adventists from the current agitation (1987) for the ordination of women!

#### Current Attitudes

In a letter published in the October 3, 1986 issue of Christianity Today, Lt. J.C. Waddington of the Salvation Army informed its readers that women had been serving as officers in that organization since 1865, or for more than one hundred and twenty years. He also reminded them of the many years when he and his fellow Salvationists had been led by their General, Catherine Booth, the daughter of the Army's founding father, William Booth. The same journal referred to the Pentecostal and Holiness Movements which



had opened their ministerial ranks to women in the 1880s, but noted that the liberal decision had not led to its immediate implementation in practice.

These early trends may have reflected the somewhat unique position that such organizations hold in the sisterhood of Christian congregations, namely, that they do not usually describe themselves as churches. They shun ecclesiastical tradition, preferring the freedom to venture steps that more conservative bodies are still reluctant to take, and maintain a Biblical stand that limits ministerial office to men. But several of the conservative churches were not long in following their more liberal sisters' example. The United Presbyterians led the way in 1956 by voting to ordain women. By 1975 it had 160 women ministers, and by 1985 the number had risen above one thousand. And some of them not only occupied pulpits, but were also in executive responsibility. The Episcopalians had followed suit in 1977, bringing to five the number of larger denominations that had decided to grant ministerial ordination to women, the other four being Methodist, Presbyterian, National Baptist and Lutheran. A head count revealed that by 1986 eighty Protestant denominations in the USA, holding a wide variety of doctrinal positions, were practising the consecration of women to public ministry, with the United Methodists accounting for the largest number of ordinands.

Such revolutionary moves as the ordination of women had been encouraged by the extension of life expectancy that medical science and more liberal social policies were making possible. In 1900 the average female life span covered forty-five years. By 1986, thanks to medical advances and higher standards of living, the expectancy figure had risen to eighty years! This gave women, who usually live longer than men, a potential of thirty-five to forty additional years, free from child-bearing, and open



for the enjoyment of wider interests and occupations than had hitherto been possible. This increased span also held out the possibility of engaging in gainful employment after child-bearing years, or for dedicating their energies and gifts to Christian ministry.

There were also many religiously-minded women who saw no prospect of marriage, or, being married, found themselves childless. Only 21% counted themselves as full-time homemakers. Some of the remaining 79 per cent were free to consider careers in Christian ministry. Many of these had enjoyed some higher education, 52% being college graduates, and were attracted by the call to service in a church organization. Those whose qualifications and natural gifts met the standards of their denominations were drawn to the possibility of entering on a ministerial career.

There lie some of the bare bones of our century's readiness to accept the movement towards ordination for women. In the U.S.A. legal support for such candidates came through the Civil Rights Act, Title VII, of 1964 which banned discrimination in employment. Although that legality was basically secular, it was also seen to have ecclesiastical application, and there were qualified women who welcomed the law's support for their ministerial aspirations. Some were soon to find further encouragement in Betty Friedan's founding of NOW--the National Organization of Women--in 1966. This body is dedicated to facilitating the entrance of women into any legitimate profession or service where they might wish to serve. In pursuit of that aim, the Organization offers its organizational skills, its professional expertise and prestige to those women who seek to pass through some of the doors that have hitherto been closed to them. Many believed their cause was bearing one of its intended fruits when, in 1967, the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., voted to ordain women to its ministry. Since those now far off days, some other church organizations have followed

suit, and the pioneers see their cause as being well on the road to success. But, since when has the majority been right in doctrinal matters? Since when has the Seventh-day Adventist Church adjusted its theology in order to conform to popular custom?

How shall we, then, at this late stage, relate to such trends? Should we be swayed by popular opinion? That would be untrue to our dissenting origins. Our founding fathers did not slavishly consult public majority opinion when laying the foundation stones of Seventh-day Adventist belief. The deciding factor was "What saith the Lord?" as revealed in the Word of God. If a doctrine was not clearly based on the Bible's instruction, it was rejected. Let that rule still prevail, no matter what popular opinion may say. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa.8:20). And, let us remember, there is no accommodation or authorization in Scripture for the ministerial ordination of women. No matter how closely we may have moved toward that practice, we must have the courage to cry "Halt!".

Those who heed these reminders will be ever ready to ensure that women's abundant gifts are readily and generously used in the many forms of church service that are built into our Adventist tradition. The many departments of the Church offer a rich variety of outlets for the abilities that our Lord has liberally bestowed on the women and men in our congregations. Rightly used, those varied responsibilities will satisfy every legitimate, God-approved ambition without invoking the unbiblical procedure of female ordination.

#### CONCLUSION

Our church, with its beliefs so firmly founded on Scripture, ought not

now to be swayed by socio-religious currents concerning women's ordination. We should remain faithful to the inspired instruction as given in the Bible, and not be beguiled into following present-day trends that have secular, unbiblical bases.

We serve the Eternal, the Lord with Whom there is no Past, no Future--only, in our terms, an eternal Present. Just as darkness and light are both alike to the Lord Who is Light (Psa.139:12;1 John 1:5), so are the past and the future to Him Who reigns in an eternal Present (see Psa.90:2). Unbounded by time, unhampered by what we call Past, undaunted by what we call Future, He can order "that which His providence sees best" (The Ministry of Healing, p. 417). Recognition of this sovereign ability brings to us His children a calming realization that He has not left us uninstructed on any of life's major issues, especially those that affect His church and its administration. He has foreseen its needs, He has taken adequate steps to satisfy its legitimate desires, and has already given adequate guidance in His Word.

Let us acknowledge His all-seeing wisdom. Let us abide by His six-thousand-year pattern concerning ordination. In faithfulness to the Biblical model, let us continue to ordain godly men who have given full proof of their ministry. And let us no less warmly continue to welcome the rich selection of contributions that godly women can make and are making to all areas of church growth without the disputed rite of ordination. In so doing, we shall be following the consistent Biblical pattern that provides the church's itinerary from its birth to its transformation into the spotless Bride, the Lamb's wife (Rev.21:9).

Until that glorious change takes place, we can confidently expect to receive sufficient grace to help us all, both men and women, in time of need (Heb.4:16), and sufficient wisdom to use every masculine and feminine contribution that the Lord of the Church inspires.