

1                                   **THE CASE FOR A GENDER-INCLUSIVE**  
2                                   **ORDAINED MINISTRY**

3  
4                                   Ángel Manuel Rodríguez  
5                                   Silver Spring, MD  
6                                   April 2, 2014  
7

8                                   **I.       Introduction**

9                   The topic under consideration has become an extremely divisive one and should be  
10 properly handled in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts. It is not a new item in the Adventist  
11 agenda but one that goes back to the time of the pioneers and Ellen G. White. Unfortunately they  
12 never resolved it leaving it for us to struggle with it in the search for a final solution. This is a  
13 privilege and above all a great challenge. It seems to me that the two years used to study the  
14 topic and to pray about it, has prepared the church for a final decision. We should always believe  
15 and affirm that the Spirit has not abandoned the church and that He is working from within our  
16 studies, prayers, struggles, and disagreements opening a way for His church to move forward.  
17 What is encouraging to me is that we are all very much interested in doing whatever the Lord  
18 wants us to do. Here I will share with you the case put forward by most of those who believe that  
19 women should be ordained to the ministry. I will begin with what I consider to be a statement of  
20 fact and then proceed to build the case.

21                                   **I.       Statement of Fact**

22                   By a statement of fact I mean a statement that is biblically sound and that no one would  
23 in principle deny. Here it is: The Scriptures do not explicitly *command* and neither do they  
24 explicitly *forbid* the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. In other words we have not  
25 been able to find a clear “Thus says the Lord” that would support any of the two main positions  
26 being advocated. Otherwise we would not be here today. But that is not the whole story. In the

1 absence of an explicit, divine command we can build up a case to support either of the two  
2 positions. And this is exactly what has been done.

3 We put passages together and draw theological inferences from them in order to  
4 demonstrate that, although there is not an explicit “Thus says the Lord,” there is enough biblical  
5 evidence to indicate that the Bible opposes or supports the ordination of women to the ministry.  
6 Both sides do their best in order to persuade the church that it should go this or that way. But in  
7 the absence of an agreement on what the general teaching of the Bible is on the topic at hand the  
8 result is debate. Here, I will present to you a case for the ordination of women to the ministry.

## 9 II. Cosmic Order

10 The nature and role of the ordained ministry is primarily about church order—order that  
11 nurtures the *unity* and facilitates the *mission* of the church—and as such it should reflect the  
12 principles of order that rule the cosmic kingdom of God. The unity of the Godhead is and will  
13 remain forever an impenetrable mystery for all of His intelligent creatures. We know that God is  
14 love and that the inter-Trinitarian relationships are a constant expression and outflow of that  
15 love. Beyond that we should humbly bow ourselves before Him in silence.

16 Order as such belongs to the diversity of God’s creation and is indispensable for it to  
17 function properly. Within His cosmic kingdom order is simply the creation’s reflection of the  
18 love of God.

19 The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of  
20 intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of  
21 righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs  
22 from an appreciation of His character. . . . To all He grants freedom of will, that they may  
23 render Him voluntary service.”<sup>1</sup>  
24

---

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 34.

1           Let me make several observations about this quote. First, love is the foundation of the  
2 divine government, not an impersonal law. The character of God itself is the law that rules the  
3 universe. Second, the well-being of intelligent beings is dependent on their subjection to God. In  
4 other words the center of order is God Himself. Third, the love of the creatures finds expression  
5 in their service to God. Nothing is arbitrarily imposed on them but on the contrary, having been  
6 created free, the Creator only expects from them voluntary service.<sup>2</sup>

7           Through this law of service God holds the universe together. It is this law of service out  
8 of love that rules among the angels. Ellen G. White suggests that positions of leadership among  
9 the angels were assigned to them on the basis of service. “The more studiously the intellect is  
10 cultivated, the more effectively it can be used in the service of God. . . Talents used are talents  
11 multiplied; experience in spiritual things widens the vision of saints and angels, and both  
12 increase in capability and knowledge as they work in their respective spheres.”<sup>3</sup>

13           We know that angels are assigned new responsibilities, which means that they were not  
14 created to fill a particular one without the possibility of new opportunities for service.<sup>4</sup> Since

---

<sup>2</sup> She wrote, “All things both in heaven and in earth declare that the great law of life is a law of service. The infinite Father ministers to the life of every living thing. Christ came to the earth ‘as He that serveth.’ Luke 22:27. The angels are ‘ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.’ Hebrews 1:14. The same law of service is written upon all things in nature. The birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the trees of the forest, the leaves, the grass, and the flowers, the sun in the heavens and the stars of light—all have their ministry. Lake and ocean, river and water spring—each takes to give” (Ed 103).

<sup>3</sup> *Special Testimonies on Education*, 57.

<sup>4</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. In fact, Lucifer was exalted to the position of covering cherub; it was not his by nature. She wrote, “The first sinner was one whom God had greatly exalted. . . . Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator” (4BC 1162). She also comments, “Satan, who was once an honored angel in heaven, had been ambitious for the more exalted honors which God had bestowed upon His Son. He became envious of Christ, and represented to the angels, who honored him as covering cherub, that he had not the honor conferred upon him which his position demanded. He asserted that he should be exalted equal in honor with Christ. Satan obtained sympathizers. Angels in heaven joined him in his rebellion,

1 positions were assigned by God on the basis of service, the submission of angels to new angelic  
2 leaders was voluntary in the sense that they could understand why the Creator assigned to them  
3 their new roles of service. Their submission to angelic leaders was in fact a submission to God.  
4 As time passed the functions would change as a result of God bestowing new honors to other  
5 angels. No one was limited to a particular role within the Kingdom of God. There was a  
6 harmonious order within which each intelligent creature could freely develop the potential God  
7 gave them without any predetermined and arbitrary restriction (like for instance, who was  
8 created first; for sure not on the basis of gender).

### 9 **III. Order in Eden**

10 Order permeates the creation narratives in Genesis 1-2. In fact, after the creation ex  
11 nihilo, God's creative activity consists to a large extent in ordering things. He separates things  
12 from each other and assigns specific roles to the different components. Everything fulfills a  
13 purpose within the created phenomena. And then He created humankind: "Then God said, 'Let  
14 us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish . . . , the birds . . . , the  
15 livestock . . . , over all the earth . . . ' " (1:26). We find here three important ideas. First, they both  
16 bear the image and likeness of God; they have the same nature. There is gender differentiation,  
17 but it is compatible with being the image of God. Second, a particular function is assigned to  
18 both of them; the same function. They both are to rule over nature. In other words the rest of  
19 creation is placed under submission to Adam and Eve. Third, no human being is placed under

---

and fell with their leader from their high and holy estate, and were therefore expelled from heaven with him" (*Confrontation*, 9). Notice that when the Son received more exalted honors from the Father Lucifer thought that he should also receive them. Lucifer's position was "appointed to him" by God (GC 495). He had developed the gifts the Creator gave him above the rest of the angels. White writes, "The greatest talents and the highest gifts that could be bestowed on a created being were given to Lucifer, the covering cherub" (*The Day with God*, 287). Because of his talents he "was given a position next to Jesus Christ in the heavenly courts" (4BC 1143).

1 subjection or submission to another human being. These extremely important principles of order  
2 were instituted by God when He created the couple and were partially modified after the fall.

3 For Ellen G. White the equality of Adam and Eve is unquestionable.<sup>5</sup> “In the creation,  
4 God had made her the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with  
5 His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other.”<sup>6</sup> Equality and  
6 order are clearly affirmed and the harmonious relationship between Adam and Eve—order  
7 within creation—is grounded on living in harmony with God’s great law of love. What would  
8 have held them together as a couple was the same principle that ruled the rest of the cosmos,  
9 namely the law of love expressed in service to God and to others. This picture of cosmic  
10 harmony only changes after the fall. This is again confirmed by Ellen White:

11 Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they  
12 would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and *now*  
13 *their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part*  
14 *of the one or the other.* Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into  
15 temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by  
16 her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed *in subjection to her husband.*  
17 Had the principles joined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this  
18 sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them;  
19 but man’s abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of  
20 woman very bitter and made her life a burden.<sup>7</sup>

21 Notice that, first, the new arrangement was necessary because sin brought discord in the  
22 *wife-husband* relationship. There is no indication in the biblical text or in Ellen White that  
23 women were from now on to be under subjection to man in general. It is restricted to the home.  
24

---

<sup>5</sup> She expresses this idea in very clear terms: “Graceful and symmetrical in form, regular and beautiful in feature, their countenances glowing with the tint of health and the light of joy and hope, they bore in outward resemblance the likeness of their Maker. Nor was this likeness manifest in the physical nature only. *Every faculty of mind and soul reflected the Creator's glory. Endowed with high mental and spiritual gifts,* Adam and Eve were made but “a little lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:7), that they might not only discern the wonders of the visible universe, but comprehend moral responsibilities and obligations” (Ed 20; emphasis mine).

<sup>6</sup> AH 115.

<sup>7</sup> PP 58-59.

1 Second, it is clear that the Adam's headship is a post-fallen condition, but it is not an arbitrary  
2 decision. In a world of sin order or unity could be maintained at home by the submission of one  
3 to the other. Third, the divine intention was for this arrangement to be a blessing to the human  
4 race but human hubris has almost transformed it into a curse for women.

5 The submission of women to their husbands after the fall leaves open the possibility that  
6 a woman could occupy important leadership positions outside the home, in society, and among  
7 God's people, particularly top leadership positions.

#### 8 **IV. Order in Israel**

9 The truth is that as far as we know no woman was in the OT ordained to leadership  
10 positions. But ordination in the OT was, in the case of the priesthood, limited to one tribe,  
11 excluding the other eleven, and within that tribe only one person was anointed, excluding all the  
12 other families in Israel (Lev 8:12; Num 8:10).<sup>8</sup> No reason is given for excluding the female  
13 members of the tribe from functioning as Levites. We can only speculate. We also find the  
14 successor of Moses, Joshua, being set apart and dedicated to the Lord through the laying on of  
15 hands (Num 27:23). As far as we can tell this was a unique event. Even if we were willing to  
16 include among those ordained the anointing of kings—the evidence is lacking—the fact is that  
17 the divine ideal was to be actualized only through the family of David, excluding all other tribes.  
18 Ordination in the OT was not a matter of gender because the vast majority of the Israelites, males  
19 and females, would have never been ordained to any specific leadership role.

---

<sup>8</sup> The ordination of the Levites and the high priest, Aaron, seems to have been a unique event. We have not evidence supporting the view that every new high priest was ordained. This is not an argument from silent because we have a report of what happened when Aaron died and his son was appointed as high priest. When Aaron was to die, Moses was commanded by the Lord to remove from him the high priestly garments and to place them on his son, Eleazar (Num 20:22-26). This was a ritual of investiture that transferred the office of the high priest from Aaron to his son. It did not include the laying on of hands.

1           Nevertheless, the fact remains that the vast majority of the leaders of Israel were males.  
2 We can interpret this fact to mean that women were excluded from such positions because God  
3 placed them under subjection to the husband, but the evidence is lacking. Two examples will  
4 indicate otherwise.

#### 5           **A. Prophetesses in Israel**

6           In Israel and in the church, the gift of prophecy is gender-inclusive. The significance of  
7 this fact deserves much more attention than we can provide here. But let it be clear, first, that the  
8 highest and most influential spiritual leader in Israel was the prophet, not the priest or the king.  
9 They traveled throughout the land instructing the people and the king and when necessary  
10 condemning sin and rebellion. They had words of salvation and judgment against the nation, the  
11 king, and even the priests. They condemned the abuse of the poor and the needy, and idolatry in  
12 all its forms. Their main concern was the spiritual condition of the people and their leaders.  
13 Second, their authority was unparalleled in Israel. The authority of other leaders in Israel came  
14 from a particular set of circumstances. They had institutional authority. The king was elected on  
15 the basis of dynastic concerns or political intrigues, but his position as king invested him with  
16 legal authority that was to be accepted by all. The priest had authority based on family lineage.  
17 The prophets did not belong to any social or religious institution. They were chosen by God  
18 independent of their genealogical records or any legal basis. Their call and commission revealed  
19 God's free election. In the exercise of His freedom and in total independence of social  
20 institutions and concerns, God called men and women to the prophetic ministry. They were  
21 answerable to Him and not to the king or the priests. They had a unique type of authority, a God-  
22 given authority that was to be recognized by all, namely prophetic authority. Had God intended

1 to seriously restrict the leadership role of women in Israel by subjecting them to men in general  
2 He would have broken His own law by calling and appointing them as prophetesses.

3 Third, the fact that the prophets proclaimed to the people what God had personally  
4 revealed to them and not their own ideas does not weaken their authority but strengthen it. Their  
5 authority was determined by their personal commitment to the Word of the Lord without any  
6 regard for their own well-being. The word of a male or female prophet was authoritative because  
7 it was the expression of the word of the Lord. This is what true spiritual leadership is about. The  
8 authority of *any* leader among God’s people is dependent on his or her commitment to the word  
9 of God. The principle is the same for all. It was this lack of commitment to God’s revealed will  
10 that led to the collapse of kingship in Israel and to the destruction of the temple. Ultimate  
11 authority always resides in the word of the Lord and we, as leaders, participate in it to the extent  
12 to which we are faithful to it and clearly proclaim it. The fact that the prophet has access to that  
13 word in a unique way does not diminish his or her authority but on the contrary invests it with  
14 greater significance and urgency. The gender of the prophet does not become invisible or  
15 irrelevant because he or she is receiving the message directly from the Lord. The divine election  
16 makes them more visible as spiritual leaders.

17 Finally, the prophet is a person directly ordained by the Lord to the prophetic ministry.  
18 We only have a case in which a prophet is to be anointed as such. Elijah was commanded by the  
19 Lord to anoint Elisha as his prophetic successor (1 Kings 19:16). It could be that in this case the  
20 verb “to anoint” is used in the sense of setting apart for the prophetic ministry. Ellen White,  
21 referring to her prophetic call states, “In the city of Portland the Lord ordained me as His  
22 messenger, and here my first labors were given to the cause of present truth.”<sup>9</sup> This is the highest

---

<sup>9</sup> Ellen White, RH, May 18, 1911 (DG 252.5).



1 ritual of ordination that any human being could experience. God Himself placed His hand on His  
2 prophetic instrument and ordained her.

### 3 **B. Deborah the Judge**

4 Another case in which the Lord chose a woman to occupy two of the most important  
5 responsibilities in Israel found in the experience of Deborah. She is identified as a prophet and a  
6 judge in Israel (Judges 4:4-5).<sup>10</sup> No other judge in the book of Judges is called a prophet. In fact,  
7 very few prophets in the Old Testament are called judges and prophets. As far as I can ascertain,  
8 these two roles are ascribed to Moses (Exod 18:16) and Samuel (1 Sam 7:6, 15-17); two of the  
9 most important leaders of the people of God. This would suggest that in her role as prophet and  
10 judge, Deborah was the top leader of Israel at that time. The judges were the leaders of Israel in  
11 pre-monarchical Israel (Judges 2:11-19) and they had judicial functions.

12 The residence of Deborah was located in the north of Israel but not too distant from the  
13 south, making it easier for all Israel to come to her for guidance as judge and prophet. At the  
14 moment of national crisis she was God's instrument to deliver His people. Ellen White  
15 comments, "There was dwelling in Israel, a woman illustrious for her piety, and *through her the*  
16 *Lord chose to deliver his people.* Her name was Deborah."<sup>11</sup> The phrase "to deliver his people" is  
17 used in the book of judges to describe the primary function of the judges (e.g. Judges 2:16).

18 Guided by the Lord, she asked Barak to be the military leader but she was directly involved in

---

<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew phrase *šōptāh 'et-yiśrā'ēl* ("was judging Israel") in 4:4 is a technical phrase in Judges to refer to "the exercise of a leadership office in the premonarchic period" (*TDOT*, 15:419). The participle is always used, including the case of Deborah, to refer to the person who was exercising authority by leading the people (Judges 2:16; 17, 18, 19; 4:4). The supreme judge/leader is the Lord (11:27). In the case of Deborah it is said that she was judging/leading Israel "at that time" (4:4), indicating that at other times God had used other leaders/judges. This type of leadership was instituted by the Lord over Israel (2 Sam 7:11).

<sup>11</sup> Ellen White, ST, June 16, 1881 par. 4 (italics are mine). Although the primary responsibility of delivering God's people was Deborah's, Barak would be her military leader: "Although he had been designated by the Lord himself as the one chosen to deliver Israel, and had received the assurance that God would go with him and subdue their enemies, yet he was timid and distrustful" (Ibid., par. 6).

1 mustering the troops (5:13-14). People came from all over the land in response to her call to  
2 arms. She had “authority over” men as prophet and judge. The list of tribes that participated in  
3 this military action shows that Deborah was recognized as the leader. This explains why Barak  
4 wanted her to accompany him. Ellen White supports this description of Deborah when she  
5 writes, “He [Barak] refused to engage in such a doubtful undertaking unless Deborah would  
6 accompany him, and thus support his efforts by her influence and counsel.”<sup>12</sup> Her influence over  
7 the people was that of a wise prophet and judge. We have no reason to believe that she was  
8 directly involved in the actual battle but this was also the case with other military leaders who  
9 occasionally used their generals while they stayed at a distance. Her leadership role is so  
10 impressive that when Barak hesitates and wants her to be in the battlefield with him, Deborah  
11 points out that this would be against the traditional role of women and culturally damaging to  
12 Barak; he will experience shame. But he does not care because he wants the best leader of Israel  
13 to accompany him.

14 A final quote from Ellen White: “She [Deborah] was known as a prophetess, and in the  
15 absence of the usual magistrates, the people had sought to her for counsel and justice.”<sup>13</sup> This  
16 statement is important in our discussion. It makes clear that although it was not common for a  
17 woman to hold the role of judge/leader over Israel she held it. Consequently we can conclude  
18 that there is nothing morally or spiritually wrong with having a woman in top leadership  
19 positions among God’s people. The statement indicates that although at times it may not be  
20 necessary to have women in such positions, if the need is there it is correct to do it.

21 The two examples that we have discussed demonstrate that the subjection of the wife to  
22 the husband, as recorded in Genesis 3, did not have the purpose of restricting the role of women

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., par. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., par. 4.

1 in Israel to the home. God reveals Himself in these stories as willing to use women as top  
2 administrative and spiritual leaders among His people, even if He had to ordain them Himself.

### 3 **VI. Order in the New Testament**

4 The church was instituted by Christ who called twelve apostles to lead it. As the church  
5 grew, ecclesiastical order was further developed. In order to emphasize unity and order in the  
6 church different images were used. Most prominent among these is the image of the church as  
7 the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-31; Rom 12:1-8; Eph 1:22) whose only head is Christ Himself.  
8 While unity and the headship of Christ are Paul's main concern, his discussion of the church as  
9 the Body of Christ is framed within the context of spiritual gifts. These gifts were given to all  
10 believers and contributed to building up the church and to the fulfillment of its mission (Eph 4:1-  
11 13). Besides the spiritual gifts, there were also two main offices in the church, namely eldership  
12 and deaconate. In spite of the fact that in the NT there are just a few passages in which ordination  
13 through the laying on of hands is mentioned, Christians have generally accepted that at least  
14 elders and deacons were to be ordained to their offices. It is also recognized that the gifts of the  
15 Spirit were given to male and female members of the church. The question is whether the offices  
16 of deacon and elder were gender exclusive, i.e. to be exercised only by males member of the  
17 church.

#### 18 **A. Christian Ministry**

19 Let me begin with a brief discussion of the nature of Christian ministry. Christian  
20 ministry is modeled after the ministry of Christ: "Jesus called them together and said, 'You know  
21 that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials  
22 exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among  
23 you must be your servant [*diakonos*] and whoever wants to be first must be slave [*doulos*] of all.

1 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom  
2 for many” (Mark 10:42-45; see also Matt 20:24-28). Jesus is using the model of cosmic order  
3 instituted by God at creation in which love expressed itself in service to others. This reflects a  
4 theology of ministry that is based on service, self-sacrifice and humility, not on higher rank and  
5 status. *According to Jesus, positions of leadership in the church are not assigned on the basis of*  
6 *gender but on the quality of the service of the believer.* New Testament writers envisioned  
7 ministry as service (*diakonia*) and applied the term to the service of all believers, both those who  
8 exercise leadership roles as well as those who fulfill other ministerial roles in the church (Rom  
9 16:1; Col 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10). Rather than being conceived in terms of “ruling over,” or “having  
10 authority over” (Mark 10:42) the purpose of all Christian ministry is to encourage, empower and  
11 provide a vision “so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12) and its mission brought  
12 to completion.

### 13 **B. The Spirit and the Gifts**

14 The type of ministry envisioned by Jesus was possible through the presence of the Spirit  
15 within the church and the gifts He brought to it. Through Him, Christ made provision for each  
16 believer to participate in His ministry, empowering them to edify and serve the Christian  
17 community and to facilitate its missionary endeavor (Rom 12:6-9; 1 Cor 12:6-11; Eph 4:7, 11-  
18 13). In giving loving service to each other and to the world, believers demonstrate their  
19 obedience to Jesus’s command (Matt 22:37-39; 28:18-20). As indicated above the gifts of the  
20 Spirit are not given on the basis of gender. The exercise of the gifts contributes to preserve and  
21 strengthen ecclesiastical order. Each follower of Christ without exception, therefore, has a  
22 special and unique contribution to make to the wellbeing and mission of the church.

### 23 **C. Gift and Offices**

1           The specialized offices or ministries in the church are not radically different from the  
2 gifts of the Spirit. In order to fulfill His mission on earth, God chose some of His followers to  
3 serve as leaders in the church according to the spiritual gifting they received by the Holy Spirit  
4 (Rom 12:8, Eph 4:7,11).<sup>14</sup> Their appointments were confirmed or symbolized in various ways,  
5 and not all of them were by means of the “laying on of hands.” In all cases of ministry, however,  
6 God is the one who initiated the call, qualified the person for their ministry, and gave them  
7 authority to perform their duties and functions. Among those who exercised gifts of leadership  
8 were the appointive leaders—elders/overseers and deacons—elected by the community and  
9 affirmed by the apostles. Recognizing the gift of leadership in these individuals, and the infilling  
10 of the Holy Spirit in their lives (Acts 6:3), the church chose them for the task of spiritual  
11 oversight, protection of the community (shepherd), teaching and preaching (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim  
12 5:17). A laying-on-of-hands is clear in some instances (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6).

13           In Ephesians 4:11 the list of spiritual gifts includes the one for pastor and teacher. In the  
14 New Testament, the elders were not only spoken of as overseers, or bishops (*episkopos*, which  
15 literally means supervisor; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1-3), but also as pastors or  
16 shepherds (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4), and teachers (1 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:9). *In other words,*  
17 *elders were appointed to their office on the basis of having received gifts that qualified them for*  
18 *that position.* A person with the gift of pastorate (which is gender inclusive) could be appointed

---

<sup>14</sup>Please note that Romans 12:8, the gifts of teaching and leadership are tucked in among other, seemingly less significant gifts. It would be paradoxical to claim, on the basis of this passage, that the gift of encouragement was lower on the scale of giftedness, while the gift of leadership was higher and thus could only be endowed upon a certain class of believers in the church. Certainly this could not have been Paul’s intention. Furthermore, Paul’s use of the word *proistēmi* both in Romans 12:8 and 1 Timothy 5:17 clearly indicates that the leadership position was based on spiritual gifting. Adventists have always believed that the spiritual gift of leadership, as any other gift, is also gender inclusive and can be exercised by women. Those who exercise this gift get their authority from God as recognized by the church. This authority is not dependent on any other person in leadership function in the church.

1 by the church to the role of an elder. In fact, the gift of pastorate would find its fullest expression  
2 in the work of an elder. Originally these roles were not distinguished and were interchangeable.  
3 The spiritual gift of pastor/teacher, which is gender inclusive in our teaching of spiritual gifts, is  
4 thus equivalent with the appointed position of elder or overseer. As Seventh-day Adventists we  
5 have always recognized that women can serve as pastors/teachers, and since this gift is gender  
6 inclusive it seems natural to follow the biblical direction to also consider them for the office of  
7 elders or overseers.

## 8 **VII. Ministry, Ordination, and Women**

9 It is usually pointed out that there is no evidence in the New Testament indicating that  
10 women were ordained to the offices of elder and deacon and that the qualifications for these  
11 offices disqualify them from exercising them. We will begin with the office of deacons.

### 12 **A. Female Deacons**

13 Concerning female deacons, the New Testament provides clear hints to the effect that  
14 women were appointed as deacons. There are three lines of argumentation that support this  
15 conclusion. First, in the discussion of the qualifications for deaconate Paul inserts a brief list of  
16 qualifications for the “wives” of the deacons (1 Tim 3:11; NIV). The Greek simply says,  
17 “Women likewise dignified . . .” In other words, Paul does not seem to be referring here to the  
18 wife of the deacons but to women who were apparently appointed to the role of deacons. Second,  
19 a female deacon is explicitly mentioned by Paul in Rom 16:1: “I commend to you our sister  
20 Phoebe, a servant [*diakonos*] of the church in Cenchrea.” What we have here is the common  
21 elements of Greco-Roman epistolary commendations: It includes the name of the person who is  
22 being commended (Phoebe), the relationship with the person (“our sister”), the status/role of the

1 person (“a *diakonos* of the church in Cenchræ”), and a request (“receive her in the Lord, . . . and  
2 give her any help she may need”).

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

5 Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should  
6 be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the  
7 poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some  
8 cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are  
9 devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good  
10 in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church.<sup>15</sup>

11  
12 Church leaders, including her son W. C. White, interpreted this statement to mean that  
13 women could be ordained to the office of deaconate. Consequently they began to ordain women  
14 as deaconesses.<sup>16</sup> What was hinted at in the New Testament has been made explicit through the  
15 prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White.

---

<sup>15</sup> RH, July 9, 1895.

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

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

1           **B. Female Elders**

2           The passage discussing the qualifications for the ministry of elders (1 Tim 3:1-7) is not  
3 gender exclusive. Here is the evidence that supports that claim.

4           First, it is important to note that the introduction to Paul’s list of qualifications begins  
5 with the statement, “If *anyone* [Greek *tis*] aspires to a position of oversight [*episcopē*]. . . ,” not  
6 “If a *man* [*anēr*] desires. . .” (1 Tim 3:1). In Greek, *tis* is an indefinite pronoun that as such is not  
7 interested in defining gender. The use of this pronoun indicates that Paul is not interested in  
8 gender but that he is commending the office of an overseer as worthy of aspiration. This finds  
9 support in the fact that the apostle is primarily interested in the character of the overseer as a  
10 spiritual leader rather than on his duties. Therefore when Paul says “anyone” he means “anyone.”  
11 This is the plain meaning of the text. It is true that the noun “elder” in Greek is masculine but this  
12 is also the case with *diakonos*. Therefore even though the term is gender specific it is not gender  
13 exclusive.

14           Second, the phrase “husband of but one wife” is a highly unusual phrase found only three  
15 times in the Bible (1 Tim 3:1, 12; Titus 1:6). Its meaning is far from clear. Does it mean that the  
16 person should not be a polygamist, or that he should be married, or that he should not be a  
17 divorced person? If the requirement is that an elder should be a married man, then, single men  
18 and even widowers would be excluded from the ministry. We do not have biblical evidence to

---

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).



1 support this position. Paul seems to have been unmarried, at least for some time during his  
2 ministry.<sup>17</sup>

3 We should also notice that the emphasis of the phrase is not on gender. The order of the  
4 words places the emphasis on “one” thus indicating faithfulness and moral purity. The idiomatic  
5 phrase points to the character of the elder and not to gender exclusiveness. The best textual  
6 evidence to support this suggestion is found in 1 Timothy 5:9, where Paul writes concerning a  
7 widow that she should have been “a one-man women.” In this case a literal reading of the phrase  
8 emphasizing gender specificity would be practically meaningless or stating the obvious: “The  
9 widow should be a woman married to one man . . .”

10 Besides, we have biblical evidence indicating that the phrase is not gender exclusive. A  
11 deacon was also expected to be “the husband of but one wife” (3:12). If the phrase is gender  
12 exclusive only males could be deacons. Fortunately, as we have already indicated, the New  
13 Testament and Ellen G. White speak about female deacons. The obvious conclusion is that even  
14 though the language is gender specific it is not gender exclusive. Being this the case, the phrase  
15 “a one-woman husband” does not exclude women from being deacons or elders.

16 Third, the fact that the elder is expected to manage his household well does not exclude  
17 women from this office. In the instructions to deacons it is stated that the deacon was also  
18 expected to “manage his children and household well” (1 Tim 3:12), but this requirement did not  
19 exclude women from the deaconate. Neither should it exclude women from the office of elder.

20 Besides, Paul expected not only men but also women to “manage their household”

---

<sup>17</sup> Besides, Ellen White does not support this interpretation. She never opposed single men in the ministry. He acknowledged them. She wrote, “I was shown that the usefulness of young ministers, married or unmarried, is often destroyed by the attachment shown to them by young women.”<sup>17</sup> It could be argued that unmarried pastors were ordained after getting married but she does not indicate this. She never asked pastors who were widowers to resign from the ministry. On the contrary, she supported them and encouraged those who wanted to get married to marry again (e.g. S. N. Haskell and J. N. Andrews).

1 (*oikodespoteō*, “to manage one’s household;” 1 Tim 5:14). A good example of this is found in  
2 the conversion of Lydia. She was such a good administrator of her household that when she was  
3 baptized “the members of her household were baptized” (Acts 16:15). She could have been  
4 ordained as an elder! It is a well-known fact that women held important administrative positions  
5 at home and in society during the time of the New Testament. But perhaps we should keep in  
6 mind that the main interest of this specific qualification is that the elder should be a person with  
7 good administrative and spiritual experience which in most cases would have been demonstrated  
8 by the way he has administered the household.

### 9 C. Women as Coworkers of the Lord

10 It would take too long to demonstrate the important role of women in the apostolic  
11 church. I will only refer to one of their most important responsibilities in the church. There are a  
12 number of important passages in which Paul mentions different coworkers serving the Lord in  
13 the churches. Often these individuals are considered to be persons who worked under Paul or  
14 who were his helpers, but this is not correct. They were, like Paul, workers of the Lord. Talking  
15 about Apollos and himself he says, “We are God’s fellow workers [*sunergos*]” (1 Cor 3:9).  
16 Apollos was a well-educated man who knew the Scriptures and taught others about Jesus (Acts  
17 18:24-25). Prisca and Aquila instructed him in the gospel of Jesus, he accepted it, and went on to  
18 proclaim it (vv. 26-27). Other fellow workers mentioned by Paul are Urbanus and Stachys (Rom  
19 16:9), Timothy (v. 21; 1 Thess 3:2), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Clement (4:3),  
20 Aristarchus, Barnabas, Jesus/Justus (Col 4:10-11), Philemon (Philm 1:1), Epaphras, Mark,  
21 Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (v. 24). They are all, like Paul, proclaiming the gospel of salvation  
22 and strengthening up the churches.

1           Among the fellow workers Paul mentions several women. He includes Prisca and her  
2 husband (Rom 16:3; *sunergos*) and Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3; *sunergos*). The important  
3 role of these fellow workers is evident in the way Paul refers to them and their responsibility. He  
4 speaks highly of them and when in need of reprimanding some of them he is tactful and  
5 considerate. This is the case with Euodia and Syntyche, who apparently were having personal  
6 problems that could have damaged the unity of the church. Paul appeals to them to resolve the  
7 problem and asks another fellow worker to help them (Phil 4:3). What we have here is fellow  
8 workers helping each other to resolve a problem that could have divided the church. These ladies  
9 occupied an important leadership position in the church.

10           What were the responsibilities of the fellow workers? They are primarily servants  
11 (*diakonoi*) of the church: “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you  
12 believed” (1 Cor 3:5). In 3:9, Paul adds, “We [Apollos and Paul] are God’s fellow workers; you  
13 are God’s field, God’s building.” Since they are servants, they are not to lord over church  
14 members (2 Cor 1:24). They proclaim the message of salvation with missionary fervor and  
15 strengthen the faith of believers in their communities (Acts 18:27). Like Epaphroditus, they  
16 could be located in one particular church from which they would go out to serve (Phil 2:25).  
17 This is also the case with Euodia and Syntyche. The function of the fellow workers of God was  
18 so important that Paul urged the members of the church at Corinth, to be “in subjection to  
19 [*hupotassō*] such men [the household of Stephanas] and *to everyone who helps in the work*  
20 [Greek, “to every fellow worker”] and labors [laborer]” (1 Cor 16:16).<sup>18</sup> It would be difficult to  
21 argue that the submission to fellow workers is to be limited to males when Paul explicitly calls

---

<sup>18</sup> Ellen White echoes the words of Paul when she writes, “These whom God has appointed are workers together with God, and they are to be respected and honored and loved” (RH, October 10, 1893 par. 13). This statement is preceded by a quotation from Ephesians 4:11-13—“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers . . .”

1 some women coworkers. We find here women functioning in important leadership roles to whom  
2 *church members were to be in subjection.*

3 **VIII. “I do not permit a woman to teach” (1 Tim 2:12)**

4 There are some passages in the NT that give the impression that women were not to have  
5 important leadership roles in the church. We will briefly examine some of them.

6 **A. 1 Tim 2:11-15**

7 In the discussion of this passage we should start with its main idea: “A woman should  
8 learn.” This is a positive idea. We should also ask why Paul is asking the church to make sure  
9 that the female members are to be properly instructed. The epistle (the immediate context of the  
10 passage) makes clear that this is necessary because of false teachings being promoted among  
11 church members. Women have the right to learn the Christian message but they should be taught  
12 by reliable teachers in the church.<sup>19</sup> Then Paul proceeds to discuss how this teaching is to take  
13 place. They are going to learn “in silence and in full submission.” This is an excellent  
14 pedagogical advice. Notice that “in full submission” is not followed by the name of the person to  
15 whom they submit. The *context* clearly indicates that they are to be submissive to the teacher. In  
16 v. 12, Paul develops both ideas—in silence and in submission. Learning in silence means that  
17 they are not yet ready to teach and therefore Paul clearly states that he does not permit those who  
18 are learning to function as teachers. “In full submission” means that they are not to have

---

<sup>19</sup> According to the Bible the teaching authority of the church, understood as the community of believers, is to be exercised by all of its members in accordance with their gifts. Elders, as overseers, are responsible for making sure that what is taught in church is the apostolic truth, this is emphasized in the Pastoral Epistles, but church elders are not the only teachers. There is a gift called teaching and there is no evidence limiting to church elders or to male members of the church (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28). Through the gift of prophecy, exercised by men and women, God teaches and edifies His church (cf. 1 Cor 14:3). Paul also mentions that when the church gathers, anyone can share a “hymn,” a “word of instruction/teaching,” a “revelation” or even a “tongue,” but this should be done “for the strengthening of the church” and in an orderly way (14:26; also Col 3:16). Believers are expected to be teachers (Heb 5:12). The authority of the teaching is determined by its loyalty to Scripture rather than by the gender of the person who proclaims it (e.g. Isa 8:20).

1 authority over man. The question is who this man is and the context indicates that this is the  
2 teacher. The teacher could be an elder or a person with the gift of teaching. Paul closes v. 12 the  
3 way he began in v. 11: Women are to be silent.<sup>20</sup> This is the expected attitude of a true student.  
4 The command to be silent indicates that the women were not assuming the attitude of students  
5 and were disrupting the teaching process making it necessary for Paul to order them not to  
6 discuss with the teacher but to learn in silence. They were to be submissive to both the teacher  
7 and to the content of the teachings.

8         The meaning of the verb *authentēō* (“to have authority over,” NIV) is a matter of debate.  
9 Its use in documents from around the time of Paul indicates that it refers to a negative type of  
10 authority expressing the idea of a domineering and abusive use of power. Paul’s use of this verb  
11 indicates that he is dealing with a situation of conflict in the church and provides the grounds for  
12 his desire for women to be in silence. Its use also implies that women were disrupting the  
13 educational process. The verb is never used to describe the authority of a church elder.

14         It is clear that Paul is addressing a local situation<sup>21</sup> otherwise the order to be in silence  
15 would not only be universal in nature but absolute. Women would be permanently forbidden by  
16 him to speak in church, without any exception. We know that this was not what Paul meant to

---

<sup>20</sup> The Greed term *hesuchia* means “silence, tranquility, rest.” The verbal form means “to be silent, to be calm/tranquil.” Paul is calling “for an attitude of attentiveness and receptiveness” (Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994], 179, who comments, “In the LXX and the papyri, the most common meaning of *hēsychia-hēsychazō* is remain calm, tranquil; repose is contrasted with agitation, war, or a danger. It is commonly said that the land, the city, or the populace was tranquil for so many years, meaning that they enjoyed peace for that length of time: peaceful people live in security and at rest [Ezek 38:11; Hebrew *šāqat*]).” See also C. H. Peisker, “*Hēsychia* quiet, tranquil,” *EDNT* 2:126. The Greek word-family emphasizes silence as the absence or avoidance of conflict. Philo wrote, “Has someone said something worth hearing? Pay close attention, do not contradict them, be silent (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ *en hesuchia*), as Moses taught (Deut 27:9): Be silent and listen” (Philo, *Dreams* 2.264).

<sup>21</sup> A reading of 1 and 2 Timothy indicates that the women in Ephesus were attracted by the false teachings dividing the church (e.g. 1 Tim 6:20-21; 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17-18), and that they were accepting these false teachings and advocating them (e.g. 1 Tim 5:13; cf. Rev 2:20).

1 say (see 1 Cor 11:4). The implications of the universal, permanent, and absolute nature of the  
2 order can only be avoided if Paul was dealing with a particular problem in a particular church or  
3 churches. Once this is established we can then proceed to identify the universal principles being  
4 promoted in the text. Several things are of universal value. First, the church is responsible to  
5 teach the message of salvation and its implications to Christian women. Second, this is to be  
6 done by people who are qualified to teach. Third, those who are studying the message should not  
7 function as teachers or challenge the teacher or the content of the teaching. They should not be  
8 allowed to teach. Fourth, the students are expected to learn by showing proper respect to the  
9 teacher and by not disrupting the educational process. Any attempt to control the process is to be  
10 rejected. These guidelines would apply to both men and women who are students of the gospel in  
11 any church, anywhere in the world, and are to be enforced by local church leaders.

12         Verses 13-14 are the most difficult to interpret in the passage. Paul mentions the priority  
13 of Adam but he does not interpret it. He simply states a biblical fact, Adam was created before  
14 Eve. He does not explicitly develop an argument using the phrase. Whatever interpretation we  
15 provide it would be our way of filling-in gaps in the text. If we follow the Genesis creation  
16 account the “first-then” sequence would point to their equality and to the importance for both of  
17 them to work together against a common enemy. They failed and the same is happening in  
18 Ephesus. We could even argue that the priority of Adam in creation is being contrasted with the  
19 priority of Eve in sin in order to demonstrate that deception is not inevitable. However, Paul’s  
20 main point in his argument is not Adam but the experience of Eve. The reference to her fits the  
21 context very well. (1) In both passages women are involved. Paul is advising them and he feels  
22 that the experience of Eve could be helpful to them. (2) In both narratives we face the problem of  
23 false teachers. In Ephesus women were listening to false teachers promoting their views within

1 the church while in the garden there was an intruder, a false teacher, teaching falsehood to Eve.  
2 (3) The fundamental concern of Paul flows out of the experience of Eve. The enemy deceived  
3 her and Paul fears that the women in Ephesus were being deceived and, like Eve, could become  
4 instruments of deception. He says that “some [women] have in fact already turned away to  
5 follow Satan” (1 Tim 5:15). Contextually, the main interest of Paul is not on the matter of  
6 headship but on the danger of false teachers and deception.

7 First Timothy 2:15 is a notoriously difficult passage. The best way to analyze it is to  
8 place it within the general discussion of Paul in the epistle. He is most probably attempting to  
9 affirm the value of marriage and childbearing as a response to some of the false teachings being  
10 promoted by some (cf. 4:3; 5:9-10, 14). Women will be saved—this is important for Paul—if  
11 they persevere in faith, love, and holiness, that is to say by not listening to false teachers and  
12 remaining committed to the Christian message.

### 13 B. 1 Corinthians 14:33-34

14 There is not a significant difference of opinion on the meaning of this passage among  
15 those who support the ordination of women to the ministry and those who oppose it. The passage  
16 is dealing with the speech of both men and women in church that disrupts the service. This type  
17 of behavior dishonors the Lord and creates confusion in worship. The silence required by Paul  
18 consists in self-restraint that contributes to the edification of the church. In such a context to be  
19 silent and submissive are offered as the solution for the disruption of worship. In other words the  
20 submission is shown in silence during worship and applies not only to women but also to men  
21 (14:28, 29-31).

### 22 C. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

1           The idea that male headship excludes women from the ordained ministry is usually  
2 grounded in 1 Cor 11:2-16. Probably the most debated question in this passage is the meaning of  
3 the Greek term *kephalē* (“head,” NIV). It could mean “head,” in a literal sense (a part of the  
4 body) or in metaphorical one (“leader; one having authority over someone”), “source,” and  
5 “preeminent.” The translation “source” is contextually defensible (vv. 8-9, 11-12). In this case  
6 Christ is the source of men, men are at least partially or indirectly the source of the woman, and  
7 God is the source of Christ.<sup>22</sup> The sequence is the creation of man, then woman, and then the  
8 incarnation of the Son of God who is sent from the Father. The translation one chooses may not  
9 be as important as what Paul is aiming at throughout the passage.<sup>23</sup>

10           First, the passage is regulating male and female participation in prayer and prophesying  
11 in church (vv. 4-5). *It is not about restricting the role of women in church.* It provides  
12 instructions about gender differentiation, expressed through a cultural practice, and about making  
13 God the center of worship. Men are not to wear a veil while women should wear a veil when  
14 leading in prayer or in the proclamation of the word of God through a prophetic message. Thus is  
15 gender differentiation, established by the Lord at creation, reaffirmed in the church among its  
16 leaders.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ellen White takes the phrase “Christ is the head of every man” to mean that He is the head of the church: “ ‘The head of every man is Christ.’ God, who put all things under the Saviour’s feet, ‘gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.’ 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22, 23. The church is built upon Christ as its foundation; it is to obey Christ as its head. It is not to depend upon man, or be controlled by man” (DA 414). This would suggest that for her the phrase “man is the head of a woman” is referring to the husband (cf. Eph 5:22-23). In a more theological reading of the text, Ellen White takes the term “head” to mean “source” (see Ángel M Rodríguez, “Evaluation of the Arguments Used by those Opposing the Ordination of Women to the Ministry,” 44-45).

<sup>23</sup> It may be useful to keep in mind that “woman is not man’s subordinate in this passage; she is his ‘glory’ (or ‘reputation,’ ‘honor,’ ‘splendor’), the one who brings him shame or honor” (Craig S. Keener, *Paul, women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letter of Paul* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992], 33). It is not said anywhere in the passage that man “has authority over” the woman; in fact, it is the woman who “has authority” over her head (v. 10) (see Gordon Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987], 502).



1           Second, the practice is supported by a theological reason. When men pray or prophesy  
2 they glorify God by not wearing a veil and women glorify God, not their husbands or the men in  
3 church, by wearing the veil. By wearing a veil that covers their hair women also set aside their  
4 own glory which according to Paul is displayed through their long hair (11:15). Women should  
5 not allow men to deprive them from giving glory to the Lord.<sup>24</sup> When leading in worship they  
6 both should point to God and not to each other or to themselves.<sup>25</sup> In a sense this idea is a  
7 development of 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all  
8 for the glory of God.” The rest of the arguments revolve around these fundamental ideas.

9           The veil frees the woman to only give glory to God. In fact, when she does this she “has  
10 authority on her head” (v. 10). The Greek reads “the woman ought to have authority on/over/ her  
11 head.” This is about the authority a woman has and not about the authority someone else has  
12 over her.<sup>26</sup> It could be that “her head” means “her own person.” This means that she is authorized  
13 to pray and prophesize in the church by wearing a veil that covers all human glory and her own  
14 glory making God’s glory the most important thing in the church.<sup>27</sup> The angels also rejoice when

---

<sup>24</sup> See, Morna D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. XI.10,” *NTS* 10 (1964): 410-416.

<sup>25</sup> Ellen Whites sates, “Heavenly intelligences can work with the man or woman who will not absorb the glory to himself, but who will be willing that all the glory shall redound to the honor of God” (LHU 358.3).

<sup>26</sup> The phrase “to have authority over her head” is difficult to understand and in some manuscripts the noun “authority” was change to “veil” (*kalumma*) to try to clarify the meaning (“to have a veil over her head”). But there is no reason to change the Greek text. The word *exousia* “can mean ‘power’ or ‘authority’ but there is no evidence that it means power or authority exercised by someone *else* over the person in question [in this case the woman]. . . We are talking, then, about an authority or power which the woman has. It is best to translate *exousia* as authority, not power” (Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Church* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 87).

<sup>27</sup> It seems strange that Paul would say that only man is the image of God and not the woman. It is unquestionable that in Genesis 1 both man and woman were created in the image of God. This is confirmed by Ellen White when she writes, using the phrase Paul uses: “Created to be ‘the image and glory of God’ (1 Corinthians 11:7), Adam and Eve had received endowments not unworthy of their high destiny” (Ed 20). How can we harmonize what Paul says with Genesis and with the statement of Ellen G. White? We can suggest that Paul, in this polemical passage, decided to use a popular interpretation among

---

Jewish interpreters of Genesis 1:27 without necessarily considering it to be the final reading of Genesis. In the Jewish exegesis of Genesis 1:27, the first part of the verse was interpreted to be about man (“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him”) and the second about the woman (“male and female he created them”). According to this interpretation only man was the bearer of the image of God. See, Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 533, who was relaying on Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei: Gen 1, 26f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis, und in den paulinischen Briefen* (FRLANT 76; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 107-112, for the Jewish examples. Paul would then be arguing from within the Jewish reading of the text. His main point would remain valid independent of this particular interpretation of the text if his intention was to emphasize the importance of giving all glory to God in Christian worship.

Some may feel uncomfortable with this harmonization. Let me offer you another possibility. When Paul says “man is the image and glory of God” he is not necessarily denying that woman is also the image and glory of God. What he is saying is correct—man is the image and glory of God—but because of the polemical nature of the text he chose not mention the inclusive nature of the statement. It is also true that the “woman is the glory of man” as explained by Paul. According to him, since Adam was created first the creation of the woman provided for him what he was missing, fullness of being (Weinfeld, “*Kābôd*,” TDOT 7:24, points out that the Hebrew term *kābôd*, [“glory”] “can mean ‘substance, being’”). 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 had already been created when 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; see our discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 below). There is another passage in the New Testament in which we find a grammatical structure similar to the one in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9. Since it is also used in the context of creation it could help us to understand what Paul means when he says that woman was created for the benefit of man. We are referring to Mark 2:27: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” There are some important parallels between these two passages. The first one is the concept of creation. Jesus was talking about the moment when God instituted the Sabbath; when it came into existence (*ginomai*, “to come into existence, be made, be created”). In the case of Paul the reference to creation is even more evident. He uses the verb *ketizo*, which means “to bring something into existence, to create.” Second, in both passages a temporal sequence is assumed. In the saying of Jesus the temporal sequence is implicit when he says that man was not created for the benefit of the Sabbath. Man was created first. In Paul, the priority of man is also implicit in the phrase “for man was not created for benefit of woman.” Third, in both passage something is denied and something is affirmed in connection with creation. The grammatical formulation is the same in both cases: The proposition *dia* is followed by a noun in the accusative. Fourth, what is denied is that something/someone was created for the benefit of another: Man (*anthropos*) was not created for the benefit of (*dia* + accusative) the Sabbath and man (*aner*) was not created for the benefit of (*dia* + accusative) the woman. The positive side is that the Sabbath was created for the benefit of (*dia* + accusative) man (*anthropos*, the human race) and the woman for the benefit of (*dia* + accusative) man (*aner*). These are the facts. The question is whether the fact that something is created for the benefit of another means or implies that the one who receives the benefit has power or authority over the other. The obvious answer is that this is not the case. Humans have no authority over the Sabbath. Jesus said that only the Son of Man has authority over the Sabbath. It is only the creator who has authority over both the Sabbath and humankind. Eve was created for the benefit of Adam. She added existential weight (“glory”) to his life. The woman knew from the very beginning fullness of being because she always had Adam with her. But she did add something to him. In this sense Paul is in complete agreement with Genesis.

1 both men and women come together to give all glory to God. This is about equality in both  
2 essence and function.

3 First Corinthians 11:2-16 is not about the headship of male church leaders (elders) over  
4 women in church. There is nothing in the context of the passage about the headship of elders in  
5 church.<sup>28</sup> Besides there is nothing in the passage about who should be or not be ordained to the  
6 ministry.

## 7 IX. Ellen G. White and Women in Church<sup>29</sup>

8 We should begin with a statement of fact: Ellen G. White does not explicitly command or  
9 oppose the ordination of women to the ministry. That she supported the involvement of women  
10 in various forms of ministry is well known and documented. However, a careful consideration of  
11 Ellen White's thought on the role of women in the church supports the case for allowing the  
12 ordination of women today. The perspective we draw from Ellen White's writings encourages  
13 us to move ahead and stretch the boundaries of our understanding of ministry and ordination, to  
14 step out in faith and to respond to God's leading in the full participation of women in all aspects  
15 of ministry.

### 16 A. Women in Ministry

17 Ellen White believed in including women in all aspects of service and ministry. In 1893,  
18 even if some men did not feel comfortable with women doing ministry alongside their husbands,  
19 and be fairly remunerated for this work, she argued, "this question is not for men to settle. The

---

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps one of the most puzzling things in the New Testament regarding patterns of leadership is the total silence in 1 Corinthians of any mention of elders. For a church that was plagued with so many troubles, Paul never refers to elders to keep things in order or to bring things under control. It is almost as if there were no elders in that church.

<sup>29</sup> I have summarized in this section material from the first draft of the paper that will express the position of those who support the ordination of women in TOSC ("A Synthesis Statement on Gender-Inclusive Ministry and Ordination").

1 Lord has settled it.” God is calling women to engage in ministry and in some instances they will  
2 “do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God.” Emphatically she  
3 stated, “There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry.”<sup>30</sup>

4 In 1879, she addressed a difficult situation in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, and stated,  
5 It is not always men who are best adapted to the successful management of a church. If  
6 faithful women have more deep piety and true devotion than men, they could indeed by  
7 their prayers and their labors do more than men who are unconsecrated in heart and in  
8 life.”<sup>31</sup>

9  
10 In this inclusive statement her understanding of ministry embraces *church management*, a  
11 ministry that women can perform.

12 In 1880 she invited young people to do literature evangelism because it can serve as a  
13 good education for “men and women to do pastoral labor.”<sup>32</sup> Twenty years later in 1900 she  
14 again encouraged women to do ministry. “It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that  
15 prepares workers, both men and women, *to become pastors to the flock of God.*”<sup>33</sup> In 1887,  
16 while discussing the need to provide good education to Adventist youth in our schools, she  
17 exhorted administrators to do their best to train young women “with an education fitting them *for*  
18 *any position of trust ...*”<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> “The Laborer Is Worthy of His Hire,” Manuscript 43a, 1898, in *Manuscript Releases*, 5:324-327. It is important to emphasize that Ellen White recommended that tithe be used to pay women doing ministerial work. Tithe in the Old Testament was only to be used to pay the Levites and Priest, all of them females. For Ellen G. White this distinction has come to an end. A woman can be a spiritual “Levite” and be paid from the tithe.

<sup>31</sup> Ellen G. White to Brother Johnson, n.d. (Letter 33), 1879, in *Manuscript Releases*, 19:56.

<sup>32</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:390.

<sup>33</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:322.

<sup>34</sup> *Review and Herald*, June 21, 1887, in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 117-118 (emphasis added). Ellen White supports the idea of placing women in high administrative positions. After a discussion of the enthronement of David and the instructions God gave him, she applies the narrative to church leaders: “Those placed in *positions of responsibility* should be *men and women* who fear God, who realize that they are humans only, not God. They should be *people who will rule under God* and for Him. Will they *give expression to the will of God for His people*? Do they allow selfishness to tarnish word and

1           Although she was aware that in her day there would be limitations on what women could  
2 do, she did not limit the options available to them and never used the concept of male headship  
3 to limit women in ministry. If somehow Ellen White believed that there should be limits on  
4 ministerial options for women, she had plenty of opportunities to clarify her thought. She never  
5 did. Instead, her encouragements to young women are consistently open-ended and inclusive.<sup>35</sup>

## 6           **B. Ordination**

7           Ellen White earnestly believed that the ordained pastoral ministry alone is not sufficient  
8 to fulfill God’s commission, that God is calling Christians of all professions to dedicate their  
9 lives to God’s service. And thus she invited the church to branch out in its understanding of  
10 forms of ministry to include non-traditional roles, beyond those of ordained pastor, elder and  
11 deacon we find in the New Testament, to meet the needs of the church, and even to ordain people  
12 in these roles.

13           In order to encourage the mission of Adventist medical institutions, Ellen White wrote in  
14 1908 that medical missionaries “should be as sacredly set apart for [this] work *as is the minister*  
15 *of the gospel.*”<sup>36</sup> In a similar context, in 1895, she wrote a long article about the work of lay  
16 people in local churches. She counseled:

17           Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should  
18 be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the  
19 poor. *They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.* In some

---

action? Do they, after obtaining the confidence of the people as leaders of wisdom who fear God and keep His commandments, belittle the exalted position that the people of God should occupy in these days of peril? Will they through self-confidence become false guideposts, pointing the way to friendship with the world instead of the way to heaven?” (Manuscript 163, 1902=CTr 146). The statement is important in that it makes clear that a woman can be placed in positions of responsibility that would require from them to “rule under God and with him” and to teach God’s will to the people.

<sup>35</sup> This perspective also harmonizes with what we stated earlier that spiritual gifts are gender inclusive. Ellen White agreed that women with gifts of leadership, pastoral ministry, and teaching could serve in the church.

<sup>36</sup> Manuscript 5, 1908, in *Evangelism*, 546 (emphasis added).

1 cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are  
2 devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good  
3 in the church. *This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We*  
4 *need to branch out more in our methods of labor.*<sup>37</sup>  
5

6 Here she counseled that God is leading the church in setting apart women for these forms of  
7 ministry. In these two recommendations, Ellen White clearly had in mind a broader  
8 understanding of ordination than some had in her day and saw ordination as a form of  
9 affirmation serving a variety of functions and purposes. This suggests that Ellen White did not  
10 understand ordination to be a form of sacrament limited only to certain gender-specific functions.  
11 From a mission perspective, it seems obvious that in her counsels, all these functions are gender-  
12 inclusive.

13 These last two examples reflect a non-sacramental understanding of the laying on of  
14 hands. Ordination is first of all a form of affirmation and commissioning to a task. In fact, it is  
15 accurate to say that in her writings ordination and commissioning seem to be the same thing.<sup>38</sup>  
16 Ordination is viewed as an affirmation of God’s prior spiritual ordination and commissioning to  
17 ministry. The church simply recognizes what God has already blessed. In fact, in 1851, when

---

<sup>37</sup> “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895, (emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> Very early in Seventh-day Adventist history, the leading pioneers of the movement felt concerned about the confusion and false teachings that were manifested sometimes 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” (*Early Writings*, 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.

1 she wrote about the ordination of our very first ministers she called this ceremony a  
2 commissioning not an ordination. By 1896, she still had the same concept of ordination.

3 We must note that Ellen White was not interested in displacing men from the traditional  
4 roles they have had in the family, church, and society but she asked the church to allow women  
5 in the broad functions of gospel and pastoral ministry, and in any position of trust they are  
6 qualified for, even including the management of the church.<sup>39</sup> Thus she appealed to the church to  
7 include women with gifts of leadership, pastoral ministry and teaching (all the same biblical  
8 functions occupied by pastors, teachers, elders and overseers), implicitly and explicitly calling  
9 the church to ordain them for these positions, as men are ordained for the same positions.

## 10 X. Conclusion

11 There is not a divine command in the Old and New Testaments or in the writings of Ellen  
12 White to ordain women to the gospel ministry. Neither is there an explicit command against  
13 ordaining them. However, we do find in the Bible and in the writing of Ellen White references to  
14 women holding very important leadership positions that required from them to “have authority  
15 over men.” If ordination means basically “to have authority over some one” there is no reason to  
16 exclude women from being ordained to the ministry. But ordination is not about headship. It is

---

<sup>39</sup> It would be helpful here to note a statement made by C. C. Crisler in *Women of God*, 255, to the effect that Ellen White did not oppose women’s ordination on theological grounds as permanently opposed to God’s will, but in the circumstances where by doing so it would be exposing the church to unnecessary prejudice by a “gainsaying world.” From Crisler’s many conversations with her on this subject, he makes plain that this was her practical concern, not that of headship or some other theological obstacle, and that the day might come that this obstacle would no longer be an issue. Here is the statement by Crisler: “Sister White, personally, was very careful about expressing herself in any wise as to the advisability of ordaining women as gospel ministers. She has often spoken of the perils that such general practice would expose the church to by a gainsaying world; but as yet I have never seen from her pen any statement that would seem to encourage the formal and official ordination of women to the gospel ministry, to public labor such as is ordinarily expected of an ordained minister. This is not suggesting, much less saying, that no women are fitted for such public labor, and that none should ever be ordained; it is simply saying that so far as my knowledge extends, sister white never encouraged church officials to depart from the general customs of the church in those matters.”—C. C. Crisler (DG 255).

1 based on gifts, a divine call, the witness of the church, and a spirit of service to God and to others  
2 (mission). An overemphasis on authority will distort the nature of ministry and will bring us too  
3 close to a type of ministry that is not supported by the New Testament but that is found in some  
4 Christian communities. Christ has to be our model.

5 It is important to realize that Ellen White opposes an understanding of the ordained  
6 ministry (a theology of ordination) along the lines of “having authority over.” Talking about the  
7 ministry of the apostles as illustrating our ministry she writes:

8 The apostles wished it to be understood that *they did not set themselves up as lords over*  
9 *the faith and consciences of the believers*. They avoided all the severity they possibly  
10 could, and labored to promote the joy of the believers, leading them by kindly persuasion  
11 to renounce their errors. *Thus we are to work, by faith in God fulfilling our duty, not by*  
12 *exercising authority or dominion, but by revealing Christlikeness of character.*<sup>40</sup>

13  
14 No one has been called by God to have authority over other believers, males or females, but to  
15 serve them by revealing a Christ-like character. This is leadership through the influence of a holy  
16 life. A theology of ministry and ordination is to be grounded in the endowment of the Spirit, the  
17 divine calling, and a life of commitment to God, to His people, and to the world. Grounding it on  
18 an alleged cosmic principle of male headship must be kindly rejected in order to avoid  
19 developing an understanding of ministry that would be difficult to support from the Scriptures.

20 Having presented our case, I must acknowledge that our friends have also their own case  
21 and arguments to support their position. We have not been able to reach a consensus on the

---

<sup>40</sup> 21MR 275. She will also discourage an understanding of marriage based on the idea of having authority over: “*Neither the husband nor the wife is to make a plea for rulership*. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love the husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other” (7T 47). It is true that our friends argue that “having authority over” is to be understood as something positive and constructive and not as domineering authority. But there is no way for them to fully avoid the negative aspect because it is understood as not allowing women to teach. The element of control is always present in their use of the phrase. What makes this even more challenging is that this authority is particularly exercised on the basis of gender. This is the only criteria used independent of the quality of service of the woman, her consecration to the Lord, and her commitment to mission.



1 biblical materials. This by itself indicates that we do not have enough information in the Bible to  
2 settle this case. The question of whether or not we should ordain women to the ministry cannot  
3 be resolved on the basis of our own private opinions on what the Bible teaches because the  
4 church has not been able to reach a Spirit-led consensus on the topic. This has some implications  
5 for you as church leaders. Here is one: It would not be theologically correct for the world church  
6 to decide what to do on the basis of a majority vote that would support any of the two positions  
7 as expressing the biblical teaching on the subject. In such a case biblical truth would be defined  
8 not on the basis of what the Bible says but on the basis of the belief of a majority. Let us  
9 continue to uphold the Bible as our final authority.