

“The Lord has ordained me”: Ellen G. White’s Perspective

John Skrzypaszek (DMin)
Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre
Avondale College of Higher Education.
December 2012

In the two letters written on October 19, 1909 and January 20, 1910, Ellen White used a significant and reflective phrase - “The Lord has ordained me as His messenger”. This paper aims to explore the meaning of this significant phrase in the framework of its contextual setting. Further, it aims to explore Ellen White’s understanding of the term “ordination” and its ecclesiastical function in God’s mission to the world. Finally, it aims to explore Ellen White’s practical application of the term “ordination” in the life and work of the church. For this purpose, this study examines the meaning of the phrase “the Lord has ordained me” from three perspectives, a) experiential; b) biblically reflective; and c) practical.

Experiential Perspective

On October 19, 1909, Ellen White appealed to the churches at large to raise money for the completion of the church in Portland, Maine. The foundations of the building were already laid but the members were few. She wrote, “Unless they [believers in Portland] receive help from their brethren and sisters, they cannot complete the building.” The project was crucial as it was “the first Seventh-day Adventist church to be built in that city.”¹ While visiting Portland the previous summer, she was encouraged to appeal to all the church members throughout the state “asking each member to make a donation of ten cents”. On the way back home, and while visiting several camp meetings, Ellen

¹ Ellen White, Letter written from St Helena California, “An Appeal”, October 19, 1909.

White collected a small sum of “over two hundred dollars.”² Now in an open appeal, she invited all, “young and old, parents and children to take part in this missionary effort.”³ Her appeals were backed up by personal commitment. In a letter written to Elisa Morton on February 17, 1910, WC White observed, “Brother Montgomery tells us that of the amount received, \$391.04 has come from the West as the result of Mother’s labors.”⁴ During this period, she actively encouraged churches to support the work in Portland by appealing both to local church communities and to the churches at large.⁵ Why was this project so close to her heart?

Firstly, she pointed out. “The Lord has given instructions that the work of uplifting the banner of truth in the eastern states must now go forward with new power.”⁶ She indicated more specifically, “Portland has been especially pointed out as a place that should be labored for without delay.” Secondly, with this instruction, she recalled the thriving revival that took place in Portland during the events leading to the great disappointment.

The city of Portland was remarkably blessed by God in the early days of the message. At that time able ministers preached the truth of the soon coming of the Lord giving the first warning of the near approach of the end of all things...The first and second angels’ messages sounded all through Portland, and the city was greatly moved. Many were converted to the truth of the Lord’s soon coming and the glory of the Lord was revealed in a remarkable manner.⁷

In contrast to the spiritual revival, Ellen White described the decline she encountered in the city of her childhood. “Now there are only few believers in Portland.” Some of the faithful ministers aged and were unable to do “much active work

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ WC White. Letter to Miss Eliza H. Morton, February 17, 1910. In the same letter he comments “Now I had in mind that Mother has raised and sent to you nearly \$500, and I wish you would send us a particularized statement of what you have received from Mother and from our Conferences, as raised by her.”

⁵ Ibid. “Mother has written four appeals regarding this meeting house,-- one to the people of Portland Church, one to our brethren in the state of Maine, one to our people in New England and one to our people everywhere.”

⁶ Ellen White, Letter, October 19, 1909.

⁷ Ibid.

for the cause.” In her mind God’s work in Portland needed a new sparkle of fire. She pointed out, “These faithful workers would be greatly encouraged if they could see the work in Portland revived as a result of the Holy Spirit’s work upon the hearts of the believers.”⁸

Specific needs coined with love and passion for God’s work triggered in Ellen White’s mind a vivid recollection of her childhood years, the pictures of the thriving spiritual revival experienced in the distant past. In this context, she recalled the moments of her personal life-changing experience. “In the city of Portland, the Lord has ordained me as His messenger, and here my first labors were given to the cause of the present truth.”⁹ It is evident this experience left a lifelong imprint in her memory. On another occasion, while visiting the city of Portland in 1884, she recalled, with distinctive clarity, the intensity of the emotional struggles associated with the experience of God’s call.

How clearly I remembered the experience of forty years ago, when my light went out in darkness because I was unwilling to lift up my cross, and refused to be obedient. I shall never forget the agony of my soul when I felt the frown of God upon me.¹⁰

Twenty-five years later, prompted by the described circumstances, the mode of reflective reminiscing opened the scenes of God’s involvement in her life.

In this succinct, yet full of conviction expression, Ellen White linked the notion of ordination with God’s actions, or God’s initiative, paving a specific purpose in her life, a role, which she defined as “His messenger”. Further, God’s direct call ignited her response of commitment to the designated task. However, even though her recollections involved nostalgic and emotionally charged sentiments, she described her experience in

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ellen White, Travel Notes, *Review and Herald*, November 25, 1884

a rather plain and un-emotive manner, a matter of fact, based on an undeniable conviction.

Few months later, on January 20, 1910, Ellen White wrote another appeal to “all the churches throughout the United States.”¹¹ She urged the believers to provide financial support for the completion of the church in Portland. In the introduction she wrote, “Unless they receive help from their brethren and sisters, they will be greatly embarrassed.”¹² At this point of time, the church still needed to raise \$5848.¹³ The second letter had an ongoing motivational purpose. At the same time, Ellen White added more details to the descriptive recollections of this significant experience named “the Lord has ordained me”.¹⁴

Firstly, she recalled her transition from the state of emotional despair to the revelation of God’s love and the experience of joy and happiness. “After a period of despair, the blessed Saviour revealed to me His love and brought joy and happiness to my soul.”¹⁵ She attributes this change to God’s direct leading through which she received a new appreciation of His love. The new understanding ignited in her life a burden and a passion for the conversion of her friends.

When I was but a child, the Lord placed upon me a burden for souls. I worked earnestly for the conversion of my playmates, and at times ministers of some of the churches would send for me to bear a testimony before their congregations.¹⁶

¹¹ Ellen White, Letter written from St Helena California, January 10, 1910.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ WC White, Letter written to Eliza Morton, February 17, 1910. The cost of the Church was estimated at \$7934.91. The funds raised by donations added to \$2086.91, out of which nearly \$500 was raised by Ellen White efforts. The tone of the letter suggests a dose of frustration. “I wish you would send us a particularized statement of what you have received from Mother and from our Conferences.

¹⁴ Ellen White, Letter, January 17, 1910. In the second letter she repeats exactly the same sentence. “In the city of Portland the Lord has ordained me as His messenger and here my first labors were given to the cause of present truth”. However, she provides a more comprehensive description of the experience.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

In this instance, her recollection moved beyond the events associated with the direct call she received soon after her first vision in December 1844. The extended reflection unfolds the heart of her transformational experience, the journey that eventually led to God's specific call. Secondly, she described the more direct nature of the call. "After the great disappointment, the Lord has revealed Himself to me in a special manner and bade me to bear His message to the people."¹⁷

It seems, the named events were part of the wider two-phase process associated with what she names as "the Lord has ordained me". The two named experiences have one common denominator, a personalized reference to God's involvement in the process, "The blessed Saviour revealed to me His love" and "the Lord has revealed Himself to me in a special manner."¹⁸ In the second letter, the added details move beyond the descriptive, state of fact quality and task oriented specificity expressed in her first letter. In this context, ordination was not simply an act conferring a set of ecclesiastical responsibilities, sacerdotal power or titles of authority. Here, Ellen White's understanding of the phrase, "God has ordained me" differed from the accepted definitions and views.¹⁹ Rather, her reflections brought into the picture what matters to God. It is apparent that to Ellen White ordination was not a rite or occasioned conferral of a pastoral title. Rather, it was a process involving a relationally experiential interaction or a spiritual dialogue between God and a person. On this journey, God's actions, namely His guidance, nurture and nudging direct individuals towards His ordained purpose.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Noah Webster, *Dictionary 1828*, Ellen G. White Writings Comprehensive Research Edition CD. The act of conferring holy orders or sacerdotal power; called also consecration. In the Presbyterian and Congregational churches, the act of settling or establishing a licensed clergyman over a church and congregation with pastoral charge and authority; also, the act of conferring on a clergyman the powers of a settled minister of the gospel, without the charge or oversight of a particular church, but with the general powers of an evangelist, who is authorized to form churches and administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, wherever he may be called to officiate.

Further, Ellen White's reflections recapture the essence or the ethos of God's act of ordination. The first component is the revelation of His love. The second component involves a transformational journey on which individuals develop a vision for what God cares about, namely a burden and passion for people. The third component involves a clear understanding of the designated task. In Ellen White's case, she was called to be God's messenger. Finally, the fourth component includes human response - the outflow of passion demonstrated in active ministry for the conversion of people.

The intensity and impact of God's call rested with her through her entire life. It carried her, through ups and downs, and helped her to survive the most challenging and discouraging circumstances. In 1906 she exclaimed, "At the age of seventy-eight I am still toiling. We are all in the hands of the Lord. I trust in him; for I know that he will never leave nor forsake those who put their trust in him. I have committed myself to his keeping."²⁰ In the same article she expressed the unwavering conviction about God's act of ordaining her to a specific task. "I am instructed that I am the Lord's messenger; that he called me in my youth to be his messenger, to receive his word, and to give a clear and decided message in the name of the Lord Jesus."²¹

It is of interest to note that although Ellen White wrote the second letter on January 20, 1910 it was published in *Review and Herald* in May 18, 1911 under the title, "An Appeal to our Churches Throughout the United States".²² According to W.C. White the fund raising for Portland competed with other major financial commitments, namely "Ingathering Campaign and the annual offerings".²³ However, he adds, "it did

²⁰ Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, July 26, 1906.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ellen White, "An Appeal to Our Churches Throughout the United States", *Review and Herald*, October 18, 1911.

²³ W.C. White, Letter to Eld. O Montgomery, Feb. 18, 1910. He wrote, "But it did not seem to her [Ellen White] to be wise to send a general appeal to the *Review* at the time when our people were straining every nerve to do their duty in the Ingathering campaign and the annual offering.

not seem to her [Ellen White] wise to send a general appeal to the *Review* before we were sure that our leading brethren in Maine and in the Atlantic Union were ready to take up the work and push it forward to success.”²⁴ It is evident the tone of her appeal in the second letter is stronger than in her first letter. “I am now urging that a strong effort be put forth to give the last message of warning to the city of Portland”.²⁵ Well over a year later, the building stood unfinished. She wrote, “Our people are now meeting in the basement.”²⁶ However, her concern moved beyond the boundaries of Portland for work had to be opened in “different sections of our cities”. During this period her heart was burdened for the expansion of work in other cities. She wrote, “When I think of the cities yet unwarned, I cannot rest. It is distressing to think that they have been neglected so long.”²⁷ Is it possible to consider that Ellen White recognized more serious spiritual issues? What did she have in mind by referring to the leading brethren in Maine and the Atlantic Union?

Her correspondence unfolds three major concerns. First, she called the leaders to open up new fields and to focus on mission in large cities. She felt that this work was neglected. In this context twice she referred to the city of Portland, Maine.²⁸ She warned of the dangers of “gathering too many responsibilities in one place” while the message should be proclaimed “in needy fields, yet unworked”.²⁹ Here she called for a change in regard to “the work that God has pointed out to do in opening new fields”.³⁰

Second, she called for a spiritual revival and conversion. In contrast to the growing challenge of sharing God’s message in new places, Ellen White identified the prevailing problems that hindered the progress of God’s vision. “I sometimes feel sick

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ellen White, Letter, January 20, 1910.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, November 25, 1909.

²⁸ Ellen White, Letter, June 23, 1900; Letter 21, 1909; Letter, June 13, 1910

²⁹ Ellen White, Letter, Jan 13, 1910

³⁰ Ellen White, Letter, June 15, 1910.

at heart when I consider how the work has been hindered by men who are eager to use authority”.³¹ With this in mind, she challenged physicians, ministers and conference officials to “walk in the counsel of God instead of using arbitrary authority that has greatly retarded the work”.³² Further, she called for “an entire change based on thorough conversion,” a sway away from worldly attitudes and the spirit of self-exaltation.³³

Third, in view of the existing tension between God’s vision and the prevailing problems, Ellen White focused on the heart of the matter, namely life in Christ and its relationship to human responsibilities. Here she identified an important connection. “While Christ ministers in our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary, through the delegated ministry of the church He carries forward His work on earth.”³⁴ Again she highlighted God’s all-inclusive and continual involvement in this process.

From His ascension to the present day, chosen men ordained of God, deriving their authority from the great Teacher, have borne the message to the world. The under shepherds are to rely upon the chief Shepherd.³⁵

It may be noticed that in calling the church to refocus on what matters to God, Ellen White attributed the process of ordination to God’s actions or His sole involvement in this process. God ordains or designates specific responsibility for His message to be proclaimed to the world. Individuals respond and “become workers together with Christ “representing Him before the world.” It may be said that ordination means more than being set aside for a specific task. Rather, it involves a transformational experience of allowing God to “mould the character after the divine similitude” with the purpose of connecting other people with God.³⁶ Ellen White understood this process from an all-inclusive perspective. “Thank God that His truth can be communicated by men and

³¹ Letter June 10, 1910.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Letter, Dec, 21, 1909.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

women, even in their old age.”³⁷ Under the umbrella of Christ’s leadership, “each of us has a special part to act.”³⁸

In the context of this urgency and the prevailing lack of commitment to expand God’s vision, Ellen White recalled the moments of God’s call. “It was in Portland that the Lord first gave me a work to do as His messenger, when I was but fifteen years old.”³⁹ Further, her mind raced back to the time of the spiritual revival in Portland. “The city of Portland was remarkably blessed by God in the early days of the message”. The moments of God’s involvement in her life were still vividly impressed in her mind. In doing so she aimed to ignite the passion, commitment and enthusiasm for God’s mission. It is clear that in her mind the spirit of love and commitment to God’s work should be all-inclusive. “Let the children, as well as the older members of the Lord’s family, have a share in it”.⁴⁰ Correctly Arthur White comments. “She encouraged the spirit of self-sacrifice” and reminded the church of “constant devotion to the needs of the world”.⁴¹

It may be concluded that Ellen White’s understanding of the expression, “The Lord has ordained me” moved beyond the boundaries set by human perceptions and traditions. She linked ordination with the divine process through which God invites individuals to a life of commitment and involvement in His mission to the world. The heart of the process involves a journey of transformation and reorientation initiated by the revelation of God’s love and an awakening of a passion and burden for what God cares about, namely people. On this journey people ordained by God, both men and women, are simply his ambassadors, receiving commission and wisdom from Christ.⁴²

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ellen White, Letter, January 13, 1910.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ellen White, Letter, October 19, 1909 and Letter, January 20, 1910.

⁴¹ Arthur White, Volume 6, 209.

⁴² Ellen White, Letter, December 21, 1909.

The act of God's ordination has a specific purpose, namely to connect other people with God. The next section aims to show how Ellen White's biblical reflections affirm God's involvement in the process of ordination.

Biblically Reflective Perspective

Ellen White's biblical reflections reiterate that ordination involves the divine process through which God sets apart individuals to a life commitment and involvement in His mission to the world.⁴³ At the same time, she highlights the church's role, namely as the recognition of the divine call. This point is so emphatically stressed in her reflections on Paul's ministry. "Paul did not depend upon man for his ordination. He received from the Lord his commission and ordination."⁴⁴ She then refers to his attitude in seeing the ministerial work "as a privilege" for "he labored for the souls of men."⁴⁵ Here she links ordination with the process through which individuals recapture God's vision and a passion for the lost and time during which they strengthen their conviction about the specific nature of the call. "Paul's labors at Antioch, in association with Barnabas, strengthened him in his conviction that the Lord had called him to do a special work for the Gentile world."⁴⁶ She comments further, "He studied constantly how to make his testimony of the greatest effect."⁴⁷ Paul's testimony focused on his conversion and call to service. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful appointing me to his service" (1 Timothy 1:12-17). God's calling initiated in Paul's life a transformation and commitment to God's

⁴³ The term biblical reflection is based on Ellen White's statement in her letter written to W.C. White. "I am thankful that I can remain for a time where I can be close to my helpers...I have been fully employed in preparation of matter for the 'Life of Paul'. We are trying to bring *scriptural evidence of truth* and these we believe will be appreciated by our people." Ellen White, Letter, February 15, 1911 (Emphasis added).

⁴⁴ Ellen White, Manuscript, 74-03, July 27, 1903.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 159.

⁴⁷ Ellen White, Manuscript, July 27, 1903. Also, see, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 159.

purposes. At this point, Ellen White draws an important lesson. “Would that to-day men might be found with faith to do as Paul did, men who would preach the gospel, not looking to men for their reward, but willing to receive their reward in souls.”⁴⁸

In this context she highlights specific instructions relating to the church’s role in the divine process of ordination. Her comments on the narrative from Acts 13:2-4, the setting apart by the church of Paul and Barnabas, unfold the depth of her understanding. The biblical story presents the following sequence.

- a) While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”
- b) After they have fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them.
- c) They sent them off.

It is of great interest to note Ellen White’s reflections and her contextual treatment of this story.

Both Paul and Barnabas had already received their commission from God himself, and the ceremony of the laying of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification. It was an acknowledgment form of designation to an appointed office and a recognition of one’s authority in that office. By it the seal of the church was upon the work of God.⁴⁹

Firstly, she understood that ordination was simply a public recognition of the divine call. “Paul and Barnabas had already received their commission from God.” The question may be raised, so why was such recognition necessary? She points out that specific circumstances raised the need to provide a protective framework. Its main purpose was to authenticate the work of the apostles in an adverse environment. “The apostles who had been appointed to lead out in this work would be exposed to suspicions, prejudice and jealousy.”⁵⁰ God foresaw the difficulties and “He instructed

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 161-2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 161.

the church by revelation to set them apart publicly to the work of ministry.”⁵¹ The main reason for this public action was to provide protection against external challenges.

Hence, the prevailing circumstances compelled God to instruct the church to officially affirm, or set apart, what He has already set in motion. It is important to recognize Ellen White’s emphasis on the circumstantial need. In response to the raising challenges and difficulties God instructed the church to provide a protective umbrella for those called to a specific ministry.

Secondly, she clarifies that the laying of hands “added no new grace or virtual qualification.” On this point she adds that with passing time “ordination by laying of hands was greatly abused” and that “unwarranted importance was attached to it as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination.”⁵² Further, her reference to “ones authority in that office” must be understood in the light of her personal experience. In this context the recipient of God’s ordination reflects the depth of His passion for the lost and shares the authority of servanthood. Ellen White understood this in terms of “the means He [God] has ordained for the help, encouragement and strength to His people.”⁵³ So what did the rite of laying hands imply? In the framework of cultural practices it implied a provision of blessings.

And when the ministers of the church of believers in Antioch laid hands upon Paul and Barnabas, they by that action, asked God to bestow blessings upon the chosen apostles in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed.⁵⁴

Through the laying of hands the church prayed for God’s blessings and for the continuity of His involvement in the designated task. This culturally ingrained practice

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 162. “To the Jews this form was a significant one. When a Jewish father blessed his children, he laid his hands reverently upon their heads.”

⁵³ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 162.

had a future oriented bearing.⁵⁵ Facing the challenge of the designated task, Paul and Barnabas needed the support of the community. They became an extension of the body of Christ, and Christ Himself. In accepting God's call and the church's affirmation, they became Christ's extended hands in the world He came to save. In this capacity, "they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, being invested with full ecclesiastical authority."⁵⁶ It needs to be understood that in contrast to the prevailing views, Ellen White understood the ecclesiastical authority in the framework of the responsibility to "give to the world the glad tidings of the grace of God."⁵⁷

In this context, the act of ordination or setting apart, created a bond and a sense of mutual accountability in carrying the gospel to the Gentiles. There was to be a close tie between those whom God ordained and the body of Christ, the church, a tie of mutually interdependent participation in God's vision. It safeguarded individual workers from the danger of self-oriented confidence and trust in personal judgment and at the same time it challenged the church to provide a support base of encouragement for those in specific leadership roles. Ellen White summarized the importance of this link in the following words. "The Lord in His wisdom has arranged that by means of the close relationship that should be maintained by all believers, Christian shall be united to Christian and church to church."⁵⁸ It appears her focus was not on the functions or rites. These should be understood only as means to an end. The main focus is on God's action and on the ability to discern His movements in the lives of those He ordains. More so, she challenged the church to maintain openness to the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit. "Every agency will be subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all the believers will be

⁵⁵ Ibid. This spiritual act was later distorted. It assumed the role of a rite which conferred holy orders or sacerdotal power.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

united in an organized and well-directed effort to give to the world the glad tidings of the grace of God.”⁵⁹

In summary, it is important to note the contextual framework in which Ellen White comments on the process of ordination or the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas by the church in Antioch. She points out that specific circumstances occasioned the need for the church to recognize what God has already set in motion. In the context of God’s mission ordination, or setting apart, was no more and no less an act of affirmation. Through this process God invited the church to become a supportive base providing spiritual encouragement, motivation, guidance, help and strength. Such a nurturing climate empowered the ones ordained by God with vibrancy to carry on the task. Further, it provided a mechanism for accountability protecting individuals from the danger of self-oriented independence. Finally, it had a unifying purpose through which the Holy Spirit guided all entities towards successful fulfillment of God’s vision.

It is also important to stress that in the context of the progressive organizational development of the movement Ellen White gained a clearer understanding of the nature of ordination and its relationship to the life of the church. In the third volume of *The Spirit of Prophecy*, published in 1878 she refers to the story of Paul and Barnabas’ ordination. Basically, she highlighted that “ordination was an open recognition of their mission, as messengers chosen by the Holy Ghost for a special work.”⁶⁰ She defined the rite of laying hands as a “seal of the church upon the work of God.” At the same time, she pointed out that the “rite of laying of hands was at a later date greatly abused.”⁶¹ Ellen White incorporated the same position in *The Acts of the Apostles* published in 1911. However, in the later edition her biblical reflections included a more profound

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ellen White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol.3 (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald, 1878), 348-9.

⁶¹ Ibid.

understanding of ordination in its relationship to the life of the church. As previously shown the prevailing circumstances of that time necessitated a revision of this theme to help the church refocus on a refreshed view of ordination in the context of God's mission to the world. Was it then necessary for the church to understand the process of ordination, as recognition of what God has already set in motion, in the framework of circumstantial needs? With this question in mind, the next section explores Ellen White's application of the named principles in the context of God's missional vision.

Practical perspective

It appears the passion for the expansion of God's work and the raising awareness of unopened fields preoccupied Ellen White's thoughts during this time.

The cause of God in the earth today is in need of living representatives of Bible truth. The ordained ministers alone are not equal to the task of warning the great cities. God is calling not only upon ministers, but also upon physicians, nurses, colporteurs, Bible workers and other consecrated laymen of varied talent who have a knowledge of the word of God and who know the power of His grace to consider the needs of the unwarned cities.⁶²

With this mindset she spoke against views hindering its progress. In her understanding every opportunity should be utilized and improved.⁶³ It is important to consider whether this drive enlarged the scope of Ellen White's understanding of ordination? The quotation above suggests that new circumstances required a conceptual rethink in the approach to mission. She pointed out that the ordained ministers alone were not equal to the task. In this thought one detects a broadening note of an inclusive thinking. God was not only calling ordained ministers but a team of other talented workers to share the knowledge of the Bible in the unwarned places. One may ask, if God places a burden

⁶² Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 158.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

for souls on people's hearts, and in view of the new circumstances, did Ellen White expand her understanding of ordination and its application in ministry? Further, did she see ordination as an exclusive process or did she see it from a more inclusive perspective? With these questions in mind one needs to explore her progressive thinking in the lights of the passion she had to see the progress of God's work.

During her tenure in Australia, in 1896 she wrote an insightful note entitled "Remarks Concerning Foreign Mission Work".⁶⁴ The main thrust of her concern focused on the "many fields right around that ought to be worked that are not worked." The paragraph quote below unfolds the heart of her concern.

But from the light that I have had there has not been all that training of men for workers, and bringing them right up close in the connection with ministerial labor, and appreciating their talents, and teaching them how to use them so they could go out and go right in to such places as these and work, all over, all around, and let the light shine, as should have been. God does not rest his work on a few ministers. He does not do it. We have let the matter settle in our minds altogether too strongly and too firmly that it is a full-fledged minister that must be prepared to take hold of the work.⁶⁵

The opening sentence is very significant. The light on this subject came from a higher authority. It coincides with her emphasis on the work to be carried in Portland. "The Lord has given instruction...Portland has been especially pointed out as a place that should be labored without delay."⁶⁶ Further, it also reflects the tone of her passion expressed in the quoted extract from *The Acts of the Apostles* (1911). It seems evident that God who ordained or set apart individuals for a specific role in His mission, gently worked through Ellen White to break the barriers raised by set traditions. Indeed, God's views are different. "God does not rest his work on a few ministers. He does not do it." Her last statement is expressed so emphatically. "We have let the matter settle in minds altogether too strongly and too firmly." In view of the new circumstance Ellen White

⁶⁴ Ellen White, Ms 75, November 12, 1896 (Previously Unpublished).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ellen White, Letter October 19, 1909.

called for a change in the approach to the mission work. In fact, she proposed an innovative, all-inclusive alternative.

Firstly, she referred to the early apostolic times. Persecution scattered the believers around and in adverse circumstances they continued to preach the gospel. She followed this thought with an interesting insight. “Well now, they were not ministers.” What follows is rather interesting. “We have got to begin to handle as we have not yet done, those who are not ministers not waiting until they are ordained, but take men that we know fear God and make them feel that it is possible for them to go and take hold of the work in these countries.”⁶⁷ In other words, she encouraged the church to note that changed circumstances opened ways to new opportunities

Secondly, in this context, she moved further. “There must be men that shall be commissioned or encouraged by our brethren to go out, and if they feel [brethren] that it is best for these man to be ordained - some of them - why, ordain them.” In other words, she encouraged the church to affirm what God has already set in motion. “But if not let them go out and let them do to the very best of their ability.” Her statements suggest that she did not view ordination from an exclusive perspective, relating to the process of establishing an ecclesiastical and hierarchical authority. Rather, she saw it in the light of God’s missional purpose. “When men go out with the burden of the work to bring souls into the truth, those men are ordained of God, [even] if [they] never have a touch of ceremony of ordination.”⁶⁸ She finds support for this position in the Bible claiming that the scattered believers preached the gospel but “they were not ministers.” She encouraged the church to be supportive of those who feel a burden for souls. “Our finite mind must not pronounce upon it, and think that they must go through the minister’s ordeal, all the way through, before they can be accepted as laborers. Let them go out.

⁶⁷ Ms 75, 1896.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Let them test their power, their ability, and see what they will do and not go to them and say, “You aren’t a minister””⁶⁹

In this context Ellen White pushed the boundaries of the prevailing thinking even further. She argued that if individuals feel the burden for work and they lead people to conversion “To say [they] shall not baptize when there is nobody else, [is wrong].” Then she continued to make a rather strong statement. “When the Lord works with a man to bring out a soul here and there, and they know not when the opportunity will come that these precious souls can be baptized, why he should not question about the matter, he should baptize these souls.”⁷⁰ To support her position, again, she adheres to the authority of the Bible by referring to the story of Philip. “Philip was not an ordained minister” but when asked by the eunuch he baptized him.⁷¹

It becomes evident that to Ellen White new circumstances create a demand for conceptual change, and what this study refers to as a functional flexibility and openness to new possibilities. In the light of God’s mission one detects a broadening, more inclusive view of ordination. When God ordains people or set them apart for a specific role by creating in their heart a burden for souls, she warned, “we must not put men in straight jackets.”⁷² Rather, she encouraged the church to affirm such a call and to provide support and nurture through earnest prayers.⁷³

Her openness to new possibilities stemmed from the urgency to expand God’s work in ‘unworked’ places and large cities. In 1909 she wrote, “The message that I am bidden to bear to our people at that time is, work in the cities without delay. The Lord has kept this before us for the last twenty years or more. A little has been done in few

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. “We must lead this men with our prayers, earnest prayers, and our hearts to go with them, and bid them Godspeed, and for the Lord to prosper them. This is what we must do.”

places but much more might be done.”⁷⁴ She expressed her frustration so clearly in a letter written in 1910. “Nine years have passed into eternity, Elder Daniells, and these fields in our cities have been neglected. Untaught, uneducated souls are perishing. How can we save these souls?”⁷⁵ In the light of this urgency she encouraged the church to expand the work through every possible avenue, medical missionary work, literature evangelism and the church members at large. She wrote, “Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellow men...The charge to give this invitation includes the entire church.”⁷⁶ During the past years, and in the spirit of missionary urgency, Ellen White used a gender inclusive phrase, referring to both ‘men and women’.

Time and space does not permit for an extensive study of all the references. However, a selected sample unfolds her supportive arguments for the inclusion of women in all facets of ministry.

In ancient times the Lord worked in wonderful way through consecrated women who unite in His work with men whom He had chosen to stand as His representatives. He used women to gain great and decisive victories. More than once in times of emergency, He brought them to the front and worked through them for the salvation of many lives.⁷⁷

Again, Ellen White highlights God’s initiative to work through consecrated women in what she considers as a primary role for the salvation of many lives. Then she adds a fascinating challenge. “A study of women’s work in connection with the cause of God in Old Testament times will teach us lessons that will enable us to meet emergencies in

⁷⁴ Ellen White, Letter 168, December 1, 1909, To the Officers of the General Conference,

⁷⁵ Ellen White, Letter, Cir, 1910, to Dear Brethren and Sisters.

⁷⁶ Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 110. It is in this light and urgency that she wrote the book. “While preparing the book of Acts of the Apostles, the Lord has kept my mind in perfect peace. This book will soon be ready for publication... There should be an awakening on the part of the people, and fresh efforts made to get the light of the present truth before the world...missionaries are needed everywhere.” Ellen White, Letter to F.M. Wilcox, July 25, 1911.

⁷⁷ Ellen White, Letter, May 7, 1911 (Letter writer to Loma Linda California)

the work to-day.”⁷⁸ The context of the entire letter addresses the issues relating to the medical work in Loma Linda sanitarium. At the same time, the quoted reference demonstrates Ellen White’s sanction of the role women played in God’s plans at large. She did not see it just in terms of a professional engagement. Expressions such as, times of emergency, forefront and salvation of many, connect women with a significant role in God’s mission to the world. In the same letter, she admonished the leaders. “The work must move forward on a higher plane, and after a more sacred order than it has heretofore it is to accomplish all that God designs should be accomplished by it in our churches and for the world.”⁷⁹ Could it be considered that her reference to “times of emergency” coincides with the challenge of the neglected work in large cities? Could it be assumed that such a time of emergency prompted God to inspire Ellen White with openness to new possibilities?

Such a prospect comes to view when examining her gender inclusive references. “All men and women who are Christians in every sense of the word, should be workers in the vineyard of the Lord.”⁸⁰ “God chooses his workers from all classes of people, and imbues them with his own Spirit. So it was in ancient times. The men and women of God’s selection were of intense earnestness, full of zeal.”⁸¹ However, her call was not only to encourage the church at large in the work of sharing the gospel. This was the responsibility of every church member. “God is waiting for His people to bear to them the message of Him who died--the just for the unjust. He desires to work through men and women who, losing sight of self in Christ, are content to say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁸² Rather, in unfolding an all-inclusive understanding of God’s vision, she weaved into the fabrics of her admonitions

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ellen White, *Advance*, June 1, 1899.

⁸¹ Ellen White, *Advocate*, March 1 1899.

⁸² Ellen White, *Australasian Union Conference Record*, April 15, 1912.

subtle motivational gems. It may be suggested that through these sparkles of new ideas she endeavoured to open the mind of the church to functional flexibility and openness to new possibilities.

Addressing the need for schools and education, she emphasized the importance of specific roles. “There should be men and women who are qualified to labor in the churches, and to train our young people for special lines of work, that souls may be brought to Jesus.”⁸³ On another occasion she wrote about the best training ground for preparing both men and women for the work of ministry. “All who want an opportunity for true ministry, and who will give themselves unreservedly to God, will find in the canvassing work opportunities to speak upon many things pertaining to the future immortal life. The experience thus gained will be of the greatest value to those who are fitting themselves for the work of the ministry.”⁸⁴ After outlining the benefit of canvassing the work, she made a significant all-inclusive statement.

It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God. As they cherish the thought that Christ is their companion, a holy awe, a sacred joy will be felt by them amid all their trying experiences and all their tests.⁸⁵

It is evident that in preparation for pastoral work both men and women had the same equal privilege to be led by the Holy Spirit. What about the question of ordination? It appears that Ellen White is silent on any direct instruction regarding this matter.

However, as shown she is open to the prospect of seeing both men and women in a pastoral role. In view of this would she be completely silent on such a vitally important issue as ordination?

In her diary notes date, November 1, 1889 Ellen White refers to the visit by Brother Prescott, who at that time served as the President of the Battle Creek College.

⁸⁴ Ellen White, *Australian Union Conference Record*, July 1, 1902.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

During the conversation he informed her about the “brethren’s” plans to ordain him and about his personal indecision on this matter.⁸⁶ Ellen White’s response was rather interesting as it suggests a voice of approval. “I could only say I could see nothing to hinder this move being made if he [Prescott] in his judgment considered it best.” She then qualified her approval with an important argument. “His duties as principal of the college were important and large, and his responsibilities many. If he could serve the cause of God any better in receiving ordination and credentials, it would be best.” It is evident that in her understanding the practice of ordination extended beyond the scope of one specific role, namely pastoral ministry. Rather, it unfolds a more inclusive practice of ordination involving those in teaching-leadership ministry.

In a letter written to Kellogg in 1899 Ellen White referred to the work of the Holy Spirit enabling committed and humble individuals to gather harvest. She argued that fitness and success derives from the lessons “learned in the school of Christ”. She followed it with a rather interesting statement. “If human hands have never been laid upon them in ordination, there is One who will give fitness for the work if they ask for it in faith.”⁸⁷ It is evident that in her understanding the success in reaching people depends totally on personal commitment to Jesus and on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It does not derive from the rite of ordination by laying of hands. As previously shown, Ellen White understood that this practice added no new grace and virtual qualification. She was quite clear about God’s directives. The church had to recognize and affirm His call and to provide support, encouragement and strength. She expressed this thought in the following words. “The Lord Jesus calls for soul winners, and those who go forth to

⁸⁶ Ellen White, Manuscript 23, 1889.

⁸⁷ Ellen White, Letter, January 14, 1899. Written to John H. Kellogg.

gather the sheaves should have the prayers of the whole church, that they may go as sharp sickles into the harvest field.”⁸⁸

On another occasion Ellen White referred to some matters presented to her “in regard to the laborers who are seeking to do all in their power to win souls to Jesus Christ.”⁸⁹ Again, she reinforced this point by adhering to the divine authority.” While I was in America, I was given light on this subject. I was instructed that there are matters that need to be considered.”⁹⁰ She referred to a particular minister, whose wife’s ministry was not recognized.

If the Lord gives the wife as well as the husband the burden of labor, and if she devotes her time and her strength to visiting from family to family, opening the Scripture to them, although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon her, she is accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry. Should her labor be counted as naught, and her husband’s salary be no more than that of the servant of God whose wife does not give herself to the work, but remains at home to care for her family?

Ellen White supported her argument with the divine revelation “I was given light on this subject”. Firstly, due to fact that the wife’s commitment was taken for granted “injustice has been done to the women who labor just as devotedly as their husbands and who are recognized by God as being as necessary to the work of ministry as their husbands.” Interestingly, addressing this problem Ellen White switched the emphasis from the singular case to a more inclusive tone referring to the injustice of women (plural). Secondly, she affirmed that this practice is not after the Lord’s order. “Injustice is done. A mistake is made”. Thirdly, she warned, “This arrangement if carried out in our Conferences, is liable to discourage our sisters from qualifying themselves for the work they should engage in.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ellen White, Letter, October 25, 1899, Sunnyside Cooranbong. Letter written to Brother Mountain.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. It needs to be noted that Ellen White used the plural form not only in reference to gender but in reference to the Conferences.

One wonders, whether the injustice was not only committed in the area of remuneration but in the Conferences' failure to recognize and affirm what God has already ordained. This question stems out of her further remarks.

If women do the work that is not the most agreeable to many of those who labor in word and doctrine, and of their works testify that they are accomplishing a work that has been manifestly neglected, should not such labor be looked upon as rich in results as the work of an ordained ministers? Should it not command the hire of the laborer? Would not workers be defrauded if they were not paid?⁹²

She concludes with a strong and convincing thus said the Lord. "The question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled." So, what was the church's responsibility? "You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel whose work testifies that they are essential to carrying the truth into families."⁹³ In Ellen White's understanding the duty of the church was to affirm what God has already set in motion. Its main role was to provide support, spiritual encouragement, motivation, guidance help and strength.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that Ellen White does not delineate a theology of ordination. Rather, her experiential understanding of the phrase "The Lord had ordained me" coined with her biblical reflections and practical application clarifies the view of this vital experience in the life and ministry of the church. The explored data shows that circumstances prompted Ellen White to reflect on the experience of her call to the ministry as God's messenger. Recalling this significant time, she describes it in terms of a two-phase process during which God's actions are highlighted in a personalized manner. The first phase referred to God's revelation of His love that ignited her burden for souls. The second phase involved God's personal call. In this context, Ellen White

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

understood the phrase, “God has ordained me” in terms of God’s involvement in human life. The process included a relationally experiential interaction or a spiritual dialogue between God and herself. On this journey, God’s actions, namely His guidance, nurture and circumstantial nudging directed her towards His ordained purpose. Further, research has shown that Ellen White’s understanding of the expression “The Lord has ordained me” moved beyond the boundaries of set traditions. She saw it as a divine process through which God invited her to a life of commitment and involvement in His mission to the world. At the heart of this experience was a journey of transformation. It was initiated by God’s revelation of His love and an awakening of a passion and burden for what God cares about, namely people.

Further, this research has shown that Ellen White’s biblical reflections about ordination affirmed her personal experience of God’s call. Reflecting on Paul and Barnabas’ ordination, she highlights two basic facts. Firstly, they received their commission and ordination from God. Secondly, new circumstances raised the need to provide a protective support against external challenges. Therefore, God instructed the church to confirm what He has already set in motion. In this context the symbolical laying of hands had a future oriented bearing. Its purpose moved beyond the function of a one-off event. Here, God invited the church to a participative role in His mission, namely to provide spiritual encouragement, motivation, guidance, help and strength. In other words an attitude of an ongoing state of prayer, an ongoing pleading for God’s presence in the life and ministry of those He ordained. Such a nurturing climate empowers the ones ordained by God with vibrancy to carry on the task. At the same time, it provides an environment for accountability protecting individuals from the danger of self-oriented independence. Further, it moulds a unifying purpose through which the Holy Spirit guides all entities towards successful fulfillment of God’s vision.

Finally, Ellen White's experiential perspective, biblical reflections and God's guidance expanded her understanding and application of the phrase "The Lord has ordained". In the context of new challenges associated with the expansion of God's mission, she used the concept of ordination in a gender inclusive framework and one that embraced all aspects of ministry. As shown, the light given to her on this subject did not only refer to one isolated case. Rather, the changed language directs attention to the inclusiveness of the experience through which God ordains individuals both males and female for ministry. The depth of such an experience is so graphically illustrated through her personal experience. According to Ellen White's understanding, the phrase "The Lord has ordained me" includes a memory of God's direct call. Such an experience creates a lifetime imprint and generates an ongoing passion for the lost. In Ellen White's understanding, the duty of the church was to discern, affirm and nurture what God has already set in motion. Her last words ring the bell of convincing optimism. It seems, the question of ordination is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it through His direct call – His act of ordaining or designating people for specific roles, namely to connect others with God.

Sources

Letters & Manuscripts

White, Ellen G. January 14, 1899

_____. Letter, October 25, 1899

_____. Letter, June 23, 1900.

_____. Letter 21, 1909.

_____. Letter, October 19, 1909.

_____. Letter, December 21, 1909

_____. Letter, January 10, 1910.

_____. Letter, January 13, 1910

_____. Letter, January 20, 1910.

_____. Letter, February 20, 1910.

_____. Letter, June 10, 1910.

_____. Letter, June 13, 1910.

_____. Letter, June 15, 1910.

_____. Letter, 168, December 1, 1910.

_____. Letter, Circa, 1910.

_____. Letter, February 15, 1911.

_____. Letter, May 7, 1911.

_____. Letter, July 25, 1911.

_____. Manuscript 74-03, July 27, 1903.

_____. Manuscript 23, 1889,

_____. Manuscript 75, November 12, 1896 (Previously Unpublished).

Publications

_____. *Review and Herald*, November 25, 1884.

_____. *Bible Echo*, January 29, 1894

_____. *Advance*, June 1, 1899.

_____. *Advocate*, March 1, 1899

_____. *Australian Union Conference Record*, July 1, 1902.

_____. *Review and Herald*, July 26, 1906.

_____. *Review and Herald*, November 25, 1909.

_____. *Review and Herald*, October 18, 1911.

_____. *Australian Union Conference Record*, April 15, 1912

Books

_____. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911.

_____. *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 3. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1878.

White, William C. Letter, February 17, 1910.

_____. Letter, February 18, 1910.

White, Arthur L. *Ellen White, The Later Years 1905-1915*, Vol. 6. Washington, D.C.:

Review and Herald, 1982.

