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THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

A review of the principal arguments for and against
the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

by

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THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The controversy regarding the proposal to ordain women to the ministry can be understood best by recognizing its ties to major social changes under way in the western world. Strong feelings borrowed from the accompanying ferment helps explain why feelings about it are so intense and differences so difficult to resolve.

Not yet 30 years old in its present form, the ordination of women issue arose in the context of counterculture social movements that developed, particularly in the United States and Europe in the 1960's, continuing into the early 70s. A resurgent feminist movement attracted a following in certain political circles and the clergy of certain mainline Christian denominations. The feminist demand for sexual equality was translated into a demand for ordination, and in the 1970s a few denominations began ordaining women.

Reflecting these social concerns, a number of theologians undertook the project of reinterpreting the scriptures and theology. Since 1970 numerous books and articles have appeared in support of a Biblical or moral argument for ordaining women. Since 1980, however, evangelical theologians have begun a re-examination of the Biblical antecedents to the nearly 2000-year-old practice of limiting the ordained Christian ministry to men, so there are now carefully-structured arguments both pro and con.

The issue is clouded, however, by the socio-political struggle in the secular environment over women's rights. The recent struggle in the United States over ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment was to a large degree organized from pulpits, both liberal and conservative.

All sides agree that there is no direct discussion in the Bible of the ordination of women, for the practice is unknown to Scripture. For

that reason, those who argue positions do so because of their convictions on the way they understand God acts, how we are to interpret Biblical passages and themes, the nature of creation and redemption, and the question of how the universe is ordered.

Nature of the Universe

The fundamental philosophical issue behind the ordination-of-women discussion relates to how one conceives of the nature of the universe. Is it to be thought of as (1) immediately governed by the moment-by-moment direction of a relatively fixed plan by God or (2) does it function fundamentally as a complex series of interlocking incidents related to divine will overall, but in which cause and effect, randomness, and human choice have large input? In short, is the universe (hence the world) at root best described as unitary or particularistic?

The Bible, particularly the Old Testament, describes the world in unitary terms, and that perspective is carried over almost intact into Christianity. Filled with kingdom language, the Bible narrative treats the world in terms similar to a realm governed by a sovereign Creator. His foreknowledge and direct action in earthly matters provide the basis for prophecy, and miracles are cited repeatedly as specific evidence of His immediate, although less visible, plenary control. The Bible describes a world governed by law, but it is not simply natural law, it is personalized in the functioning of a God who is intensely involved with His creation.

When it encountered Hellenism, Christianity for the first time met a developed philosophical method dedicated to the systemization of ideas. Even the Greeks were divided into several philosophical schools. Some, such as the Platonists and Stoics, stressed the unitary nature of the world;

Aristotelians were less convinced. Paul's encounter with Greek philosophers in Athens led him afterward to disregard philosophy rather than try to use it, but the Roman world was steeped with its method, and within two centuries the church's intellectual leaders largely had adopted Platonic-Stoic rational models in their systemizing the Christian faith. With few exceptions the sovereign God model was accepted and prevailed for more than 1,000 years.

This view of nature was challenged, however, by an influential theologian-philosopher of the late middle ages, William of Occam (1300?-1348). Turning from a tightly-governed world under God's direct command, Occam proposed a view that posits reality in terms of specifics rather than universals. His system is called nominalism.

Occamist applications to the scientific method and the entirety of modern thought are obvious. Eighteenth century rationalism, developing the Occamist premise, declared virtual independence from classical ideas of universals. Numerous humane benefits have come from the accompanying decline of autocratic abuse of power, but the change has eroded the structures by which society governs itself, the family offering a contemporary example.

With respect to the role of the Bible in church life, nominalist approaches decrease the influence of all types of authority. By undercutting the sense of divinely-established structure, those with personalities inclined toward change tend to support what appears to others to be a radical departure from established practice.

Hermeneutics

In the mainline denominations dissonance between an authority-oriented Bible and contemporary thought has been dealt with by new methodologies in

Bible study that redefine the Scriptures as a general pool of truth rather than a model for church structure and practice. It is fair to recognize that such an approach represents a departure from the historic Adventist position that held the Scriptures as read in a rather literal way to be normative in both faith and order. The principal early Adventist argument for Sabbath observance was built upon the certainty of Sabbath-keeping in Bible times and an effort to return the church to an original, pre-papal form.

How then shall the Scriptures be read? Are the teachings and practices described in them only descriptive of what was appropriate practice for the time or should they be regarded as normative for today? Are doctrinal teachings to be severed from method, the former normative but the latter descriptive? Shall Adventists continue with a hermeneutic heavily weighted toward obvious meanings in Scripture or will primacy be given to theological syntheses speaking at a higher (or deeper, depending on metaphor) level? Shall Adventist hermeneutic represent a considered blend of the two?

The ordination-of-women issue points up the far-reaching impact of decisions made in hermeneutic and the fact that neither Adventists nor conservative Christians in general, both of whom value the authority of Scripture, can agree wholly on what constitutes proper Biblical interpretation. In the presentation of issues that follows it will be evident how deeply different approaches in hermeneutics affect final positions on a specific item, namely the ordination of women.

Non-Adventist Churches and the Ordination of Women

The historic position in Christianity, as in Judaism, provides for a male clergy. In later Christianity a feminine counterpart existed, however,

in the assignment of a mediatorial role to the virgin and to numerous women elevated to sainthood. Ordination, however, with its authority to function in sacramental and leadership posts, was limited to men, following consciously the example of Christ's selection of male apostles.

For centuries both theologians and administrators addressed the question of church leadership from a common position: that the world and its fundamental social structures, including the family and the church, were designed by the creative act of God, and their form was secured by the expressed will of God. Early church fathers who addressed the question were united, although today some of their arguments seem overdrawn. Augustine, the medieval theologians (including Aquinas), and the Reformation leaders, Luther, Calvin, Knox and Wesley, held to divine ordering. Albert Barnes, along with virtually every other 19th century commentator, defended similar ideas. In the 20th century respected theologians such as Barth, Brunner, Berkhouwer, and Carl Henry stress divine order. Even C. S. Lewis, influential despite lack of training as a theologian, described efforts to ordain women as contrary to the planned order of God.

Aside from certain charismatic personalities such as Mary Baker Eddy and Aimee Semple McPherson, feminine leadership traditionally has been limited to two groups. The earliest was among the Quakers, whose doctrine of inner illumination dispensed with classical forms in worship. Quaker services functioned without designated ordained clergy or religious ceremony. Experience served as the normative element in religion.

The other group, the Pentecostals, are a development of the present century. In common with the Quakers, their ultimate religious authority is experience rather than the more rationally-centered exposition of the

Word. It was felt that possession by the Spirit, evidenced by glossolalia, represented of itself divine qualification to perform any religious function. Although women pastors continue to function in the widespread Pentecostal movement, the present trend among them is toward a fully male clergy while making provision still for occasional women pastors.

Some Adventist proponents of women's ordination suggest that the practice is so widespread among Christians that the Adventist church is out of step. At least in the United States a fair examination of current practice among the larger churches fails to support that contention.

Provisions for ordaining women

Unitarian-Universalist
 United Methodists
 American Baptists
 Lutheran Church in America
 Disciples of Christ
 Congregational Christian
 United Presbyterians
 Episcopal Church
 Some Pentecostal churches

No provisions for ordaining women

Roman Catholics
 Orthodox churches
 Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod
 Southern Baptists
 Churches of Christ
 Christian Reformed Church
 Latter Day Saints (Mormons)
 Independent Fundamentalists
 Some Pentecostal churches
 Most black churches

A comparison of memberships shows that churches providing for ordination of women have fewer than 30 million members while those without such provision exceed 100 million members. Disregarding the liturgical churches whose theology of the sacrament limits their openness to ordained women priests, the membership of non-ordaining churches continues to exceed that of ordaining churches. A quick comparison reveals also that aside from the Pentecostal churches, who vest authority in experience, all denominations ordaining women are mainline groups following liberal theologies.

Recently groups have developed in non-ordaining denominations, both Protestant and Catholic, who wish to see the practice instituted. In 1974

an unauthorized group in the American Episcopal Church (Anglican), distressed by the reluctance of church leadership to ordain women as priests, determined to break ground by ordaining ten women to the priesthood. Although the act created serious disagreement, it was confirmed later by action of the bishops and the ordination of women now is practiced within the Episcopal Church, although in numbers women represent a small minority of priests. Upon the bishops' approval of the practice, Episcopal opponents of women's ordination withdrew to form a new denomination, the Anglican Church in America. Recent reports indicate that of the ten women ordained in 1974, only two continue active in the Episcopal priesthood.

The Issue of Women's Ordination in the Adventist Church

The role of women in the Adventist Church has continued as a minor point of discussion since the 1850s when the issue was raised by the prominence of Ellen White in the young movement. Published articles defended her leadership in the church on grounds that hers was a special gift from God. Mrs. White defended her activities on the same grounds, but evidently declined to seek ordination. Two standard ordination certificates exist that list her name in the space designed for the minister's name. The certificates are believed to have been used for identification and possibly designation of salary level, as she received a salary from the church. On one of the certificates neat lines have been drawn through the word "ordained" in order to modify the standardized text.

Files of the Biblical Research Institute indicate that ordination of women became a matter of substance in the church concurrently with its rise as an issue in other denominations, about 1970. Much study was given during the 1970s and it is clear that virtually every available evidence was explored.

From September 16-19, 1973, a series of papers was studied at Camp Mohaven, Ohio, some of which dealt with women's ordination, the remainder with related material. Additional papers were prepared later by staff members of BRI and others, several of which were collected and released under the title, "Symposium on the Role of Women in the Church." The collection fails to include papers that reflect the views of those who support an all-male clergy.

The issue of what roles are appropriate to women in the church was addressed by the Annual Councils of 1973 and 1974, the Spring Meeting of 1975, and the Annual Council of 1977. The 1973 Council took notice of the Mohaven meeting, requested that the information be shared with NADCA, supported the concept of the priesthood of all believers, emphasized the primacy of the married woman's role in the home, requested continued study to the theological issues surrounding ordination of women, and encouraged involvement of women in pastoral/evangelistic work authorized by "the appropriate missionary credentials/licenses" (AC 1973, 22-23). The Annual Council of 1974 reaffirmed the actions of the previous year but concluded that the world church was not prepared for the ordination of women, "therefore in the interest of the world unity of the church, no move be made in the direction of ordaining women to the gospel ministry" (AC 1974, 13-14). Continuing study was to be addressed to the theological and practical implications of ordaining women to the gospel ministry, and further study was to be given concerning ordination of women to local church offices (AC 1974, 13-14).

The 1975 Spring Meeting reaffirmed previous actions, requested administrators to involve additional women in leadership at all levels where appropriate, requested study be given to a suitable ordination service for deaconesses, but reaffirmed the conviction that ordination of women to the

gospel ministry would not be acceptable to the world church (SM, 3 April 1975).

The Annual Council, 1977, recorded the following action and report in its minutes:

ASSOCIATES IN PASTORAL CARE

VOTED, 1. To adopt the term "Associates in Pastoral Care" to identify persons who are employed on pastoral staffs but who are not in line for ordination.

2. To agree that persons employed in this type of work should initially receive a missionary license and eventually missionary credentials.

ORDINATION OF WOMEN--STATEMENT

"Any position in the Seventh-day Adventist Church not requiring ordination to the gospel ministry is open to women who are members of the church," Robert H Pierson, President of the General Conference, reported on October 17 to world leaders gathered for the Annual Council.

"For several years this subject has been under review by church leaders and theologians from most lands, both male and female," he declared. "Currently we find no inspired evidence supporting the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. As a church we must move forward unitedly on such an important matter. Thus far all divisions of the world church, including North America, feel that we are not ready to make this move.

"The wife is the queen of the home. The husband is the priest. Each has a unique role to play. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church women are accorded the highest regard. They serve on most of our church committees and institutional boards, they direct certain institutions, and occupy high posts in others. They play a key role in the life and the service of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We wish to continue opening doors for their committed talents." (AC 1977, 11-12).

Perhaps the potential divisiveness of the issue has led councils to avoid direct confrontation on the issue. Based on the official actions, the ordination of women as local elders in churches had not received direct approval prior to 1984. The action coming closest to approval is couched in the form of a warning, reading:

"5. That in harmony with the spirit and intent of paragraph 3 of the Annual Council 1974 action (pages 12-14) the greatest discretion and caution be exercised in the ordaining of women to the office of local elder, counsel being sought in all cases by the local conference/mission from the union and division committees before proceeding." (SM 3 April 1975).

The Annual Council action mentioned in the text takes no position; it simply authorizes further study pending a forthcoming decision. The Annual Council of 1984, however, took clear action to authorize appointment of women as local elders in congregations that choose that course.

The Textual Evidence

As noted previously, there is no direct Biblical reference to the ordination of women, therefore the discussion in regard to Scripture centers on the wording and intent of 14 passages that deal directly with male/female relationships.

The first task of the Biblical theologian is to perform a careful exegesis of the texts. During the last two centuries sound exegesis has come to include an acquaintance with other factors, such as those dealing with authorship, time of writing, purpose, previous inspired writings on the same or related topics, and a host of additional contributory evidence. Once this is complete, the Bible student comes to the kind of creative theological analysis often manifest in such terms as "the force of the passage is . . ." or "Biblical evidence suggests . . ." Such statements are valuable and often uncover latent truths; on the other hand they contain substantial subjective elements that allow the bias of the theologian to skew his or her finds in the texts and auxiliary information. It is in this area that the strongest differences surface as scholars discuss what the Scriptures actually mean.

Because of their profound practical implications the 14 texts have been exegeted repeatedly over the centuries. The recent movement toward women's ordination precipitated numerous reinterpretative studies, many of which arrived at new conclusions, principally by reassigning the relative weight given ideas in the various passages involved. Seventh-day Adventist scholars have done exegesis on these texts as well, arriving generally at concurrence on the fundamental meaning of the texts but differing substantially over how the texts relate to the church in modern times.

The Basic Biblical Texts

A brief summary of the texts and points about the way they are interpreted will prove helpful. In all cases texts are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

1. Genesis 1:27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Scholars are virtually agreed that the Genesis 1 passage teaches full equality of men and women in a relationship of mutuality. However, the statement is so brief as to be cryptic. Karl Barth's suggestion that creation in the image of God means that in humanity male and female are at once jointly expressed by creation and that a human must be thought of as being-in-fellowship as the Trinity is God-in-relationship is seen as important by some scholars but dismissed by others as interesting but only analogy. Emil Brunner, for example, declined to accept Barth's definition of the image of God, but Paul Jewett, whose book *MAN AS MALE AND FEMALE*, perhaps the most influential contemporary book supporting the ordination of women, finds in Barth's image of God doctrine the key to proper understanding.

2. Genesis 2:21-24: So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; ²²and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of
Man."

- ²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

The passage of Genesis 2 describes the process of creating woman, using a rib from Adam. Some interpreters see only equality in Genesis 2. Eve, created following Adam's survey of the animals, was created as a helper appropriate for man. The Hebrew word implies no inferiority. Other scholars, however, see a primal distinction between man and woman drawn from Adam's priority in creation. Man and woman were not created simultaneously, but woman was created as a helper or for assistance: identical in nature but separate in function. For some expositors the unity of chapter 1 guides the meaning of chapter 2; for others chapter 2 fills in an element of creation unaddressed in the brevity of chapter 1, hence adds another element to our understanding of God's purpose.

3. Genesis 3:16: To the woman he said,
"I will greatly multiply your pain
in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth
children,
yet your desire shall be for your
husband,
and he shall rule over you.

In the passage of Genesis 3 God responds to the entrance of sin. It clearly teaches subordination of woman to man: "he shall rule over you." Scholars friendly to the feminist cause stress that the context of this verse is the home, often adding that because Christ lifted the consequences

of sin the Christian woman is equal to and no longer is in submission to her husband. Other expositors hold that the wife's relationship to her husband remains intact, for Christ's death was not intended to rearrange relationships between spouses, but to deal with estrangement from God.

More traditional scholars believe that the dependence of woman to man is the plan of God as long as sin prevails, but will be superceded in eternal life. Many believe also that the Pauline passages dealing with this issue demonstrate that the relationship remains, not only in the home, but also in the church. Rather than justifying male abuse of women, they argue that it must be interpreted in harmony with texts such as Ephesians 5:23-29.

4. Genesis 5:1-2: This is the book of the generations of Adam.
¹When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.
²Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.

Because this verse adds little to what already has been discussed in Genesis, little is made of it in theological literature.

5. Mark 12:24-25: Jesus said to them "Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? ²⁵For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Here Jesus' discussion of the future life portrays a time when the new order transcends sexuality, at least that aspect germane to marriage. This has been the understanding of traditional theology, although Jewett insists that the traditional view actually is saying there will be no women in heaven. Such a reading seems hardly justified. The text offers a problem, however, to those who believe maleness/femaleness is an original, necessary component in humanity. To supercede it implies a radical readjustment of human nature.

6. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. ³But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head--it is the same as if her head were shaven. ⁶For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. ⁷For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸(For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.) ¹⁰That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹(Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹²for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.) ¹³Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.

This passage introduces the Pauline-Petrine cluster, all of which display a commonality of spirit. As he so frequently does, Paul is discussing one topic by citing proofs drawn from another topic. Here they relate to propriety as expressed in women's veils and relationships between the sexes.

For scholars sympathetic to womens ordination this passage presents serious problems. Typically it is dismissed as a Pauline discussion of local customs. Some suggest its serious theological elements are incidental. Most commentators concern themselves with speculation about the nature of the veiling custom in Corinth in the first century, but revisionist theologians as a whole have found the passage difficult.

For theologians holding the traditional doctrine of divine order, the theological elements provide strong support. Karl Barth, for example, cites Paul's discussion as describing the order of men and women established from

creation. The veil represented symbolic recognition of this order. In Corinth God's order was being challenged in that form, so had to be defended in that form. (Dogmatics III/2, p. 312).

Other supporters of the historic view point to (1) Paul's commendation of those who hold to what he previously taught them, (2) the clear teaching of structured order in which Christ is answerable to the Father, the man is answerable to Christ, and the woman is answerable to the man. In this instance the language is generic, not the relationship of husband and wife, and it teaches functional subordination. (3) To strengthen the case, traditionalists point to verses 7-9 as a reference not to Genesis 3, but to Genesis 2. If this is true, the ordering of man/woman relationships is traced to man's pre-fall condition rather than resting exclusively on post-fall ordinances. (4) Such scholars also point out that Paul's addressing such a message to the Corinthian church disproves the contention that subordination of women to men ended at the cross.

Revisionist scholars emphasize the mutuality taught in verses 11 and 12, to which traditionalists respond that Paul's intent was to remind men of their dependence lest they take unfair advantage of their status. The fact that both men and women are dependent upon one another need not mean that the divine order is superceded. Traditional scholars point out that Paul appeals both to nature and Scripture but makes no case for conformity to local custom lest the name of Christians be maligned. Therefore his concerns were related to God's plan rather than to social practices.

7. 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38: As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. ³⁵If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

³⁶What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?

³⁷If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. ³⁸If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

The Pauline instruction prohibiting women from speaking in the churches generally is regarded by revisionist scholars as counsel to a local congregation where unruly members were creating a disturbance. The instruction scarcely can be absolute, for the same apostle speaks (11:5) of women in the same church who pray or prophesy, but there his complaint relates to their unveiled heads, not their speaking. Nevertheless, the passage is treated by such theologians as a local matter in the descriptive mode, not the norm for other churches.

Defenders of the traditional view respond that Paul's counsel is not limited to Corinth alone, but is in force "as in all the churches of the saints." How can the anomaly with 11:5 be reconciled? Several proposed solutions are suggested: (1) Perhaps on second thought Paul changed his mind between chapters 11 and 14, or perhaps it was a simple error. (2) Some suggest 1 Cor. 14:34, 35 is a scribal insertion, however virtually the same language appears in 1 Timothy 2 and there is no manuscript evidence of scribal variance in the Corinthian text. (3) Others propose that chapter 11 merely alludes to the possibility a woman might speak, however the wording hardly supports the idea. (4) Yet others suggest chapter 11 refers to private worship. The section applicable to public worship begins with verses 17 and 18.

Granted that the expression prohibiting women speaking in churches is incidental to Paul's argument, it remains still a problem without a satisfying solution. Traditionalists call attention to the fact that Paul's

instruction comes not from personal preference or conformity with local custom, but as a command from the Lord (v. 37).

8. Ephesians 5:22-33: Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. ³¹"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³²This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; ³³however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Paul defends his counsel that wives be subject to their husbands on grounds of analogy between Christ and the church. As the setting is within the bounds of marriage, the majority of commentators relate the passage to the domestic subordination outlined in Genesis 3. The passage becomes difficult, however, for interpreters who hold that all subordination of wife to husband terminates in the acceptance of Christ. Theologically the text deals with ways that the husband's authority over his wife relates to Christ's authority over the church. The husband's Christ-appointed responsibility requires him to deal with his wife in a self-sacrificing manner.

9. Colossians 3:18-19: Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

The short passage written to the Colossians clearly seems to address the marriage relationship, where subordination is taught, but, as in

Ephesians 5, the issue of women's roles in the church is not primary.

10. 1 Timothy 2:11-15: Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness.¹²I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

The instruction to Timothy is of interest chiefly because (1) its setting seems oriented to general principles rather than domestic relationships, (2) women seem to be excluded from the teaching role, at least with respect to men, and (3) Paul argues for male authority over women on the basis of Adam's primogeniture and Eve's early fall into transgression.

Revisionist scholars point out that Paul apparently appreciated the assistance of numerous women who helped him in spreading the gospel, that Priscilla and Aquila took leading roles in instructing the new convert Apollos, and that Paul's reasons for his position seem more like rabbinic argumentation than sound points.

To traditionalist interpreters who favor divine order arguments, the general rather than domestic setting implies that the subordination principle is applicable in churches. If this were so it would affect the issue of women's ordination. Furthermore Paul's citation of Adam's priority to Eve ties his thought with Genesis 2 while his argument based on woman's deception and its implications ties his reasoning with Genesis 3.

11. Titus 2:4, 5: ⁴and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited.
12. 1 Peter 3:1, 2: Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, ²when they see your reverent and chaste behavior.

13. 1 Peter 2:9: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

While the passages in Titus and 1 Peter are treated as theological lightweights in the discussion of women's roles in the church, the third text has attracted more discussion for its theology of believers' priesthood. While some theologians find in this text sufficient authorization for any believer to perform any function appropriate to Christian order, others believe it teaches only that each believer has direct access for himself or herself to the throne of God, and that to read more into it constitutes abuse rather than exegesis.

14. Galatians 3:26-28: ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

For theologians who favor the ordination of women this passage is cited as Paul's most comprehensive and only definitive theological statement describing currently applicable relationships between men and women. It is believed to have universal scope, dissolving restrictions imposed by traditional custom or prior regulation. In the same sense that Paul transcends racial lines (Jew and Greek) and fixed social categories (slave and free), his trilogy of deliverance banishes lines between male and female, bringing all together in one in Jesus Christ. On this basis no present limitation remains to prevent women from serving in any position within or outside the church and the ordered structure both explicit and implicit in Biblical passages no longer is applicable.

Other scholars take issue with such readings, arguing that Paul had no intention of suspending the God-given order in the world. Such argument

would be equivalent to anarchy. They contend that the issue really being addressed has to do not with primarily interpersonal relationships but with the believers' universal access to salvation through Christ, a position so strongly inherent in the text that Paul Jewett concedes that "Undoubtedly . . . the apostle thinks preeminently coram deo, that is in terms of Man-to-God relationship rather than in terms of Man-to-Man relationship" (p. 144). Scholars who support the divine order view believe Paul's doctrine of faith in no way supports release from foundational orderly process in the world, but that the believer is inheritor of the promises given to Abraham (v. 29). They also point out that the apostle uses virtually the same words in three other places widely interpreted to be a baptismal formula, but in all of them omitting the expression "neither male nor female." (1 Cor. 12:13, Col. 3:9-11, Rom. 10:12).

Survey of the Arguments

It is useful to set the arguments in parallel columns, recognizing that no listing will include every possible position. The following pages present the major points in tabular form.

<u>Favoring women's ordination</u>	<u>Favoring male leadership on basis of divine ordering</u>
1. Scripture does not prohibit it therefore it cannot be offensive in the sight of God. It is a neutral matter in regard to right and wrong.	1. Scripture does not authorize it. Silence an unsound basis for advocacy. One of first principles of hermeneutics is that silence confirms an existing pattern. Ellen White addressed the silence argument by condemning it. GC 289, 90.
2. Paul's arguments conditioned by the culture of time and place.	2. Cultural elements exist in Scripture, but cannot be allowed to nullify clear statements of instruction. Cultural elements (as veils in 1 Cor 11) are separable from theological statements

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Corinth church needed unique instructions.

They are Paul's personal opinion.
1 Cor 7:6.

Paul teaches conformity to customs of the day to allow free growth of gospel, but when customs change the command is inapplicable.

Paul is concerned lest women religious leaders hamper the church's reception.

Paul fears feminine leadership will blur the distinctions between Christianity and pagan cults.

Paul's reasoning reveals his reversion to rabbinic thinking that is allowed to supercede his more noble insights (Gal 3:27-28).

Paul's attitude toward women is derived from the thinking of his time.

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Paul appeals to universal practice of all the churches. 1 Cor 11:16.

They are commands of the Lord.
1 Cor 14:37. Paul's argument rests on the law (torah), not personal authority.

Paul's reasoned arguments appeal to Scripture, Christ's command, nature, and God's creative ordering, but never cultural practice. While a culture provided environmental elements, Paul speaks from principle. The same argument appears in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy.

As a matter of fact, female religious leaders were abundant in the Greco-Roman world, carrying no stigma. Christians were exceptional in denying church leadership to women, which suggests it was intentionally done.

The argument is the reverse of the previous one and rests on pure speculation. Christianity's distinctiveness was evident beyond its masculine leadership.

Such contention allows the influence of the human element in Scripture to nullify its validity. Where was the guidance of the Holy Spirit as Paul wrote? Argument jeopardizes reliability of the Scriptures.

Is this the same Paul who wrote Gal 3:27-28? Argument gives undue stress to cultural suppositions. Inadequate hermeneutic allowed to weaken theology. An argument worthy of historical-critical premises. Where principle is involved, God often gave instructions that clashed with existing cultural patterns.

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3. Revelation is progressive. We should exercise care that we do not lock provisional features into our normative pattern for all time. Examples are polygamy, slavery, circumcision, and prohibition of foods offered to idols.
4. Women were chosen by God in Bible times as spokesmen.
5. Hierarchal ordering creates an unfair handicap for women and reduces the pool of talent available to extend the gospel.

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3. Agreed, revelation is progressive and the danger exists. Interpreters must distinguish between principle and temporary provisions. However, unless there is clear later revelation or transcending principle that undermines previous practice, normative lines should be drawn closely to previously revealed guides. Although all Scripture is God's Word, the NT is normative above the Old, as it represents later insight.

There is, however, a restorationist theme in Scripture that should not be disregarded.

4. Special gifts have been given both men and women in OT and NT times. But these gifts are exercised outside the ordinary structure of religious leadership by merit of extraordinary appointment. Mrs White's claims to authority rest on this principle. Outside special endowment of certain women, leadership in the church must conform to the Biblical precedent of the NT.
5. While God created men and women of equal value in His sight, He also established clear differences of function. Functional variance does not necessarily indicate inferiority in basic nature. This idea is reflected in the case of Christ as cited in 1 Cor 11:3. Supposition that functional subordination denigrates would destroy our understanding of the Trinity. One must avoid confusing identity with fairness.

Both women and men are free to function within their appointed areas. The opposing argument is based on identity of function not identity of access to service. Barth's observation is accurate: "The supremacy of men is not a question of value, dignity, or honor, but of order." Dogmatics III:1, pp. 301-302.

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Feminine subordination stems from sin and is limited to the marital relationship.

6. The doctrines of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12) and priesthood of every believer (1 Pet 2:9) support the authority of all Christians to leadership without reference to sexual difference. (Gal 3:28)

7. Jesus and Paul's relationships with women revealed their disregard for conventions and their respect for the full dignity of women.

Jesus' death freed women from subordination that resulted from the fall.

Gal 3:27-28 represents the theological ideal, transcending other limits on women.

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Although it extends to the home, Paul relates it to the pre-fall creation of Gen 2 as well in 1 Cor 11:3, 7-9. It is a part of His ordering.

6. Paul's most vigorous statements regarding women's functional roles in the church are given in the context of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12, 14). Paul's strongest point in discussing spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12) is that there is universal service but diversity of function.

Equal access to Christ was not intended to dissolve all ranks and distinctions on earth. That concept is not at all a Christian one.

7. Both social and rabbinical custom reduced women to deprived status. Jesus disregarded such customs. However, careful scholarship suggests that women had much more open participation in society than rabbinic laws would provide. Jesus' acceptance of women as persons in no way countermanded the divinely-planned ordering of society

The idea that Jesus reversed the divinely-established social relationships in this world is entirely absent from Scripture. In 1 Cor 11 Paul appeals to the creation order in pre-fall terms.

The redeemed Christian remains male or female. Differences are transcended but not obliterated. What the Bible teaches is equality of status with diversity of function.

Gal 3:28 is inapplicable to ordination. Men and women in Christ are co-heirs of His redemption. It does not follow, however, that women are eligible for ordination any more than children are. That argument confuses spiritual unity with identity of role.

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8. To accept functional subordination on a NT basis would require reinstatement of slavery, for they are addressed together in Gal 3.

9. Failure to ordain women is immoral in that it unfairly limits what they can do in ministry for Him. It denies them access to military chaplaincies and chaplaincies in non-SDA institutions.

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Barth puts it well: "The relationship of men and women established in creation, and the distinctions which it entails, cannot be regarded as transitory and accidental and abolished in Christ, as though Christ were not their meaning and origin." Dogmatics II:2, p. 295.

8. Analogy from slavery is invalid because:

- (1) Slavery was a social corruption entirely apart from God's created order, hence never was a part of His plan.
- (2) Nowhere does Scripture command the practice of slavery.
- (3) The man/woman relationship is built into created structure prior to development of a culture. Slavery followed by human arrangement.

9. The moral argument is taken from contemporary social theory rather than Scriptural precedent. God's distinctions in assignment of duty are immoral only if God's planning is immoral. Morality should not be confused with identity of function.

Practical Implications

A decision to include women in the working force as fully ordained ministers of the gospel could be expected to have little immediate effect on the composition of the Adventist ministry. Denominations whose experience with women's ordination now extends over ten years have found that few women opt to enter the pastorate. Churches with active recruitment of women, such as the United Methodists and Presbyterians, report that fewer than five per cent of their pulpits are filled by women, although the

proportion of feminine seminary students is higher. Many women who complete seminary choose not to enter the pastorate.

Several beneficial results could be expected to follow the opening of the gospel ministry to Adventist women:

1. It would bring about change, encouraging an innovative outlook in the church. Much of the resistance to ordaining women is mere inertia rather than based on informed opinion.

2. Military chaplaincies and chaplaincies in non-Adventist institutions would be opened to women. At present there are substantial vacancies in these areas.

3. A certain constituency in the church would be pleased by the change, including a sizeable number of professional and academically trained persons. Many women in the professions have a sense of having battled their way past barriers, and see the reluctance to ordain women as structural, not theological. Graduate programs in most universities are oriented toward contemporary values and issues, a fact that influences Adventists who study there.

4. Ordination of women would provide additional personnel, particularly in areas that experience chronic shortage of ministers. It is possible that in some parts of the world where women make up the large majority of the Adventist membership there would be more openness to women pastors.

5. Seminary enrollment would be increased. It is doubtful Adventist colleges would experience a noticeable increase, as women entering ministerial programs would almost always be drawn from other college curricula.

On the other hand, a decision to ordain women could be expected to raise substantial practical difficulties, including the following:

1. It would have theological implications for the Adventist pattern of hermeneutics. The interpretative methodology followed to justify womens ordination partakes substantially of the critical approach to Biblical studies and opens the way to rationalize several Adventist beliefs unpopular in present society. Our literalistic reading of Genesis 1-11 would become vulnerable. The change also would accelerate present trends in the church away from doctrinal and evangelistic concerns toward ethical and social action concerns.

In the experience of other denominations the achievement of womens ordination has been followed swiftly by demands from homosexuals. This problem has advanced to the forefront in Methodism and Presbyterianism and is agitated seriously at each of their general councils. The theological methodology used to justify ordination of women in those churches now has been adapted to favor the same step for homosexuals.

Homosexuals within the Adventist church would interpret a favorable decision on womens ordination as a significant step toward broadening the church to include their life-style and ultimately their ordination.

2. The Adventist theology of ordination is involved in the discussion. Advocates of womens ordination argue that the unordained worker is deprived significantly of standing in the church and opportunity to serve. Ordination is perceived not only in terms of qualification to perform baptisms and marriages: it is seen as the doorstep to upward mobility within the denominational structure.

Traditionally, Adventists have described ordination in terms of service rather than sacramental function. If ordination actually is seen in terms of opportunity for service, omission of baptismal and marriage functions become incidental. Both Spurgeon and Dwight L. Moody performed their

ministries without handicap as unordained workers for the Lord. Dr. William Shea at the theological seminary can be cited as a contemporary example.

3. Relationships between husbands and wives. Would we expect female pastors to be single or married? How would family relationships function if a wife were pastor of a church? Could her husband assume the leadership role in his home? The additional factor of child care is a substantial one. The pastor's program makes it virtually impossible to meet systematic appointment schedules. Is it compatible with motherhood?

4. Would women pastors be assigned to sheltered pastorates such as multi-staff or institutional churches or would they be available for the more varied solo ministry typical of most churches or districts? Would they bear the brunt of challenge in pastorates and extensive evangelistic work?

5. Issues relating to unequal assignment based on sex would be introduced into the church, raising new types of problems. While these could be dealt with, they may be anticipated.

6. In parts of the world an ordained woman minister would be ineffective, if not resented. Should we regionalize ordination, surrendering the current practice of ordination to the world work? This decision is laden with implications and should be studied carefully.

7. Unity. The ordination of women can be expected to arouse vigorous opposition in many congregations. A significant proportion of our members, both men and women, have theological reservations regarding the ordination of women. Being theologically based, these reservations will be certain to surface as objections of the most persistent nature, for they are seen as grounded in Scripture.

It is likely many congregations would reject appointment of women pastors, creating special difficulties for administrators and further fraying

the fabric of unity. Administrators who deal wisely with their fields should be able to avoid schism under such circumstances, but the resulting situation would be eminently favorable for the rapid growth of right-wing ministries. Seventh-day Adventists basically are a conservative people. To judge them by large institutional churches is to misread their spirit.

8. Opening the ministry to the ordination of women would add to the backlog of applicants for internships, although the increased selectivity engendered by competition could raise the overall skill level at the entry level.

A Personal Evaluation

Preparation for this report has required an extensive review of the literature on the ordination of women. Aside from somewhat tangential studies, little new data has come to light since completion of the BRI studies about 1977. The arguments turn on methods of hermeneutic and one's personal orientation toward contemporary social issues.

In interpreting the relevant texts the theologian must decide whether a synthesized theological construct saying that God sees men and women in identical light shall supercede Biblical passages that appear to support ordered, separate functions planned from the beginning. Are there genuine tensions in Scripture that require a dialectic approach or can unity be found in the most basic premises? Historically Adventists have defended the unity of truth when rightly understood. Ellen White supported this approach.

But exegesis has failed to lead to consensus, even among Adventist scholars, for the reason that the genuine decisions too often are made outside the Scriptures. There is a reasonable level of agreement about what each individual Biblical text is saying but substantial disagreement about how to use its contribution in constructing an overall synthesis.