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5 **THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST**  
6 **POLICY AND PRACTICE, UP TO 1972\***

7  
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14 This paper begins in the nineteenth-century and ends in 1972, but with a short excursus at the end  
15 to 1989. It is very difficult, in the time and space available, to do justice to the whole sweep of the  
16 Adventist history concerning women's ordination. Accordingly, his paper concentrates on the  
17 nineteenth century before surveying forty years in the middle of the twentieth century. I have taken  
18 this approach because I feel, as an historian, firstly, that the nineteenth-century history of debates  
19 and discussions about the ordination of women—whether it be as ministers or deaconesses—has  
20 become somewhat subject to mythology: and historians are drawn to the prospect of myth-busting  
21 like a fly to honey. And I feel secondly that, when it comes to the episodes of the mid 1930s and the  
22 early 1950s–early 1970s, that they are little known and their significance has not been not fully  
23 appreciated. In short, I have concentrated on those aspects of the Adventist history of women's  
24 ordination that seem to me to be most in need of having the light of historical criticism shone onto  
25 them. I fear that I may end up just casting them into deeper shadow; but the game, if I may continue  
26 the metaphor, seems worth the candle. I know that many people from both sides of this debate, will  
27 dislike and disagree with parts of this paper (albeit presumably not the same parts!). However, if in  
28 sparking debate I prompt further research and critical thinking about our history, it will have been  
29 a worthwhile enterprise.

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33 **I. HAS A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST WOMAN EVER BEEN**  
34 **ORDAINED TO GOSPEL MINISTRY?**

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37 That a woman has been ordained to gospel ministry with the sanction of the organized Seventh-day  
38 Adventist is highly unlikely, but is just possible. It is a big world and, in mission fields in early days,  
39 with inchoate denominational organization, or under the pressure of persecution, it is possible that

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\* I am greatly obliged to Benjamin Baker for his assistance in research, without which this paper could not have been written, and to Winifred Trim for her comments on an earlier draft. This is a revised and slightly expanded version of the text presented to the theology of Ordination Study Committee on July 22, 2013.

1 *ad hoc* measures were taken that departed from normal denominational praxis, as is happening in  
 2 China today. Emergency measures unquestionably have been taken: ordinations of ministers and  
 3 elders carried out in an *ad hoc* manner, under pressure from persecutory regimes, and in breach of  
 4 denominational protocols. Some examples are known, though the subject of oral traditions rather  
 5 than verifiable in the documentary record;<sup>1</sup> and there can be little doubt that there have been other  
 6 instances that time and circumstances have obscured. Yet not only should the significance of these  
 7 stopgap measures not be exaggerated; but in addition some of the known cases actually indicate the  
 8 desire of those involved to conform to official protocols, since they demonstrate belief that certain  
 9 functions are properly performed by those who have been ordained.<sup>2</sup> In any event, actions in front-  
 10 line mission fields, under repression and/or where only sketchy denominational organization exists  
 11 cannot be taken as normative.

12 There is some evidence, however, and certainly claims have been made, that in its early years in  
 13 North America, some Adventist women were officially ordained. In particular, it has been claimed  
 14 that Ellen White, Sarepta Henry and Lulu Wightman were all ordained to gospel ministry.

15  
 16 *Ellen G. White*

17 The facts about Ellen White been very well set out by the White Estate on its website,<sup>3</sup> but I will  
 18 briefly recapitulate the key points. Mrs. White held minister's credentials from 1871, until her death  
 19 in 1915, a fact that is widely known. She always is listed as holding ordained minister's credentials,  
 20 rather than a license.<sup>4</sup> However, to quote from the website:

21 The White Estate possesses six paper credentials that were issued to Ellen White. The first credential  
 22 is dated October 1, 1883, from the Michigan Conference. The second is dated December 6, 1885,  
 23 from the General Conference. On that one credential, the word "ordained" was crossed out. The third  
 24 is dated December 27, 1887, from the General Conference. The fourth is dated March 7, 1899, from  
 25 the General Conference. The fifth is dated June 14, 1909, from the General Conference. The sixth is  
 26 dated June 12, 1913, from the General Conference.

27 Some writers have stressed that, whereas the 1885 credential has the word "ordained" crossed out,  
 28 the 1887 credential does not, which could be implicit evidence for ordination in the interim, or an

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., there is a story that Adventist missionaries, evacuating China in 1949, ordained a local woman to ensure that at least one experienced church leader remained in that part of the country. The story derives from the late James Cress and is based on interviews with the woman in question, in China, and with an ex-missionary in the USA; Cress concluded that it meant at least one Chinese woman was a "properly ordained minister". (Cress to Jones and Kent, Sept. 24, 2006, General Conference Archives [hereafter GC Ar.], Record Group [hereafter RG] 58, Miscellaneous Correspondence.) However, there is no documentation of any service; in any case, to be "properly ordained" the decision ought first to have been approved by appropriate committees first. Even if true, then, this episode is one of several examples of unapproved ordinations of women in the unorganized territory of the China Union Mission (though most of these are recent).

<sup>2</sup> An example is the ordination of male elders by unordained women, in the Soviet Union—a measure taken, however, to enable the elders then to baptize new converts, which actually reveals church-members' desire to abide by policies.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White Estate, "Records pertaining to Ellen G. White's Ministerial/Ordination Credentials" (Oct. 2012): [http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/egw\\_credentials/egw\\_credentials.htm](http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/egw_credentials/egw_credentials.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Her first credentials were issued by the Michigan Conference in 1871: "Michigan Conference of S. D. Adventists", *Adventist Review & Sabbath Herald* [hereafter *R&H*], 37 (Feb. 14, 1871): 69. From 1884 on, her credentials are recorded in the *Yearbook* [hereafter *YB*], for 1884–1894 and for 1904–1915, and in the *General Conference Bulletin* [hereafter *GCB*] for 1895–1903; they were issued variously by the Michigan and California Conferences and the General Conference. For details, see White Estate, "Records pertaining to Ellen G. White's Ministerial/Ordination Credentials".

1 example of a mistake being corrected.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the 1883 credential also does not cross out the word  
 2 “ordained”; there is thus no chronological trajectory, making interpretation difficult. Of course, the  
 3 fact that “ordained” is struck through in only one credential could be seen as a mistake. However,  
 4 equally, the 1885 credential could represent an effort to correct an earlier mistake—to make the  
 5 point that, while holding minister’s credentials, she had not been ordained. The striking out makes  
 6 the credential state she is a “minister in good and regular standing in the General Conference of  
 7 Seventh-day Adventists”, rather than an *ordained* minister. In other years, this may have been so  
 8 well known that no need to strike out “ordained” was felt necessary. In sum, the evidence of the  
 9 paper credentials is ambiguous, rather than demonstrating that Mrs. White was ordained.

10 In 1935, furthermore, Dores E. Robinson, son-in-law of Ellen White’s eldest son, W. C. White,  
 11 wrote to L. E. Froom that his father-in-law had just told him: “Sister White was never ordained, that  
 12 she never baptized, nor did she ever give the ordination charge to others.” Credentials, Robinson  
 13 continued, had been “issued to her because of her evident call of the Lord”.<sup>6</sup> This statement comes  
 14 at second hand and was made 20 years after Mrs. White’s death, but given that it is attributed to her  
 15 son, with whom she worked closely, it cannot simply be dismissed. It strongly suggests that she was  
 16 issued with credentials as a courtesy and recognition of the importance of her prophetic role, rather  
 17 than because she had been ordained to ministry. This is borne out by the standard denominational  
 18 worker’s “Biographical information blank” completed on Ellen White’s behalf by her secretary Mary  
 19 Steward and submitted to the General Conference in March 1909. The information in this form is  
 20 highly accurate. The line next to the question “If ordained, state when, where, and by whom” simply  
 21 has an “x” through it.<sup>7</sup>

22 Finally, reinforcing this evidence, it is striking that the *Review & Herald* printed the decision by  
 23 the Michigan Conference to issue her with and renew her credentials each year from 1872 though  
 24 1877—sixteen years of reports. Yet it contains no record of her being ordained, even though the  
 25 *Review* regularly published reports of ministerial ordination ceremonies. Given Ellen White’s  
 26 prominence, it is inconceivable that, if she had been ordained, it would not have been reported.

27 Ordination consists not of a certificate but of being set apart by prayer and laying on of hands.  
 28 There is absolutely no evidence that Ellen White was ever thus set apart to ministry—no date and  
 29 place have ever been suggested for an ordination service. Taking all the evidence together, there is  
 30 no reason to doubt that, although Ellen White carried an ordained minister’s credentials, she was  
 31 never ordained; or rather, she was not ordained by men. Credentials were issued to her as a gesture  
 32 of respect and because, as a prophet, she was *sui generis* and normal rules did not apply.

### 34 *Sarepta M. Henry*

35 As far as I am aware, no one has yet explicitly claimed in print that Sarepta Myrenda Henry (née  
 36 Sarepta Irish) was ordained,<sup>8</sup> but it is one that I have heard made in seminars and public meetings

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Josephine Benton, *Called by God: Stories of Seventh-day Adventist women ministers* [1990], rev. ed. (Lincoln, Nebr.: AdventSource, 2002), p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson to Froom, Nov. 17, 1935, digital copy available at [http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/egw\\_credentials/egw\\_credentials.htm](http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/egw_credentials/egw_credentials.htm).

<sup>7</sup> Completed Mar. 5 and received Mar. 10, 1909: GC Ar., “Personal information forms and biographical material pre-1950”, RG 21, Box 7303, record no. 114952.

<sup>8</sup> It is made implicitly, however: see below, pp. 10–11.

1 on several occasions. Henry only became a Seventh-day Adventist in 1896, at the age of 57, having  
 2 already carved out a distinguished career as a poet, temperance reformer and revivalist preacher;  
 3 and she died in 1900. She received an Adventist ministerial license in 1898 and 1899 (and probably  
 4 would have been licensed again but for her death early in 1900).<sup>9</sup> The chronology thus makes it  
 5 virtually impossible that she could have been an ordained minister. But in any case, ordination was  
 6 actually something she did not seek—indeed, something she probably opposed, since she seems to  
 7 have felt that women ought not be ordained.

8 This was not because she thought that “women should remain silent” in church. The young  
 9 Sarepta Irish had studied at Rock River Seminary, a Methodist seminary in Illinois, and had hoped  
 10 to become a missionary.<sup>10</sup> Later, as already noted, she became a successful preacher. However, she  
 11 identified definite limits to the role of women in ministry. Her memoirs, edited by her daughter,  
 12 Mary and supplemented by the latter’s own recollections, makes it plain that Mrs. Henry invariably  
 13 sought to work with local ministers (of various Protestant denominations) when undertaking  
 14 temperance or revival campaigns. Having labored for a year to build up a company in Rockford,  
 15 Illinois, she urged her congregation that they “must be organized as a church” and urged them to  
 16 find a pastor. When they initially expressed a hope of having her continue in that role, she recalled  
 17 that she told them “that they needed church fellowship and the ordinances, which we could not  
 18 administer”.<sup>11</sup> The ordinances were for an ordained minister to celebrate. Even more telling is the  
 19 story Mary, Henry’s daughter, tells of her mother taking her to visit Northwestern University,  
 20 around 1876 or 1877. There she met a female scholar who, Mary recalled, “talked to me with  
 21 enthusiasm about the wonderful opportunities for girls of my day, and sounded my mind as to any  
 22 latent ambition I might have to study theology and help compel the ministers to let the women into  
 23 their ordained ranks.”<sup>12</sup> What is notable, however, is how the story ends: “But I shared my mother’s  
 24 views as to the sphere of woman, and my whole child-being shrank from the thought.”<sup>13</sup> It is clear  
 25 that Sarepta Henry was never ordained.

### 26 *Lulu Wightman*

27 There is no question that Lulu Wightman was a powerful preacher.<sup>14</sup> It is known that, in 1904,  
 28 her husband, John (himself a licensed minister), appealed to the New York Conference to ordain his  
 29 wife, but without success.<sup>15</sup> However, the evidence that she was ordained a few years later seems at  
 30 first glance definitive: the *1908 Yearbook* lists her under the California Conference—and not among  
 31 the licentiates, but among the ministers.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Benton, *Called by God*, pp. 107–8.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Henry Rossiter, *My mother’s life* (Chicago, New York & Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), pp. 44, 47.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 205–6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207–8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> Benton, *Called by God*, pp. 49–58; Bert Haloviak, “The Adventist heritage calls for ordination of women”, *Spectrum* 16, 3 (1985): 54–55; idem, “A place at the table: Women and the early years”, in Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart (eds.), *The welcome table: Setting a place for ordained women* (Langley Park, Md.: TEAM Press, 1995), pp. 28, 31–32.

<sup>15</sup> Benton, *Called by God*, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> *YB 1908*, p. 68.

1        Nevertheless, there is contrary evidence: in the *General Conference Bulletin* in 1901 and 1902,  
 2 and in the *Yearbooks* for 1904, 1905, 1906 and 1907, and for 1909 and 1910, she is listed as holding  
 3 a license.<sup>17</sup> In other words, only in 1908 is she listed as a minister, whereas both before and,  
 4 crucially, afterwards she is listed as a licentiate. Now, 1908 was the year she and her husband, who  
 5 was also a minister, moved to the California Conference after a number of years in the New York  
 6 Conference. Josephine Benton suggests it is “possible that the California Conference may have  
 7 invited the Wightmans with the understanding that both would be ordained ministers and may  
 8 have turned in their names thus to the Yearbook, afterward being discouraged by church leadership  
 9 from continuing Mrs. Wightman in that status.”<sup>18</sup> However, there is no evidence to support this  
 10 hypothesis. Indeed, Benton concedes that “no official records seem to exist of a discussion or  
 11 action” to ordain Lulu Wightman.<sup>19</sup> The only indication that she may have been ordained is that one  
 12 entry in the *1908 Yearbook*. Yet the simplest and most probable explanation is that the entry is,  
 13 simply, a mistake: whether a printer’s error, or a slip-up in the office of a conference in which Mrs.  
 14 Wightman was, after all, a new employee—but a mistake that was immediately corrected the  
 15 following year.

16        In addition to this evidence, there is no report of her ever being ordained in the *Review* or any of  
 17 the union papers. There is, then, little reason to think that Lulu Wightman was ever ordained.

18  
 19 *Conclusion*

20        To sum up, there is no persuasive evidence that any woman has ever been set apart to gospel  
 21 ministry with the sanction of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—not even in the nineteenth or  
 22 early twentieth centuries. It was not our pioneers’ practice to ordain women to ministry.

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## 26                    II. SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY TO 1922

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29        This conclusion that no women have been officially ordained by the organized denomination, even  
 30 in our early decades, runs contrary to the trend of much of the recent historiography on women’s  
 31 ordination in Adventist history, which is written by proponents of ordaining women to gospel  
 32 ministry. The sheer volume of books, chapters, articles, and papers arguing that, in Adventism’s  
 33 early years there was no discrimination in setting apart to ministry, can seem impressive. However,  
 34 this body of scholarship does not actually prove its case, due to a critical misunderstanding of what  
 35 early Adventists supported when it came to the involvement of women in the work of the church.

36        Three different issues are conflated—those of women in ministry, the related issue of women’s  
 37 right to preach, and the ordination of deaconesses. The result is to create a fallacious impression  
 38 that Adventist pioneers, including Ellen White, approved of ordaining women to gospel ministry.  
 39 Proponents have rightly stated, firstly, that early Seventh-day Adventists approved of licensing

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<sup>17</sup> *GCB*, 4 (1901–2): 526, 608; *YB 1904*, p. 20; *YB 1905*, p. 24; *YB 1906*, p. 22; *YB 1907*, p. 20; *YB 1909*, p. 29; *YB 1910*, p.  
 31.

<sup>18</sup> Benton, *Called by God*, pp. 56–57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

1 women ministers; secondly, that they supported the right of women to preach the gospel; and  
 2 thirdly that Ellen White supported the setting apart, by ordination, of women to a certain type of  
 3 ministry. From these three demonstrably factual statements, however, they draw the conclusion  
 4 that Ellen White and early Adventists advocated the ordination of women to gospel ministry. And  
 5 this is palpably incorrect. The error arises from a misunderstanding of early Adventist conceptions  
 6 of ministry.

## 9 Adventist women in forms of ministry, 1872–1922

11 It is important, first, to be clear that our pioneers indubitably accepted the right of women to serve  
 12 as what they called “licentiates”—what became known as licensed ministers (though our pioneers  
 13 tended simply to use the term “minister” for ordained ministers).<sup>20</sup> Many of the pertinent facts are  
 14 now known, thanks to the research of Josephine Benton, Bert Haloviak and Kitt Watts.<sup>21</sup> However, it  
 15 will be helpful, I think, briefly to summarize the data.

16 The first known instance of a woman receiving a license was Sarah Lindsey in 1872.<sup>22</sup> Others  
 17 received licenses later in the 1870s. By 1881 at least six conferences—New York–Pennsylvania,  
 18 Michigan, Kentucky–Tennessee, Kansas, Minnesota, and Illinois—had licensed around a dozen  
 19 women.<sup>23</sup> In 1884, the first year for which we have a complete ministerial directory, six out of 130  
 20 licentiates were women. From 1884 through the epochal 1922 General Conference Session there  
 21 were between two and ten women licentiates every year, and on average five and a quarter per

<sup>20</sup> David Trim, “Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist history”, unpubl. paper, presented to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (Laurel, Md., Jan. 15–17, 2013), p. 3; Benton, *Called by God*, p. 155 n.2.

<sup>21</sup> See Benton, *Called by God*, chaps. 1-3, 5-6, 8; Bert Haloviak, “Route to the ordination of women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Two paths”, unpubl. GC. Ar. Research Paper (March 18, 1985) [available to download at [http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc\\_info.asp?DocID=37](http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc_info.asp?DocID=37)]; idem, “Adventist heritage calls for ordination of women”, 52–60; idem, “Longing for the pastorate: Ministry in 19th century [sic] Adventism”, unpubl. paper (1988) [available to download at [http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc\\_info.asp?DocID=51](http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc_info.asp?DocID=51)]; idem, “Ellen White and the ordination of women”, idem, sermon preached at Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church (Oct. 15, 1988) [available to download at [http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc\\_info.asp?DocID=49](http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc_info.asp?DocID=49)]; idem, “Women and the SDA Church” unpubl. paper presented at a seminar at Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church (Oct. 15, 1988) [available to download at [http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc\\_info.asp?DocID=55](http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc_info.asp?DocID=55)]; idem, “A place at the table”, pp. 27–44; idem, “Documentary analysis of the role of women in the SDA Church”, GC Ar. Research Paper (n.d.) [available to download at [http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc\\_info.asp?DocID=58](http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc_info.asp?DocID=58)]; Kit Watts, “The rise and fall of Adventist women in leadership”, *Ministry*, 68, 4 (April, 1995): 8; repr. as “Moving away from the table: A survey of historical factors affecting women leaders”, in Habada and Brillhart, *The welcome table*, pp. 45–59; idem, “An outline of the history of Seventh-day Adventists and the ordination of women”, in Habada and Brillhart, *The welcome table*, app. 5, pp. 334–358.

*Note:* Subsequent writers are heavily reliant on these works, which are cited in chronological order, but note that while Haloviak’s work predates Benton’s 1990 book, he attributes primacy to her research: Haloviak, “The pit dug for Adventist women ministers”, *Spectrum*, 40, 4 (Fall 2012): 37.

<sup>22</sup> Lindsey’s evangelistic prowess was briefly described in R. W. Schwarz, *Light bearers to the remnant* (Mountain View, Calif., Omaha, Nebr. & Oshawa, Ont.: Pacific Press Publ. Assoc., 1979), p. 135. This was probably the cue for Brian E. Strayer’s study, “Sarah A. H. Lindsey: Advent preacher on the southern tier”, *Adventist Heritage*, 11, 2 (Fall 1986): 16–25, which is the basis for descriptions of, or references to, her work in: Benton, *Called by God*, 105, 109–10; Haloviak, “Longing for the pastorate”, p. 9; idem, “Documentary analysis”, p. 2; and Watts, “Rise and fall”, p. 8 (“Moving away from the table”, p. 53).

<sup>23</sup> Haloviak, “Longing for the pastorate”, pp. 4, 8–9.

1 year each year, over these four decades.<sup>24</sup> Although Watts, in an influential essay, asserts that, from  
 2 1915 onwards, “the number [of women licentiates] decrease steadily”,<sup>25</sup> the greatest number in any  
 3 single year was actually the 10 reported in the 1917 *Yearbook*.<sup>26</sup> Their statistical significance ought  
 4 not to be overstated, since in those forty years women were at most 4.62 per cent of the total  
 5 number of licentiates and were on average just 1.62 per cent. This is very similar to the proportion  
 6 of Freewill Baptist and Christian female licensed preachers in the mid-nineteenth century, which a  
 7 recent study estimates at “between 1 and 5 percent”.<sup>27</sup> However, in addition, in the forty years  
 8 through 1922, between 2.68 and 13.82 per cent of all union, conference and mission officers were  
 9 women—the annual average was 8.42 per cent.<sup>28</sup>

10 These true pioneers were largely forgotten by church leaders and church members alike for  
 11 much of the twentieth century, until their stories were recovered by the labors of Josephine Benton,  
 12 Bert Haloviak, and others, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s. The careers of some of these women  
 13 have now been sketched out and their stories told.<sup>29</sup> If there were never very many of them, there is  
 14 no doubt but that women could be and were licensed by Seventh-day Adventists. Furthermore, this  
 15 was a practice that Ellen White endorsed.<sup>30</sup>

16 There is, moreover, no question but that early Adventists asserted the right of women to speak  
 17 in public, to proclaim the gospel, and to evangelize—“triumphantly vindicating the right of the  
 18 sisters” to preach, to borrow the language of an early Adventist periodical article. Here we owe  
 19 much to the scholarship of Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood.<sup>31</sup> It was doubtless because a  
 20 wealth of articles in Adventist periodicals maintained the right of women to preach that Adventists  
 21 accepted female licentiates. In light of the fact that some recent statements by those opposed to  
 22 ordination of women to gospel ministry seem to imply that *any* kind of *public* ministry by women is

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<sup>24</sup> Analysis of *YB* and *GCB* by Melissa Bedford and Benjamin Baker of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research. See Appendix 1, below, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Watts, “Rise and fall”, p. 8 (“Moving away from the table”, p. 52).

<sup>26</sup> This is a year for which Benton lists no women licentiates; indeed, she lists none for the four years between 1915 and 1920: *Called by God*, p. 160.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Billington, “Female laborers in the Church’: Women preachers in the northeastern United States, 1790–1840”, *Journal of American Studies*, 19 (Dec. 1985): 381.

<sup>28</sup> For data, see Appendix 1, below. For analysis, see Bert Haloviak, “The decline of leadership positions for SDA women”, unpubl. GC Ar. Research Paper (March 20, 1990) [available to download at [http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc\\_info.asp?DocID=47](http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc_info.asp?DocID=47)]; Watts, “Moving away from the table”, pp. 50–52.

<sup>29</sup> See works cited in n. 21 above; see also Kit Watts, “An outline of the history of Seventh-day Adventists and the ordination of women”, app. 5 in Habada and Brillhart, *The welcome table*, pp. 334–58; Michael Bernoi, “Nineteenth-century women in Adventist ministry against the background of their times”, in Nancy Vhymeister (ed.), *Women in ministry: Biblical and historical perspectives* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998), pp. 211–33, esp. 225–29; Ardis Stenbakken, “Historic Adventist women”, *Ministry*, 74, 8 (Aug. 2001): 5–7; Ginger Hanks Harwood and Beverly Beem, “A work for all to do: Nineteenth-century Adventism and women in ministry” (unpubl. paper presented at the meeting of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies at Chicago, Ill., 16 November 2012).

<sup>30</sup> See Haloviak, “Documentary analysis”, pp. [3–4]; Jerry Moon, “‘A power that exceeds that of men’: Ellen G. White on women in ministry”, in Vhymeister, *Women in ministry*, pp. 189, 192–93, 195, 197, 199–200.

<sup>31</sup> See Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood, “‘Your daughters shall prophesy’: James White, Uriah Smith, and the ‘triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters’ to preach”, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 43 (2005): 41–58; “‘It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus’: Early Seventh-day Adventist answers to objections to women as public spiritual leaders”, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 45 (2007): 221–45; and “What about Paul? Early Adventists and the preaching of ‘the Marys’”, *Spectrum*, 38, 2 (Spring 2010): 25–30. Cf. Haloviak, “Route to the ordination of women”, pp. 2–3; idem, “Longing for the pastorate”, pp. 5–6; Bernoi, “Nineteenth-century women in Adventist ministry”, pp. 221–24.

1 prohibited by the Bible, it should be stressed that this is very far from our pioneers' understanding  
2 and from their practice.

3 Finally, it is also incontrovertible that Ellen White supported ordaining women. There are a  
4 variety of statements that might (or might not) be interpreted as showing approval of women's  
5 ordination. However, there is one that is unmistakable. In 1895, she directly addressed the issue of  
6 women's ordination in an article entitled "The duty of the minister and the people". She declared:

7 Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be  
8 appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They  
9 should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to  
10 counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital  
11 connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of  
12 strengthening and building up the church.<sup>32</sup>

13 The question, "What were these women were to be ordained to?" is key (and is discussed below).  
14 But certainly it is clear that there is support in the Spirit of Prophecy for ordaining women.

15 From these three demonstrable facts, however, the conclusion is drawn that in the formative  
16 years of the denomination, Adventists supported ordaining women to gospel ministry. And to be  
17 sure, a few individuals seem to have done so.<sup>33</sup> However, taking the church as an organized body,  
18 this assertion is demonstrably false.

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## 21 **Drawing conclusions from the data**

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23 The mistake is to conflate ordained ministers and licensed ministers as all engaged in the same type  
24 of ministry, and all ordinations as equivalent. However, as I showed in a functional analysis (in my  
25 previous paper for this committee), in early Adventism, ordained ministers, licentiates, elders and  
26 deacons had roles that were distinct and understood to be so.<sup>34</sup> How, then, should this impact our  
27 understanding of the facts covered thus far?

28

### 29 *Ellen White's 1895 article*

30 To take the last point first: what Ellen White describes in her 1895 article is very clearly *not* the  
31 role of either a minister, or even a licentiate, even though it has been used as support for ordination  
32 to gospel ministry by some commentators since, after all, it *does* advocate ordaining women. But to  
33 what role?

34 Nowhere is preaching mentioned, much less baptism, administration of the ordinances, or the  
35 raising up of new churches.<sup>35</sup> The function of these women, who deserve ordination, is instead "to  
36 visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor". Similarly, theirs is  
37 not a full-time role; just the opposite, for they are "to consecrate [only] *some* of their time to the  
38 service of the Lord". Finally, they are "to counsel with the church officers or the minister", which  
39 shows that Mrs. White distinguishes them from "church officers or the minister". The functional

<sup>32</sup> E. G. White, "The duty of the minister and the people," *R&H*, 72 (July 9, 1895): 434.

<sup>33</sup> See below, p. 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Trim, "Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist history", pp. 10-20.

<sup>35</sup> See *ibid.*, esp. tables 1 and 2, pp. 10, 19.



1 role described is, in sum, neither that of ministers (whether ordained or licensed) nor that of elders  
2 (“church officers”). Ellen White here is calling for the ordination of deaconesses.

3 To be sure, she uses neither the terms “ordination” nor “deaconess”; however, her language is  
4 unmistakably that of ordination (“set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands”).<sup>36</sup> And  
5 there can be no doubt that she is describing the function of an Adventist deaconess of the era. The  
6 1882 provisional Church Manual (which, though drafted and never adopted, was prepared at the  
7 instance of a General Conference Session and hence is a good indicator of contemporary Adventist  
8 *practice*, albeit not of *policy*) defined the duties of the deaconess thus:

9 They should visit the sick and the poor, and interest themselves generally in works of charity. In  
10 fine, they should act the part of mothers in Israel, lending a helping hand to all who need their  
11 assistance, and striving in every way to promote the peace and prosperity of the church.<sup>37</sup>

12 Furthermore, it is striking that this was written while Ellen White was living in Australia and that,  
13 within five years, in August 1895 and January 1900, there were ordination services at two local  
14 churches in Australia at which elders, deacons *and deaconesses* were ordained. The first was carried  
15 out by J. O. Corliss, a distinguished church leader; the second by W. C. White, not only an important  
16 leader but also, of course, Ellen White’s son and confidant.<sup>38</sup>

17 In light of all this evidence, there can be no doubt that Ellen White supported the ordination of  
18 deaconesses. Neither can there be any doubt that ordaining them was denominational practice, at  
19 least for a period.

20

21 *Preachers, not “ministers”*

22 When we come to the first two points, they are integrally interconnected. It is no coincidence  
23 that all the statistics cited above were for female *licentiates*—reinforcing my earlier point that there  
24 is little or no evidence of any female *ministers*. What, then, did a license, as opposed to a ministerial  
25 credential, signify in Adventist ecclesiastical polity? This is a key question,<sup>39</sup> one that I addressed in  
26 some detail in my previous paper.<sup>40</sup>

27 A license’s essential meaning in Seventh-day Adventist policy and praxis was captured by the  
28 veteran denominational administrator Oliver Montgomery, in his path-breaking 1942 study of  
29 church organization and administration.

30 The licensed minister does not have authority to preside at any of the church ordinances. He cannot  
31 administer baptism or the Lord’s Supper, or perform the marriage ceremony. He cannot preside at  
32 sessions or meetings of the church in which members are received into fellowship or dismissed from  
33 church membership. His ministerial license does not clothe him with such authority. He is authorized

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Moon, “Ellen White on women in ministry”, p. 201.

<sup>37</sup> W. H. Littlejohn, “The duties of local church officers”, *R&H*, 60 (July 3, 1883): 427 (I am indebted to Clinton Wahlen for this reference). On the history of this proposed Church Manual, see P. Gerard Damsteegt, “Have Adventists abandoned the Biblical model of leadership for the local church?”, in Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (ed.), *Here we stand: Evaluating new trends in the church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventists Affirm, 2005), pp. 654–61.

<sup>38</sup> Arthur N Patrick, “The ordination of deaconesses”, *Adventist Review*, 163 (Jan. 16, 1986): 74. (I am grateful to Jerry Moon for drawing this article to my attention.) A third such ordination may have been carried out in California in 1916, though the evidence is not clear: see Moon, “Ellen White on women in ministry”, pp. 202, 209 n. 87.

<sup>39</sup> Haloviak, “The pit dug for Adventist women ministers”, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Trim, “Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist history”, pp. 18–20.

1 to preach, to assist in a spiritual way in any church activities, to lead out in missionary work, and  
2 especially to engage in evangelistic efforts.<sup>41</sup>

3 In other words, the licentiate was a preacher and evangelist. It is hardly surprising that, having  
4 vindicated the right of the sisters to preach in theory, Adventists were also willing to license some  
5 of them to preach in practice.

6 However, in neither case does it demonstrate any commitment to ordaining women. And this is  
7 what has been lost sight of in much recent writing on women in ministry in early Adventist history.  
8 All of the work of Benton, Haloviak, Watts, Beem, Hanks Harwood, and others—all the many superb  
9 quotations they have mined from Adventist periodicals—all go to show no more than that early  
10 Adventists affirmed the right of women to preach and to evangelize. In all this historiography, *there*  
11 *is nothing* to show early Adventists arguing for women’s right to baptize, to preside over the  
12 ordinances, to organize local churches—no evidence of any commitment to ordination.

13 The problem is that the proponents of women’s ordination in the present have projected their  
14 views back onto the past, using modern terminology in a way that elides different categories in late  
15 nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Adventist ecclesiastical polity. The early Adventist  
16 women who were licensed are typically described simply as ministers or pastors, or as “in ministry”  
17 —but this conflates a small group, whose members were rarely called “minister” at the time, with  
18 the much larger official pastorate, for whom ordination, as I showed in my January paper, was  
19 highly important and a key qualification.<sup>42</sup> My point here is not to assess whether female licentiates  
20 were (or were not) engaged in ministry in the same way as men, which is a theological question.  
21 Rather it is that, in early Adventism, the roles of ministers and licentiates were distinct and were  
22 seen as such; and that influential writers on the role of women in Seventh-day Adventist history do  
23 not do justice to these facts—in fact, they do just the opposite.

24 Benton, to be sure, points out that her subjects were licensed; moreover, some early licentiates  
25 were married to ministers and she several times refers explicitly to the ordination of husbands, thus  
26 highlighting the different nominal status each enjoyed. She brings out the fact that some men held a  
27 ministerial credential (granted to the ordainee) while others, men and women, held a license. But  
28 she also strongly implies that in practice there was no distinction. For example, she describes *all* the  
29 women whose stories she narrates as being in “ministry”—a term never qualified. She repeatedly  
30 writes of women being “called to [or into the] ministry” and being in “formal ministry” or “official  
31 ministry”.<sup>43</sup> These are terms that would typically be applied, both at the time and since, to ordained  
32 ministry. Furthermore she describes the work of Helen Williams in terms that show Williams was  
33 fulfilling the function of a licentiate (she “preached [and] gave Bible studies” and later was “Giving  
34 Bible studies faithfully two or three days a week [and] conducting regular prayer meetings”); yet  
35 her work is then characterized simply as “ministry”.<sup>44</sup> These usages are significant, since ordained  
36 ministers (all men) are also described only as being “in ministry”.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Oliver Montgomery, *Principles of church organization and administration* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publ. Assoc., 1942), p. 134.

<sup>42</sup> Trim, “Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist history”, pp. 8–9.

<sup>43</sup> Benton, *Called by God*, pp. 6–7, 12, 21, 23, 30, 46, 58, 109, 110, 115, 116,

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 107, 109.

1 All this allows Benton to take a letter from Mrs. White to Mrs. Henry, encouraging her to preach,  
 2 and cite it as an example of how “Ellen White also repeatedly encouraged other women to use their  
 3 gifts in ministry”,<sup>46</sup> although, as we have seen, not only was Sarepta Henry a licensed, not ordained,  
 4 minister, but there is also good evidence that she rejected ordination of women to gospel ministry.  
 5 Benton elsewhere suggests that women licentiates were regarded as being on the same footing as  
 6 the “majority of the male ministers”.<sup>47</sup>

7 There is no doubt that nineteenth-century Adventists did, at times, use “ministry” for the work  
 8 of both ordained and licensed ministers.<sup>48</sup> However, Benton uses terminology consistently,  
 9 carefully, to blur distinctions which were drawn between “ministers” and licentiates and which  
 10 were held to be important. The net effect is to prompt readers to conclude that early Adventists  
 11 recognized only one kind of “ministry” and, too, recognized female licentiates as engaged in that  
 12 ministry in identical fashion to male ordained ministers.

13 Haloviak likewise elides the significant distinctions between the roles of ordained and licensed  
 14 ministers in early Adventism. In one essay he avers that “women were clearly defined within the . . .  
 15 Adventist definition of ministry” of the nineteenth century:

16 They belonged to ministerial associations, they held the Seventh-day Adventist ministerial license or  
 17 the “license to preach,” they conducted evangelistic campaigns, they visited churches doing pastoral  
 18 labor, and were paid from tithe funds that Ellen White considered reserved for the official church  
 19 ministry. Thus Lulu Wightman [who has been subject of a case study] was a Seventh-day Adventist  
 20 minister in the fullest sense defined by the church.”<sup>49</sup>

21 No evidence is adduced of their membership of ministerial associations; and the “license to preach”  
 22 is implicitly conflated with ministerial ordination. Similar is his assertion, elsewhere, that: “In the  
 23 fullest sense of the meaning of ministry in the 19th century, Mrs. E S Lane was an SDA minister”<sup>50</sup>—  
 24 this despite the fact that Haloviak has already conceded that “her lack of ordination prevented her  
 25 from organizing churches, baptizing, or leading the ordinance services.”<sup>51</sup> As I showed in my earlier  
 26 paper, these were *not* things taken lightly by early SDAs—they are not somehow minor omissions  
 27 or unimportant exceptions!<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, they mean, *ipso facto*, that neither Lulu Wightman  
 28 nor Mrs. Lane was a minister “in the fullest sense”. Rather, they exercised a more limited ministry—  
 29 which is another way of saying they were licentiates, not ministers. The conclusion “that women  
 30 were licensed and fully considered ministers in the nineteenth century”<sup>53</sup> is an oxymoron.

31 In addition, Haloviak conflates (thereby confusing) ordination to the diaconate with ordination  
 32 to gospel ministry. For example, he discusses Ellen White’s statement of July 1895, on ordaining  
 33 women and recognizes that its applicability is to ordaining women to the diaconate rather than to  
 34 gospel ministry.<sup>54</sup> However, later, in his conclusion, he simply declares: “Ellen White considered

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100. Benton also describes Henry simply as “this gifted, active minister” (*ibid.*, p. 108), again implying that there was only one kind of minister.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Moon, “Ellen White on women in ministry”, pp. 188–90.

<sup>49</sup> Haloviak, “A place at the table”, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> Haloviak, “Longing for the pastorate”, p. [12].

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. [11].

<sup>52</sup> Trim, “Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist history”, pp. 8–9, 12, 14, 17–19, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Haloviak, “A place at the table”, p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33–35.

1 women as ministers during her time and . . . she favored the act of ordaining women.”<sup>55</sup> Both of  
2 these statements are strictly accurate; but are in fact misleading.

3 There is, in sum, as much wishful thinking as historical fact in many of the conclusions drawn  
4 about women ministers in the nineteenth century. Adventist women were readily granted a role as  
5 preachers and evangelists, and in visitation and what might be called social ministry. But they were  
6 not ordained—they were never given the right to administer the ordinances, to baptize, to organize  
7 new churches, or to ordain. These differences are neither accidental nor insignificant; rather they  
8 reflect distinctions that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Adventists thought important. All  
9 this does not constitute an argument against ordaining women to gospel ministry in the twenty-  
10 first century. But it is an attempt to be realistic and authentic about what the sources actually show.

### 14 III. THE 1881 GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

17 In the late nineteenth century there was one notable attempt to approve ordination of women to  
18 the ministry, but then the issue apparently became dormant for almost eighty years, save for a few  
19 seemingly isolated incidents. I suspect that this reflects the influence of the rise of fundamentalism,  
20 whose wider impact on attitudes to gender among American Protestants is addressed by Nicholas  
21 Miller in his paper.<sup>56</sup> However, first we need to consider the celebrated 1881 GC Session.

22 Although no Adventist women were ordained as ministers in the nineteenth century there were  
23 Adventists who supported a move in that direction. This is unsurprising. During the first half of the  
24 nineteenth century, many (though by no means all) American Protestant denominations witnessed  
25 an increasing willingness to allow women to preach. Among Quakers, Congregationalists, Christians,  
26 Universalists, and some kinds Methodists and Baptists (including Millerites), women were licensed  
27 as “assistant preachers”, “exhorters” and “female laborers in Christ”.<sup>57</sup> Most American Protestants,  
28 however, drew a line between licensing and ordaining women. It was a distinction drawn by many  
29 female pastors and preachers as well. Most “did not seek ordination, and some accepted that only  
30 men should celebrate the gospel ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>58</sup> But if Sarepta  
31 Henry is indicative of one position among religious women, her daughter’s experience in the second  
32 half of the 1870s highlights that there was increasing talk in wider Christian circles that women  
33 should push to oblige “ministers to let the women into their ordained ranks”.<sup>59</sup> Freewill Baptists,  
34 Unitarians and Congregationalists were increasingly willing not only to allow women to preach, but

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Miller, “The ordination of women in the American Church”, unpubl. paper presented to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (Linthicum Heights, Md., July 22–24, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> Billington, “Female laborers”, pp. 369–94 (quotations at 381); Catherine A. Brekus, *Female preaching in America: Strangers and pilgrims, 1740–1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); chaps. 3–8. Jennifer M. Lloyd, “Women preachers in the Bible Christian Connexion”, *Albion*, 36 (Autumn 2004): 451–81; Miller, “Ordination of women”, pp. 2–6.

<sup>58</sup> Billington, “Female laborers”, p. 380 and cf. pp. 381, 391; see Lloyd, “Women preachers”, pp. 461, 463; Miller, “Ordination of women”, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Rossiter, *My mother’s life*, pp. 207–8.

1 also to ordain them as ministers.<sup>60</sup> This is the broader context for the resolution proposed at the  
 2 1881 General Conference Session: “That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that  
 3 position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian  
 4 ministry.”

5 The events of 1881 have been widely misunderstood. It is widely claimed as fact in Adventist  
 6 circles that a decision to ordain women was taken at the 1881 General Conference Session—that  
 7 the celebrated resolution proposed at that Session was “passed” or “voted”.<sup>61</sup> This is in fact not so,  
 8 but misapprehensions and misunderstandings about the vote have proliferated. Confusion exists  
 9 for a number of reasons, which are addressed below.

### 10 11 12 **Confusion between what was reported in *Review and Herald (R&H)*** 13 **and *Signs of the Times (ST)***

14  
15 The church had two periodicals in 1881, *R&H*, the original paper, and *ST*, which was for the growing  
 16 West Coast community of Adventists. GC Session minutes were published in full in *R&H*; but *ST*  
 17 naturally included reports on GC Sessions, though they are selective. The minutes printed in *R&H*  
 18 note that the motion to ordain “females” was referred to the GC Committee.<sup>62</sup> However, the report  
 19 in *ST* lists this resolution among several “resolutions adopted”.<sup>63</sup> There is a misconception that both  
 20 papers simply printed minutes and that their reports are, therefore, of equal weight—so that one is  
 21 free to take the *ST* report as accurate and *R&H* as inaccurate if one wishes.<sup>64</sup> This is not the case.

22 The report in *R&H* was in fact the official record. Thus, in the actual minute books of the GC  
 23 Sessions in the 1870s and 1880s, the minutes consists of copy cut-and-pasted from the *Review*;  
 24 there are some handwritten corrections and additions, but the overwhelming body of text is simply  
 25 that from *R&H*. It should be noted that there are *no* handwritten annotations or corrections in the  
 26 original minute book for the 7th meeting of the 1881 GC Session, at which the resolution on  
 27 ordaining women was proposed.<sup>65</sup>

28 That the *ST* report is not authoritative should in any case be obvious from looking at it. In *R&H*  
 29 is a full report, spread over two full pages.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, the report in *ST* is less than one full column  
 30 and begins with a slightly apologetic preface: “We can give only a partial account of the proceedings  
 31 . . . . We give extracts of the most general interest, as far as we have received. The following were

<sup>60</sup> Billington, “Female laborers”, pp. 380, 391; Miller, “Ordination of women”, pp. 1-2.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., “GC session actions affecting women”, *Adventist Review*, GC Session Bulletin, July 5, 1985, p. 6; Watts, “Rise and fall”, p. 10 n.36; Bernoi, “Nineteenth-century women in Adventist ministry”, p. 224; cf. Randal Wisbey, “SDA women in ministry 1970-1998”, in Vhymeister, *Women in ministry*, p. 235.

<sup>62</sup> *R&H*, vol. 58, no. 25 (Dec. 20, 1881), p. 392.

<sup>63</sup> *ST*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Jan. 5, 1882), p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. Monte Sahlin, “What did happen in 1881?”, *Adventist Today Online*: <http://www.atoday.org/article/1326/blogs/sahlin-monte/what-did-happen-in-1881>; Haloviak, “Longing for the pastorate”, p. [15], although it is notable that Haloviak, in another paper of the same year, concluded that the 1881 GC resolution “obviously did not pass”: idem, “Ellen White and the ordination of women”, p. [4].

<sup>65</sup> GC Ar., Box 6873, “Records of the General Conference”, vol. 2, 1879-1886, p. 61; also in “Transcription of minutes of GC Sessions from 1863 to 1888” [hereafter MGCS] (GC Ar., available to download at [http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc\\_info.asp?DocID=17](http://docs.adventistarchives.org/doc_info.asp?DocID=17)), p. 197

<sup>66</sup> Vol. 58, no. 25, pp. 392-93.

1 among the resolutions adopted.” It then lists several. It is very clear that the resolution on ordaining  
 2 women has been placed here by a simple error.

### 5 **Confusion over the presence of the word “Resolved” in the record**

7 During the nineteenth century, motions at GC Sessions frequently, though not invariably, included  
 8 the word “Resolved.” To modern ears, the fact that the word “resolved” is present in minutes of a  
 9 meeting can make it sound as though the motion in question was passed. This is no doubt one  
 10 reason why many have taken the *ST* record as accurate, because it chimes with what seems to be in  
 11 front of their eyes. However, things were different in the nineteenth century.

12 It was common parliamentary procedure in English-speaking countries in the mid-nineteenth  
 13 century and up to the mid-twentieth century for a motion on a substantive issue to be offered as a  
 14 proposition, which would then be debated and either adopted, rejected, or referred to a committee  
 15 for further deliberation. This procedure was followed at Seventh-day Adventist General Conference  
 16 Sessions. Indeed, draft resolutions were, by design, a very significant part of the business of early  
 17 sessions, though this, too, has been misunderstood. As capable an historian as Richard Schwarz has  
 18 declared that the resolution on ordaining women was proposed by “[a]n enthusiastic delegate to  
 19 the 1881” Session.<sup>67</sup> But that was far from true. Instead, it came from a special committee.

20 The 1865 Session had voted “that a committee of three be appointed by this Conference to draft  
 21 resolutions on such subjects as they deem important to be brought before the meeting”.<sup>68</sup> It was  
 22 duly formed and came back with twelve draft resolutions, on subjects ranging from organization,  
 23 theology and mission to an expression of distress at the assassination of President Lincoln, all of  
 24 “which were unanimously adopted”.<sup>69</sup> From 1865 through 1895, except in 1867,<sup>70</sup> one of the  
 25 standing committees elected at each Session was the “Committee on Resolutions”. In 1897 this  
 26 committee became the Committee on Plans and Resolutions,<sup>71</sup> which was a standing committee at  
 27 each session until 1905 GC Session (though still sometimes referred to in passing simply as the  
 28 Committee on Resolutions).<sup>72</sup> Beginning with the 1909 Session, this committee became the  
 29 Committee on Plans, though for at least two more sessions it in fact continued to present proposed  
 30 resolutions to sessions.<sup>73</sup>

31 Now, many actions proposed during sessions were, of course, simply “Moved”; however,  
 32 substantive motions brought to the Session by the Committee on Resolutions were presented  
 33 prefaced with the word “Resolved”. The process is well described in the minutes of the 1866  
 34 Session: “Committee on Resolutions reported so far as they had prepared resolutions. Report

<sup>67</sup> *Light bearers to the remnant*, p. 135.

<sup>68</sup> Third Session, May 17, 1865, morning meeting (MGCS, p. 11).

<sup>69</sup> As above, afternoon meeting (MGCS, pp. 12-15).

<sup>70</sup> No Resolutions Committee was appointed.

<sup>71</sup> Thirty-Second Session, 6th meeting, Feb. 26, 1897, minutes in in *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, 1 [*sic*, for 7], no. 12 (March 1, 1897): 191.

<sup>72</sup> Thirty-Fifth Session, 8th meeting, May 15, 1905, 2.30 p.m. and 14th meeting, May 18, 1905, 2.30 p.m., minutes in *R&H*, 82: 21 (May 25, 1905): 12, 23.

<sup>73</sup> See Thirty-Sixth Session, 22nd meeting, May 26, 1909, 10.30 a.m., minutes in *GCB*, 6 (May 27, 1909): 172; Thirty-Eighth Session, 17th meeting, May 25, 1909, 10 a.m., *GCB*, 7 (May 23, 1913): 139.

1 accepted. The Conference then proceeded to act upon the resolutions.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, the presence of the  
 2 word “resolved” in the draft resolutions did not mean that it *was* resolved by the Session—rather it  
 3 was the resolution which the Session then decided to adopt—or not!

4 If one was to ask what was the point of the standing Committee on Resolutions/Plans and  
 5 Resolutions, the committee’s own description in the 1888 Session was that it was “appointed to  
 6 consider what subjects should come before [each] Conference in the form of resolutions”.<sup>75</sup> At  
 7 times, it was asked by the Session to prepare a resolution on a specified subject.<sup>76</sup> But perhaps the  
 8 best summary comes from 1903, when former GC President G. A. Irwin described the Committee on  
 9 Plans and Resolutions as “a committee, which will thoroughly consider all ... propositions, and bring  
 10 some definite recommendations before the Conference.”<sup>77</sup> Resolutions were not simple actions to  
 11 accept reports, appoint committees and sub-committees, move personnel, or appropriate funds—  
 12 though sometimes resolutions *were* used to move personnel and spend money). Resolutions  
 13 frequently included prefatory sections headed “Whereas”, which set out the basis for decisions  
 14 and/or ideological positions. Resolutions seem to have been especially used for making statements  
 15 on substantive issues, or for setting out positions for wider consumption outside the denomination.  
 16 For all these reasons the actual wording of a resolution was of great importance and so, rather than  
 17 adopting a form of words in haste, a committee was created whose task it was to draft and craft  
 18 statements.<sup>78</sup>

## 21 **Confusion over the outcome**

23 All this is important to recognize because it helps to explain why, in practice, resolutions proposed  
 24 by the Resolutions Committee were almost never simply defeated; and the significance of this point  
 25 will become clear in a moment. I have gone through the minutes of the first 27 years of GC Sessions,  
 26 looking at every resolution proposed by the standing Resolutions Committee.<sup>79</sup> There were, in  
 27 practice, five possible outcomes: —

- 28 1) Unanimous adoption: which happened to the great majority.
- 29 2) Adoption by a divided vote: which happened sometimes.
- 30 3) Attempts to amend it: sometimes successful sometimes not.
- 31 4) Referral back to the Resolutions Committee, or to a special ad hoc committee for study.
- 32 5) Referral to the GC Committee.

33 Whenever a resolution was referred as described in no. 4, the draft resolution *always* came back to  
 34 the Session having been amended or nuanced in some way. It seems clear that, when there was  
 35 support for a resolution, but doubt about its wording, it was sent back, or in cases of particular  
 36 significance sent to a special committee to consider the implications. But since the resolutions were

<sup>74</sup> Fourth Session, afternoon meeting, May 16, 1866 (MGCS, p. 16).

<sup>75</sup> As described in the Committee’s first report to the 26th Session: 5th meeting, Nov. 16, 1887 (MGCS, p. 345).

<sup>76</sup> E.g., Sixth Session, 2nd meeting, May 13, 1868, 2 p.m. (MGCS, p. 34).

<sup>77</sup> Thirty-Fifth Session, 4th Meeting, March 31, 1903, 10.30 a.m., minutes in *GCB*, 5 (April 1, 1903): 36.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., see the Session’s vote “That the Committee on Resolutions be authorized and requested to prepare an address to set forth our views on certain existing evils”: Sixth Session, 3rd meeting, evening, May 12, 1868 (MGCS, p. 34).

<sup>79</sup> See Appendix II, below.

1 always brought back from those committees to the floor at the same Session, and were then passed,  
 2 it is clear that they must have had significant support, hence my suggestion that what motivated  
 3 referral was doubt about the wording or particular aspects.

4 Referral instead to the GC Committee only happened rarely—in the Church’s first twenty-five  
 5 years, I have found only three draft resolutions proposed by the Resolutions Committee that were  
 6 referred to the GC Committee.<sup>80</sup> Now, we do not know what happened when the Committee  
 7 discussed the proposal, simply because there are no official minutes of the GC Committee from  
 8 before 1889. This makes it all the more important to know what “referral to the GC Committee”  
 9 actually meant.

10 Unlike the proposed resolutions referred back to the Resolutions Committee, or to a special  
 11 committee, none of those referred to the GC Committee ever come back to a Session, and neither  
 12 are they ever acted on outside a GC Session. Thus, while some students of 1881 have suggested that  
 13 referral to the GC Committee was the Session sending an approved proposal forward to the GC  
 14 Committee for action is, I think, reading our current committee approach back into the nineteenth  
 15 century. It is not based on a close study of how GC Sessions worked in that period.

16 We need to take into account the fact that, in the first 25 regular annual sessions, *no* resolution  
 17 proposed by the Resolutions Committee was ever simply defeated.<sup>81</sup> Resolutions proposed from  
 18 other quarters (from other committees or from the floor) were not infrequently lost—but not those  
 19 proposed in reports of the Committee on Resolutions. Taking all this evidence together, I think a  
 20 picture emerges: one based, to be sure, on circumstantial evidence, but a clear picture even so.  
 21 Referring resolutions from the Resolutions Committee to the GC Committee was a tactful way of  
 22 rejecting them. It was the Resolutions Committee's job to come up with Resolutions; it had been  
 23 given the difficult task of taking ideas from around the delegates and probably from those unable to  
 24 attend Sessions and formulate them into cogent propositions, in a short space of time. It would be  
 25 natural if there were some hesitation about simply rejecting them.

26 I have described this in conversation to one Adventist scholar who suggested that delegates  
 27 would not have been aware of such fine distinctions as whether a resolution came from the  
 28 Committee on Resolutions or some other body. But if one reads the minutes of early Sessions, it is  
 29 clear that our pioneers, like many Americans of the era, were steeped in parliamentary practice and  
 30 the rules of debate. At the first so-called “general conference” in 1860, after preliminary remarks,  
 31 much of the first page of minutes in the *Review & Herald* is taken up with detailed points relating to  
 32 proper parliamentary procedure.<sup>82</sup> I think it entirely credible that delegates to General Conference  
 33 Sessions were aware of these fine distinctions.

34 I want to emphasize that it *is* very significant that the Committee on Resolutions at the 1881 GC  
 35 Session presented a report that included a draft resolution providing for ordination of “females . . .  
 36 to the work of Christian ministry.” Indeed, because of the tendency to overstate the approval of  
 37 women in ministry, which I argued earlier, I think we lose sight of just how extraordinary the  
 38 proposal is. Furthermore, it did not come from an enthusiastic delegate on the floor, or it could be

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<sup>80</sup> In addition to 1881, the other two instances were in 1883 and 1886: Twenty-second Session, 8th meeting, 3 p.m. Nov. 13, 1883 (MGCS, p. 236); twenty-fifth Session, 14th Meeting, Dec. 6, 1886 (MGCS, pp. 329–30).

<sup>81</sup> The first time this occurred was in 1887: twenty-sixth Session, 10th and 11th meetings, 4 p.m. Nov. 22, and Nov. 24, 1887 (MGCS, pp. 353–55).

<sup>82</sup> “Business Proceedings”, *R&H*, 16 (Oct. 9, 1860): 161.



1 easily dismissed. It was brought by one of the most trusted standing committees. Here was a fork in  
 2 the Adventist historical road! Clearly there were some of our pioneers who saw no objections to  
 3 ordaining women to gospel ministry. In the end, however, even more significant is the fact that the  
 4 resolution was not adopted. There were simply not enough Adventist leaders who wanted to go  
 5 beyond licensing females to ordaining them.

#### 9 **IV. GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEES CONSIDER** 10 **WOMEN'S ORDINATION, 1936-1972**

11  
 12  
 13 The history of the official study processes—beginning with the “Role of Women in the Church  
 14 Committee” appointed in 1973—along with the history of their outcome in official proceedings  
 15 through 1995, is reasonably well known and so are not presented now.<sup>83</sup> That said, there are still  
 16 enough misconceptions, albeit mostly minor, that it is my hope, in another paper to explore the  
 17 actual study committees and commissions that considered ordination and the role of women in the  
 18 1970s and 1980s, their chronology, and their interactions with General Conference Sessions and  
 19 meetings of the GC Executive Committee. For now, however, I will simply summarize some key  
 20 developments over the four decades preceding the establishment of the first Role of Women in the  
 21 Church Committee and its meeting at Camp Mohaven in 1973—developments that are little known  
 22 or whose significance are not well understood. That will bring us up, as it were, to the present  
 23 day—at least to within the lifetimes of most members of the present study committee.

#### 24 25 26 **(Mis)reading Mrs. White: 1936 and 1950-51**

27  
 28 Earlier we considered Mrs. White's advocacy both of the important work to be done by deaconesses  
 29 and of their being ordained. Isolated in Australia, as she was in 1895, however, Mrs. White's counsel  
 30 seemed to have been overlooked—certainly she was not able to push her views as she would have  
 31 been had she been in the United States. Nonetheless, her views were there, in print; if they were not  
 32 much noted at the time, they garnered continuing attention over subsequent decades.

#### 33 34 *First concerns: 1936*

35 One of the extraordinary facts about the 1881 draft resolution is that it was, in effect, the end of  
 36 the matter. For two generations, women's ordination was a dead issue—whether to gospel ministry  
 37 or, indeed, to any church office.

38 Not until 55 years later did church leaders again discuss the issue of ordaining females—though  
 39 not, on this occasion, to ministry. In 1936 the Home Missionary Department wanted to reprint Ellen  
 40 White's original 1895 article “as a leaflet”, but before doing so, J. A. Stevens, the department head,

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<sup>83</sup> A timeline of these study committees is available at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee webpages on the GC Ar. website: <http://www.adventistarchives.org/gc-appointed-committees>.

1 went to the General Conference Officers for counsel. The minutes record that he sought “advice  
2 regarding a paragraph in the article which seems to recommend the ordination of women.” The  
3 Officers’ response was enigmatic. Evidently there was a discussion, but the minutes record simply:  
4 “Inasmuch as this matter has never been acted upon during the years . . . it does not seem desirable  
5 to raise the question now.” Accordingly, it was voted: “To recommend that the entire paragraph be  
6 eliminated from the leaflet.”<sup>84</sup>

7 This probably reflected both a genuine feeling that home missionaries, for all their merits,  
8 simply did not warrant a separate ordination service, whether for males or females, and a desire  
9 not to stir up unnecessary debate and confusion. But even if the motive is understandable, the  
10 action seems a touch disingenuous. Furthermore, the wording is striking, in that the problem is  
11 portrayed as being the “paragraph in the article which seems to recommend the ordination of  
12 women”—note this wording. The emphasis is on the gender question, not the role or function  
13 question (home missionary versus minister, elder or deacon). The Officers seem not to have  
14 identified that Ellen White was writing about the function of a deaconess, though it may not have  
15 mattered, for in this period they if anything encouraged a downgrading of the deaconess’s standing.  
16 Thus, for example, in 1939 the Officers regretted that, in practice, “among our churches it is not  
17 uncommon for the deaconesses to dispose of the leftovers” after Communion, which they evidently  
18 saw as too sacred a task for deaconesses, and they agreed that the next edition of the *Church*  
19 *Manual* should address this.<sup>85</sup> In any event, having discussed “the ordination of women”, church  
20 leaders must have felt that they had quietly put an end to the matter.

### 21 *The case of “certain sisters”: 1950–51*

22 The next significant episode involving Mrs. White’s statement did not come until 1950, though it  
23 is one whose chronology has been slightly misrepresented by writers on the subject. Kit Watts, in a  
24 timeline of women’s ordination in Adventist history states that in May 1950 the General Conference  
25 Officers “Agreed, To recommend to the General Conference Committee ... that a small committee be  
26 appointed to study and report” whether the Spirit of Prophecy provided for “the ordination of  
27 certain sisters in church service”.<sup>86</sup> In fact, Watts gets her dates wrong. In May 1950 the Officers  
28 received a rather more puzzling piece of information, namely that, “In California some women have  
29 been ordained for Dorcas Society work.” It was agreed to take wider counsel on this issue with the  
30 meeting of the “Home and Foreign Officers” scheduled for just before the 1950 GC Session.<sup>87</sup> When  
31 this meeting took place at the end of June, one of the General Conference general vice presidents:

32 A. V. Olson explained how the item had come to be listed. A statement from the pen of Sister White,  
33 as found in the *Review and Herald* of July 9, 1895, has been understood by some to provide for the  
34 ordination of certain sisters in church service.<sup>88</sup>

35 It is perhaps unsurprising, given the sentiments the quotation expresses, that it seems to have been  
36 taken as warrant for ordaining members of Dorcas Societies, not deaconesses. It was at this point

<sup>84</sup> General Conference Officers’ Meeting (hereafter GCO), Feb. 2, 1936 minutes, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> GCO, minutes of Dec. 13, 1939, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Watts, “Outline”, pp. 338–39.

<sup>87</sup> GCO, May 3, 1950, Minutes, 50–117. Note: the ultimate successor of “Home and Foreign Officers” is what is known today as “GCDO” (GC and Division Officers).

<sup>88</sup> GCO, June 29, 1950, Minutes, 50–158.

1 that the action cited by Watts was taken: “To recommend to the General Conference Committee  
2 following the session that a small committee be appointed to study and report on this question.”<sup>89</sup>

3 It is significant, however, that when the GC Executive Committee duly met, after the Session,  
4 and considered the matter it voted: “That a small committee be appointed to study, and report on  
5 the question of the ordination of women for Dorcas work, and as Bible workers.”<sup>90</sup> It is unclear why  
6 Bible workers were added. But this is, in fact, seems to be the first time that church leaders  
7 considered ordaining women to some kind of spiritual, as opposed to social, ministry. It is thus a  
8 noteworthy, albeit forgotten precedent.<sup>91</sup> However, when the report of the “small committee” was  
9 submitted to the GC Officers, in the spring of 1951, it apparently made no mention of Bible Workers.  
10 The report itself does not survive, but the Officers’ decision does:

11 Agreed, To ask W B Ochs and H T Elliott to confer with the union conference presidents regarding  
12 the question of ordination of women Dorcas leaders, believing that this procedure will care for any  
13 agitation which may be in the field at this time regarding the matter.<sup>92</sup>

14 What Ochs, a general vice president, and Elliott, an associate secretary, were to say to the NAD  
15 union presidents was left unspecified, as is exactly what degree of “agitation . . . may [have] be[en]  
16 in the field at this time”. However, one can speculate that Ellen White’s words were prompting  
17 women to propose that they should be ordained, though to what role exactly remains unclear—the  
18 reference is to “women Dorcas *leaders*” suggests that the debate may have become about “setting  
19 apart” women to leadership positions. It is possible, indeed, that ordaining deaconesses (maybe  
20 even the ordination of women as elders) was now being discussed, given the reference to women  
21 leaders and in light of the inclusion of Bible workers in the Executive Committee’s 1950 action.

22 In any event, the episode, while it remains a little puzzling, may be significant not only as a  
23 precedent for later agitation, but also for when it occurred. A number of scholars opposed to the  
24 ordination of women to gospel ministry identify the campaign in favor of ordaining women as a by-  
25 product of the radical Sixties and especially of the “Women’s Lib” movement.<sup>93</sup> While it is difficult to  
26 imagine that the Civil Rights Movement and Feminism have *not* in some way influenced proponents  
27 of women’s ordination, it is nevertheless striking that, according to the testimony of the General  
28 Conference Officers, there was “agitation . . . in the field” in 1951 about “the question of ordination  
29 of women”. Almost certainly it was not about ordination to gospel ministry. Nevertheless, efforts to  
30 have women leaders “set apart” by the laying on of hands cannot be dismissed simply as a spin-off  
31 of radically secular movements associated with the 1960s and 1970s; they date back to the socially  
32 conservative early 1950s.

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89 Ibid.

90 General Conference Executive Committee (GCC), July 23, 1950, GCC, July 1950 minutes, p. 24.

91 Although not cited, as far as I am aware, by any previous scholar. Watts makes no reference, in her timeline, either to the GCC’s action, or to the GC Officers’ response to the eventual report (on which see below).

92 GCO, March 14, 1951, Minutes, 51–69.

93 E.g., C. Raymond Holmes, *The tip of an iceberg: Biblical authority, Biblical interpretation, and the ordination of women in ministry* (Wakefield, Mich.: Pointer Publications, 1994), chap. 6; Laurel Damsteegt, “Feminism vs. Adventism: Why the conflict?”, *Adventists Affirm*, 3:2 (Fall 1989): 33–40; idem, “Spiritualism and women: Then and now”, in Mercedes H. Dyer (ed.), *Prove all things: a response to Women in Ministry* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventists Affirm, 2000), pp. 251–71 *passim*; Jay Gallimore, “The larger issues”, in *ibid.*, pp. 340–41.

## 1 Steps towards Camp Mohaven

2  
3 In 1968 the General Conference Officers received a request from the Northern European Division  
4 for “counsel regarding ordination of women”, as it is described in the minutes, which continue: “The  
5 question has arisen in Finland. Historically Seventh-day Adventists have not ordained women. Yet it  
6 is believed that the subject should be listed for the 1968 Autumn Council agenda.” The Officers  
7 voted: “To list on the agenda for the 1968 Autumn Council the subject of ordination of women.”<sup>94</sup>

8 But in practice this seems to have meant discussing it with the various officers *prior to* Annual  
9 Council. For at their meeting just before the 1968 Annual Council, the “Home and Overseas Officers  
10 briefly discussed the desirability of a study on the theology of ordination of women.” This gathering  
11 of senior church leaders from around the world did not put the issue on the agenda of the meeting  
12 of the full Executive Committee at Annual Council, but instead: “Agreed, To request the chairman to  
13 appoint a committee of three theologians to study the theology of ordination of women.” The three  
14 men appointed by the committee were two veteran scholar-administrators. H. W. Lowe and M. K.  
15 Eckenroth, and a youthful but already distinguished theologian, Raoul Dederen.<sup>95</sup> The committee  
16 came back with a report that noted Ellen White’s statement from July 1895, but concluded, quite  
17 reasonably, that it applied to deaconesses, rather than to ministers.<sup>96</sup> This suggests that, whatever  
18 other grounds were given for the request from Finland (which almost certainly included the  
19 extraordinary achievements of unordained women evangelists in the country over the previous 26  
20 years),<sup>97</sup> the Finnish Union or Northern European Division also cited Ellen White’s 1895 article.

21 Two years later, the General Conference Session in Vienna requested the General Conference  
22 Officers to prepare “a statement on the role of women in the church organization.” The Officers  
23 were asked “to appoint an adequate committee to consider this large topic, and give special study to  
24 the theology involved and the importance of the home and family in the life of the church, and to  
25 submit a report for consideration at the 1970 Autumn Council.”<sup>98</sup> However, looking at the minutes  
26 of the discussion in Vienna, there is no reference to ordination, and if it is hinting at it, it is doing so  
27 unusually opaquely. This is probably a response to the perceived challenge of “Women’s liberation”,  
28 rather than being about ordination, *per se*.<sup>99</sup>

29 However, that said, there is no further report in the GC Officers’ Meeting Minutes. And no report  
30 was brought during the 1970 Annual Council—there is no reference to anything like this in its  
31 minutes; only a note in the minutes of the meeting of Officers and Union Presidents before Annual  
32 Council, “To refer ... To forthcoming meetings of the available General Conference personnel and  
33 North American Union Presidents” a number of agenda items, including the vaguely titled “Women

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<sup>94</sup> GCO Apr. 8, 1968, Minutes, 68–183. See Watts, “Moving away from the table”, p. 56 and “Outline history”, p. 339.

<sup>95</sup> Home and Overseas Officers, Sept. 30, 1968, in GCO Minutes, 68–419. Cf. Watts, “Outline history”, p. 339.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Haloviak, “The pit dug for Adventist women ministers”, p. 35: in light of his treatment of history (outlined above) it is ironic, to say the least, that Haloviak criticizes Lowe’s report on the grounds that it was written “without probing into the context of nineteenth-century ministry”.

<sup>97</sup> See R. M. Whitsett, “Finish evangelists visit Minnesota”, *Northern Union Outlook*, 22, 6 (June 17, 1958): 6–7 (I owe this reference to Lisa Beardsley-Hardy); Watts, “Moving away from the table”, pp. 55–56, 59 n. 38; and Esa Rouhe, “Elsa Luukkanen and the role of Adventist women in Finland”, in Hugh Dunton *et al.* (eds.), *Heirs of the Reformation: The story of Seventh-day Adventists in Europe* (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 1997), 96–97.

<sup>98</sup> GCO, June 5, 1970, Minutes 70-299; copy of statement encl. not enumerated, between pp. 299-300.

<sup>99</sup> *Pace* Watts, “Outline history”, p. 340.

1 in the Church”.<sup>100</sup> But while “Women in the Church” was item no. 18 on the agenda of the NAD  
 2 Union Presidents and Officers meeting in January and February 1971, it was one of a few items that  
 3 were never actually dealt with. Eventually, though, in April 1971, the GC Officers voted: “To request  
 4 the Biblical Research Committee to arrange for studies in the following areas: 1. Ecology, 2. The  
 5 place of women in the Church, 3. The theology of the Church’s mission, 4. The priesthood of the  
 6 member.”<sup>101</sup> There is no report of any response.

7 One suspects that one of the issues rolled up in that omnibus item, “Women in the Church”, was  
 8 the issue of ordination. But in 1970 and 1971 it seems that a number of committees based in and  
 9 around the General Conference and North American Division were playing pass the parcel with the  
 10 issue. Matters eventually came to a head, however, in 1972, when the GC Officers received a request  
 11 from an unusual quarter.

12 For it was a request from the Far East Division (rather than a European division) that seems to  
 13 have been a spark for Mohaven in 1973. In June 1972, the Officers’ Meeting discussed the following:

14 The Far Eastern Division has requested counsel about ordaining women. The Biblical Research  
 15 Committee has been assigned the task of studying “the place of women in the Church”. It is believed  
 16 that the Far Eastern Division’s request should be referred to the Biblical Research Committee for  
 17 study and counsel in connection with its study of the subject.

18 Agreed, To refer the Far Eastern Division request about ordaining women to the Biblical  
 19 Research Committee. (J R Spangler will provide material on the subject for A H Roth to relay to the  
 20 Chairman and Secretary of the Biblical Research Committee.)<sup>102</sup>

21 How and why this request came from the Far East Division is a subject for ongoing research. But  
 22 with it, a corner had been turned. Significantly, later that summer, the Officers: “Agreed, To name a  
 23 special Officers *Ad Hoc* Study Committee to consider: Making use of capable S D A [*sic*] women in  
 24 the Church.” This ad hoc committee comprised three members: the General Conference president,  
 25 secretary, and treasurer.<sup>103</sup> The nettle, finally, was being well and truly grasped. But in some ways,  
 26 we are grasping it still.

## 30 VI. CONCLUSION

33 We have taken the story up to 1972. A detailed analysis of events since then must await another  
 34 occasion. However, in conclusion, I want to highlight two particular weaknesses in the official study

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<sup>100</sup> Officers and Union Presidents, Oct. 7, 1970, in GCO Minutes, 70–490. Thus, the claim that a study committee was set up by the GC to study women’s ordination in 1970 (Robert Jacobson, “General Conference Issues Unusual “Appeal” Regarding Women’s Ordination”, *Spectrum*, June 29, 2012: <http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/2012/06/29/general-conference-issues-unusual-appeal-regarding-womens-ordination#gctextcite3>) is simply incorrect. Similarly inaccurate is the claim of Laurel Damsteegt (“Pushing the brethren”, *Adventists Affirm*, 12:3 (Fall 1998): 24) that “Various committees were appointed” between 1968 and 1973. No study committee was set up to consider women’s ordination between 1968 and 1973.

<sup>101</sup> GCO, Apr. 7, 1971, Minutes, 71–133.

<sup>102</sup> GCO, June 21, 1972, Minutes, 72–204.

<sup>103</sup> GCO, Aug. 30, 1972, Minutes, 72–300.

1 process of the 1970s and 1980s, and two lessons that can be learned as we go through this current  
 2 process. The first is that too much of the proceedings were kept secret for too long. I myself have  
 3 been angrily asked by church-members, “Why didn’t they release the Mohaven papers?” I have been  
 4 pleased to be able to reply that all are now available freely online to download;<sup>104</sup> but it did take  
 5 nearly forty years! And it is not a new question. In June 1975 the President’s Executive Advisory (or  
 6 PREXAD) considered whether or not to release those papers produced by members of the Biblical  
 7 Research Institute (BRI) for the meeting at Camp Mohaven, which had subsequently been revised.  
 8 The minutes note that: “Requests have been received from the field for the release of the papers.” It  
 9 is noteworthy that PREXAD approved a plan proposed by the BRI for publication of this selection of  
 10 the Mohaven papers.<sup>105</sup> However, not for nine more years would those papers actually be  
 11 published.<sup>106</sup>

12 There is an undoubted need for discretion with discussions as sensitive as those with which the  
 13 Theology of Ordination Study Committee is currently concerned; but discretion must not blur into  
 14 secretiveness. When discussions and papers are kept in the dark, wild fantasies and conspiracy  
 15 theories flourish. Our proceedings should be as transparent as reasonably possible, for that is the  
 16 best way to avoid destructive suspicions and speculations—these tend to wilt and fade in the light. I  
 17 realize there is a difficult line to tread, but it does not hurt to look critically at ourselves and our  
 18 processes.

19 The second weakness of past study processes is that all those committees did not do justice to  
 20 the theological question that was at stake and did not reflect the global nature of the Seventh-day  
 21 Adventist Church. This Committee is the first time that the worldwide Church has explored the  
 22 theology of ordination. The three-man committee in 1968 considered the “Theology of ordination  
 23 of women”.<sup>107</sup> Starting in 1973, in a sixteen-year span from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, five  
 24 special committees or commissions considered the “role of women in the Church”<sup>108</sup>—a remit that  
 25 in practice largely, though not wholly, meant whether or not women should be ordained. None of  
 26 these was given the task of establishing the fundamental question of what ordination means, as is  
 27 the case with this Committee.

28 Furthermore, none of the previous study committees or commissions operated as part of a  
 29 global process—the GC seems to have requested, in 1972 or 1973, in the run-up to the Mohaven  
 30 meeting, that Divisions submit papers setting out theological or Biblical perspectives on the role of  
 31 women. However, only two such papers survive, both submitted by the Australasian Division.<sup>109</sup> It  
 32 is difficult to know whether it submitted other papers, or whether many, or any, other divisions  
 33 submitted papers. Furthermore, all of the members of the committee that met at Mohaven were  
 34 based in North America. Some members, like Gordon Hyde and Gerhard Hasel, had been born in  
 35 Europe but had spent virtually all their professional pastoral and scholarly careers in the United

<sup>104</sup> At <http://www.adventistarchives.org/1973-5-mohaven>.

<sup>105</sup> PREXAD, June 28, 1977, Minutes, 77–55.

<sup>106</sup> Biblical Research Institute Committee, *Symposium on the role of women in the church* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1984).

<sup>107</sup> GCO, Apr. 8, 1968, Minutes 68–183.

<sup>108</sup> They met in 1973, 1975, 1985, 1988, and 1989: see <http://www.adventistarchives.org/committees-on-the-role-of-women>.

<sup>109</sup> Papers by A. S. Jorgenson and D. Ford, GC Ar., RG AU 1, MSS 4323 and 4324; Australasian Division Committee, meeting of Nov. 29, 1973, minutes in GC Ar., RG AU 1, Box 6578, fld. “Minutes November-December, 1973”, p. 1096.

1 States.<sup>110</sup> Church leaders took steps to ensure the committee had African–American representation,  
2 yet there was no representation from the rest of the world.<sup>111</sup> It is unsurprising that its  
3 recommendations failed to win the support of leaders from outside North America at subsequent  
4 annual councils. As for the two “Role of Women Commissions” of 1988 and 1989, they had a wider  
5 global representation, and every Division nominated representatives to the 1898 Commission, as is  
6 the case with the current committee.<sup>112</sup> However, the 1988–89 deliberations were not part of a  
7 global study process involving study within each of the divisions, as well as “at the top”.

8 Thus, even though one of the comments one hears most often about this Committee’s work  
9 is “Why do we need another committee? Why does the issue need more study?”, actually what we  
10 are doing is unique. We face an extraordinary challenge. But we also have an unusual opportunity. I  
11 pray that we are open to cooperating with the Holy Spirit, to make the most of it.

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<sup>110</sup> Gordon Hyde, biographical file, GC Ar., RG 63, box 6929. C. Mervyn Maxwell, “Life sketch: Gerhard F. Hasel, 1935–1994”, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 34 (1996): 165–68.

<sup>111</sup> See PREXAD, July 17, 1973, Minutes, 73–74; GCC, July 19, 1973, Minutes, 73–1593.

<sup>112</sup> Digital copies of lists of participants are available online: <http://www.adventistarchives.org/participants-and-discussion-questions.pdf> (1988) and <http://www.adventistarchives.org/participants-in-the-commission-on-the-role-of-women.pdf> (1989).

## APPENDIX

### Women licentiates and union, conference and mission officers, 1883-1922

Year	Total Licentiates	Total Women	Percentage Women	Total Conference Officers	Total Women	Percentage Women
1883	...	...	...	82	6	7.32%
1884	130	6	4.62%	76	4	5.26%
1885	130	4	3.08%	76	5	6.58%
1886	160	5	3.13%	80	3	3.75%
1887	265	5	1.89%	84	4	4.76%
1888	190	7	3.68%	84	8	9.52%
1889	179	4	2.23%	95	7	7.37%
1890	166	2	1.20%	97	8	8.25%
1891	182	2	1.10%	101	5	4.95%
1892	181	2	1.10%	100	9	9.00%
1893	162	3	1.85%	99	7	7.07%
1894	210	3	1.43%	112	10	8.93%
1895	274	4	1.46%	131	9	6.87%
1896	264	3	1.14%	148	14	9.46%
1897	274	3	1.09%	143	14	9.79%
1898	297	4	1.35%	152	21	13.82%
1899	365	6	1.64%	162	22	13.58%
1900	343	5	1.46%	163	21	12.88%
1901	333	5	1.50%	206	18	8.74%
1902	306	6	1.96%	265	31	11.70%
1903	NO DIRECTORY	NO DIRECTORY		NO DIRECTORY	NO DIRECTORY	
1904	338	8	2.37%	291	27	9.28%
1905	307	8	2.61%	290	32	11.03%
1906	351	8	2.28%	311	36	11.58%
1907	405	4	0.99%	327	35	10.70%
1908	407	4	0.98%	350	40	11.43%
1909	441	6	1.36%	368	38	10.33%
1910	445	7	1.57%	381	43	11.29%
1911	459	6	1.31%	429	49	11.42%
1912	482	4	0.83%	458	42	9.17%
1913	502	9	1.79%	524	44	8.40%
1914	483	4	0.83%	539	41	7.61%
1915	469	4	0.85%	563	41	7.28%
1916	484	4	0.83%	578	40	6.92%
1917	529	10	1.89%	582	39	6.70%
1918	647	8	1.24%	560	36	6.43%
1919	887	5	0.56%	560	40	7.14%
1920	930	7	0.75%	523	14	2.68%
1921	931	7	0.75%	580	18	3.10%
1922	916	7	0.76%	623	40	6.42%
	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>5.2368</b>	<b>1.62%</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>8.42%</b>
	<b>MIN</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.56%</b>	<b>MIN</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.68%</b>
	<b>MAX</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4.62%</b>	<b>MAX</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>13.82%</b>
	<b>MEDIAN</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.39%</b>	<b>MEDIAN</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>8.40%</b>