

WOMEN IN MINISTRY: WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?

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1 The papers that have been presented by members of this committee, have made it obvious
2 that division on the issue that has brought us together has grown wider. That awareness was
3 verbalized by the question posed, on the last day of the July 2013 TOSC meeting, concerning the
4 future.

5 In the light of that reality, the paper presented by Dr. Nicholas Miller makes an important
6 observation: “We need to carefully understand our [SDA] complementarian roots, and affirm
7 women’s ministry and leadership, even as we look for biblically appropriate and faithful ways to
8 do so. A defense of the patriarchal status quo, as the history of the reformed churches shows, will
9 be an inadequate, and even harmful, response to the present crisis over gender and leadership in
10 our church.”¹ I concur, in that a negative decision by itself would not be an adequate or even
11 appropriate action. However, Miller also observes that “groups with similar roots to Adventism
12 have not found a purely egalitarian approach to issues of gender and leadership to be a
13 church-growth enhancer.”²

14 15 **Part One: What We Should Not Do**

16
17 In spite of the 1990 and 1995 actions of the General Conference in session, the issue of the
18 ordination of women is still before the church. But now, recent events have revealed that the
19 issue threatens the unity of the remnant church.³

20 The delegates at the 1990 and 1995 GC sessions opted, by significant majorities, to
21 continue ordaining only men because they were convinced that any change would represent a
22 radical departure from the biblical model of church organization and practice. Furthermore, they
23 recognized that the underlying issue is how the Bible is read, interpreted, and understood.

24 The deciding factor in my transition from the Lutheran to the Adventist church was
25 confidence in its determination to stay true to the Bible. Especially in light of the fact that my
26 former church was gradually abandoning *sola scriptura*. The plea I heard over and over again
27 during that transition process, was to follow the Bible. Ellen G. White, writing about the spiritual
28 leadership of the church of God says:

29
30 The same principles of piety and justice that were to guide the rulers among God’s people
31 in the time of Moses and of David, were also to be followed by those given the oversight of
32 the newly organized church of God in the gospel dispensation. In the work of setting things
33 in order in all the churches, and ordaining suitable *men* to act as officers, the apostles held
34 to the high standards of leadership outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures. They
35 maintained that *he* who is called to stand in a position of leading responsibility in the

¹*The Ordination of Women in the American Churches*, pp. 23-24.

²*Ibid*, p.30.

³Specifically the actions of the Columbia Union Conference, the Pacific Union Conference, the Northern German Union Conference, and the Netherlands Union Conference, to ordain candidates for ministry without regard to gender, together with the recent action by the Southeastern California Conference in nominating and electing a woman as conference president in spite of pleas from leadership not to go ahead.

1 church 'must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not
2 given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good
3 men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that
4 he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.' Titus
5 1:7-9.⁴
6

7 Why did Ellen White use masculine terminology when she speaks of "those given the
8 oversight of the newly organized church of God"? Was she mistaken, simply reflecting the culture
9 of her time? Did she merely use generic terminology, common in her day? Or was she faithful to
10 the inspired Word of God, and to her own principles of interpretation? Such as: 1-Take "the Bible
11 as it reads,"⁵ 2-Focus on the Bible's "plain statements,"⁶ and 3-Explain the language of the Bible
12 "according to its obvious meaning"⁷? Principles easy to understand and apply by any person who
13 believes the Bible is the Word of God, reads it in faith, trusts its counsel, seeks to understand it, and
14 is determined to live by its truth.

15 Thank God for Johann Gutenberg, who published the first book printed in Europe. That
16 event is noteworthy because for the first time the Bible was accessible to anyone who could read.
17 By the providence of God the reading and understanding of the Bible was taken out of the hands of
18 the ecclesiastical elite and put in the hands of believers everywhere leading, ultimately, to the
19 Protestant Reformation a century later. Which brings to mind a comment Luther once made, to the
20 effect that "a farmer with the Bible in his hands has more wisdom than all the bishops of the church
21 together." One does not need advanced academic degrees, or training in the biblical languages, to
22 use Ellen White's three principles and come to valid conclusions.
23

24 Crucial for the issue of ordination to the office of elder are the New Testament passages of
25 Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7⁸, which, by applying Mrs. White's principles, are easily

⁴*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 95. (Emphasis mine.)

⁵"The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed....If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error." (GC:88).

⁶"We must not be influenced from the truth as it is in Jesus, because great and professedly good men urge their ideas above the plain statements of the word of God." (RH, July 17, 1888) "Men ignore the plain statements of the Bible to follow their own perverted reason. Priding themselves on their intellectual attainments, they overlook the simplicity of truth; they forsake the fountain of living waters to drink of the poisonous stream of error." (RH, January 27, 1885)

⁷"The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning." (GC:598)

⁸Scriptural quotes are from the *English Standard Version, 2001*, unless otherwise noted. The Preface to the ESV states, with respect to gender language: "In the area of gender language, the goal of the ESV is to render literally what is in the original. For example, 'anyone' replaces 'any man' where there is no word corresponding to 'man' in the original languages, and 'people' rather than 'men' is regularly used where the original languages refer to both men and women. But the words 'man' and 'men' are retained where a male meaning component is part of the original Greek or

1 understood. At the heart of these passages are the words “husband of one wife.” The only way the
2 obvious meaning of these passages can be circumvented, is to try to convince the church that the
3 language does not mean what it says.

4 Notice first the plain statements of Paul in Titus 1:7-9, the text upon which Ellen White
5 bases what she says about “the work of setting things in order in all the churches” by “ordaining
6 suitable *men* to act as officers.”

7
8 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint
9 elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one
10 wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or
11 insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not
12 be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a
13 lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the
14 trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and
15 also to rebuke those who contradict it.

16
17 Paul says that the reason he left Titus on the island of Crete was “so that you might put
18 what remained [to do] in order, and appoint elders [overseers] in every town as I directed you.” We
19 could assume that the term “elders” refers to an older person, male or female, who was already
20 recognized as one with authority among the believers, except for the plain statement that refers to
21 “elders” as masculine, that an “elder” [spiritual leader] is to be “the husband of one wife” (or “man
22 of one woman”). What is the obvious meaning of the language? First, the elder is to be a male.
23 Second, he is to be married to a woman not another man, and to only one woman. “Husband of one
24 wife” is not an idiomatic expression. *The Clear Word* paraphrase is accurate in its rendering: “An
25 elder must be someone who has a blameless reputation and is faithful to one wife. His children
26 should be Christians, not wild and rebellious.” The reference to “one wife” and “his” children
27 make it obvious that “an elder” must be “someone” who is a male.

28 On the basis of the plain statement of Titus 1:6 it is obvious that the reference is to a man.
29 Furthermore, it does not mean “man of one man,” or “man of one spouse,” or “spouse of one
30 spouse.” The spiritual leader, overseer/elder, “in every town” is to be a man who upholds God’s
31 standards for the institution of marriage. That’s not complicated or difficult to understand. An
32 elder is a man who “must hold firm to the trustworthy word...” and “must” (imperative) be faithful
33 to, hold to, and teach the Word of God. Without fear or compromise. His ministry rests on the
34 authority of the Bible and the Bible alone, not tradition or the demands of culture at any time or
35 place. That is the obvious contextual meaning of Paul’s language.

36
37 Ellen White is faithful to her own principles of interpretation and understanding of this
38 text, as well as to the biblical trajectory, when she says: “In the work of setting things in order in all

Hebrew....The inclusive use of the generic ‘he’ has also been regularly retained, because this is consistent with similar usage in the original languages and because an essentially literal translation would be impossible without it. Similarly, where God and man are compared or contrasted in the original, the ESV retains the generic use of ‘man’ as the clearest way to express the contrast within the framework of essentially literal translation. In each case the objective has been transparency to the original text, allowing the reader to understand the original on its own terms rather than on the terms of our present-day culture.”

1 the churches, and ordaining suitable *men* to act as officers, the apostles held to the high standards
2 of leadership outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures.” She took “the Bible as it reads,” focused
3 on Paul’s “plain statements” to Titus, and drew a conclusion based on the “obvious meaning” of
4 the language. Did she, or did she not, present truth in her understanding of Titus 1:5-9? Was she
5 right or wrong? Now, using her principles of interpretation, let’s look at 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

6
7 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble
8 task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife,
9 sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not
10 violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own
11 household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not
12 know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not
13 be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the
14 condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he
15 may not fall into disgrace. Into a snare of the devil.

16
17 The text uses the Greek term *episkopos*, as in Titus 1:7, translated “overseer” in the ESV
18 and “bishop” in the KJV and the RSV.

19 It is linguistically accurate to say that the pronouns in this text could either be translated
20 “he” or “she.” But only if they were translated without reference to the context. When the whole
21 passage is taken into account, in order to be accurate and not mislead the reader, the translator must
22 use masculine pronouns. Why? The key is found in vs 2, again in the phrase “the husband of one
23 wife.” Whether it is translated “husband of one wife,” or “husband of but one wife,” or “husband
24 by the side of one wife,” or “of-one-wife husband,” or “man of one woman,” the plain statement
25 refers to a *male*. The obvious meaning of the language is that the *office* of “overseer” is to be
26 occupied by a man.

27 The intent is clear. Therefore, every pronoun within the passage referring to that individual
28 must be translated and understood as referring to a male. By no stretch of the imagination could the
29 text be made to read “the wife of one husband” or “the person of one person.” When Paul speaks
30 here about the qualifications for one holding the office of “overseer” he is talking about a man not
31 a woman or a generic person. To conclude that Paul’s use of masculine language does not preclude
32 the possibility of women serving in that office is hypothetical, in that it defies logic by denying
33 Paul’s statement of fact.

34 The same holds true when it comes to the qualifications for deacons which follow in 1
35 Timothy 3:8-13. Again the plain statements of the context tell us whether or not “deacons” are
36 male or female. Verse 11 says “their wives likewise must be dignified.” Verse 12 says “Let
37 deacons each be the husband of one wife.” The obvious meaning of the language is that deacons
38 are men. Therefore, just as there is no such thing as a female “deacon,” there is no such thing as a
39 female “elder.”

40 In his instructions to Timothy and Titus concerning the organization of congregations, was
41 Paul simply reflecting the culture of the times? Expressing his personal opinion? Was he being a
42 male chauvinist? Or was he, instead, exercising his apostolic authority? He writes what he says
43 about male-female role relationships in the church (1 Timothy 3:15), “so that...you may know how
44 one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and
45 buttress of truth.” He appeals to the order of creation, on the fact that (1 Timothy 2:13) “Adam was

1 formed first, then Eve...” affirming the male headship principle established by God at creation. The
2 order of creation is the apostle’s *reason* why men are given the primary role of spiritual leadership
3 in the church. What Paul writes is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, culture, of
4 either Paul’s time or our time, is not a trustworthy principle of Bible interpretation. Otherwise the
5 long-range impact on our preachers, teachers, evangelists, and ultimately our members is
6 frightening to contemplate. It would open wide the door to anything.

7 Do these Bible passages present us with what Paul *really* says? Did he really say what he
8 means and, furthermore, did he mean what he says? Is it clear or fuzzy? Does it require an “expert”
9 to unravel?

10 Now, let’s ask, on the basis of Ellen White’s principles of interpretation, do Titus 1 and 1
11 Timothy 3 reserve the spiritual leadership office for men? Any idea that Paul’s use of masculine
12 gender language in these passages does not exclude women from that office, means that the
13 language chosen by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is irrelevant, meaningless, and can
14 be ignored. Such a conclusion effectively throws the Apostle Paul, and Ellen White for that matter,
15 under the bus. Does the word MEN on a public bathroom door exclude women from entering, or is
16 it an invitation for anyone who feels like it to enter? The answer is obvious. Trying to convince the
17 church that Paul doesn’t really say what he says, or that he doesn’t really mean what he says, will
18 not contribute to the resolution of this issue. Numerous attempts have been made, in papers and
19 articles, to so convince the church. However, “Numberless words need not be put upon paper to
20 justify what speaks for itself and shines in its clearness. Truth is straight, plain, clear, and stands
21 out boldly in its own defense; but it is not so with error. It is so winding and twisting that it needs a
22 multitude of words to explain it in its crooked form.” (*Early Writings*, p. 96) Also, “Let the plain,
23 simple statements of the Word of God be food for the mind; this speculating upon ideas that are not
24 clearly presented there is dangerous business.” (*ISM*:181)

25 The apostle Paul made it clear that he was to be regarded as a *servant* of Christ and a
26 *steward* of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1-2), and that “it is required of stewards that they be
27 found trustworthy.” “I apply this to myself” he says (4:6), “for your benefit...that you may learn by
28 [from] us not to go beyond what is written.” A steward is one who cares for and protects, one who
29 can be trusted to stay true to the Word of God no matter the personal consequences (see 2 Cor.
30 11:24-28).

31 To ask if Paul really says that an elder is a man brings to mind the serpents question to Eve
32 (Gen. 3:1), “Did God actually [really] say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” Doubt
33 leads to disbelief and then to disobedience, which is Satan’s intended consequence. I fear that is
34 the danger we face now, and there are two examples of Bible doctrine crucial for Adventist
35 theology that underscore that danger, which we make so emphatically clear in our public
36 evangelism: The Sabbath, and the state of the dead. The Bible says that God sanctified the seventh
37 day (Gen 2:3), Saturday, not the first day, Sunday, or any other day of one’s own choosing. The
38 Bible says that the soul that sins shall die (Ezek. 18:20), that the dead know nothing (Eccl. 9:5),
39 and that believers are given immortality at the time of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:53). But Catholic
40 and evangelical scholars and ecclesiastics say, no, the Bible doesn’t really say that or mean what it
41 says. It either means something else, or the church has changed the obvious meaning.
42 Doubt-disbelief-disobedience. It becomes easy to disobey, then convince others to do the same.

43 The latest argument is that the ordination issue is not biblical/theological but

1 ecclesiastical,⁹ having to do with the practice of ministry. If that is all it is then divisions, unions,
2 conferences, and congregations, could operate under conflicting ecclesiologies. If the issue is just
3 ecclesiastical, what about the practice of baptism? Why not allow some unions to sprinkle babies if
4 it is culturally acceptable? So much for church unity! But ecclesiology cannot be divorced from
5 biblical doctrine and theology, because they are what determine and shape ecclesiology not the
6 other way around. So, to say that the issue has only to do with the “ecclesiastical practice of the
7 church” is a fig leaf behind which biblical truth is hidden. Furthermore, ecclesiastical unity cannot
8 be achieved or maintained if apostolic beliefs are disregarded or discarded (John 17:10-23).

9 “Since His ascension Christ has carried forward His work on the earth by chosen
10 ambassadors, through whom He speaks to the children of men and ministers to their needs. The
11 great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of *men* ordained by
12 God to act as His representatives.”¹⁰ Also, “Paul’s writings show that the gospel minister should
13 be an example of the truths that *he* teaches.” The whole context of chapter 34 in *The Acts of The*
14 *Apostles* (“A consecrated Ministry”), make it obvious that the language is not generic. It was
15 obvious to Ellen G. White that a he is a he, not a she. Neither the Scriptures nor the Spirit of
16 Prophecy are gender neutral.

17 Should the reasoning and arguments in favor of ordaining women as elders not be
18 challenged, how will texts such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (RSV) be interpreted in the future? “Do
19 you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived:
20 neither the [sexually] immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals will inherit the
21 kingdom of God.” Most proponents will passionately insist, and sincerely mean, that they would
22 never interpret texts such as this in ways that would support the approval of same-sex marriage, or
23 the ordination of practicing homosexuals. However, no confidence can be given to such assurance
24 because the contemporary history of some Protestant churches proves otherwise. The one has
25 inevitably led to the other. Throwing the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the hermeneutical
26 cliff will eventually produce the same result. The same arguments of gender neutralizing passages
27 used for the ordination of women as elders would eventually be used in support of gay marriage
28 and the ordination of homosexual clergy, because we would have already allowed for it
29 hermeneutically.

30 One of our prominent scholars has called for patience on the part of proponents. If that
31 implies waiting until opponents have all died, leaving leadership in the hands of proponents, the
32 obvious response would have to be that their generation too will eventually be followed by another
33 that will carry on where they left off and take things a step further. Having left behind what they
34 consider a more enlightened interpretation, the consequence would be inevitable. Furthermore,
35 toying with the idea that the issue would be resolved by simply eliminating the rite of ordination is
36 moot. To do so would not alter 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1.

37 If one has any ambitions concerning the interpretation and understanding of the Bible, it
38 should be to become a master of the obvious. We must not sell out to inclusiveness in language or
39 practice egalitarianism to the point where the church conforms to culture and our message and
40 mission is confused and derailed by a seemingly innocuous social cause. We would take a giant

⁹See the July 2012 *Visitor*, published by the Columbia Union.

¹⁰*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 360, 369. Emphasis mine.

1 step in the direction of the Seventh-day Adventist Church becoming just another liberal protestant
2 denomination.

3 A most revealing example being that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
4 (ELCA) in which the acceptance of the methods of biblical criticism has been followed by the
5 acceptance of evolution in the 1960's, and the ordination of women as pastors about twenty years
6 ago. The inevitable result of that trajectory was reached in 2009 when the ELCA church
7 assembly voted, as the outcome of a lengthy "sociological" study of human sexuality (not a
8 biblical study!), to ordain practicing homosexual clergy and to approve of same-sex marriage.
9 Such an example makes it obvious that the issues of evolution, homosexuality, and the ordination
10 of women are hermeneutically linked.

11 Finally, this statement that made such a powerful impression during my transition from the
12 Lutheran to the Adventist church, and that throws light on the crisis we are in:

13
14 Men in this age of the world act as if they are at liberty to question the words of the Infinite,
15 to review His decisions and statutes, endorsing, revising, reshaping, and annulling, at their
16 pleasure. If they cannot misconstrue, misinterpret, or alter God's plain decision, or bend it
17 to please the multitude and themselves, they break it. We are never safe when we are
18 guided by human opinions; but we are safe when we are guided by a 'Thus saith the Lord.'
19 We cannot trust the salvation of our souls to any lower standard than the decision of an
20 infallible Judge. Those who make God their guide, and His word their counselor, follow
21 the lamp of life. God's living oracles guide their feet in straight paths. Those who are thus
22 led do not dare judge the word of God, but ever hold that His word judges them. They get
23 their faith and their religion from his word.¹¹

24
25 Here is the method mandated for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in resolving
26 dissension in such a way that it can move forward unitedly and in harmony:

27
28 The order [ecclesiastical] that was maintained in the early Christian church made it
29 possible for them to move forward solidly as a well-disciplined army clad with the armor of
30 God. The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members
31 of one body; all moved in concert and in harmony with one another. When dissension arose
32 in a local church, as later it did arise in Antioch and elsewhere, and the believers were
33 unable to come to an agreement among themselves, such matters were not permitted to
34 create a division in the church, but were referred to a general council of the entire body of
35 believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the
36 apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility. Thus the efforts of Satan to attack
37 the church in isolated places were met by concerted action on the part of all, and the plans
38 of the enemy to disrupt and destroy were thwarted. God is not the author of confusion, but
39 of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." 1 Corinthians 14:33. He requires that order
40 and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of
41 old. He desires His work to be carried forward with thoroughness and exactness so that He
42 may place upon it the seal of His approval. Christian is to be united with Christian, church

¹¹Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 21, 1899, p. 113.

1 with church, the human instrumentality cooperating with the divine, every agency
2 subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all combined in giving to the world the good tidings of
3 the grace of God.¹²
4

5 The issue of whether or not to ordain women to the office of overseer/elder has become a
6 fatal distraction. The result is a house divided. There has to be a better way to resolve the conflict
7 and dissension. A way that is true both to the Bible, and to the fact that God is calling women to
8 ministry.
9

10 **Part Two:** 11 **What We Should Do** 12

13 Every summer at the Michigan camp meeting I enjoy the privilege, as a minister of the
14 Seventh-day Adventist Church, of participating in the solemn ritual of inclusion called ordination.
15 The annual experience leaves me with mixed emotions. I rejoice with the men who are being set
16 apart for ministry, and I feel sad when a friend of mine quietly and unobtrusively joins us for the
17 ritual, even though she herself has never been so recognized. I have told her of my sadness, and
18 also of the fact that I find it impossible to change my point-of-view respecting biblical authority
19 and interpretation as they relate to ordination, as delineated above.¹³ However, over the years I
20 have spent considerable time in prayer and thought regarding women in ministry, about my
21 conflicting feelings, and about the crisis the church now faces. What follows is the result of that
22 process.

23 Our long argument over the issue of whether or not women should be ordained as *elders*
24 has become wearisome. The long debate has gotten us nowhere in spite of General Conference
25 actions (1990 and 1995). The issue remains unresolved, and the sometimes acrimonious debate
26 continues. At times we sound like politicians taken over by a spirit of anger, meanness, and
27 partisanship.

28 The debate has gone on long enough. The issue must be resolved and finally put to rest,
29 because it is threatening the unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and does not serve the
30 interest of our mission. Failure to reach a permanent solution has put our church in danger of
31 fragmentation at a time when unity is crucial on the threshold of the return of Jesus and what is
32 destined to precede it. We cannot remain oblivious to the terrible risk we are taking with that unity.
33 As long as we remain divided and engaged in bitter dissension, the cause to which we have
34 dedicated our lives is in grave jeopardy. Ellen White has perceptively warned us concerning the
35 devastation to reputation and witness caused by such dissension:
36

37 But how often do professed Christians, by their lack of self-control, open the door to the
38 adversary of souls! Divisions and even bitter dissensions which would disgrace any

¹²*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 95-96.

¹³For a more extensive treatment, see my book *The Tip of an Iceberg* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm and Pointer Publications, 1994).

1 worldly community, are common in the churches, because there is so little effort to control
2 wrong feelings, and to repress every word that Satan can take advantage of. As soon as an
3 alienation of feeling arises, the matter is spread before Satan for his inspection, and the
4 opportunity given for him to use his serpentlike wisdom and skill in dividing and
5 destroying the church. *There is great loss in every dissension.* Personal friends of both
6 parties take sides with their respective favorites and thus the breach is widened. A house
7 divided against itself cannot stand. Criminations and recriminations are engendered and
8 multiplied. Satan and his angels are actively at work to secure a harvest from seed thus
9 sown. Worldlings look on, and jeeringly exclaim, “Behold how these Christians hate one
10 another! If this is religion, we do not want it.” And they look upon themselves and their
11 irreligious characters with great satisfaction. Thus they are confirmed in their impenitence,
12 and Satan exults at his success.¹⁴
13

14 A solution such as entities of the church taking unilateral action, or looking to see where
15 the most votes are, is unworthy of our claims to biblical fidelity. Unilateral decisions to push ahead
16 in spite of General Conference actions and recommendations, constitute a major event destructive
17 of the unity of the remnant church. It establishes a dangerous precedent that opens the door for any
18 union or conference anywhere in the world to take any action though it be contrary to either
19 doctrine or policy. Would such entities tolerate those whose consciences prohibit support of such
20 actions? Should such unilateral action be allowed to stand, we would no longer be able to use the
21 term “world church” in reference to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it would no longer be
22 descriptive of reality.

23 It is not a matter of which view, or segment of the church, has the most votes. It is a matter
24 of all of us submitting to the will of God revealed in His Word. All of us in ministry are required to
25 submit to the will and authority of the God who called us and whose ministry is defined by the
26 Scriptures and affirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy.

27 Any solution that would ignore the biblical principle of headship, as well as the plain
28 Bible facts that there were no female priests in Old Testament times, that there is no direct biblical
29 evidence that Jesus appointed any female apostles¹⁵ or that female elders were appointed in the
30 early church, is simply untenable for a church that claims to be the extension of the Reformation in
31 an uncompromising stand on *sola scriptura*.

32 The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been confronted with major issues in its past
33 history, which, though contentious at times, were resolved in ways that did not weaken but

¹⁴ *Selected Messages* 1:123 Emphasis supplied.

¹⁵ It is comforting to proponents of women’s ordination to conclude that the “Junia” mentioned in Romans, 16:7 was a female apostle, but that is based on conjecture and speculation not on biblical evidence and fact. If she was an apostle, who appointed her? New Testament evidence reveals that Jesus appointed apostles, the initial twelve and later Paul, not the church. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1957 edition) v.6, p. 650, opines that “Andronicus and Junia may have been incarcerated with Paul during one of his numerous imprisonments...although such is not the necessary interpretation of the passage.” With reference to the phrase “of note among the apostles” (KJV), or “they are well known to the apostles” (ESV), the *Commentary* adds that “The meaning may be either that they were well known by the apostles or that they themselves were distinguished apostles.” The term “may” makes it clear that there is no definitive evidence upon which to base a reliable conclusion.

1 ultimately strengthened its witness. Ways that produced satisfying resolution and harmony. In
2 those struggles two sources were always turned to for truth and guidance: the Bible and the Spirit
3 of Prophecy.

4 If we really believe, as we so enthusiastically claim, in the authenticity and reliability of the
5 Spirit of Prophecy, the key to resolution lies right before our eyes. The Spirit of Prophecy can
6 bring an end to debate and promote the unity so badly needed to complete our mission at such a
7 critical and momentous time in world history. Let us prayerfully allow the purpose of the Spirit of
8 Prophecy as divine guidance for the remnant church, to guide us now.

9 I still believe to be true and right that, “The writings of Ellen G. White do not constitute a
10 barricade across the road of Biblical studies and theological scholarship. Rather, they constitute a
11 fence along both sides of the road of such inquiry to protect the church from veering away from the
12 straight and narrow of God’s revelation. That purpose of her work must always be maintained by
13 Adventists.”¹⁶ Those writings contain advice and counsel given to the church by one whose
14 character and Christian experience was permeated by deep and widespread knowledge of the
15 Scriptures. That fact is indisputable. Ellen White’s most pertinent statements bearing on the issue
16 of women in ministry are these:

17
18 Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should
19 be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the
20 poor. They should be set apart to do this work by *laying on of hands*. In some cases they
21 will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted
22 women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the
23 church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to
24 branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul
25 discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly,
26 to help forward this grand work. Place the burdens upon men and women of the church,
27 that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand
28 of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness.¹⁷

29
30 You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that
31 they are essential to carry the truth into families. Their work is just the work that must be
32 done. In many respects a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot.
33 The cause would suffer great loss without this kind of labor. Again and again the Lord has
34 shown me that women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which He has
35 appointed them as are men.¹⁸

¹⁶C. Raymond Holmes, *Stranger In My Home* (Berrien Springs, MI: Pointer Publications, 1987, Revised and Enlarged edition), p. 89. (Originally published by Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, TN, 1974.)

¹⁷*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 9, 1895, p. 434. Apparently this was construed as referring to deaconesses, as one month after its publication a number of deaconesses were ordained in Australia. In spite of the fact that Mrs. White made no explicit mention of deaconesses in her article. The current edition of the Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* indicates that elected deaconesses are to be recognized by a “suitable service of induction.”

¹⁸Manuscript Release #330 in *Manuscript Releases*, vol.5, p. 325.

1
2 The Lord has a work for women as well as for men.... The Saviour will reflect upon these
3 self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that
4 exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that
5 reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach.
6 Their labor is needed.¹⁹
7

8 There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do
9 more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God.²⁰
10

11 The significance and value of statements such as these is that they identify the specific kind
12 of ministry to which women are called, and for which they are to be set apart by the “laying on of
13 hands.”

14 Based on the above, three questions are posed: 1- Is God calling women to ministry? Yes!
15 2- Is God calling women to the identical office of ministry to which He calls men? No! While the
16 role of women in ministry is unique and “essential,” it is different in function than that of men in
17 that it does not include the headship office and supervising responsibility of elder. 3- To what
18 specific ministry has God called and “appointed” women? Ellen White’s description of this
19 ministry is best understood as pastoral care ministry. It is a work that “reaches the inner life,”
20 pointing individuals (children, young people, and adults, who are poor in spirit) to the Savior, a
21 work for which they are uniquely qualified. In doing this work, God gives them “a power that
22 exceeds that of men.” Power for the specific ministry to which God calls them and for which they
23 are especially qualified.

24 We would not have the conflict we continue to experience if women that God has called to
25 ministry were trained for the ministry for which they are qualified and gifted by the Holy Spirit. As
26 long as women in ministry are trained for the same office and role for which men are trained, they
27 can be expected to claim the same outcome. It goes without saying that men, called and trained for
28 the office of overseer/elder, would have to submit to some specialized training for that ministry
29 which would prepare them to work with women in an appropriate professional relationship.

30 We do the women God is calling to ministry a terrible disservice as long as we do not
31 provide training for the specific ministry to which God is calling them. It is our failure to provide
32 such training that constitutes unfairness and injustice. After all, we are brothers and sisters in the
33 faith, allies in a most noble mission, and to provide such training for women would result in the
34 recognition of their unique spiritual gifts for ministry, and should alleviate feelings of repression.
35 It would also remove animosity from our hearts and accusations from our lips, that have made our
36 words so hurtful. Above all, it would preserve the unity of the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist
37 Church when it is most needed. There should be no hesitation to recognize the women God has
38 called to do this unique work, and for which they would be trained, by the “laying on of hands.”

¹⁹*Evangelism*, p. 464-465.

²⁰*Evangelism*, p. 472.

1 At the same time, based on the above Spirit of Prophecy counsel, understanding that though
2 they are “set apart to this work by the laying on of hands,” they are not being set apart for spiritual
3 headship ministry as *elders*. When Ellen White writes about ordination, which includes the “laying
4 on of hands,” she states clearly that it is a “form of designation to an *appointed office*, and a
5 recognition of one’s authority *in that office*.” That is to say, in a specific office and in none other.
6 Furthermore, the ritual of laying on of hands constitutes the prayer of the “ministers of the church”
7 asking God to “bestow His blessing” upon those chosen for “*the specific work* to which they had
8 been appointed.” It is to a “definite line of service.”²¹ With such an official and corporate
9 understanding I would be one of the first in line to participate in such a ritual of inclusion for the
10 women God calls to that specific ministry!

11 Could this be part of the revival and reformation that is being prayed for so earnestly at this
12 time throughout the world church? This resolution would preserve Ellen White’s principles of
13 Bible interpretation, and protect the church from the tragic consequences suffered by Protestant
14 churches representing the Anglican/Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Lutheran traditions. Of course
15 this would require careful thought and planning, some hard work, and some expense. Worthwhile
16 things usually do, but we have the will and the resources necessary to meet the challenge and the
17 opportunity.

18 Let us allow the Spirit of Prophecy to function as the fence on both sides of the road,
19 protecting us from veering either to the extreme left or the extreme right, but staying in the center.
20 Our acceptance of the Spirit of Prophecy counsel respecting this issue is the ultimate test of our
21 widely published confession regarding its authenticity and prophetic authority. It is imperative that
22 we all submit to the direction and guidance we have been given, and recognize formally that the
23 ministry to which women are set apart by “laying on of hands” is *complementary* to, not identical
24 with, the ministry to which men are set apart. Recognizing also that in terms of ministry a prophet’s
25 authority, whether male or female, is *direct* from God; that the male minister’s authority is *derived*
26 from Christ who is the Head of the church and the “head of every man” (1 Cor. 11:3), and who
27 thereby has something to say about how the church and its ministry functions; and that the female
28 minister’s pastoral care role is *delegated* by those holding the office of overseer/elder exercising the
29 authority of their headship role. This trajectory preserves the biblical principle of headship,
30 understood by all concerned that headship is *not*, repeat *not*, a license for cruel domination or the
31 exercise of hierarchical power. It is rather a God-ordained responsibility for the exercise of
32 Christlike caring. Caring that demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22-23). While
33 “self-control” is one fruit of the Spirit, control over others is not.
34

35 It is imperative that the above Spirit of Prophecy counsel, based as it is on a comprehensive
36 knowledge of Scripture, inform and support our theology of ministry and the shaping of policy with
37 respect to training for, the practice of, and official inclusion in ministry. The Seventh-day Adventist
38 Church is obligated by Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy to move toward the establishment of
39 fully recognized positions in ministry for women. Clearly defined positions that would not
40 compromise biblical principles, and that would uphold the standards identified by the Spirit of
41 Prophecy.²² As Protestant Christians let us take the lead in this, and bear witness as to how to

²¹ *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 162.

²² It needs to be noted that while Mrs. White speaks of women laboring “in the gospel ministry,” she avoids

1 maintain the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* and remain faithful to the Word of God.

2 Ultimately the whole church must reach a corporate decision resulting in prevention of the
3 division and fragmentation that can only undermine mission. Furthermore, corporate biblical
4 theology and understanding must *precede* the process of preparing policy. Imperatively, policy
5 with respect to the official inclusion of women in ministry, must be carefully prepared so as to
6 preclude misunderstanding and/or misinterpretation. No loopholes! It must be a process that
7 harmonizes with the following counsel as the Holy Spirit gives wisdom to God’s remnant church in
8 its search for the right solution, and grace for changes of heart.

9
10 God has made His church on earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His
11 purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of
12 and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a
13 knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ’s body—is left in
14 darkness. In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in
15 order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others
16 whom He is leading out to advance His work. There have ever been in the church those who
17 are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that
18 independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in
19 himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem
20 the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in offices that God has appointed for the
21 leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power
22 which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises
23 the voice of God.²³

24
25 The next few years will be critical. We are part of what Elder Wilson has declared “will be
26 a very careful process.”²⁴ We must pray fervently for that process asking the Lord to protect it from
27 manipulation, and above all that His Spirit guide the whole church to a resolution that is true to
28 Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. A process protected from the idea that an increasingly
29 decadent and declining American and Western culture should be celebrated as the example for a
30 world church.

31 Captain John H. Kaelberer, former chaplain of the Atlantic Fleet USA, observes that “When
32 the secular rules the sacred, the Christian Church is derailed from its appointed work.”²⁵ Kaelberer
33 cites a study of the Barna Research Group which reports, “In denominations that ordain women,
34 only 15 percent subscribe to a biblical world view.”²⁶ In order to be genuinely “careful,” the study

the terms “minister” or “elder” with reference to their role in that ministry.

²³*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163-164.

²⁴*Adventist Review*, November 17, 2011, p. 10.

²⁵*The Not So Silent Merger* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing, 2004), p.28.

²⁶*Ibid*, p. 108.

1 of the theology of ordination should include research regarding the influences in those
2 denominations that produced such a drastic consequence.

3
4 If culture prevails it will result in the deChristianization of church structure, practice, and
5 institutions. It would take only one wrong decision to sever the Seventh-day Adventist link to *sola*
6 *scriptura*. However, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a world church which is, I believe,
7 determined to be what it has historically claimed to be in its evangelistic appeals, the remnant
8 church united in the elevation of Scripture not the celebration of, or capitulation to, culture.

9 Yes, we must sing in harmony. But in order to do so we must sing in unison, which means to
10 sing the same song in harmonious agreement with eyes unwaveringly fixed on the Director. No
11 choir can sing in harmony apart from unity. If each member, or segment such as the tenors or
12 sopranos, does not sing the same music the result is discord and disharmony. The unavoidable fact
13 is that harmony and unison, with respect to the ordination issue, can be achieved only if they are
14 built on a theology that does not run counter to biblical reality. The need is for a full and complete
15 biblical perspective of manhood and womanhood, as opposed to a social/cultural perspective,
16 which can then boldly and confidently be translated into ministerial policy and practice. If we are to
17 fearlessly proclaim the message that calls God's people to "come out of" apostate churches, we
18 had better be very careful that the church to which we call them is itself faithful to the Bible. What
19 price are we willing to pay to stay true to God's Word? The unpleasant fact is that any compromise
20 with Scripture, any capitulation to culture, any complacency in the face of such compromise or
21 capitulation, opens the door to apostasy. Furthermore, unity does not rest on sharing a common
22 mission but on sharing common beliefs.

23 The Seventh-day Adventist Church has an opportunity to be what it claims to be: Loyal to
24 its faith and tradition in which a major factor has been the trustworthy counsel of the Spirit of
25 Prophecy, and, above all, a champion of the Bible and the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*.

26 What should we do? Collectively we have some repenting to do. Taking the form, first,
27 because it contradicts the plain statements and obvious meaning of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9
28 and introduced practice prior to the resolution of the issue, of rescinding all previous actions
29 permitting the ordination of women as local elders. Also, the 1990 General Conference action
30 allowing women to perform most of the functions of an ordained minister in their local churches
31 should be carefully reconsidered. Second, in harmony with Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy,
32 because since that action our academic institutions have been training women for the same
33 ministerial role as men, a specialized track should be established that would prepare women for the
34 ministry to which God is calling them, for which they are uniquely qualified and gifted, and
35 recognizing that call by the "laying on of hands."

36 Finally, as the entire process hopefully moves the church toward resolution, we need to
37 keep in mind these plaintive words of Ellen White:

38
39 Why are we not more spiritually minded? Why do we so readily yield to the temptation to
40 bite and devour one another? It is because Satan is allowed to enter the heart with his
41 temptations... and hearts are grieved and wounded... Precious time is worse than wasted,
42 and minds are filled with sadness and distrust.²⁷

²⁷*The Southern Watchman*, June 18, 1903.

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ADDENDUM

The issue of the ordination of women has to be seen in the wider context of modern cultural trends which includes the feminization, and the subsequent emasculation, of Christianity. The breakdown, and corruption, of American culture began at the most fundamental level, that of the abdication of true masculinity and femininity which has devastated the institution of marriage and the traditional family structure. The most powerful contributor to the breakdown is the propaganda of the radical feminist and gay rights movements which has influenced the thinking, socially and politically, of American society since the 1960's. Tragically, the churches have been falling in line with the resultant cultural pressure and in many ways have become collaborators and even contributors.

Society itself is sick and needs to be healed by the transforming grace and power of God's truth. That will never happen if the church abandons its divine commission to "preach the word," to be "ready in season and out of season," to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching," and by doing so to fulfill its ministry. (2Timothy 4:2-5)

It is becoming apparent that modern cultural trends are having greater influence on Christian churches and theology than 2000 years of Christian consensus informed by Scripture and natural law. This is a form of antinomianism, a post-modern hermeneutic applied to the Bible. A major consequence is that it is becoming more and more difficult to tell the difference between right and wrong, truth and falsehood.

The polarity of the sexes is rooted in the order of creation. How does natural law, which God also created, fit into the issue? Is what the Bible teaches right because it is in the Bible, or is it in the Bible because it is right?

Moral laws, principles, standards for human life grounded in the way God created and ordered the world and human existence cannot be wiped away by appealing to the love of God. Nor by pious platitudes of American culture religion designed to assure constituents of faithfulness.