

WHY I CHANGED MY MIND ABOUT WOMEN'S ORDINATION

BRENT KING



“All animals are equal, but pigs are more equal.”
– George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

“Without confronting men’s sense of entitlement I don’t think we’ll ever understand why so many men resist gender equality.”
– Michael Kimmel, “Why Gender Equality Is Good For Everyone”

“As I have learned over many years, the problem in the church is not strong and gifted women. We need all those we can get, and were it not for them, many churches would have closed long ago. I remember so vividly meeting the babushkas—the grandmothers in the Moscow Baptist Church, who had stopped Stalin from closing the church by standing in the door and not letting his troops enter and close it down. Thank God for strong, gifted women in the church. No, the problem in the church is not strong women, but rather weak men who feel threatened by strong women, and have tried various means, even by dubious exegesis, to prohibit them from exercising their gifts and graces in the church.”
– Ben Witherington, “Why Arguments Against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical”

“Precious light is to shine forth from the Word of God, and let no one presume to dictate what shall or what shall not be brought before the people in the messages of enlightenment that He shall send, and so quench the Spirit of God.
Whatever may be his position of authority, no one has a right to shut away the light from the people. When a message comes in the name of the Lord to His people, no one may excuse himself from an investigation of its claims. No one can afford to stand back in an attitude of indifference and self-confidence, and say: “I know what is truth. I am satisfied with my position. I have set my stakes, and I will not be moved away from my position, whatever may come. I will not listen to the message of this messenger; for I know that it can not be truth.” It was from pursuing this very course that the popular churches were left in partial darkness, and that is why the messages of heaven have not reached them.”
– Ellen White, Selections From Testimonies Bearing on Sabbath School Work 65.1

“I wonder what it would be like if we committed the next five years not to headship theology, but to footship theology.”
– Alex Bryan

“You can’t hold back the dawn.”
– Gerald Winslow

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Many of my family, friends, and mentors strongly believe that women should not be ordained as pastors. This is the position I grew up with and held for most of my life. However, God used a compelling article by Ty Gibson to open my mind to the idea that I could be wrong. As I studied the issue further, as a result of its increased exposure because of the 2015 Seventh-day Adventist General Conference session, the mountain of evidence I discovered became so compelling that it led me to change my position.

I now believe that taking a hierarchical position to define our relationships within the church does not reflect God's character or His plan for us. Nor does it point us toward the truth of our destination in the world to come.

What follows are the ideas, themes, and reasoning that caused me to change my mind.

THE PROBLEM WITH ORDINATION

Ordination in the History of the Christian Church

One of the first things to alert me that there was something wrong with the all-male headship theology in the Seventh-day Adventist church was its origin. Something wasn't right, and the more I looked at it, the more I knew it. Basically, the trouble our church is having with women's ordination stands upon a deeper problem. Our method of ordination is not a biblical concept, but a post-biblical, papal concept. This is true or we wouldn't even be struggling with this issue in our church.

An understanding of how ordination evolved will devastate any ideas that Seventh-day Adventists can use it for God's glory in its traditional format. Hierarchical and sacramental principles of headship gradually transformed the apostolic Christian church into what it is today: the Catholic Church. We must reject these principles or the same thing will happen in our church. Dr. Darius Jankiewicz addresses this problem frankly:

If there were no such change [from a functional laying-on-of-hands that recognizes gifts given by the Spirit to a sacramental organization that invokes magical powers not already possessed] we would not be talking about women's ordination. I say to my students that women's ordination is a Catholic problem, not an Adventist problem. So we should not even be discussing this problem here in Adventism. (From a presentation given at the 2012 Women Clergy Conference)

How could we have missed this when it is right in front of us? It's the Catholic Church whose all male priesthood has been elevated to take the very place of God. It's the very church that the Seventh-day Adventists and many Protestant reformers believe to be the Antichrist that has incorporated such a system of hierarchy. This fact should raise red flags and cause bells and whistles to go off in our heads. Andrews University drafted a headship statement, "On the Unique Headship of Christ in the Church: A Statement of the Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary", that candidly calls out the origin and true nature of headship theology:

From the second century onward, post-Apostolic Christianity gradually implemented a system of church government that reflected Rome's conception of authority as the power to arbitrarily command and coerce obedience and replaced the headship of Christ with the headship of mere humans. This counterfeit system of church governance was (1) hierarchical, based on a chain of command with a monarchical bishop at the "head" of the Church, with complete and final control over its affairs; (2) sacramental, meaning that the spiritual life of believers, including their very salvation, depended on ordained clergymen; (3) elitist (i.e., sacerdotal), meaning that the rite of ordination (laying on of hands) infused the clergy with special powers; and (4) headship-oriented, meaning that those who received the rite of ordination were thereby married to their Church and thus took on "headship" roles in the Church in place of Christ the Head ("in persona Christi Capitis"; cf. Vicarius Filii Dei, "in the place of the Son of God").

This system of government has been implemented in various forms, amounting to the usurpation of Christ's headship in the Church by mere humans. (See [Appendix 3](#))

So through the years we have been conditioned to accept an unbiblical form of ordination. Even though the laying on of hands is a biblical concept, we receive our "commission from God Himself, and the ceremony of the laying on of hands adds no new grace or virtual qualification" (Ellen White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 161). It is simply human recognition of an existing spiritual calling, of a gift the Spirit has already given. Therefore, we must turn from the papal belief that ordination confers magical powers that one has not previously received from the Holy Spirit.

So how did this unbiblical method of ordination, the same threefold ordination we practice in the Seventh-day Adventist church, come about?

Papal Origins

Dr. Darius Jankiewicz, a theology professor at Andrew's University who has spent many years studying the history of Christian church structure, raises an important question:

Since historical research shows that the threefold ordination of pastor, elder, and deacon comes not from the laying-on-of-hands of the early church, but from the "ordinatio" of pagan Rome, blended into the church through the theology of Ignatius Loyola, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, and Cyprian of Carthage to elevate the status of church officials and increase the power of their institution, is it serving the Adventist church well? ("The Problem of Ordination: Lessons from Early Christian History")

He further asks,

Is the distinction between ordained clergy and un-ordained laity, as accepted and practiced within our denomination, in agreement with the biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers? Have we sufficiently freed ourselves from the shackles of sacramentalism bequeathed to us from other Christian churches? Have we truly understood the radical implications of Paul's teaching on the Body of Christ and His belief that 'to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it?' Ephesians 4:7, 11; Romans 12:6 (Ibid)

So this, he says, is the all-important question: Does the current way of understanding and practicing ministerial ordination continue to serve the mission of the church? (Ibid)

Ellen White Herself Raised A Red Flag On Ordination

Ellen White understood this problem better than we do:

At a later date, the rite of ordination by the laying-on-of-hands was greatly abused; *unwarrantable importance* was attached to the act, as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work. But in the setting apart of these two apostles, there is no record

indicating that any virtue was imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands. There is only the simple record of their ordination, and of the bearing that it had on their future work. (Ellen White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 162, emphasis mine)

An Inescapable Conclusion

Because of these things, it is no surprise that evangelist Ty Gibson has come to this same conclusion as Dr. Jankiewicz:

This present inclination among us to sharply distinguish clergy from laity and elevate the pastoral position with language of headship and privilege over other church members is decidedly papal. ("A Closer Look At Women's Ordination").

In their book, *Questions and Answers about Women's Ordination*, Martin Hanna and Cindy Tutsch concur:

As a prophetic movement, we need a clearer understanding of the nature of the Protestant message regarding the authority structure of the papacy, which in reality is the foundation for most theological objections against female participation in pastoral ministry.

After a thorough examination the history of ordination, I confess that I have come to the same conclusion.

Functional Missionary Movement (Horizontal) or Sacramental (Vertical)?

Martin Hanna and Cindy Tutsch comment on how this unbiblical form of ordination is affecting our church:

Women are hired as pastors because church leaders see their gifts and recognized their calling. The idea that a conference hires a woman to serve as pastor, assigns her to pastor a particular congregation, and pays her but does not recognize her as called and gifted by God, makes no sense at all. However, because there has not been a consensus in the church on what the Bible teaches about the ordination of women, the decision to not go forward was more pragmatic than biblical. The delay has also been influenced by the fact that in some places it would be regarded as highly unusual and possibly scandalous to recognize a woman with ordination.

This compromise, however, is not biblically consistent. As ordination is an act of recognition and confirmation, and it bestows no authority beyond the authority to do the job one is called to (see the example of Acts 13:1-3), there is no reason to withhold it.

If one is called and capable of serving a ministry, there is no biblical reason not to acknowledge it by the act of laying on of hands. The dividing line at the point of ordination comes from a wrong view of ordination, a medieval view that made

ordination a “sacrament,” which confers special virtue on the person ordained. (*Questions and Answers about Women's Ordination*)

Angel Rodriguez speaks to the same issue:

Ordination is not about headship. It is based on gifts, a divine call, the witness of the church, and a spirit of service to God and to others. An overemphasis on authority will distort the nature of ministry and will bring us too close to a type of ministry that is not supported by the New Testament but that is found in some Christian communities. Christ has to be our model. (“Evaluation of the Arguments Used by Those Opposing the Ordination of Women in Ministry”)

And Dr. Jankiewicz drives it home:

In horizontal (functional missionary movement), ordination is not an issue. In vertical (sacramental), it's a big issue. We must decide as a church whether we are primarily an organization with a mission, whether we subscribe to an institutional model where institution is primary, or whether we are a missionary movement with an organization that is suppose to get us somewhere.” (“The Problem of Ordination: Lessons from Early Christian History”)

There is safety in being a functional missionary movement, a fellowship of believers with Christ at the head, but if we follow the sacramental process of ordination, then we soon come to the Catholic teaching that there is no salvation outside the ministers of the Church and that God's will is revealed only through the clergy. In light of the recent actions of the General Conference it would be well for us to heed the warning of Dr. Jankiewicz:

In answering these questions, let the history of the organizational developments of the early church serve as a warning to us; for it did not take long for the persecuted church to become a persecuting church, with those who disagreed suffering much at the hands of the ordained clergy. This church, so enamored with its own institution and the protection of the powers of its clergy, ultimately lost its place in the divine scheme of things. There are no guarantees that history will not repeat itself again. (Ibid)

At the Root of the Problem

The papal origin of the ordination we practice in the Seventh-day Adventist church is at the root of our church's issue with ordaining women. Those against women's ordination want our church to imitate the male only leadership perspectives of the Catholic and Protestant churches that seek to replace the headship of Christ with mere humans. However, those in favor of women's ordination are rightly urging us to move away from the Roman Catholic interpretation of scripture that insists on a male only priesthood. We need to listen carefully to those who, like Dr. Jankiewicz, study history. History repeats itself and too easily the fate of the early Christian church could become our fate.

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FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #1 AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Mimicking the system of Rome does not serve our church well. Yet hierarchal errors in ordination take us far beyond distortions in the way we look at ministry because they strike to the very heart of our liberty in Christ. One of the biggest reasons I broke with those against women's ordination was their flagrant attack on the personal freedom of their brothers and sisters in Christ. For me, the spirit of persecution is the biggest clue pointing to who is right in this disagreement. The spirit of coercion was rife at San Antonio and boldly exhibited in the subsequent document sent from the General Conference to the NPUC. Forcing the conscious of others is at the top of the list of the things that displease God.

Yet what did we expect? If we are going to copy the hierarchal practices of papal Rome, then the result will be persecution. We will become a church that subjugates, oppresses, and injures its congregation. History is clear about this. Ty Gibson nails it:

Coercion kills love and justification by faith is inextricably intertwined with liberty of conscience... This is also why she [Ellen White] warned so strongly against any exercise of domination by church leaders. The inclination to control others is the core principle of the papal system. Those who operate by this principle are following in the track of Rome and thus preparing themselves and those they lead to abandon others to save self when the mark of the beast is enforced.

So as countless Protestant alarms are rightfully being sounded to warn us to watch out for what the pope and the papacy are up to, I thought it appropriate to issue a warning to watch out for what you and I are liable to be up to unless we intentionally seek, by the grace of God, to deal graciously and respectfully and non-coercively with one another, especially when we disagree, and most especially when we happen to be in positions of leadership and influence. As we beware the Romanism *without*, let us also beware the Romanism *within!* ("The Romanism Within," an article on Lightbearers.com website)

The members of TOSC drive this concept home in their position #2 summary:

Should we ignore the question of religious liberty when dealing with this topic?

In a sense it could be ignored because the deeper issue is a slightly different one. It surfaces when the possibility of deciding the biblical position through a majority vote is placed on the table. If this were to be done the question would no longer be whether we should ordain women or not but whether we should be loyal to Fundamental Belief #1. The issue is a very complex and important one for those of us who have always upheld the message and mission of the church as summarized in our Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. Our message was established through the study of the Bible and the guidance of the Spirit through Ellen G. White. The result was the formulation of a consensus among God's people. No vote was needed because the Bible and the Spirit instructed the church. The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is a summary of the message and mission that the Lord gave to His church and it unifies us as a people. The question we now face is: What should we do with the topic of the ordination of women to the ministry in the absence of a consensus based on the study of the Bible and the guidance of the Spirit? If we go for a

majority vote we would have denied Fundamental Belief #1. Biblical truth would no longer be defined on the basis of the Bible alone but on the basis of what a majority believes that the Bible teaches on this topic. Then, the vote of the majority would be imposed on those who may have sincerely concluded that the Bible teaches something else (freedom of conscience?). We would have by de facto created an ecclesiastical magisterium (a majority of delegates to the Session) that would decide for the rest of the church whatever the Bible teaches on a particular topic and what the church should believe. The ordination of women to the ministry should remain what it has always been among us, namely a subject about which we have different opinions (like the question of the human nature of Christ). These different views have been tolerated by the church. There has never been a consensus on this topic and consequently it has never been raised to the level of a Fundamental Belief. This topic should not be solved at any cost.

How we treat those who differ with us is important because it shows our love and forbearance for each other, something that we must learn before we can be the church that will go through. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35 There is no love in forcing our brothers and sisters against culture and conscience on non-fundamental issues. At some point we are going to have to learn this.

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FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #14 AND EQUALITY IN CHRIST

Not ordaining a pastor, simply on the basis of their gender, is a clear violation of Fundamental Belief #14, “Unity in the Body of Christ.” This comes through clearly in the summary paragraph of the belief:

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one Fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.

We have this fundamental belief because of the following texts (among others):

- Galatians 3:28—There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- Joel 2:29— Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
- Revelation 1:6—He has made us a kingdom of priests for God His Father. All glory and power to Him.
- Gen 1:27—So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them [both male and female are in God's image. God is both. If you put down one part of his image you are putting down God].

In the middle of the TOSC sessions, the truth of what is happening here became clear, vividly illustrating the reality of our violation of this fundamental belief. Chris Oberg, lead pastor of Las Sierra University church commented on it: “There was finally someone who said, ‘Friends, if we just took out gender and replaced race in the same sentence, we would all know this is wrong and we would be done.’ That was a startling moment.”

And how true! When we look at history, we see many hard-fought battles for human dignity, grace, and equality. Some of these were fought over centuries, but in the end, truth prevailed: the Gentiles were brought to Christ's table; the slaves were freed; justice was done. We can only speculate on why we have held out so long against extending the same freedom to women in God's church, yet this discrimination cannot stand forever. Like Gerald Winslow said, “You can't hold back the dawn.” I believe the same dignity, grace, and equality will at last be extended to women in God's true church. It will be an amazing witness to a world that doesn't know how to love when, at last, a group of believers embrace Galatians 3:26 with all their hearts.

This brave stance calls for love that completely breaks down selfish barriers and prejudices previously held. It calls for unity in our diversity. This paragraph summary clearly states that distinctions, including cultural, class, or gender, should not be divisive among us and that all of us are “equal in Christ.” The theory of male headship is debunked before this fundamental

belief. There can be no doubt that the refusal to ordain anyone to pastoral ministry solely on the basis of gender is a clear and glaring violation of Fundamental Belief #14.

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ELLEN WHITE

One of the most striking disconnects of those embracing headship theology in the Seventh-day Adventist church is Ellen White. How can we even have this debate on women's ordination when the most influential clergy person in Adventist history was a woman, forty four times ordained by our church? I mean, how incongruous can a position get in a denomination that was founded by a woman along with her male colleagues? Alex Bryan, senior pastor of the Walla Walla University Church, elaborates:

No one in Seventh-day Adventist history is given a position of greater authority and influence than Ellen White. Ellen White was a woman. She will continue to be a woman in the New Earth when we meet her one day, when we're all gathered together. Her writings serve a leadership function, an instructive function. They have authority in the life of the church, and therefore it has become clear to me, as one who is positive about Ellen White, that women should be called into ministry. And in fact, it is my conviction that to fully honor women in ministry will send a strong signal that we support the ministry of Ellen White that currently is suspect by some.

Yes, when pondering these things, one cannot help but question the tenets of male headship. Ty Gibson says nearly all that needs to be said on this issue:

Ellen White is the most obvious and immediate example (of women in leadership roles) for Seventh-day Adventists. She was an active itinerant preacher throughout her ministry, teaching both men and women, and she was (and still is) the most prolific teaching authority in Adventist history. "Ah," someone will interject, "but she was not ordained!" Actually, she was ordained...by God Himself:

"In the city of Portland the Lord ordained me as His messenger, and here my first labors were given to the cause of present truth" (*Review and Herald*, May 18, 1911).

Ellen White's case is extremely enlightening. Let the fact register with all the force it carries that God chose a woman to be His end-time prophet, to speak and to write authoritatively as His foremost representative to His end-time church. And He did so at a time in history when women generally did not occupy leadership roles. Women couldn't even vote, nor could they occupy political office, in her time. And yet, God chose a woman to be the channel through which He would teach, lead, and even reprove men.

"But she was not ordained by the church!"

No, she was not, but ordination originates with God, not with humans, so she had the higher, not the lower, level of ordination. If you're ordained by God, but not by humans, you're still ordained. If you're ordained by humans and not by God, you are not ordained.

"But she was ordained as just a prophet, not as a pastor, because pastoral ordination

would have put her in spiritual authority over men, which the Bible forbids!”

Yet we all know that apart from the Bible the writings of Ellen White constitute the highest authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. That’s why we’re all quoting her authoritatively in this debate.

“But when the men in leadership told her to go to Australia, she obeyed and went, because they were men and she was a woman!”

Yes, she did go to Australia when they told her to, but there is nothing to indicate that she went *because* she was a woman and men told her to go. She went because of a humble spirit of submission to her brethren, the same as any male minister of the time would have gone if the brethren had told him to go. On different occasions men told her to do other things and she rebuked them, and on many occasions she told men in leadership positions what they were to do and she expected them to comply.

The plain truth of the matter is that Ellen White was, in fact, ordained by God himself, which clearly indicates that while we may be against ordaining women to authoritative spiritual office, God is not, which, if you think about it, is a very awkward position to be in.

Awkward, indeed!

Those Adventists who interpret 1 Timothy 2-3 as a universal mandate against women’s ordination overstep the evidence in the face of the fact that they are members of a Church with a woman prophet, and a church that has always accepted women in general in teaching, preaching, and evangelistic roles, all of which are, by definition, activities of spiritual authority. They have to outrun the text to sustain their overall position against women’s ordination while at the same time allowing for Ellen White’s ministry to be acceptable and for women in general to teach and preach.

In other words, there is a glaring gap in the logic of their position.

They begin by insisting that male-only ordination is a *moral* mandate due to the fact that Adam was created before Eve, from which they insist that women may not authoritatively teach men. But then they are faced with a woman prophet they accept in an authoritative teaching role—namely, Ellen White. So they have to figure out some explanatory angle to make exceptions for some women to teach men. But here’s the colossal problem: if we’re dealing here with a *moral* mandate, then there can be no exceptions, and to make exceptions is to inadvertently confess that it’s not a *moral* issue after all. And if it’s not a moral issue, then there is no legitimate reason to urge it as a universal rule for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (“A Closer Look at Women’s Ordination,” an article on Lightbearers.com website)

Ellen White Was Ordained

Ellen White was even clearer about her authority than Ty Gibson mentions above. She wrote to the Elders of Battle Creek on her authority in the sacred pulpit:

Neither the Lord nor Sister White will need to be dictated to by the brethren as to what subject she will bring before them [from the pulpit]. I ... ask not permission to take the desk in the tabernacle. I take it as my rightful position accorded me of God. (EGW Manuscript 30, June 1889, in 1888 Materials, pp. 355-356)

To second this statement is the fact that the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirmed Ellen White's ordination. "The last meeting took action recommending those who should receive ministerial credentials. Ellen White's name was among those voted to receive papers of the ordained ministers, although her ordination was not by the laying on of hands by men." *Ellen G. White: The Lonely Years: 1876-1891* (vol. 3), by Arthur L. White, p. 377.

Some have argued that the question of whether she was ordained or not was settled definitively by her own hand on the biographical information blank that she filled out in 1909 for the General Conference records, where she inscribes an X after the question about whether she was ordained or not (the same response that, farther down on the form, she uses to answer if she was remarried). However, there is more than one way to interpret what she meant there. It is just as valid to see this as her indication that God, and not man, ordained her.

The fact remains that she was still ordained. I repeat Ty Gibson's comment above: "Ordination originates with God, not with humans, so she had the higher, not the lower, level of ordination. If you're ordained by God, but not by humans, you're still ordained. If you're ordained by humans and not by God, you are not ordained."

Those who argue that Ellen White was not ordained are making two very serious assertions: The church issued her fraudulent documents (six of the forty four remain as clear proof—read them at the White Estate) and she was complicit in the fraud by accepting and using them. According to the current policy, Ellen White couldn't receive the same credentials that she received over half of her life, unless of course, she lived in the Pacific Union Conference.

Nikolaus Satemajer, former editor of *Ministry Magazine* and is a retired associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association, adds a powerful punctuation to this:

Now the one thing I know about Ellen White: if she was against ordaining women, she would have said it. Her writings are very transparent of what the Lord showed her. She was not a timid person. She commented on so many things, and so by her not being against it, by her not saying to the church leaders, 'How dare you issue credentials in my name!' she showed her approval. We know they issued her credentials, and the fact that she never chided the leadership for issuing them tells us a lot. That means she felt comfortable with it, and the church felt comfortable giving it to her.

Ty Gibson makes a similar point about how Ellen White's treatment of the subject of women's ordination in his article, "A Closer Look at Women's Ordination" (See [Appendix 6](#)).

Ellen White Anticipated A Day When Things Would Change

Indeed, Ellen White uttered not a single word of prohibition against ordaining women to ministry. Yet she said many things that anticipated the day when the eyes of our community of faith will open and realize that it is time for one of the last walls in our church to come down. Here are a few:

It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God. (Testimonies for the Church Volume 6, p. 322)

Women . . . should be set apart . . . by prayer and laying on of hands. (Review and Herald, July 9, 1895).

...when God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that *in all things* she should be his equal. (Testimonies, 3:484).

The secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ. (Selected Messages Book 1, 259)

When God specially calls your wife to the work of teaching the truth, then should you lean to her counsel and advice, and confide in her instructions. God may give you both, as possessing an equal interest in and devotion to the work, equal qualifications to act a prominent part in the most solemn work of saving souls. (Testimonies for the Church, 1:710)

Another Hostile Attack On Ellen White

Finally, I would like to follow up on a the statement that I quoted from Alex Bryan at the beginning of this section: *And in fact, it is my conviction that to fully honor women in ministry will send a strong signal that we support the ministry of Ellen White that currently is suspect by some.*

Though modern advocates of headship theology use Paul's instruction that women should keep silent in church and that the bishop should be the husband of one wife to illustrate that male headship is a biblical principle, these arguments are not original to them. More than 100 years before the modern headship theology was developed, critics used these same arguments to condemn the Seventh-day Adventist Church for recognizing Ellen White as a spiritual authority. During that time, Adventist preachers demonstrated that "keep silent" and "husband of one wife" did not exclude women from preaching and teaching (See [Appendix 8](#) and [Appendix 9](#)). On one occasion Stephen Haskell stood in the pulpit and rebutted these literalistic interpretations of Pauline passages. In other words, our pioneers were preaching the opposite of what headship theology advocates are preaching now! Let me say that again:

Our pioneers were preaching the opposite of what headship theology advocates are preaching now!

What's more, the interpretive method used by Ellen White's critics in her time is regarded now as the only hermeneutic that is both correct and genuinely Seventh-day Adventist. With this state of affairs, how can we defend her ministry today?

Because of this, what Alex Bryan says is absolutely true. The present attack from male-only headship advocates against women in ministry is but another hostile attack on the ministry of Ellen White. This reality would horrify these advocates if they could see it for what it truly is.

More Than A Prophet

Ellen White was more than a prophet. She was a leader, an evangelist, a shepherd, and a luminary on a level much higher than any pastor or conference president. Smithsonian Magazine even listed her as one of the most significant Americans of all time. How can anyone, knowing the God-given authority and leadership of Ellen White, continue to insist that women cannot be in leadership roles? Dwight Nelson comments brilliantly on this striking non sequitur:

She is the most prolific American author of either gender, the third most translated author of all time, that woman, that wife, and mother, who was a visionary and a leader, and the founder of the largest Protestant parochial school system on earth, the founder of the largest Protestant health system on earth, the founder of the largest Protestant publishing system on earth, and the founder of the most expansive Protestant movement in missions on earth. Isn't it a bit incongruous that some within the Seventh-day Adventist community of faith that revere the spiritual authority of this little five foot two inch woman called Ellen White would continue to insist that women should not exercise spiritual authority over men. It's almost astounding in its implications. To say that she was elevated by the gift of prophecy in a way that other women can't be elevated is just semantic wordplay. The argument does work. (From a presentation given at the 2012 Women Clergy Conference)

I agree. The argument *doesn't* work. And I have to admit that this was the biggest blind spot in my logic against women's ordination. Indeed, there are many women among us who are called to leadership in ministry every bit as much as was Ellen White. [Back To Top](#)

HERMENEUTICS

Though conservatives and liberals love to vilify each other, the truth is that many of us on both sides of the issue have studied it carefully, comparing scripture with scripture in the Spirit, and we simply haven't come to the same conclusions. That is the problem with this issue: mature, godly Adventists from all paths of life just don't agree in their interpretation of scripture, even when using the same hermeneutic. This means that we shouldn't call the other side apostate, heretical, Jesuit, or pagan.

Indeed, Even the Same Hermeneutic Doesn't Help

One of the arguments launched against those who supported women's ordination is that a person has to use a different, less than biblical hermeneutic to support a pro-women's ordination position. I used to believe this too, but have come to see that this is fear mongering and an attempt to marginalize the credibility and legitimacy of the other side.

Two Ways To Read the Bible

There are two ways to read the Bible. One can take a plain, literal, "common sense" approach or they can come to a principle-based understanding. Both methods have their place. Neither is wrong.

Much of the time we can read the Bible literally, but there are times when that just doesn't work. So when should we use a principle-based reading? When the interpretation of a passage contradicts other teachings of scripture. A principle-based reading may also be helpful when there is a challenge of conflicting interpretations due to hard passages or cultural context or when an understanding of the historical background greatly enhances the reading.

On top of this, the same word can mean opposite things in different contexts and we must sometimes study those contexts to understand what the Bible author is actually saying. Dr. Ron du Preez talks about this:

So often the statement is made, "Oh, we read the Bible simply and plainly, just as it stands." And then, of course, I'm tempted to ask the question, "What does the word 'fast' mean?" Read it plainly. If I say "fast" as an adjective, what does it mean? Quickly? Yes. What else? If the paper is color-fast, does it move quickly? It doesn't move, right? It stays. Wait a minute, so "fast" means it moves and "fast" means it doesn't move. What does it mean? "He stands fast on principle." But on a Saturday night, you're driving down the road at midnight and you see a woman with a short dress and high heels and you say to your friend, "There's a fast woman." You know what that means: the opposite of "fast" on principle, right?

Okay, so what does "fast" mean? Words have to be understood in context. We have to take time to dig deeply into the Word to understand it. So for those who say, "I simply go with a simple, plain reading of scripture," I have a real problem. We've got to read carefully. We're called upon to dig as for hidden treasure, not just this plain, simple

understanding. Adventists have not done that when it comes to “the fire burns forever and ever.” We’ve not done that, right? We’ve been careful when it comes to Rachel, when she dies her soul departs. We say, “No, no. Let’s go back. Let’s study the Hebrew, let’s study the Greek.” We’re very careful with some of these doctrines and rightly so. But, amazingly, when we get to this issue of women in spiritual leadership, we suddenly claim the simple, plain reading of scripture. Let’s be fair. (From a presentation given at the 2012 Women Clergy Conference)

My problem with the position I took against women’s ordination was that most of the time I read the text literally and refused to accept a principle-based interpretation or to look at the context. Now it is obvious to me that sometimes a purely literal interpretation can get one into a lot of trouble. One must often compare scripture with scripture while seeking the principle being taught.

Many of our beliefs run deeper than a “plain reading” of scripture. Adventists should quickly realize this at the restaurant. “Waiter, I’ll have a juicy T-bone steak (1 Cor. 10:25) and a glass of merlot (1 Tim. 5:23).” We must be careful what we attack as higher criticism or an historical critical method. Many who throw these words around are not using them accurately.

Even Jesus Took A Principle-Based Interpretation of Scripture

Brighton Kavaloh, a much loved and respected UK pastor, makes a very compelling point about the hermeneutics of Jesus. When he was accused of healing on the Sabbath, it is very telling that Jesus took not a literal, but a purpose driven interpretation of scripture. Multiple times Jesus told those he healed to carry their bed on the Sabbath, and the traditionalists were right there to point out Jeremiah 17:21. But Jesus didn't adhere to a literal hermeneutic at all. He took a principal based one.

We do the same thing to defend many of our Seventh-day Adventist tenets.

It's Not Always A Different Hermeneutic

An article by Steven Grabiner, posted on Lightbearers website, opened my eyes to the fact that, though we may focus on literal or principle-based interpretations, we are not necessarily using a different hermeneutic. He believes the issue is “more about members of the body of Christ coming to different conclusions using the same method.”

He emphasizes that “sincere Bible students using the same hermeneutical principles can come to different conclusions on this matter. Not all issues are spelled out for us. We should be wary of turning black and white into gray, but just as wary of turning gray into black and white. Ironically enough, some of those accusing others of using a wrong hermeneutic are drawing more exaction from the text than good hermeneutics warrant! We need humility. It is imperative that Christian charity and warmth be graciously extended to all participants in the conversation. ‘Christ-like love places the most favorable construction on the motives and acts of others’” (Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 319).

He (and I) bring this up to underscore the fact that not only is women’s ordination a non-fundamental doctrine, but likely we are coming to different conclusions using the same

technique of Bible study. The bottom line is that our differing interpretations are not only a non-issue because of the former, but because of the latter too.

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A POLICY AT WAR WITH ITSELF

Martin Hanna makes a valid point about our existing church policy. If we take an unbiased look at what our policy on nondiscrimination actually says, we can't help but see the inconsistency.

Policy BA 60 10 states, "The world church supports nondiscrimination in employment practices and policies and upholds the principle that both men and women, without regard to race and color, shall be given full and equal opportunity within the Church to develop the knowledge and skills needed for the building up of the Church. Positions of service and responsibility (except those requiring ordination to the gospel ministry) on all levels of church activity shall be open to all on the basis of the individual's qualifications."

We should be embarrassed by this policy! The exception clause nullifies the whole point of the paragraph. How can we be non-discriminatory and yet discriminate in regards to ordination? We can't. It *is* discrimination, bold and clear.

Additionally, the vote we took at San Antonio was just as inconsistent. I quote Martin Hanna:

We already ordain women as elders and therefore it is inconsistent to deny the ordination of women as pastors. All the biblical arguments people propose for rejecting female pastors are based on texts that refer to elders. So if we already agree that these texts on elders allow for female elders, then how can we use these same texts to reject female pastors?

If we wanted to remove female elders we should have made the vote about that. We did not do that. We wasted the time of the church on a vote that did not address the elephants in the room. We already have female elders, and we ordain them. We already have female pastors. And we have a policy that admits that we discriminate against them. God have mercy on us!

Our policies on women in ministry are inconsistent. We need to admit that our current policy on non-discrimination is a policy at war with itself and step forward to do something about it.

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HEADSHIP THEOLOGY: IT'S HISTORY

A close look at the history of headship theology in the Seventh-day Adventist church shows that it is quite new. The male headship theology that is popular among Christians today was forged by a few Calvinist Evangelical teachers and preachers (Wayne Grudem, James B. Hurley, and John Piper) in the 1970s and 1980s, and brought into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the late 1980s by Andrews University professor Samuele Bacchiocchi, and advanced in Adventism during the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Though some Adventists have enthusiastically promoted the male headship doctrine during the last thirty years, the Adventist world church has never adopted it. It was unknown to the Seventh-day Adventist church before the 1970s, and never appeared in any published article or book written by an Adventist before Bacchiocchi in 1987. This doctrine did not arise in our church until after the Southern Baptist Convention and other Evangelicals had fleshed out their doctrine of male headship.

There is no hint of headship theology in our constitution or any book or article written by any Adventist pioneer. Decades of church-sponsored research on the theology have found no prohibition to women in ministry. In fact, the Adventist fundamental beliefs (particularly #14) deny the headship principle and the church officially approves of women serving as both elders and pastors. Though some claim that Adventists have always believed the headship doctrine and that its principles define all relationships in our homes and churches, its absence from our Fundamental Beliefs are hard to explain away.

It is also interesting that since there has never been a church policy prohibiting the ordination of women, the opponents of women's ordination can only appeal to tradition. Believe me, they would appeal to a policy if there were one.

It is also significant that after two years of intense Bible study, 2/3 of the diverse group of conscientious scholars, church administrators, pastors, and laypersons that made up the TOSC study committee voted in favor of moving ahead on women's ordination.

Because of the ministry of Ellen White, the church had to decide very early what it believed about women doing ministry. Adventist pioneers argued vigorously from the Bible that women were not barred from public leadership in church (See [Appendix 8](#) and [Appendix 9](#)), and the Review and Herald published articles to that effect: unqualified endorsements by editors James White and Uriah Smith, plus more cautious ones by J. H. Waggoner and J. N. Andrews. Although the immediate need for research was to defend Ellen White's ministry, none of the articles were limited to her role, or to women as prophets specifically. Uriah Smith commented that, while Joel's prediction of daughters prophesying "must embrace public speaking of some kind, this we think is but half of its meaning."

Here, as mentioned before, we must once again reiterate a major Achilles heal of those espousing headship theology: they are preaching just the opposite of what our founding fathers preached to defend the ministry of Ellen White.

It is no accident that Calvinists developed the new headship theology. Since Calvinism gives men no choice, it follows that a Calvinist will interpret 1 Corinthians 11:13 male "headship" as being all about authority and submission. Nobody in the chain of command has any choice but to submit. However, Adventist, who come from an Arminian/Wesleyan theology have never believed that. Darius Jankiewicz explains that "if you believe, as Arminians do, that Christ's part in salvation was entirely voluntary from beginning to end; if

you believe that Christ freely chose to suffer and die to save everyone, because He loves everyone, but then He exerts no pressure of any kind to force submission, then it follows that men's "headship" of women, like Christ's headship of men, is sacrificial service without any hint of mandatory submission or hint of violating free will."

Thus, arguments in favor of headship theology lack an awareness of our Adventist theological heritage. Do the proponents of this theology realize that it is based on a Calvinistic view of God that is totally foreign to the very core of Adventist theology? One must be either uninformed or underhanded to press Calvinistic headship theology and Roman Catholic views of ordination forward as "true Adventism." It is a far cry from our Anabaptist and Restorationist roots. If we do not understand these things, how can our decisions be rooted in "the way God has led us in the past?" Without the uniqueness of our past we could never have broken away from mainline Protestant and Catholic theology.

Gerry Chudleigh concludes in his article, "A Short History of the Headship Doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church":

No one is advocating that Seventh-day Adventists adopt the entire package of Calvinist predestination theology. But is it possible to pick just one apple from the Calvinist tree without changing Adventists' traditional understandings of such things as the gracious character of God, the spiritual relationship between Christ and His followers, the commitment to religious liberty for all, and the urgency to take the gospel to every person on earth?

An Antagonist To Adventist Truth

The problem with headship theology is that it misrepresents the nature of what Paul means by "head" in 1 Corinthians 11:13. It is about servant life source and not hierarchy or chain of command (authority). In doing this, it also subjugates women and prevents them from experiencing the fullness of God's call on their lives.

Given its Calvinist moorings and its antithetical relationship to the theology of our pioneers, the new all-male spiritual headship theology must be seen for what it truly is: an antagonist to Adventist truth.

Again, we must remember the original source of male-only spiritual headship. This theology was one of the major factors that turned the vibrant apostolic church into papal Rome. This troubles me. Shall we imitate the male-only leadership perspectives of the Catholics and Protestant churches, whose methods of interpretation promote Sunday sacredness, everlasting hellfire, and a once-saved-always-saved theology? Who is right? Are we going to side theologically with them? Shall we follow the policies and traditions of other churches instead of the way God has led us in the past?

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CHRIST IS THE ONLY HEAD OF THE CHURCH

After the fall, God placed the husband in a position of loving servant leadership within the family, but there's no suggestion that the husband's role in the family extends to the church. In the course of arguing against the ordination of women, some are urging that this is the case, thereby introducing a new theory of male-only spiritual headship into our church. This theology sets up men in the place of Jesus Christ, who is the only head of the church (Ephesians 5). However, we cannot make the theological mistake of displacing Jesus Christ as the only true and unique head of the church with a headship of mere men. This is surely what we are doing when we put men in a hierarchal position over women in the church.

Taking the husband's supremacy over the wife in the marriage relationship and extending it to the church is a big mistake, and is one of the biggest disconnects in the new headship theology in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Ellen White is clear on this:

“The husband is the head of the family as Christ is the head of the church.” (Testimonies vol 1: 307)

“Christ is the only head of the church.” (Manuscript Releases, vol 2: 274)

Grounds for the general submission of women to men in God's church cannot be found in scripture. Ron du Preez comments:

While there is not even a hint of headship in Genesis 1 and 2, a subjection of Eve to Adam is seen in Genesis 3:16 (NKJV): ‘Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.’ It is highly significant to recognize that this subjection comes only after the Fall into sin. Moreover this is not a general submission of women to men, but is limited to the husband-wife relationship. This is the consistent interpretation of Ellen White (See especially PP 58-59; 1T 307-308), and the SDA Bible Commentary. The servant-headship of the husband to his wife, as indicated in Genesis 3, can no more be broadened to man-woman relationships in general, than can the sexual desire of the wife be extended to mean the sexual longing of all women for all men. (*What the Bible Really Says about Women as Spiritual Leaders*).

Ty Gibson agrees:

But let us be certain of this: the Bible nowhere reasons that since the husband is the head of the wife in the home, therefore only men can occupy the ordained role in the church. That Bible verse simply does not exist. The idea is a forced construct that lacks even one biblical passage. I am the head of my wife, not the head of every other man's wife in addition to my own. And I have a hunch that all my married brothers in Christ want to keep it that way. (“A Closer Look At Women's Ordination”)

We must keep this ever clearly in view: Christ alone is the head of the church. See [Appendix 2](#) and [Appendix 3](#) for more information on the error of broadening male headship from the family to the church.

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SERVANT LIFE GIVER

There is no doubt that there is such a thing as headship. It has just been misinterpreted. Understanding the nature of true headship is crucial because it runs very close to the heart of love. Let me explain.

A New Order

Though men have dominated women through a hierarchical order since the fall, the coming of Christ and the new covenant brought a new order of things—a renewal of the things lost when we broke the covenant. The sinful barriers to male/female relationships are transformed to a new order (1 Corinthians 7:4). By his statement in Galatians 3:28 it is clear that Paul believed in this new order. Some new and revolutionary things happened in it. God wrote his love upon our hearts and minds where we could live out His love in a natural way. As the fullness of love, or other-centeredness, came to us, our understanding of relationships in this world had to change too. Gentiles, slaves, and women now stood on equal footing with Jews, free men, and males as fellow members of the new order. The Kingdom makes no provision for second-class citizens.

In light of this, if there is to be a submission of women, it cannot be the same submission (or subjection) that destroys the equality between a serf and a king. In other words, not the submission we have known since the fall. William P. Young explains this concept in his book, *The Shack*:

At the fall men and women turned from God and abandoned a relationship with Him to assert their own independence. Men turned to themselves and the work of their hands, but women turned to men or another relationships. The man's response was to rule over her, to take power over her, to become her ruler. Before this she found her identity, her security, and her understanding of good and evil in God. Man was not made to be all those things for woman. He was not made to be her ruler. In attempting to become her identity, security, and understanding he is playing God!

Filling roles is the opposite of relationship. Males and females should be counterparts, face-to-face equals, each unique and different, distinctive in gender but complementary and each empowered uniquely by the Spirit of God from whom all true power and authority originates.

Headship: It's Not What We Have Thought

One thing that helped me think more critically about this interplay between the sexes was a deeper understanding of what Paul meant by headship in his writings. In his article, "I Believe In Male Headship", Gilbert Bilezikian says it clearly:

Sometimes, the word *head* in this text (1 Corinthians 11:3) is carelessly infused with its meaning in the English language to obtain this hierarchical order: God *head* over Christ—Christ *head* over man—man *head* over woman. This top-down vertical chain of

command would then go as follows: God-Christ-man-woman.

However, such results are obtained by manipulating the biblical text. In order to make the text say what the Scripture does not teach in this passage, its three clauses must be taken out of their original sequence and rearranged. The Apostle Paul knows exactly how to structure hierarchies in perfect descending order (see 12:28, for instance). In 1 Cor. 11:3, he is not structuring a hierarchy. In keeping with the theme developed in the immediate context, Paul is discussing the traditional significance of origination. The sequence that links the three clauses is not hierarchy but chronology. At creation, Christ was the giver of life to men as the source of the life of Adam ("by him all things were created" Col. 1:16). In turn, man gave life to the woman as she was taken from him. Then, God gave life (through the woman) to the Son as he came into the world for the incarnation. When the biblical sequence of the three clauses is not tampered with, the consistent meaning of *head* in this verse is that of a servant function as provider of life (or source of life).

Head is used figuratively in relation to the body...always with the meaning of servant provider, never with that of authority. When the New Testament metaphor of headship is understood generically and is protected from corruption by meanings foreign to the text, it describes perfectly the relation of Christ to the church and of husband to wife as servant life-givers. The fall had made of Adam ruler over the woman (Gen. 3:16). Christ makes of husbands servants to their wives in their relationship of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21). For this reason, I believe in male headship, but strictly in its New Testament definition. (For the complete article, see [Appendix 5](#))

A Circle of Mutual Submission

This is mind-bending! It illumines 1 Corinthians 11:3 to show that headship is not about *taking* power. It is about *giving* life. This application of love within our marriages is just a little of what Jesus gave us back at the cross. Love, as God would have us understand it in the New Covenant, implies the concept of submission. It is other-centered. There is a readiness to give up your will for the sake of the beloved other. There can be no love without mutual submission. It is the natural flow of love. Love is the supreme obligation that members of the new creation owe each other (Rom. 13:8, 10) and which characterizes how they live.

It is not what Paul said to women in Ephesians 5 that is revolutionary. It is what he said to men, calling for husbands to enter into a relationship of subjection with their wives. Paul emphasized the sexual distinction between men and women while rejecting notions of superiority, inferiority, dominance, and submission between them.

Headship is about the flow of love. Love is mutual submission. True, it takes on different expression depending on position, gender and personality, but it is still the same thing. For example, I have always taught my boys the 4 Pillars of Manhood: To be a King (provider), a Warrior (protector), a Friend (lover), and a Mentor (teacher). Yet when I first started to understand this, it struck me that a woman is all of those things too. Just in a different way. The man is a provider of life, but the woman gives it back, which makes her an equal participant as a provider of life. Neither one is in any way above the other although they have different parts to play. In giving life to others we continue to complete the great circle of love. This is the way we pass from death to life.

In this paradigm God is not above his creation even though He is at its head or source. Love, being a cycle of mutual submission, puts God in a place where He submits to His beloved, and they submit to Him. Looking at it that way, submission is not about authority or obedience; it is all about a relationship of love and respect. In this way, the God of the universe is submitted to us in the same way that we are submitted to Him.

There is a difference between headship and lordship. Headship is about being a servant life-giver and is differentiated from lordship. Lordship puts God in a position of hierarchical authority over us. Paul says that the husband is the head of the wife, but nowhere does he say he is lord of the wife. Instead, they mutually submit to one another in ways that compliment each other, and this is how life is breathed into the relationship. This differentiation is seen in Christ's headship of the church that is different than His lordship (even though they are related). Lordship is about authority. Headship is about the origin or source where love (or life) is coming from.

Headship Indicates Source of Life or Direction of Love's Flow

Our earthly systems are all about hierarchy and chain of command, but Paul's description in Ephesians 5 does not embrace those systems. It contrasts them. Love and submission are not hierarchical, but are all about giving life to the beloved other.

This is what Dr. Bilezikian is talking about: out of God came a man, and out of man came a woman, and out of a woman came man. It is a striking example of love coming back full circle. Headship only indicates the source or direction of flow within the cycle of love. To understand this concept is to totally change our understanding of our interaction with each other. It is to totally change our understanding of love. Love is the great equalizer.

God engineered this equality right from the beginning. From the first day God hid the woman within the man, so that at the right time He could remove her from within him. God didn't create man to live alone. Woman was purposed from the beginning. By taking Eve out of Adam, He birthed her in a sense. So God created a circle of relationship, like His own, but for humans. Then, He added Himself to the mix, coming out of woman.

We can see from this that no hierarchy is intended. Woman is not above God! Plus, if the female had been created first, there would have been no circle of relationship (because woman can't come out of man), and thus no possibility of a fully equal face-to-face relationship between the male and the female!

Hierarchical Constructs Must Give Way To Love

We are equal, and our submission is equal in God's new order. The traditional authoritarian barriers are gone. Ephesians 5:21-33 stands in continuity with Galatians 3:28 and flows out of it. If this can be understood clearly, Paul's other statements on how men and women should worship can be better understood.

The conclusion of an article by Fred D. Layman in the Wesleyan Theological Journal really nails the heart of this understanding of headship:

Paul understood headship to mean that man was the source of woman and woman had her origin from man according to Genesis 2:18-25. The idea of headship does not serve a governmental function for Paul but is a basis for his claim, asserted against certain

gnostic counterclaims, that sexual differences and marriage have a continuing role in the new order, in the purposes of God.

The hierarchical interpretation cannot be squared with Galatians 3:28. In reality that interpretation does not change the status of women in the hierarchy. Their position is the same as it has been from the creation. The hierarchical interpretation attempts to ameliorate the situation and empty it of the potential for abuse by emphasizing the demand for love on the part of the man, but the woman is still subjected to a forced subordination. This in effect is to take away with the left hand what was given by the right. *There is no way one can still speak of equality between the sexes and yet retain divinely appointed governmental structures which require a uniform submission of women and a dominant role by men.* Nor is it biblically necessary.

One is on firm biblical grounds to insist upon male-female dualism and the complementarity which exists between the sexes. Biologically men and women both resemble and differ. How far differences extend into the psychological sphere is debated and generalizations at that point are always suspect. Nonetheless, sexual distinctions in no way affect sexual equality in Christ and the new creation. There may very well be pragmatic reasons for role assignments and employee selection—education, training, experience, physical ability, etc.—*but such decisions cannot appeal to a biblical base for an ordered subordination of women to men*, if Paul's concept of headship is in view. (“Male Headship In Paul’s Thought”, Volume 15, Spring, 1980, emphasis mine)

So we can see that traditional interpretations of the headship and submission statements in the Pauline letters run into serious problems under closer scrutiny. Yet the insight into love is the amazing revelation here. It is the very character of God that precludes the existence of hierarchy in the church because the nature of love is the mutual submission of servanthood.

This is why the issue of women in the church is so critical. Our concept of love rests on our understanding of male/female relationships. The acceptance of women as leaders and pastors in the church—women freed to pursue God’s call in their lives—is a wonderful byproduct of the outworking of the principle of love.

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MARRIAGE

One of the biggest problems I have with the new headship theology in the Seventh-day Adventist church is wrapped up in what marriage means. In researching my latest book, I studied marriage as it relates to heaven. I have been interested in this subject for over a decade. As I thoughtfully considered it, I realized that the face of marriage will be much different in the next life—as in flip-flopped, stood on its head. For a great read on just how radical this role reversal might be, read Sigve Tonstad's article, "A Woman Encompasses a Man" ([Appendix 10](#)). We are headed toward corporate marriage to Christ, where Christ is the head of us all—the husband to both men and women—and no one will stand between.

This doesn't mean marriage and sexuality are abolished. It means that they are drawn up (swallowed up) into something bigger. What was private will become public. Unlike our experience here, we will share things intimately in the same way as the different parts of our body do. We will see the realization of what marriage has always symbolized: a fellowship of all believers, where we are all the bride, focusing on the bridegroom and celebrating each other's insights, gifts, and differences.

Although this leaves room for differentiation in individuality, sexuality, and talent, it leaves little room for hierarchy. Paul says that no part of the body is more important than any other part, though it may seem so. As I consider these things, it becomes clear to me that, in light of where God is leading us, we should take Galatians 3 and Isaiah 61 more seriously (See [Appendix 1](#) for Ellen White's comments on Isaiah 61). The realities of heaven are only dimly perceived on earth. We have a hard time seeing what we shall be (Hebrews 11), but it is clear to me from the statements of Saint Paul and Ellen White that both men and women, though being different parts of the same body, are destined for a deeper experiential revelation of what it means to occupy the same exalted position: the bride of Christ.

God is leading us away from hierarchy, back toward His original plan for marriage. I love what Ron du Preez says about this:

In short, the husband's loving servant leadership in the home, though arising from the results of sin, is to be seen as a divine blessing in fostering harmony and union between husband and wife—a type of leadership which is designed to lead back as far as possible to the original plan of union between equal partners without hierarchy. (Ron du Preez, "What the Bible Really Says about Women as Spiritual Leaders")

What this means is that men are to take the initiative in moving toward this goal. In their marriages (and in the community of believers) they are to crucify themselves, to take the first step in what must become mutual submission. As Stu Weber says in *Tender Warrior*, men are to lead on the soft shades of the tender side—providing, protecting, teaching, caring, guiding, loving, developing, freeing, sacrificing, leading—rather than in the harsh tones of the warrior side—ruling, presiding, directing, determining, bossing, deciding.

Inspiration lucidly points to men and women jointly occupying a priestly and ministerial role in Christ's body (Revelation 5:9-10). Clearly stated, God is moving us from the Old Testament male priest system to a priesthood of all believers. As we can see throughout the world, men cling desperately to a domination of women. On some level we all know that this is wrong. It is time to follow marriage to its biblical conclusion and accept each other unconditionally as equal parts of the same body, the body of Christ. [Back To Top](#)

THE ETERNAL EQUALITY OF THE GODHEAD

By representing women as being created below (subject to or in submission to) men, headship theology misrepresents the relationship of the Trinity by insisting that Christ is eternally in voluntary submission to God the Father. Hierarchy dictates that the woman is eternally submissive to the man as the man is eternally submissive to Christ as Christ is eternally submissive to the Father. Yet, as we have seen, this is not the nature of love.

Scripture teaches that the subordination of Christ was temporary, volunteered by the Son to fulfill a function: the salvation of humanity. The Trinity are mutually submitted to each other and eternally equal.

“The interpersonal relationships within the Trinity provide the ultimate model of love and self-sacrifice for us. As such, they do not furnish a model for a top-down governmental structure for human leadership within the Church” (On the Unique Headship of Christ in the Church: A Statement of the Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary). Mutual submission is the essence of love and hierarchy essentially destroys it. Some would even assert that teaching pre-Fall female inferiority as a symmetrical modeling of the Trinity is a primary Christian heresy, that hierarchy in the Trinity undercuts monotheism.

Jesus prayed that we might be one, just as the Trinity is one. Dwight Nelson poignantly points to our problem: “They say marriage is when two people become one. The trouble starts when they have to decide which one.” This is the seed of our disunity.

So how is the Trinity one? How do the Three manage to be united? Dwight calls Their oneness “unity in community.” You can’t have commUNITY if you take out the unity. You only have comm. But what does unity mean in concrete terms? Dwight cuts straight to the chase, saying that mutual submission is the secret to genuine unity—when I place your interests ahead of my interests—when I love you sacrificially, at my own expense. *The unity of the Trinity is the fruit of mutual submission.* The Father submits to the Son (Hebrews 1:13; Philippians 2:9-10). The Son submits to the Father (John 5:19, 30; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Philippians 2:6-8). The Holy Spirit submits to the Father and the Son (John 14:16, 26; 16:7, 13, 14). Calvary is the Trinity’s most sublime example of how they do mutual submission. There, our fallen race is included in their circle of submission.

How many relationships, churches, and marriages could be saved if we would reject our delusions of hierarchy and accept the Trinity’s principal of mutual submission.

The nature of love brings us to this, and it is curious that those, like Ty Gibson and Dwight Nelson, who are icons in the study and teaching of the nature of God’s love, are the ones who best understand the God-ordained place of women within marriage and community.

Those who believe in the eternal submission of Jesus to the Father have a critical problem: If women are subjugate to men in perpetuity as Jesus is to the Father and thus unqualified for ordination, then doesn’t that preclude the ordination of Jesus as our High Priest?

For more on this, see [Appendix 3](#) under The Unique and Non-Transferable Headship of Christ.

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GENESIS

Those who oppose women's ordination often point to Genesis to prove the superiority of man and the subordination of women. Five of the most often cited "proofs" of male headship related to Genesis are found here as follows:

1. Woman was created second and is therefore inferior to man. Because of this, women must be excluded from leadership or from exercising authority in the home, church, and society.
2. Man, not woman, is spoken to by God and does the speaking for them both, which shows the natural primacy of man over woman.
3. It wasn't until Adam fell that the world fell under the dominion of the devil.
4. Woman is formed for the sake of man, to be his "helpmeet" or his assistant to cure man's loneliness
5. Eve is named by Adam, showing his position over her.

1. Woman was created second and is therefore inferior to man.

This argument has several flaws. First, we can't just look at man and woman here. We have to look at the entire creation, and we don't see a decreasing hierarchy, but one that builds increasingly from incomplete to complete. The creation of man and woman is also a progression from incomplete to complete, just as the rest of the creation was in Genesis 1. Thus, "if creation order were to be an indication of rulership, one would have to conclude that the woman was to rule the man" (Martin Hanna and Cindy Tutsch, *Questions and Answers about Women's Ordination*).

Second, if being created first gives you a higher position in creation, then the plants and animals have a higher position than Adam.

Third, the creation of humans in Genesis 2 is done in a style of writing in Hebrew literature called an "inclusio" device or "ring construction." The passage is written in such a way that the main points of equal concern are placed at the beginning and the ending of the passage (Genesis 2). The writer of Genesis 2 underscores their equality of importance by using the exact same number of words (in Hebrew) for the description of their creation.



Finally, if we add to this the fact that Eve was created not from Adam's head or his foot, but from his rib, and that Ellen White's says that Eve was created "to stand by his side as an equal" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46), there can be no doubt that this argument is faulty.

2. The natural primacy of man over woman is shown by the fact that man, not woman, is spoken to by God and Adam does the speaking for them both.

First, it was important that God warn Adam about evil from his first consciousness, and since Eve wasn't created yet, this was simply a practical action and not one depicting hierarchy.

Second, being spoken to directly doesn't equate to hierarchy. God spoke directly to Eve post-fall like He did to Adam pre-fall.

3. It wasn't until Adam fell that the world fell under the dominion of the devil.

This can just as easily go the other way: since Adam and Eve were co-regents (with equal headship/rulership), it was only after both Eve and Adam had sinned that the earth fell under the dominion of Satan.

4. Woman is formed for the sake of man, to be his "helpmeet" or his assistant to cure man's loneliness

If we study the original word "helpmeet" (which occurs nineteen times in the Bible), we find that most occurrences of the word in scripture refer to someone (God) who is stronger or more powerful (with the rest referring to an equal). In scripture this word *never* refers to a subordinate. Yet this is not surprising. As we saw above, God created Eve from a rib, not a head nor the foot, "to stand by his [Adam's] side as an equal."

5. Eve is named by Adam, showing his position over her.

The act of naming in the Bible is an act of character recognition rather than an act of unilateral authority. Additionally, Adam names Eve in the very first verse after God's curse, making her identity separate from his. They were one. This separate name should never have been....

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CAN WOMEN HAVE LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THE CHURCH?

Husband of One Wife

This one argument has been used more than any other (although mostly among laity) as the clinching argument against women in spiritual leadership. The argument goes like this: Since the Bible states specifically (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:6) that a pastor or elder should be “the husband of one wife,” then women must be excluded from these positions.

Dr. Ron du Preez answers this concern lucidly in his article, “What the Bible Really Says about Women as Spiritual Leaders” (See [Appendix 4](#)):

There is a very specific term in Greek to stress gender, *arsçn* (male), which Paul and other New Testament writers used in some places, but which is absent here; (ii) If the Holy Spirit had sought to clearly communicate that the spiritual leaders needed to be male, He could easily have done so, by inspiring Paul to indicate that the elder or pastor *dei...einai* (must be...), *arsçn* (a male); (iii) Instead, Paul used *ançr/andros*, which in its various forms appears about 215 times in the New Testament. In the well-respected Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, of all the definitions listed for *ançr/andros*, the word “male” is never used; (iv) The structure of the phrase is unusual: *mias gunaikos andra* (i.e., literally, a “one-woman-man”), thus implying that the stress is on the word “one;” (v) Paul did not say that bishops/elders must be “husbands of a wife” – which would have allowed for a stronger emphasis on the term “husband” – but he said: “husband of one wife.” This clearly excludes a position claiming that Paul focused on the maleness of the bishop/elder (“Husband of One Wife”); (vi) In line with the other character qualities in this list, this phrase shows that the overseer must be totally devoted to the spouse, as the CEB rightly renders it: They should be faithful to their spouse.

In other words, this is about character, not gender.

He also makes a second point:

It is this appropriate idiomatic interpretation of the phrase “*mias gunaikos andra*” (i.e., “faithful to their spouse”) which accounts for the fact that Phoebe was identified as a “deacon [diakonos] of the church at Cenchreae” (Rom 16:1, NRSV). In brief, *just as the use of masculine gender terms in the Decalogue does not exempt women from obedience, similarly the use of masculine gender language in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 does not exclude women from serving as elders or pastors.* (Ibid, emphasis mine)

Ty Gibson also makes a strong case for Dr. Preez’ second point in “A Closer Look at Women’s Ordination” (See [Appendix 7](#)).

Finally, James White cuts right to the core of the issue:

We object to that narrow-souled theology which will not allow the old ladies to have dreams because the prophecy says, “your old men shall dream dreams;” and that will not

allow young women to have visions because the prophecy says “your young men shall see visions.” These stingy critics seem to forget that “man” and “men” in the Scriptures, generally mean both men and women. The Book says that it is “appointed unto men once to die.” Don’t women die? (James White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 25, 1862; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 24)

Ty Gibson fleshes James White’s comment out:

This is brilliant on a number of levels. First, James White is setting forth a foundational perspective regarding how to read and interpret the Bible responsibly (hermeneutics). He takes Scripture for its obvious intent, discerning the principles on display in the text while taking into consideration the use of words in their historical setting. Secondly, he discerns that the inclination to interpret the Bible with a literalistic exactitude that ignores both the broader context of Scripture, as well as the historical context, has its source in a spiritual condition he called “narrow-souled” and “stingy.” (“A Closer Look at Women’s Ordination”)

Only a principle-base reading of scripture can give us the context.

There is the phrase: “the husband of one wife.” Now I’ll throw you another phrase. Tell me what this phrase means: “give him a hand?” An appeal for applause? Asking for assistance? Begging for a body part? So what does “give him a hand” mean? We don’t know, because it depends on the context. (Ron du Preez, from a presentation given at the 2012 Women Clergy Conference)

The bottom line is that we can’t enforce our own opinions in defiance of reason and context. “Man” and “men” in scripture generally means both men and women. What’s good for the gander is good for the goose.

Women In Ministry

The gifting of leadership in God’s church is ultimately under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Thus, as we see in Ephesians 4:11, it is God who calls and commissions both men and women to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. A great example of how God uses women in this way is what is happening in China today, echoing the beginnings of the early apostolic church. (See “Women Serving As Ordained Ministers in the Adventist Church in China” on the *adventlife* website)

Ellen Whites comments on this subject are extensive. Here are a few:

There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. (Manuscript 43a, 1898).

Make no mistake in neglecting to correct the error of giving ministers less [salary] than they should receive.... The tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women.” (M.R. 1:263)

The Holy Spirit “prepares workers, both men and women, to become

pastors.” (*Testimonies Vol. 6*, p. 322)

It is not always men who are best adapted to the successful management of a church.
(*Pastoral Ministry*, p. 36)

Christ selected 11 [men] and a few faithful women to lay the foundation of the Christian church. (Ellen White, *Testimonies*, vol 5, 130)

That last quote is especially poignant. If Jesus established the practice of inclusive spiritual leadership, we should too.

The way Jesus and Saint Paul treated women is fascinating. Though Jesus and Paul were very careful not to upset the established order of society (to do things that would prevent the success of the gospel) they both pointed the way forward with revolutionary actions and principles that would eventually undermine slavery, patriarchy, and all dictatorial hands of hierarchy. (See points 6 and 7 in [Appendix 4](#))

Proverbs 31 Woman

Here is a description of a strong woman that most overlook when it comes to the subject of women in leadership. The Proverbs 31 woman is not as subservient as many would have us believe women should be. She ran her household! Not only that, but she was a businesswoman, bringing home earnings to expand the family’s fortune (She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar...She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard).

This woman, that the Bible envisions and idealizes, is a vision of leadership and equality. She holds her own within her family and community.

Pastor as Overseer

Saint Paul’s statements in 1 Peter, Titus, and 1 Timothy allow a woman to be an overseer; a pastor; to hold a church office. I can’t make this point any better than Ty Gibson in “A Closer Look at Women’s Ordination”:

The word “bishop” in 1 Timothy 3:2 is *episkopos*, and literally means “overseer” (ESV). Paul tells us that “the overseer (*episkopos*) manages (*oikonomos*) God’s household” (Titus 1:7, NIV). In other words, part of the biblical job description of the *episkopos* is the *management* of the church, and Ellen White clearly sees women, as well as men, in the church management role.

So we are faced with the biblical allowance that women can preach and teach, and we are faced with Ellen White’s statement that sometimes women are better adapted to the successful management of a church. At this point, some attempt to maneuver around the obvious and say that it is permissible for a woman to teach and preach, or it is permissible for a woman to manage a local church, but it is not permissible for a woman to occupy both roles at the same time, because that would acknowledge in a woman the two primary gifts that equate to a local pastor. Of course none of this reasoning exists

anywhere in the Bible or the writings of Ellen White. At this point we're just making up angles and arguments as we go in order to get around the clear implications of the inspired material before us.

But now, lest there be any doubt, consider one more point that allows us to achieve perfect clarity regarding whether or not women are eligible to occupy the ordained role of "overseer" (*episkopos*). Follow carefully:

- Both sides of the debate agree that all the spiritual gifts are gender inclusive (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4).
- All acknowledge, as well, that one of the gifts is that of "pastor" (*poimēn*), as listed in Ephesians 4:11, and therefore all agree that women, as well as men, may be "pastors."
- But in order to restrict the women "pastor" (*poimēn*) from the ordained "overseer" (*episkopos*) role, those opposed to women's ordination have insisted that there must be a distinction between spiritual *gifts* and *offices*, the reasoning being that a woman may receive and exercise the spiritual *gift* of "pastor," but she cannot be ordained in that role as an *office* equivalent to the "overseer" (*episkopos*) role.

Got that so far?

Now notice what 1 Peter 5:2 says to the local church leader: "Shepherd (*poimainō*, the same word as "pastor" in Ephesians 4:11) the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers (*episkopeō*, the same word as "bishop/overseer" in 1 Timothy 3:2)."

The following is, therefore, evident:

- One of the spiritual gifts for both men and women is that of "pastor."
- And Peter says that the "pastor" is one and the same position as the "overseer."
- Therefore, to concede that a woman can receive the spiritual *gift* of "pastor" is to concede, if we allow all of Scripture to inform us, that a woman can be in the ordained *office* of "overseer" to a local church.

The All Male Priesthood

Since all the Old Testament priests were men, shouldn't we follow precedent? We must recognize that the Old Testament Levitical priesthood is not the model for the New Testament Christian community. There can be no doubt that this community of apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, elders, and deacons are not priests of the same cloth as those in the Old Testament. The old priesthood gives way to the New Testament priesthood of all believers. Not only does Galatians 3:28 clearly state this, but Isaiah 61 is also a specific prophecy of this transition (See [Appendix 1](#)). Christ's sacrifice made the entire Old Testament sacerdotal system of priests, temples and sacrifices obsolete.

On top of this, those who argue that there were no female priests must also consider that this practice went far beyond gender. There were no priests of other races or even other tribes

in Israel either. If this priesthood were still a model we should follow, it would mean all of our priests should continue to be from the tribe of Levi. The Levitical system also included many ordinances that are not to be practiced today, including sacrificing lambs. Adhering too strictly to this system is to make the same mistake that some have made with the feast days. So it is clear that taking these things to their logical conclusion makes this argument invalid.

Yet the New Testament teaching of a priesthood of all believers goes further yet. It is embedded in Revelation, the sanctuary, and the revealing of Jesus through his people. What happened to Jesus at his first advent happens again to his people at the end of time, Jesus once more in human flesh. If Jesus is a king and a priest and He is going to be perfectly represented in and through us by the power of the Spirit, then all of us will also have to become kings and priests.

Paul speaks about this so clearly in Galatians 3 because there is only one Jesus to reflect as each member of the body of Christ is perfectly changed into His image and becomes a channel through which God can complete His ministry.

This necessarily elevates each member of the body of Christ, regardless of status, race, or gender, to the exalted position of reflecting all that Christ is—including a king *and a priest*. We are priests *through* Christ, distributing His completed ministry as our high priest to others. There can be no hierarchy, inequality, or denigration of women in this reality.

More than anything else then, it is a deeper understanding of what God means for us to be in Christ in these last days that will finally bring women to the place in ministry that has been denied them all these years. It was Bill Liversidge that helped me to understand this.

Lastly, Ellen White's recommended use of the tithe will remove any residual doubt on this subject. The position #2 statement summary from TOSC explains this:

Second, we should keep in mind that in the Old Testament the use of tithe was exclusively used for the Levites and no other Israelite was to receive it—whether male or female. In the Christian church the law of tithing is freed from gender constraints. Now, as Ellen G. White indicated, “the tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be them men or women” (1MR 263). This is based on the fact that “it is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God” (6T 322). The priesthood of all believers does allow for women to be ordained as pastors.

The all male priesthood was one of the proofs that most convinced me that we should have all male spiritual leadership in the church. Yet now it has become for me one of the strongest arguments in favor of women in ministry.

Should Women Keep Silence?

One name shatters the argument that women should keep silent: Ellen White. Seriously, if Saint Paul intended by his statements that women should keep silence, then we have a huge problem with Ellen White. Especially considering this statement that she wrote to the Elders at Battle Creek: “...neither the Lord nor Sister White will need to be dictated to by the brethren as to what subject she will bring before them [from the pulpit]. I...ask not permission to take the desk in the tabernacle. I take it as my rightful position accorded me of God.” (EGW Manuscript 30, June 1889, in 1888 Materials, pp. 355-356) Uriah Smith,

James White, and J. N. Andrews also make powerful cases against those who often leveled this argument against Ellen White (See [Appendix 8](#) and [Appendix 9](#)).

Beyond this, we have to remember the context of Paul's statement: The verse about women being silent in church is smack in the middle of Paul's warning against disorderly worship and speaking in tongues without an interpreter. Along with the command to be "silent" is also the command that women "ask questions of their husbands at home," which hints that the problem was not a violation of man's inherent headship over women, but an issue of disorder during worship where lively discussion or even arguments broke out.

One of the problems with a hyper-literal reading of scripture is that it takes no account at all of the setting (context) in which the statement was made. A little church history gives a lot of insight into Saint Paul's statement. In the early church, only men sat in the sanctuary, while the women sat in the periphery. Since women had no opportunity to study formally, they often didn't understand what was being said. This led women to shout down to their husbands about the meaning of what was being said and their husbands to respond. This caused pandemonium in church. This very well could be the situation that Paul was addressing. Ben Witherington gives another possible reason:

Now the problem as it surfaces in 1 Tim. 2.8-15 clearly has to do with particular women, high status women who have fancy clothes and hairstyles and are expecting right off the bat to be teachers of one and all in the church. The proof that this is once more a corrective passage, dealing with problems is seen from the outset— First Paul corrects grumbling men whom he wants to pray, then he corrects these high status women. Paul is an equal opportunity corrector of men and women when they are in error. In regard to his correction of women, something needs to be said about high status women in cities like Ephesus. What we know about such women is that they played vital roles in the Greco-Roman religious festivals, temples, worship services. They were priestesses, they were prophetesses, they were teachers, healers, keepers of the eternal flame, etc. It is then not surprising that such high status women would expect to be able, once they converted to Christ, to do the same sorts of things in the church. The problem was, they needed to be properly instructed and learn before they began to instruct others, whether male or female. This is a good principle for all of us to follow.

Nothing is said about women submitting to men here. The Greek is clear enough. Here the word for 'quietness' is used rather than the word for silence which we find in 1 Cor. 14, and once again the issue is their being in submission to the authoritative teaching of Timothy and others. Secondly the Greek verb "I am not now permitting" as Phil Payne has shown over and over again, is not a verb that implies an infinite extension of this refusal to permit. It means what it says "I am not presently permitting..." Why not? Because the women needed to learn before they taught. Thirdly, the Greek, since we are dealing with a text where a correction of behavior is being offered should be translated as follows "I am not currently permitting women (in this case the women referred to with the hairdos and bling and expensive attire) to teach or usurp authority over the (authorized) men. This is a prohibition of an abuse of a privilege, It does not rule out the possibility of a later authorization of a proper use of the privilege of offering Christian teaching, indeed we hear elsewhere in the Pastorals about more mature Christian women doing some teaching. ("Why Arguments Against Women in Ministry Aren't Biblical")

In any case, this had nothing to do with a prohibition of women speaking authoritatively in church. Paul was simply practically addressing a church problem. This is the difference a principle-based reading can make in interpretation. Often we can take a literal-based reading of scripture, but in this case, not.

Finally, if Paul calls for women to be silent and in submission “*as even the Law says,*” where is this commandment in the Old Testament law? Nowhere. It isn’t there, not in the Pentateuch, or anywhere else for that matter. That simply isn’t what Paul meant.

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CONCLUSION

Like many, I had a bias against women in ministry, believing that women should be submissive to men and should not be ordained. As a young man I was enamored by headship theology. Yet as I laid that bias aside and looked at the evidence, I changed my mind. It was not the persuasiveness of any one case that convicted me, but compelling and synergistic logic woven through the many principles I've discussed here. Because of this, I believe that the weight of this evidence is so broad as to be overwhelming. It cannot be concealed. Independent ministries can't hide it. No man, or group of men, can obscure it or prevent its emergence as truth in the church. It is like the tide, and it will sweep over all until God's purpose is accomplished.

I understand headship theology from both sides now and have come to the place where my position against it isn't just arguably true for me, but true beyond all argument. I cannot even consider a hierarchal concept of headship any longer. The theory is an attack on the very heart of God's love and character and is repulsive to me. The history of ordination, the witness of Ellen White, the wording of our fundamental beliefs, the witness and unique headship of Christ, the meaning of marriage, the witness of Genesis, the true nature of headship and love, the witness of Paul, and the nature of the Godhead have made it impossible for me to continue to cling to a fundamentalist, hierarchal view of headship.

Since the beginning, women have suffered discrimination. They have been subordinated, abused, and treated like property. Yet Jesus created a new system where there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female—where all believers are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Jewish men, who used to regularly thank God that they were not made Gentile, slave, or woman, could no longer pray that prayer. Paul broke down these old barriers with a new conviction that all people are a new creation in Jesus.

This is God's will for His church and its fullness is coming. Dwight Nelson makes a powerful correlation between what happened in the early church and what will happen in our church in the last day:

The party of the circumcision calls Peter onto the red carpet and asks him to give an accounting for what has just happened [baptizing Gentiles] contrary to church authority and rules. The answer Peter gives is amazing: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning... Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" Acts 17:15,17

There is a party today that believes it's all anatomically, genderly segregated, and I think Peter's words are just as applicable to them as they were to the leaders in the early church. The Spirit is calling for this wall between men and women to come down just as the wall between Jews and Gentiles came down. If God has poured out His Spirit on young women even as He did upon us as young men, and we see the evidence of the Spirit at work in their lives in ministry, then who are we—a room full of men—to make the decision that they cannot exercise that gift, so that because of their anatomy, they cannot receive the Holy Spirit to the extent we have received it. The time has come for us to

abandon “the exclusiveness established by the custom of ages¹,” for who are we to resist what the Holy Spirit is doing among us?

The wall between Jew and Gentile fell in the early church and, just as surely, the wall between men and women will also fall before Jesus comes to take His people home. It is one of the last great walls that yet prevent a full fellowship of believers in Christ’s church. When this wall falls at last, a brighter image of the character of God will shine forth from His church.

Further, I believe that this issue is part of the reason Christ has not come. In the end time God will have a people that understand His character like no others in history ever have, that will *perfectly image His love* so He can pour out His Spirit upon them. This has not happened in the past because our view and understanding of God’s character was partial (in relationship to what He has revealed to us). Yet the light of His character is shining brighter until that final day (Proverbs 4:18).

“In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; *they can honor him only as they have a right conception of his character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them.*” Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* 593

A big part of this light is reflected in how we in His body see and treat each other. Said more simply: We honor God by how we love each other. One of the most miserable failures of men throughout history has been their inability to love women. Today their entitlement is so engrained that most can’t even see their ineptitude. Because of this, the gender barrier that is preventing the fullness of love in our church *will come down* before Jesus comes.

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¹ Acts of the Apostles, 142

APPENDIX 1

ELLEN WHITE'S COMMENT ON ISAIAH 61

The following is taken from *A Closer Look at Women's Ordination* by Ty Gibson:

Also in 1901, Ellen White made a passionate appeal for workers, and in the course of her appeal she stated that both "men and women...brothers and sisters" are called to be "Priests of the Lord" and "Ministers of our God." Notice the progression of her thought and notice the biblical source she is drawing upon:

"If men and women would act as the Lord's helping hand, doing deeds of love and kindness, uplifting the oppressed, rescuing those ready to perish, the glory of the Lord would be their rearward..."

"Christ said of His work, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek...."

"Wake up, wake up, my brethren and sisters. You must do the work that Christ did when He was upon this earth. Remember that you may act as God's helping hand in opening the prison doors to those that are bound. Wonderful is the work that God desires to accomplish through His servants, that His name may constantly be glorified. He is waiting to work through His people. Those who are willing to be used will obtain a rich experience, an experience full of the glory of God...."

"Of those who act as His helping hand the Lord says, 'Ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord; men shall call you the Ministers of our God'" (Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, October 15, 1901).

The biblical passage from which she is quoting is Isaiah 61. It is a prophecy of the ministry in which the Messiah would engage. We are generally familiar with the part of the prophecy Jesus applied to Himself. But Ellen White goes on to quote a part of the prophecy with which most of us are not familiar, the part in which Isaiah foretells the formation of the New Testament church in the wake of the Messiah's ministry:

"Ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God" (Isaiah 61:6, KJV).

One of the arguments being offered against allowing for the ordination of women is that the Old Testament priests were all men. Therefore, it is reasoned, only men should be allowed to occupy the pastoral role in the church. The problem with this argument is that it fails to recognize that within the biblical narrative, the Old Testament Levitical priesthood gives way to the New Testament priesthood of all believers. Isaiah 61 is a specific prophecy that foretold this transition. What Ellen White has done with Isaiah 61 is quite illuminating. She quotes the prophecy, invoking the language of "Priest" and "Minister," and applies it to both brothers and sisters, men and women, within the church. This is of extreme significance, because it demonstrates, unequivocally, that Bible prophecy envisioned the body of Christ as a priesthood of all believers, and Ellen White simply assumed that the prophecy pointed to both men and women occupying the priestly and ministerial role, in the Christian church. [Back To Top](#)

APPENDIX 2

SHOULD MAN BE THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH JUST BECAUSE HE SHOULD BE THE HEAD OF HIS MARRIAGE?

In *A Closer Look at Women's Ordination*, Ty Gibson talks about the mistake of broadening headship from marriage to the church:

This is a major and potentially dangerous oversight on the part of those advancing male headship as an argument against women's ordination. They employ the biblical concept of headship as evidence that women cannot occupy the ordained role because, they say, it would violate the biblical truth of male headship. But the fact is, there is no passage of Scripture that articulates the concept of male headship in relation to ministry, church organization, or ordination. Rather, headship is only spoken of with regards to marriage and there is no scripture that makes it transferable into church relations.

For the logic to remain consistent, if the ordained minister occupies the role of head to the church, then he occupies that role to all the un-ordained members, both males and females, which would place the pastor in the spiritual role of husband to the bride of Christ. This is the very thing that we, as Protestants, reject in Catholic ecclesiology. The ordained minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church most emphatically *does not* occupy a headship role to the church.

We conclude, then, that there is no biblically-informed need for concern that ordaining women would usurp the male headship role, because not even the men who occupy the pastoral position possess a headship role to the church. What we should be concerned about, however, is moving the Adventist Church in a direction that would define the pastor in headship terms, because that would constitute elevating the clergy to the position of Christ. Said another way, there is no headship role to preserve or protect, except that of Christ Himself. Ordaining women would, in fact, be an affirmation of the priesthood-of-all-believers ecclesiology we professedly adhere to as Protestants, and it would sharpen our perception of the pastoral role as simply a full-time, vocational extension of the role all church members have as a priesthood-of-all-believers community.

What happens, then, to male headship if we ordain women?

It remains, as precisely what the Bible says it is—the husband is the head of the wife and Christ is the Head of the Church!

For the church to acknowledge women pastors by the laying on of hands would simply affirm a ministerial calling to preach the gospel and win souls to Christ in a vocational capacity. It would alter nothing in a woman's ontological makeup or home relations. If a woman is ordained as a vocational soul-winner, her husband is still her husband and she is still his wife. All the husband-wife dynamics remain the same. He is still called upon by God to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, and she is still called upon to voluntarily submit to his selfless leadership within the secure relational environment of his husbandly love (Ephesians 5).

But let us be certain of this: the Bible nowhere reasons that since the husband is the head of the wife in the home, therefore only men can occupy the ordained role in the church. That Bible verse simply does not exist. The idea is a forced construct that lacks even one biblical

passage. I am the head of my wife, not the head of every other man's wife in addition to my own. And I have a hunch that all my married brothers in Christ want to keep it that way.

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APPENDIX 3

ON THE UNIQUE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH A STATEMENT OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Preamble

We, the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, affirm that Christ is the only Head of the Church (Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:18). Therefore, while there exists legitimate leadership in the Church, no other human being may rightfully claim a headship role in the Church. As Head of the Church, Christ provides the ultimate manifestation of God's love (Eph 5:23, 25), demonstrating and vindicating God's moral government of love (Rom 3:4, 25-26 5:8), and thus defeating the counterfeit government of the usurping "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 16:11; cf. *DA* 758; *2T* 2:211).

God's Moral Government of Love

Christ's headship in the Church is inextricably bound up with the love of God and is itself the ultimate explication of God's love for the world (John 3:16; 15:13; Rom 5:8). As the sole "head of the church," Christ "loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:23, 25).ⁱ Christ's demonstration of divine love as Head of the Church directly reflects God's moral government of love, within which the law is a transcript of God's character and, conversely, love is itself the fulfillment of God's law (Matt 22:37-39; Rom 13:8; cf. *TMK* 366).

Since love requires moral freedom, God does not exercise His headship power or authority to coerce or determine the moral will of His created beings. God permitted rebellion, at the highest cost to Himself, because He desires willing obedience that is motivated by love rather than fear. Such voluntary obedience could not be obtained by the exercise of power or authority, but can only be freely given. In this way, God's government is based on freely bestowed mutual love wherein God does not deterministically impose His will, but does hold intelligent creatures morally accountable to His perfect law of love.

Accordingly, rather than exercising His infinite power to unilaterally prevent or overturn the rebellion by removing the freedom necessary for a genuine love relationship, God has allowed the enemy's counterfeit government to manifest itself, while actively demonstrating the nature of His moral government of love in direct and striking contrast. Whereas the enemy grasps for power and domination, Christ, who possesses all power, does not dominate, determine, or coerce but "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant [*doulos*] . . . He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of

death, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2:7-9, NKJV). In this way, Christ, the unique Head of the Church, "demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Consequently, God's government of unselfish love is clearly and

supremely manifested.

The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan

The Great Controversy originated with Satan's direct attack against the nature and role of Christ in heaven, seeking to displace Christ and exalt himself to be like God (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:12-19; cf. Rev 12:7-9). In the history of the Great Controversy, the usurping "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. 2 Cor 4:4), although defeated at the cross, continues his quest to exalt himself by dominating others. He attempts to replace God's government of love with an alternative form of government that grasps for a domineering, self-seeking authority. He seeks to replace Christ as the Head (2 Thess 2:3-4), injuring both Christ, the sole Head of the true Church, and Christ's corporate body, His Church.

From the second century onward, post-Apostolic Christianity gradually implemented a system of church government that reflected Rome's conception of authority as the power to arbitrarily command and coerce obedience and replaced the headship of Christ with the headship of mere humans. This counterfeit system of church governance was (1) hierarchical, based on a chain of command with a monarchical bishop at the "head" of the Church, with complete and final control over its affairs; (2) sacramental, meaning that the spiritual life of believers, including their very salvation, depended on ordained clergymen; (3) elitist (i.e., sacerdotal), meaning that the rite of ordination (laying on of hands) infused the clergy with special powers; and (4) headship-oriented, meaning that those who received the rite of ordination were thereby married to their Church and thus took on "headship" roles in the Church in place of Christ the Head ("*in persona Christi Capitis*"; cf. *Vicarius Filii Dei*, "in the place of the Son of God").

This system of government has been implemented in various forms, amounting to the usurpation of Christ's headship in the Church by mere humans. Indeed, this very system is that of the sea beast of Revelation 13-14 that was granted power and authority by the dragon (13:2, 4), counterfeits the resurrection of Christ (13:3), accepts the world's worship along with the dragon (13:4, 8), blasphemes against God and His sanctuary, and exercises worldwide authority to persecute God's people (13:5-7). This antichrist power which usurps the role of Christ on earth in keeping with the ancient attempt by Satan to replace Christ in heaven, seeks to destroy the everlasting gospel and ultimately commands obedience and enforces false worship. This culminates in severe persecution of those who refuse to worship the beast and his image, the remnant who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus, those who place no confidence in mere humans with regard to their salvation (Rev 13:6-8; 14:6-12).

The antichrist system of church government sets the stage for the climactic events of the final conflict in Revelation by, among other things: (1) asserting authority to appoint humans to Christ-replacing headship positions in the Church on earth (globally and locally), (2) thereby claiming to uniquely possess authority to interpret and teach Scripture and thus have the final word on all matters of doctrine and ecclesial practice while (3) wielding the spiritual power and authority to command and coerce obedience using both spiritual and civil tools.

This system of government stands in direct contrast to Christ's headship and His teaching on

the nature of the authority of Church leaders. Christ reflected God's moral government of love by exemplifying service leadership (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45), including a kind of authority that does not seek to subject the wills of others or enforce obedience. Rather, it leads by the example of service and unselfish love, which draws (rather than compels) others to willing service in love (Gal 5:13). All authority "in heaven and on earth" was given to Christ (Matt 28:18), but Christ does not remove graciously endowed free will and force His created human beings into obedience, but "loved [us] and gave Himself up for us" (Eph 5:2). The closest the Church comes to acts of enforcement is when it engages in discipline as a corporate body based on very clear teachings of Scripture. Such discipline is not the responsibility of any one person, or even a small group, but must be an action of at least the local congregation. Even then, such discipline does not result in coercion, but in restricting the individual from privileges of membership for a time in order to allow them to come to repentance and restoration (Matt 18:12-17; 1 Cor 5:5).

Church members (including but not limited to Church leaders) are called to follow Christ's example of unselfish love [Eph 5:1]. They are to have the mind of Christ, which includes the willingness to humble oneself and take on the role of a slave (*doulos*; Phil 2:5-8), or servant (*diakonos*) of Christ (Matt 20:26), even as He humbled Himself to the point of death. Whereas the leaders in the Roman Empire of Christ's time "lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them" (Matt 20:25), it is not to be so with God's people but "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant [*diakonos*], and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave [*doulos*]" (Matt 20:26-27).

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Thus, the one who would be great is the one who is the slave [*doulos*] of all (Mark 10:44), and the "greatest among you shall be your servant [*diakonos*]" (Matt 23:11; cf. 9-12). The Bible outlines essential roles of leadership and authority in the Church. However, all leadership within the Church must be servant leadership. First Peter 5:1-3, 5-7 adroitly balances the affirmation of leadership within the Church with the humility that such leadership entails: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ . . . shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. . . . You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (Cf. AA 359-60; DA 817). Accordingly, Church leaders should be humble servants. At the same time they should be respected and deeply appreciated for their diligent labor (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17; cf. Heb 13:7) even as they also show proper respect to others by demonstrating the mutual love and regard for others that is to take place among all Christians (1 Pet 2:17).ⁱⁱ

The authority of those leading the Church is conveyed to them by the Church. This authority is delegated by Christ to His Church and implemented through its representative system. Thus appointed leaders become stewards of a power that should be exercised on behalf of Christ and for the benefit of those they lead. The functionality of authority does

not negate equality among the members given to the Church by Christ. As the Spirit leads the body of Christ, not just the few in leadership, those leading out should seek to allow their decisions to be guided, insofar as possible, by the wisdom and insight of the group. As a Church, we thus give decision-making authority not to any single president or chairperson, but to committees, where those that lead the group are seeking the wisdom and, where possible, consensus of the group.

God's remnant, then, will treasure a system of Church government, authority, and leadership that reflects (as much as is humanly possible) the ideal of God's government of love, within which moral freedom is cherished and leaders are the humble servants of all, even as Christ gave Himself up for all. This very kind of humble servant leadership, grounded in love, was perfectly modeled by Christ who, as unique "head of the church . . . loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph 5:23, 25), supremely exemplifying God's character and moral government of love.

The Unique and Non-Transferable Headship of Christ

Scripture affirms that the Son is eternally equal with the Father and the Spirit (Col 2:9; Heb 1:3; Matt 28:19; John 1:1; 5:18; 8:58; 14:9; Phil 2:6; Rom 9:5; Col 1:15-17; DA 469, 530; GC 495; 7ABC 437-40; TM 252; TA 209; RH April 5, 1906). Scripture also affirms the temporary voluntary functional subordination of Christ the Son in order to accomplish the salvation of humanity (John 5:19; 8:28, 54; 14:10, 28; 17:5; Phil 2:7-11; Col 1:18-20; Eph 1:23; Heb 1:8; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Isa 9:6-7; Dan 7:13-14; Rev 11:15; PP 34; RH, Oct 29, 1895; RH, June 15, 1905; FLB 76). The interpersonal relationships within the Trinity provide the ultimate model of love and self-sacrifice for us. As such, they do not furnish a model for a top-down governmental structure for human leadership within the Church.

According to Scripture, Christ is the only Head of the Church and the human members of Christ's Church collectively (male and female) make up the body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:19; cf. 1 Cor 11:3; Col 2:10). Likewise, Ellen White counsels: "Christ, not the minister, is the head of the church" (ST Jan. 27, 1890), and "Christ is the only Head of the church" (21MR 274; cf. DA 817, GC 51). Neither Scripture nor the writings of Ellen White apply the language of headship in the Church to anyone other than Christ. Further, neither Scripture nor the writings of Ellen White endorse any transfer of the role of head in the home to roles within the Church body.

Since Christ is the only Head of the Church, no other can be head of the Church. That is, headship in the Church is unique to Christ and is non-transferable. All those who would follow Christ's method of ministry cannot do so by taking on His role of headship in the Church but by serving others in accordance with the "mind of Christ" (cf. Phil 2:5) and God's moral government of love. Deviation from the unique headship of Christ in the Church follows the enemy's practice of domination and counterfeit government, which directly contradicts and opposes God's moral government of love.

Accordingly, the role of "head" in the home (Eph 5:23) is not transferable to the realm of the Church. Indeed, the idea that the role of "head" in the home would or should transfer to other realms is a fallacious *non sequitur* (that is, the transfer from one realm to another does

not follow logically). For example, one's role in the home obviously does not translate into a similar or analogous role in one's workplace.

Beyond the logical problems inherent in the move from head of the home to headship in the Church, two demonstrably biblical rationales exclude such a transfer. First, as already noted, Christ is the *only* Head of the Church. Any attempt at proliferation of "heads" in the Church is thus unacceptable for it is a step toward usurping the unique headship role of Christ, who is the only mediator between God and humans. It is unscriptural to speak of any kind of headship in the Church apart from that of Christ.

No inspired writer teaches the headship of man over woman at the Creation. Rather, Genesis 1 teaches us that male and female participate equally in the image of God, with no hint of pre-fall subordination of one to the other (Gen 1:27). Genesis 2 reinforces Genesis 1 in this regard. Eve's creation from Adam's side shows that she is "to stand by his side as an equal" (Gen 2:21-22; *PP* 46). Although various interpretations of Gen 3:16 have recognized some kind of post-Fall disruption of this pre-Fall egalitarian ideal, the Bible consistently calls us back to God's original plan for full equality without hierarchy (Song 7:10; Isa 65:17, 25; cf. Gen 1:29-30). Paul's writings, though often misunderstood (2 Pet 3:16), maintain this Eden model (Eph 5:21-23), affirming with the rest of Scripture the Gospel ideal of the ultimate restoration of the Eden model (cf. Matt 19:8; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:28). Ellen White also underlines this redemptive paradigm: "Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband's equal" (*AH* 231). "The Lord desires His ministering servants to occupy a place worthy of the highest consideration. In the mind of God, the ministry of men and women existed before the world was created" (*18MR* 380). "Infinite wisdom devised the plan of redemption, which places the race on a second probation by giving them another trial" (*3T* 484; cf. *PP* 58-59, and *1T* 307-308).

Second, every member of the Church is part of the body of Christ, who is the One Head. Since each member of the Church (male or female) is a part of the body of Christ, a member cannot at the same time exercise headship in the Church. In the same way, since Christ is the unique Husband of the Church (Christ's metaphorical bride), the members of the Church cannot themselves be husbands of the Church but collectively, men and women together, are the bride of Christ. That the Church as family of God is analogous to human families only serves to suggest that humans should manifest the love of God in their family relationships even as Christ does in relationship to His bride.

Within the body of Christ, the only Head of the Church, every member of the Church body receives spiritual gifts: the Spirit gives to "each one [*hekastos*] individually just as He wills" (1 Cor 12:11). The Holy Spirit is given to all believers at the time of the end: "And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-30 NIV). Within this very context, Scripture emphatically excludes the notion of elitism within the Church body of Christ, proclaiming that "we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Cor 12:13-14; cf. Gal 3:28). Thus, no member of the body is "any the less *a part* of the body" regardless of one's role (1 Cor 12:15-16) and, indeed, those that

are deemed “less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor” (1 Cor 12:23).

In all this, every gift and ministry is nothing without love, for “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13; cf. all of chapter 13; cf. Rom 12:3-10; Eph 4:11-16). Here again, the unselfish love that is central to God’s moral government should be reflected in humble service to one another within Christ’s body and bride, the Church.

This is reflected in Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief No. 14, “Unity in the Body of Christ,” which reads in part: “The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.”

There is no third category between the Head and body of Christ, or between the corresponding bridegroom (Christ) and bride (the Church). The minister is not to be separate from the body of Christ, but is likewise a member of Christ’s body and thus plays a non-elitist role in service to and alongside the other members that corresponds to the individual’s Spirit-bestowed gifts and accords with the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5-9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; cf. Ex 19:5-6). Because it is the Spirit who gives gifts to each one (male and female) as He wills (1 Cor 12:11; cf. 12, 18, 19, 27-31; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:18; Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Pet 4:10), the Church confers no spiritual powers or gifts on anyone but merely recognizes the gifts that God has granted and facilitates corresponding opportunities for ministry within the body of Christ. Leadership ministries within the Church are facilitated by the Church body as a recognition of the particular Spirit-given gifts and characteristics of servant leadership that reflect God’s moral government of unselfish love (cf. Phil 2:5-8). In this way, both individually and collectively the Church is to complete its mission of proclaiming the Three Angels’ Messages and revealing God’s character of love, the last revelation of God’s mercy to the world (*COL* 415).

In sum, any form of headship claimed by a mere human, whether male or female, usurps the sole headship of Christ over the Church. Christian service, including Church leadership, is to reflect but never usurp Christ’s leadership. Thus, while Christ’s *manner of* leadership is to be reflected by believers, Christ’s *particular role of* leadership is unique and not to be encroached upon by any mere human. Christ alone is the Head of the Church body, of which all Christians are members and submitted to Him.

No human leader, then, may rightfully assume a headship role within the Church; the highest level that any leaders can “ascend” corresponds directly to the depths to which they are willing to descend in loving and humble service, giving themselves for Christ’s body even as Christ gave himself for his body and bride, his beloved Church, the object of “His supreme regard” (*2SAT* 215).

Affirmations and Denials

- We affirm that there is only one Head of the Church, Christ, and this headship in the

Church is non-transferable and inimitable. Thus, Christ's particular role of leadership is unique.

- We deny that any human can rightly assume a headship role within the Church.
- We affirm that leadership in the Church should be modeled after Christ's servant leadership and grounded in love, with the recognition that Christ's manner of leadership is to be reflected by Christian leaders.
- We deny any Church government that results in sacramental, elitist, and headship-oriented leadership, which are counterfeits of Christ's moral government of love and usurp His unique role and authority as Head of the Church (His body) and husband of the Church (His wife).
- We affirm that Church leaders possess stewardship responsibilities of the affairs of the Church, carrying out the decisions of the Church made in committee and business sessions.
- We deny that any mere human is invested with final decision-making authority in regards to Church teaching, ritual, or doctrine.
- We affirm the priesthood of all believers and that no human mediator is needed between God and humans.
- We deny any elevation of Church leaders as mediators between God and humans or as head of or in the Church.

i Unless indicated otherwise, the biblical text is quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1995).

ii It is worth noting that some statements that refer to leadership roles within the Church use language that many English versions translate as "rule." For example, 1 Tim 5:17 states: "The elders who rule [*proestōtes* from the root *proistemi*] well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (cf. the similar use of this root in Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4-5, 12). The root *proistemi*, here translated "rule," literally refers to those who "stand before," beneficially leading and ministering to the community, and should not be confused with some kind of monarchical rulership or sovereignty. In the LXX it refers to the household "ministry" of a servant of the prince (2 Sam 13:17; cf. 1 Tim 3:4-5, 12) and the noun form of this root, *prostatis*, refers to Phoebe's ministry as *diakonos* (Rom 16:1-2).

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APPENDIX 4

WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS ABOUT WOMEN AS SPIRITUAL LEADERS

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A. Introduction

1. What is the best way to address any and all challenges to women in spiritual leadership? Ellen White's counsel is as follows: "The way to dispel darkness is to admit light. The best way to deal with error is to present truth" (DA 498.5).
2. What does this issue have to do with the authority of Scripture, as some have suggested? Actually, nothing at all. For loyal Seventh-day Adventists, the main discussion is about biblical interpretation; i.e., "rightly dividing the word."
3. How are the issues of "ordination to the ministry" and "spiritual leadership" related? The Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual, 1992, p. 76, reads: "While elders and deacons are appointed on the basis of spiritual experience and ability (Titus 1:5; Acts 6:3), the gospel ministry, Seventh-day Adventists believe, is a special calling from God. Regardless of the means by which the Lord initiates it, His call becomes an all-absorbing passion, a relentless drive that leads its possessor to exclaim: 'Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' (1 Cor 9:16). The conviction becomes a 'fire in the bones' that will not be denied expression (Jer 20:9). Ordination, an act of commission, acknowledges God's call, sets the individual apart, and appoints that person to serve the church in a special capacity."
4. What has the SDA Church voted on this?

At the 1990 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, the following recommendation was put to delegates: "1. While the Commission [on the role of Women in the Church] does not have a consensus as to whether or not the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, it concludes unanimously that these sources affirm a significant, wide-ranging, and continued ministry for women which is being expressed and will be evidenced in the varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the

Holy Spirit. 2. Further, in view of the widespread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world Church and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church, we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry," "at this time." 1173 voted for this report; 377 against. The next day, however, delegates voted that any unordained pastor (if ordained as a local elder) can perform weddings. Also, returning to its historic position, the 1995 Church Manual notes that, any local elder, can baptize, with a conference president's permission.

In 1995 at Utrecht, the GC session voted to keep the world church united, thus denying the NAD's request to ordain women pastors in its territory. In brief, "the church has not taken an official position on the biblical support (or lack of it) for the ordination of women to the ministry. It has simply voted against leaving the decision up to each world division" (Angel Manuel Rodríguez, "Can We Talk?" *Adventist Review*, October 2010).

B. Biblical Issues

1. How does the creation story of Genesis 1 view male and female in relation to each other? "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27, NRSV). This basic text has not even a hint of "divine creation order." Man and woman are completely equal, without any submission/subordination of one to the other, even though they are created with sexual differentiation.

Careful study shows that this description of the relationship between man and woman can be seen throughout the Bible and beyond. No inspired person – not Moses, Jesus, Paul, or Ellen White – teaches a creation headship of man over woman.

Ultimately, the "principle of male headship and female subordination" is the "primary theological foundation" used against women as spiritual leaders, such as pastor and elder (see, for example, Ján Barna, "Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Theology" [PhD diss., University of Bristol and Trinity College, 2009], 244).

2. What can be rightly found in Genesis 2?

(a) Because man is created first and then woman, some suggest that this teaches male headship. But, this idea contradicts the structure of the Hebrew text. The entire account (even as to the amount of Hebrew words) is written to show that the creation of woman at the end of the narrative corresponds in importance to the creation of man at the beginning. Thus, woman is created as the climax of the creation story; and the movement in the text is from incompleteness to completeness.

(b) Since God gave instructions to the man (not the woman) about the forbidden tree, some have concluded this shows male headship. However, this view ignores the fact that, as soon as He'd created the man, God needed to warn him against transgression, even before the woman was created.

(c) The Hebrew language describes the woman as man's $\text{çzer k}^{\text{e}}\text{negdô}$ ("help meet for him," Gen 2:18, KJV). While the English word "help" often suggests a subordinate, the Hebrew çzer has no such connotation. Used mostly of God (as in Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26; Pss 33:20; 70:4; 115:9-11), this relational term never (in Scripture) implies a subordinate position, but simply a beneficial relationship. The adjoining term $\text{k}^{\text{e}}\text{negdô}$ conveys the notion of a "counterpart." Hence, the NAB's rendition, "I will make a suitable partner for him," effectively captures the essence of the two terms, which reveals no headship, but rather an equal partnership, both ontologically and functionally.

(d) Because woman is created from man's rib, some claim this derivation proves subordination. That Adam was "derived" from the ground shows no subordination, neither does Eve's creation from a rib. Rather, using the raw material of the rib, God chose to aesthetically create a woman, while Adam was asleep. Taken from his side, the very symbolism indicates that, not to be stepped on, she was "to stand by his side as an equal" (PP 46.2).

(e) Contrary to popular opinion, Adam does not exercise headship over the woman by naming her, in Genesis 2:23. In fact, the act of naming in the Old Testament does not signify the exercise of authority, but merely the ability of discernment. For example, using the typical naming formula, Hagar assigns a name to God (Gen 16:13); but this certainly does not suggest her exercising headship over God. Moreover, the "divine passives" in this text imply that the designation "woman" derives from God, not from man (see Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978], 46-47).

"Conspicuously absent in Genesis 1-2 is any reference to divine prescriptions for man to exercise authority over woman.... Any teaching that inserts an authority structure between Adam and Eve in God's creation design is to be firmly rejected since it is not founded on the biblical text" (Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 41).

In brief, Genesis 2 has no evidence of any creation order with men in the headship role and women in a submissive or subordinate position. Nothing in this passage restricts her from full and equal participation with man in any ministry to which God may choose to call her. (For more on the above five points, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007], 27-35).

3. What can be learned from Genesis 3?

(a) While there is not even a hint of headship in Genesis 1 and 2, a subjection of Eve to Adam is seen in Genesis 3:16 (NKJV): "Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you." It is highly significant to recognize that this subjection comes only after the Fall into sin. Moreover this is not a general submission of women to men, but is limited to the husband-wife relationship. This is the consistent interpretation of Ellen White (see especially PP 58-59; 1T 307- 308; etc.), and the SDA Bible Commentary. The servant-headship of the husband to his wife, as indicated in Genesis 3, can no more be broadened to man-woman relationships in general, than can the sexual desire of the wife be extended to mean the sexual longing of all women for all men.

(b) "Furthermore, the temptation to which both Adam and Eve yielded was the temptation to become like God – to exercise moral autonomy in acting against the express command of God. God specifically states what the sin of both of them was: not the violation of a [so-called] man/woman leadership/submission principle but the eating of the tree from which God commanded them not to eat ([Gen] 3:11)" (Flame of Yahweh, 65.)

(c) In short, the husband's loving servant leadership in the home, though arising from the results of sin, is to be seen as a divine blessing in fostering harmony and union between

husband and wife – a type of leadership which is designed to lead back as far as possible to the original plan of union between equal partners without hierarchy.

4. How do the inspired writings of Paul relate to the edenic model seen in Genesis 1-3?

(a) Some have used a so-called “simple, plain” reading of Scripture, resulting in their conclusion that Paul’s writings place men over women. This hyper-literalistic approach is clearly contrary to the careful, contextual “Methods of Bible Study,” as voted by the GC Annual Council in 1986. Also, it ignores the fact that, as repeatedly observed in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (e.g., 65-67; 363- 369; 397-401; etc.), detailed linguistic/exegetical work is vital to explain some basic SDA beliefs.

(b) Paul provides much instruction about the relationship between husbands and wives. “Ephesians 5:21-23, the foundational NT passage dealing with husband-wife relations, is the only NT passage on this issue that contains both *kephalē*, ‘head,’ and *hypotassō*, ‘submit.’ There is no question that in this passage it is the husband- wife relationship that is in view, not men-women relationships in general... Unmistakably, in Eph 5 the counsel concerns the husband as the head of his own wife, not male headship over women in general” (Flame of Yahweh, 642).

(c) Since 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 is thematically parallel to Ephesians 5:22-33, it is best to render verse 3 as the RSV has it: “the head of a woman is her husband.” The other New Testament texts employing the word *hypotassō* (“submit”) in a man-woman relational context – 1 Cor 14:34; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1-5 – also deal with a husband-wife relationship, and not the relationship of men and women in general.

(d) This husband-wife interpretation also holds for the most discussed passage on women as spiritual leaders: 1 Timothy 2:9-14. At least as far back as Martin Luther, it was noted that verses 11 and 12 refer to the home, as rightly rendered in the 2011 Common English Bible (CEB): “A wife should learn quietly with complete submission. I don’t allow a wife to teach or to control her husband. Instead, she should be a quiet listener.”

(e) There is a headship/submission principle to be found in the New Testament church – “but it

does not consist of male leaders being given this headship role and women submitting to the male headship. Rather, according to the NT witness, there is only one true Head – Jesus Christ; he is the ‘husband’ to the church, and all the church – both men and women – as his bride, is to submit to his headship” (Flame of Yahweh, 648).

5. What actual practice do we see in the Old Testament regarding women leaders over men?

(a) Miriam is noted as a prophet and musician (Exod 15:20; Micah 6:4; etc.). Deborah (in Judges 4-5) is depicted “as a military leader with the same authority as male generals, and a judge to whom other male Israelites turned for legal counsel and to settle court cases” (Jo Ann Davidson, “Women in Scripture: A Survey and Evaluation,” in Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical & Historical Perspectives* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews

University Press, 1998], 168). Huldah, who served during the time of Jeremiah, comes to the foreground as a chief religious authority at a time of intense revival in Judah (see 2 Kings 22).

(b) In a nutshell, although there did exist social inequalities for women in Israel, there were no legal restrictions barring women from positions of influence, leadership or authority over men.

(c) God's plan was that all Israel would be a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). Due to Israel's sin, an alternate plan was instituted in which even most men were excluded – except for one family in one tribe in one literal nation of Israel.

6. How did Jesus treat women, and why?

Jesus Himself set the tone for complete gospel restoration by directing His hearers back to God's original plan "from the beginning" (Matt 19:8). He did not upset the fabric of Jewish culture; thus He did not select women as part of His immediate disciples, nor any Gentiles. But, He pointed the way forward, in His revolutionary treatment of women (see, for example, Matt 15:21-28; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:1-3; John 4:7-30; 20:1-18).

7. How did Paul treat women, and why?

(a) First, notice: "It was not the apostle's work to overturn arbitrarily or suddenly the established order of society. To attempt this would be to prevent the success of the gospel. But he taught principles which struck at the very foundation of slavery and which, if carried into effect, would surely undermine the whole system" (AA 459.3).

(b) Yet, in Galatians 3:28 (NRSV) Paul declared: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." This is not merely dealing with equal access to salvation among various groups. On the contrary, Paul here specifically identifies three relationships in which the Jews had perverted God's original plan, making one group subordinate to another: Jew-Gentile; master-slave; male-female. By using the somewhat rare terms "male-female" (i.e., *arsçn-thçly*) instead of "husband-wife" (*ançr-gunç*), Paul establishes a direct link with Genesis 1:27, and thereby shows how the gospel summons us back to the divine ideal, which excludes the subordination of females to males. Interestingly, Paul's choice of language upholds the equality of men and women in the church, without changing the position of husband as head in the family.

(c) The subordination of Gentiles by Jews was difficult to root out (even in Peter; see Gal 2:11-14). Slavery, similarly, was not immediately abolished in the church (see Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22; Phlm 12; etc.), yet principles were set forth that would lead back to the edenic ideal. Likewise, it has taken time for women to receive full and equal participation with men in church ministry.

(d) Yet, even in New Testament times there are examples of women in church leadership/headship roles. For example, Paul indicates that the women at Philippi, including Euodia and Syntyche were leaders of the local congregation (Phil 4:2-3). Priscilla had an authoritative

teaching role over Apollos (Acts 18:24-28); also, Romans 16:1-16 lists several women who ministered together with Paul as his coworkers (synergoi).

(e) While it is possible that Junia was a female apostle (see Rom 16:7), a more persuasive case for female spiritual leaders can be made from a study of Phoebe (in Rom 16:1), to be considered next.

8. What is the meaning and significance of the Pauline phrase “the husband of one wife”?

(a) Perhaps more than any other, this one phrase has been used (mostly among laity) as the clinching argument against women in spiritual leadership. The argument is essentially as follows: “The Bible states specifically, in two different places (1 Tim 3:2; and Titus 1:6), that a pastor or elder is to be ‘the husband of one wife,’ i.e., a male, thus ruling out women in these positions.”

(b) Over time various interpretations have been given as to the meaning of this phrase (see the list by Ekkehardt Mueller, “Husband of One Wife – 1 Tim 3:2,” www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org). Since several of these views contradict other clear biblical data, they can be set aside. The most credible explanation seems to be as follows: (i) There is a very specific term in Greek to stress gender, *arsḗn* (“male”), which Paul and other New Testament writers used in some places, but which is absent here; (ii) If the Holy Spirit had sought to clearly communicate that the spiritual leaders needed to be “male,” He could easily have done so, by inspiring Paul to indicate that the elder or pastor “*dei...einai*” (must be...), “*arsḗn*” (a male); (iii) Instead, Paul used *anḗr/andros*, which in its various forms appears about 215 times in the New Testament. In the well-respected Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, of all the definitions listed for *anḗr/andros*, the word “male” is never used; (iv) The structure of the phrase is unusual: *mias gunaikos andra* (i.e., literally, a “one-woman-man”), thus implying that the stress is on the word “one;” (v) “Paul did not say that bishops/elders must be ‘husbands of a wife’ – which would have allowed for a stronger emphasis on the term ‘husband’ – but he said: ‘husband of one wife.’ This clearly excludes a position claiming that Paul focused on the maleness of the bishop/elder” (“Husband of One Wife,” 4); (vi) In line with the other character qualities in this list, this phrase shows that the overseer must be totally devoted to the spouse, as the CEB rightly renders it: “They should be faithful to their spouse.”

(c) It is this appropriate idiomatic interpretation of the phrase *mias gunaikos andra* (i.e., “faithful to their spouse”) which accounts for the fact that Phoebe was identified as a “deacon [diakonos] of the church at Cenchreae” (Rom 16:1, NRSV). In brief, just as the use of masculine gender terms in the Decalogue does not exempt women from obedience, similarly the use of masculine gender language in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 does not exclude women from serving as elders or pastors.

{1. While significant material has been added, this handout relies heavily on the April 2010 document produced by Dr. Richard M. Davidson, “The Bible Supports the Ordination/Commissioning of Women as Pastors and Local Church Elders;” Andrews University}

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APPENDIX 5

I BELIEVE IN MALE HEADSHIP

BY DR. GILBERT BILEZIKIAN

I believe in male headship unabashedly and unreservedly. I cannot evade the issue or rationalize my way around it. The headship of husbands is clearly and unassailably taught in the New Testament. Moreover, the Bible clearly declares that the response of wives to their husbands' headship is submission in everything. Indeed, the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. As the church is subject to Christ, so wives must be subject in everything to their husbands (Eph. 5:23-24). This precept is not given in Scripture as a recommendation, a suggestion or a piece of advice that may be optionally followed. It is an absolute mandate that requires the same level of adherence as any of its commandments.

Coming from an advocate of the reform movement called egalitarian or, more accurately, non-hierarchical complementarian, the above statement sounds regressive. For this reason, I also caution against citing it without referencing what follows.

A basic rule of sound hermeneutics requires that no biblical term or concept be infused with meanings foreign to it. For this reason, the meaning of *head* in the New Testament must be defined from within the New Testament itself. It cannot be assumed that the value of head in the English language as authority, leader or master carries over automatically into the New Testament's use of the same word *head*.

There is no doubt that, among his multiple functions in regard to the church, Christ is authority, leader and master over the church since the scope of his universal lordship includes the church. Therefore, what is under scrutiny is not the concept of the lordship of Christ over the church. Rather, it must be determined whether the word *head*, when used to describe Christ's relationship to the church, carries the same meaning of lordship or whether it is invested with a different value. The glib assumption may not be made that, because head denotes authority in English, it also does so in the language of the New Testament.

Fortunately, the meaning of *head* can be easily determined within its scriptural use with reference to the headship of Christ in relation to the church, his body. Whatever function the *head* of the church performs in connection to the body defines the meaning of the term *head* in the New Testament.

The word *head* is used five times in the New Testament to define the relation of Christ to the church. As will be shown below, the use of *head* is consistent in all of those texts.

Eph. 1:22-23. The passage that immediately precedes this text exalts the supremacy of Christ in his session. But in relation to the church, the role of Christ is described as being *appointed as head for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*. The headship of Christ is never over the church in the New Testament. Here, it is for the church. As *head*, Christ gives the church fullness. He provides for the church's growth. The function is not one of authority but of servant provider of what makes the church's growth possible.

Eph. 4:15-16. *Christ is the head from whom the whole body grows and builds itself up*. The function of the *head* in relation to the body is to provide it with growth. Headship is not an

authority role but a developmental servant function.

Eph. 5:23. *The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which is the Savior.* As *head* of the church, Christ is its Savior. If *head* had meant authority, the appropriate designation for Christ would have been “Lord” instead of “Savior” which is consistently a self-sacrificing, life-giving servant role in the New Testament.

Col. 1:18-19. *Christ is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead. Through his blood, shed on the cross, all things are reconciled to God.* In a passage that celebrates Christ's supremacy over all creation, this text describes Christ as the source of the life of the church through his resurrection from the dead and because of the reconciliation obtained through his self-sacrificing servant ministry at the cross. Headship is not defined in terms of authority but as servant provider of life.

Col. 2:19. *Christ is the head from whom the whole body grows.* The function of *head* in relation to the body is not one of rulership but of servant provider of growth. Christ as *head* to the church is the source of its life and development.

This survey indicates that *head*, biblically defined, means exactly the opposite of what it means in the English language. *Head* is never given the meaning of authority, boss or leader. It describes the servant function of provider of life, growth and development. This function is not one of top-down oversight but of bottom-up support and nurture.

Parenthetically, it must be briefly noted that Christ is also *head* of every power and authority (Col. 2:10). Believers are given fullness in Christ who is *head* of (not “over” as the NIV has it) every power and authority. Christ is the source of growth for believers just as he is the source of the life of powers and authorities which he has created (1:16).

This meaning of *head* as source of life is verified in the one remaining reference to Christ's headship in the New Testament. In 1 Cor. 11:3, Christ is not *head* for or of the church, his body, but he is the *head* of every man. This text is made of three carefully sequenced and studiously related clauses: the *head* of every man is Christ, and the *head* of the woman is man, and the *head* of Christ is God. The question must be raised as to whether the meaning of *head* in this text is consistent with its use in the other references surveyed above or whether it has suddenly changed to mean something different in this one passage.

Sometimes, the word *head* in this text is carelessly infused with its meaning in the English language to obtain this hierarchical order: God *head* over Christ--Christ *head* over man--man *head* over woman. This top-down vertical chain of command would then go as follows: God-Christ-man-woman.

However, such results are obtained by manipulating the biblical text. In order to make the text say what the Scripture does not teach in this passage, its three clauses must be taken out of their original sequence and rearranged. The Apostle Paul knows exactly how to structure hierarchies in perfect descending order (see 12:28, for instance). In 1 Cor. 11:3, he is not structuring a hierarchy. In keeping with the theme developed in the immediate context, Paul is discussing the traditional significance of origination. The sequence that links the three clauses is not hierarchy but chronology. At creation, Christ was the giver of life to men as the source of the life of Adam (“by him all things were created” Col. 1:16). In turn, man gave life to the woman as she was taken from him. Then, God gave life to the Son as he came into the world for the incarnation. When the biblical sequence of the three clauses is not tampered with, the consistent meaning of *head* in this verse is that of a servant function as provider of life.

Two additional considerations must be taken into account in order to get at the real

meaning of *head* in the New Testament. There are scores of references in the documents of the New Testament to leaders from all walks of life: religious leaders, community leaders, military leaders, governmental leaders, patriarchal leaders and church leaders. Never is anyone of them designated as *head*. A profusion of other titles is used, but *head* is conspicuously absent from the list. The obvious explanation for this singularity is that *head* did not mean “leader” in the language of the New Testament.

The second observation relates to the constitutive elements of the human person according to the New Testament. Again, it contains scores of references to the elements that make up the human being. The functional components of personality are body, flesh, psyche, spirit, mind, conscience, inner person and heart. *Head* is never cited as the governing center of the person. In the New Testament, that function generally devolves to the heart or to the mind. Only once is there a reference made to the *head* aspiring to wield authority over the body only to deny emphatically its right to do so (1 Cor. 12:21).

Head is used figuratively in relation to the body only in the five references surveyed above and always with the meaning of servant provider, never with that of authority. When the New Testament metaphor of headship is understood generically and is protected from corruption by meanings foreign to the text, it describes perfectly the relation of Christ to the church and of husband to wife as servant life-givers. The fall had made of Adam ruler over the woman (Gen. 3:16). Christ makes of husbands servants to their wives in their relationship of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21). For this reason, I believe in male headship, but strictly in its New Testament definition.

<http://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/i-believe-male-headship?page=show>

Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian’s Challenge:

[A Challenge for Proponents of Female Submission to Prove Their Case from the Bible](#)

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APPENDIX 6

ELLEN WHITE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN OPPOSED TO WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

EXCERPTED FROM “A CLOSER LOOK AT WOMEN’S ORDINATION”
BY TY GIBSON

“Even though Ellen White did not attend the 1881 GC session, shortly after, in her April 4, 1882 *Review and Herald* article, she deliberately republished something she had written a year earlier:

‘If there is one work more important than another, it is that of getting before the public our publications, which will lead men to search the Scriptures. Missionary work—introducing our publications into families, conversing, and praying with and for them—is a good work, and one which will educate men and women to do pastoral labor’ (*Review and Herald*, April 4, 1882; published the first time in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 390).

“You likely didn’t see that coming, and neither did I. Ellen White envisioned women in pastoral ministry of some kind. And please pause to catch the significance of the historical context in which her above statement was made. A proposal was just brought before the General Conference Session stating that females ‘be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.’ Then, with that recommendation on the minds of Adventists, Ellen White stated in the church’s official magazine that women, as well as men, may ‘do pastoral labor.’

“Also notice that the main topic of her article was the need to circulate gospel literature by means of house-to-house labor. But then, apparently off topic and for no apparent reason—*unless you know that the General Conference leadership was at that very time pondering the question of whether or not women may be ordained*—she just throws in this brief comment stating that doing ministry in people’s homes ‘will educate men and women to do pastoral labor.’

“This statement indicates, at the very least, that Ellen was not *opposed* to the 1881 recommendation to ordain women. If she was, it would have been reckless of her to make this comment in the immediate context of a recommendation to ordain women to ‘the work of the Christian ministry.’ Furthermore, it is inconceivable that Ellen White would not have warned the General Conference brethren to refrain from passing the recommendation to ordain women if, in fact, doing so would constitute unfaithfulness to Scripture and rebellion against God. But she did not. In fact, she pointed in the opposite direction at the very time when the matter was under consideration.

“Some have attempted to negate the significance of her 1882 statement by claiming that she was merely using the term ‘pastoral labor’ as synonymous with door-to-door literature work. But the objective reader will notice that her actual point was that door-to-door literature work provides an education for transitioning into pastoral ministry” (Ty Gibson, *A Closer Look at Women’s Ordination*).

<http://www.lightbearers.org/a-closer-look-at-womens-ordination>

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APPENDIX 7

HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE

EXCERPTED FROM "A CLOSER LOOK AT WOMEN'S ORDINATION"

When asked to provide the most direct and explicit biblical statement against women's ordination, advocates of the position point to Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 3:2:

"A bishop (*episkope*) then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...."

Paul's point here, we are told, is that the bishop (what we now generally call the *pastor*) must be male, because the pastor must be a husband. But there are at least two sound hermeneutical reasons we know with certainty that this is not Paul's point.

First, in this same passage, a few verses later, Paul says, "Let deacons (*diakonoi*) be the husbands of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:12), and then he turns around without a blink and says to the believers in Rome, "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant (*diakonos*) of the church" (Romans 16:1).

One very important and sound principle of responsible Bible study is as follows:

"To understand doctrine, bring all the Scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence, and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error" (William Miller).

This principle is echoed in the official *Methods of Bible Study* voted at the 1986 General Conference Annual Council:

"Recognize that the Bible is its own interpreter and that the meaning of words, texts, and passages is best determined by diligently comparing scripture with scripture.... The reader must allow each Bible writer to emerge and be heard while at the same time recognizing the basic unity of the divine self-disclosure."

Pause, then, and carefully consider the comparison of the two passages before us. To Timothy, Paul says that the *episkope* and the *diakonoi* must each be the husband of one wife. Then, to the believers in Rome, Paul introduces to us a woman *diakonos*. We can only conclude, then, that Paul has no intention for his statement in 1 Timothy 3 to be interpreted as a declaration about gender.

For clarity, this is what we have before us:

"A bishop (*episkope*) then must be blameless, the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2).

"Let deacons (*diakonoi*) be the husbands of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:12).

"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant (*diakonos*) of the church" (Romans 16:1).

While *diakonoi* is sometimes used in a general sense for any informal servant role, we know Paul is using the word here in the formal sense of the ordained position because he describes Phoebe as "a *diakonos* of the church" and as occupying an active role in ministry. He then appeals to the believers in Rome "assist her in whatever business she has need of you." Clearly, she is a leader in the church.

It is evident, then, that when Paul says in 1 Timothy that the *episkope* and the *diakonoi* must each be "the husband of one wife," he is simply speaking in a general context in which most of those occupying these roles would have been men, but he was not issuing a universal gender rule.

What, then, does Paul mean to convey in 1 Timothy 3?

Well, look at the passage again: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...”

The grammar of the text presents the “bishop” as the *subject*. “Husband of one wife” is set forth as one criterion in a list that Paul offers to define what a bishop of “blameless” character looks like (see verses 2-7). “Husband of one wife” is a grammatical descriptor of “blameless.” Paul’s *subject* is not the gender of the bishop (pastor) or the deacon, but rather the moral character of those who occupy these two roles. When they are men, as most of them would have been, they are to be “the husband of *one* wife,” the point being that just *one* wife is permissible. When they are women, as in the case of “Phoebe our sister,” obviously the husband-of-one-wife criterion applies in principle, but with a different application.

It really is that simple, if we allow the Bible to speak for itself and refrain from reading it selectively with a point to prove. Clearly, Paul did not intend to make a gender restriction with his “husband-of-one-wife” statement. We simply cannot be true to Scripture and not concede that when Paul said the elder and the deacon must be “blameless, the husband of one wife,” he meant to convey that those who hold these positions must be of good moral character, not that that they must all be males, or else Paul contradicted himself by acknowledging sister Phoebe as a *diakonos*.

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APPENDIX 8

SHALL WOMEN KEEP SILENCE IN THE CHURCHES?

BY URIAH SMITH

“LET your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church” (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35).

This passage, together with 1 Timothy 2:11, has been construed as an objection to women’s speaking in public; and thousands of females that have submitted their hearts to God, and have received a baptism of the Holy Ghost, their hearts burning with love to God, and “the word of the Lord as a fire shut up in their bones,” have been deprived of the privilege of speaking out their feelings in the public congregation, to the almost entire loss of their enjoyment, by the false construction put upon these passages, notwithstanding the great amount of evidence which can be brought to prove that all who are made partakers of such love have a right to speak forth his praises.

Often have I been in meetings where it was contrary to the rules of the church for females to speak; and while the brethren would speak of their enjoyment, some humble sister whose heart would be overflowing with the love of God, would sit bound down by the chains of the church creed, while her flushed cheek and flowing tears told plainly that she was an unwilling slave to the laws of the church.

I saw a case a few evenings since. A school teacher who had been educated a Presbyterian attended a meeting where my brother was preaching. She became convinced of sin and gave her heart to God, and was made happy in a Saviour’s love. She, together with her sisters who also were converted, had been forbidden to speak in public by their parents; but while others were speaking and telling what God had done for them, her feelings were such that she could not hold her peace. Her tongue was loosed, and she was enabled to speak forth the praises of God, and also exhorted sinners to flee to Christ, while one of her sisters that had been blessed and desired to speak of it, but durst not for fear of her parents, sat and wept as though her heart would break. This is but one of many cases where parents, professing to be religious, have endeavored to bind the consciences of their children.

But says one, “What is the meaning of the passage above alluded to?” I understand it to mean a troublesome asking of questions, which could be better answered at home than in their religious meetings. That the asking of questions had become troublesome, is obvious from the following considerations. When the gospel was first preached, it excited astonishment in the minds of a large number of those who heard it. It was “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.” And even to the sober and sincere inquirers it presented mysteries in which they desired to be more perfectly instructed. Hence it became common for doctrinal questions to be asked. And this practice, in time, became troublesome by being abused, and led to an impertinent, inquisitive disposition respecting unimportant things. Hence the apostle cautioned Timothy not to “give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than edifying” (1 Timothy 1:4). And in the same epistle he further cautions him against some who were “proud, knowing nothing, but

doting about questions and strifes of words,” etc. (1 Timothy 6:4, 5). And in 2 Timothy 2:23, he charges him, “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.” He gives the same caution to Titus [chap. 3:9]; from all of which it is clear that the asking of questions had become troublesome in their religious meetings. And as he makes so direct an allusion to such inquiries, or questions in the text under consideration (“let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame,” etc.), it is at least a fair inference that he designed to put a stop to this, but had no allusion to the exercise of a gift in the ministry or in exhortation.

Indeed, we cannot suppose that the apostle would attempt to prove the impropriety of their speaking or exhorting in public, by reminding them that they might ask questions of their husbands at home. What relation could this bear to the case in hand? What question could a pious female ask at home, that would relieve her mind from the burden of a message she had received to deliver in the church. Thus it is evident that as the prohibition of the apostle in the passage above cited, related to asking of questions, and such as could properly be answered at home by their husbands, it had no relation to the exercise of a gift which God had given them to use for the advancement of his cause. Their usurpation of authority over the men, as prohibited by the apostle, related, I should suppose, to their domestic concerns; for preaching, prophesying, exhorting or praying in public, is not usurping authority and has nothing to do with it. Our Lord on one occasion reminded his disciples, “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you,” etc. (Matthew 20:25–27).

But what puts the question beyond all doubt as to the sentiment of the apostle, is that he actually gave directions how the women should behave in the exercise of their gifts. First Corinthians 11:5 [But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.]. He uses the words, “prayeth,” and “prophesieth,” which he certainly would not have done had it been prohibited. He not only gave such directions, but he mentions, with peculiar regard, certain women that had labored with him in the gospel. Philippians 4:3. And Phillip, the evangelist, had four daughters, virgins which did prophesy, Acts 21:9.

We find also that in the prophecy of Joel as quoted by Peter [Acts 2:17, 18], the promise of the effusion of the Holy Spirit was to sons and daughters, servants and handmaidens. The promise of the Spirit is as positive to the daughters and handmaidens, as to the sons and servants. And Peter says [verse 39], “For the promise is to you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Then where is the authority for saying that females should not receive a gift of the Holy Spirit in these last days. Verily God hath promised it; and I would to God that more of his handmaidens were endued with power from on high.

We read that females prophesied under the old dispensation, such as Miriam, Deborah and Huldah. The prophetess, Anna, testified to the coming of the Messiah, as did also Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. It was a woman to whom that clear exposition of worship was given at Jacob’s well; and she immediately commenced inviting others to come and see a man that had told her all that ever she did. Is not this, said she, the Christ? And so effectually did she preach Christ that many believed from her testimony, and sought him for themselves. And how many there are in these days that can say with Bro. Robbins that it was under the exhortations or prayers of females that they were led to consecrate themselves to God.

It was a woman that first announced the glorious tidings of the resurrection of our blessed Lord; and let it be remembered that these “glad tidings” were preached to the apostles themselves, who at that time were sunk into despair. They were then scattered as sheep without a shepherd, and all their prospects were involved in gloom. How cheering then the message Jesus sends by a woman, Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and to your Father, etc. John 20:17. Priscilla, as well as Aquilla, instructed the eloquent Apollos more perfectly in the nature of the gospel dispensation. And numerous cases are mentioned in the New Testament of women who labored in the gospel. Seeing that females were admitted to the high office of prophecy under the old dispensation, and in the promise of the more general effusion of this gift, the daughters and handmaidens were equally included with the other sex, that they were among the first messengers of the gospel, and after the churches were formed and settled received particular instruction how to conduct themselves in the church, in the exercise of their gifts, it is strange that the privilege should have ever been called in question.

We are informed on the authority of divine revelation that male and female are one in Christ Jesus; that in the relation in which they both stand to him, the distinction is as completely broken down as between Jew and Gentile, bond and free. Thus revelation has made known the important truth, and reason will bear testimony to the same thing. The mind of the female is certainly susceptible of all those sensibilities, affections and improvements which constitute the Christian character. In a state of renovation we must admit it has equal access to the fountain of light and life. And experience has proved that many females have possessed the natural qualifications for speaking in public, the range of thought, the faculty of communicating their ideas in appropriate language, the sympathy with suffering humanity, a deep and lively sense of gratitude to God, and of the beauty of holiness, a zeal for the honor of God, and the happiness of his rational creatures—all these are found among the female part of the human family, as frequently and as eminently as among the men. Then let no stumbling-block be thrown in their way, but let them fill the place that God calls them to fill, let them not be bound down to silence by church rules, but let their tongues speak forth the praises of God, and let them point sinners to the Lamb of God, and grieve not the holy Spirit by silence in the congregation. (Uriah Smith, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 23, 1860)

Further Thoughts

(The following are a few excerpts from an article taken from the “Portadown News,” Ireland, of March 2, 1861, which Uriah Smith later published in the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald on July 30, 1861. Smith partially prefaced the article with these remarks: “We have nothing to say upon what the writer claims to have been done by certain females. That to which the attention of the reader is especially called is the argument by which he shows that they have a right to do this, or any amount besides in the same direction.” Editor)

I will say here that if a woman can effect good in a world like ours, where so much is yet to be done for its reformation, I would think twice before I would discourage her or throw any obstacle in her way. Perhaps no man living has effected half as much for a revival of religion as Mrs. Phoebe Palmer. I hold that each individual in this world is morally bound to do as much good to others as he or she can; and he or she is bound to leave the world better than he or she found it—if they possibly can. And is Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe and other ladies to teach me through my eyes, and are they prohibited from teaching me through my ears? Certainly not! Has Miss Buck, of England, powers in the pulpit equal to the greatest

pulpit orator of the day, and is she not to use such powers? Are Spurgeon and such men to be lauded to the skies while sowing the heresy of Calvinism, mixed up with scraps of street songs and old wives' fables, and is Miss Buck to be condemned while she preaches, with much superior eloquence and dignity, the glorious gospel of the grace of God to sinful, fallen mankind – none excepted? Let us hear no more of this condemnation of woman going about doing good. I suppose, indeed I might venture to assert, that Mrs. Palmer, Miss Buck, and women like them, have each done more to lead sinners to a Saviour than any man of the same period; and will not the souls thus saved be to these women “a crown of rejoicing?” To be sure they will.

Who would object to a woman rescuing his friend from temporal death? No man. Then why object to a woman rescuing men from eternal death? Who would dare say that Grace Darling did wrong to go out in the lifeboat and rescue the crew of a sinking vessel? No man. Why then object to a woman pushing out the gospel lifeboat to rescue men sinking into perdition? Who would dare say Mrs. Fry did wrong in seeking to rescue men from dismal dungeons? No man. Then why object to woman going to seek and to save those that are pining in the dungeons of sin and iniquity?

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APPENDIX 9

STATEMENTS BY OUR FOUNDING FATHERS ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY

In January 1879, J. N. Andrews published a short article on women speaking in church in the Review and Herald. In this article, Andrews seeks to explain the two main texts used to prohibit women from speaking in church. His purpose is to show that a careful study of these texts cannot support this conclusion. In reference to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, he explained that Paul's intent was to avoid confusion in the church and to urge women to stop chatting between themselves during the worship service. Hence, "what the apostle says to women in such a church as this, and in such a state of things, *is not to be taken as directions to all Christian women in other churches and in other times*, when and where such disorders do not exist." In regards to 1 Timothy 2:12, Andrews understands "this text to give Paul's general rule with regard to women as public teachers. But there are some exceptions to this general rule to be drawn even from Paul's writings, and from the scriptures." In fact, the evidence Andrews goes on to give indicates that this general rule is rather the exception and that women are free to labor in ministry (J. N. Andrews, "May Women Speak in Meeting?" Review and Herald, January 2, 1879, p. 324 emphasis mine). See full editorial below.

A few months later that same year, Andrews again published a brief article on this subject, this time in Signs of the Times. In response to an article he had read in another paper, which stated that women were not allowed to speak in early Christian churches, he explained that such a position did not concur with the testimony of the Old and New Testaments, and that Paul's remark in Galatians 3:28 was responsible for the "diffusive benevolence of Christianity" to counter the degradation that women had been subjected to in non-Christian societies. "The number of women of whom honorable mention is made for their labors in the gospel is not small. Now, in view of these facts, how can any man in this age of Bibles say that the Bible does not notice women, or give them a place in the work of God? The Lord chooses his own workers, and he does not judge as man judges. Man looks at the appearance; God judges the heart, and he never makes mistakes" (J. N. Andrews, "Women in the Bible," Signs of the Times, October 30, 1879, p. 324)

One other article published before Ellen White's anecdotal event in California is an article published by her husband in the Review and Herald. While explaining the text in 1 Corinthians 14, James White conceded that Paul may have referred to women participating in church business meetings but he took the firm position that this text did not refer to a prohibition for women to participate in worship services. Rather "Paul ... places men and women side by side in the position and work of teaching and praying in the church of Christ." White also gave numerous examples of women who ministered for God in the Old and New Testaments to show that there is no such prohibition for women to labor for the gospel or to speak in church assemblies (James White, "Women in the Church," Review and Herald, May 29, 1879, p. 172) See full article below.

May Women Speak in Meeting?

J. N. Andrews Editorial, Review and Herald, January 2, 1879

There are two principal passages cited to prove that women should not take any part in speaking in religious meetings. These are 1 Cor. 14:34-36, and 1 Tim. 2:12. But a careful study of the books of Corinthians shows that the passage first referred to can have no such application.

The Corinthian church was in a state of great disorder. The first chapter shows that they were divided into parties in reference to the apostles themselves. The fifth chapter shows that one had taken his father's wife, and the others did not mourn over this act. The sixth chapter shows that they went to law with the world, and implies that they were guilty of violating the seventh commandment. The eleventh chapter shows that when they celebrated the Lord's supper, the rich ate and drank until they were intoxicated, and the poor were waiting and suffering hunger.

Now it appears from the fourteenth chapter that when they were assembled in meeting, the women threw everything into confusion by talking among themselves, and acting with such indecorum as to be a matter of shame to them. So that what the apostle says to women in such a church as this, and in such a state of things, is not to be taken as directions to all Christian women in other churches and in other times, when and where such disorders do not exist.

As positive proof that he was not speaking against a woman's participating in religious worship, we refer to 1 Cor. 11:5, where he says that every woman who prophesieth or prayeth with her head uncovered dishonreth her head. And in chapter fourteen, verse three, he says that he that prophesieth speaketh unto men, to edification, exhortation, and comfort. These two passages show that they (women) did speak to edification, exhortation, and comfort. It was not a shame for women to do this work. Therefore Paul did not refer to such acts when he said, "It is a shame for women to speak in the church."

1 Tim. 2:12. We understand this text to give Paul's *general* rule with regard to women as public teachers. But there are some exceptions to this general rule to be drawn even from Paul's writings, and from other scriptures. It appears from Phil. 4:3 that women labored with him in the gospel. Romans 16:1 shows that Phebe was a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea. See original.

Verse 3 shows that Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, was one of Paul's helpers; and Acts 18:26 shows that she was capable of instructing Apollos. Tryphena and Tryphosa, Rom. 16:12, labored in the Lord; and Persis labored much in the Lord. Acts 21: 8, 9. Philip's four daughters prophesied. In Luke 2, Anna the prophetess is mentioned. Verses 36-38. In the time of Jeremiah, Huldah was a prophetess consulted instead of Jeremiah himself. See 2 Chron. 34. In the fifth of Judges, Deborah is spoken of, and in the fifteenth of Exodus, Miriam.

Paul, in Romans 10:10, says, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation;" and this must apply to women equally with men.

Comment by James White

“We [*James White, and I'm sure Ellen too*] object to that narrow-souled theology which will not allow the old ladies to have dreams because the prophecy says, ‘your old men shall dream dreams;’ and that will not allow young women to have visions because the prophecy says ‘your young men shall see visions.’ These stingy critics seem to forget that ‘man’ and ‘men’ in the Scriptures, generally mean both men and women. The Book says that it is ‘appointed unto men once to die.’ Don’t women die?” (James White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 25, 1862; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 24).

Women in the Church

James White, *Review and Herald*, May 29, 1879

“Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” 1 Cor. 14:34, 35.

The only safe and proper rule of Biblical interpretation is to take every passage of the Book of God as meaning what it says, word for word, excepting those cases where the text and context clearly show that a figure or parable is introduced for a more clear elucidation of the subject. In the foregoing text the apostle does not use as figure or a parable, therefore his words should be taken as meaning just what they say.

But there are many other passages from the epistles of Paul which speak as plainly of the position of woman in the house and work of God as this one does. And in order to arrive at the truth of God on this subject, a position must be found that will harmonize all the texts. The word of God is not ‘yea and nay,” but yea and amen, to the glory of its divine Author.

Paul, in the fourteenth chapter of his epistle to the church at Corinth, is correcting existing errors and establishing order in the church of Christ. He goes even so far as to give rules for those who, under the power of the Holy Spirit, are endowed with the gift of prophecy and of tongues. There were those women, doubtless, in the apostle’s day as well as in ours, who could prate about “Women’s Rights,” as glibly, if not as filthily, as the notorious Victoria Woodhull. Hear the noble Paul on the subject in the same epistle where the foregoing text is found: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” 1 Cor. 11:3. Paul continues in verses 4 and 5, and the reader will see that he places men and women side by side in the position and work of teaching and praying in the church of Christ, “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head; for that is even all one as if she were shaven.”

But what does Paul mean by saying, “Let your women keep silence in the churches”? Certainly he does not mean that women should take no part in those religious services where he would have both men and women take part in prayer and in prophesying, or teaching the word of God to the people. The only view that will harmonize all that the apostle has said of the position and work of Christian women, is that he is giving directions relative to meetings of the church to consider the secular matters, which can be managed quite as well by the brethren as the sisters. We here give the following reasons:—

1. Both men and women attend the religious services of the church. Both hear all that is said. The woman understands quite as well as her husband, sometimes better, all that is said. They return home from church. Now apply Paul's statement to this case, "If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home." On the supposition that the husband has been out to a business meeting, may be to consult with his brethren in reference to building a meeting-house, or hiring the minister, matters in which she has deep interest, how consistent that the wife should inquire in reference to the decisions of that meeting which she did not attend.

2. But on the supposition that they had both been out to a religious meeting, where the wife had heard all, understood all, the great apostle is charged with the ridiculous farce of both sitting down and asking and answering questions relative to matters with which they were both perfectly familiar. Consistency, thou art a jewel!

In the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, holy women held positions of responsibility and honor. The first case we will here notice is that of Miriam, mentioned in Exodus 15:20, 21. "And Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Compare with Micah 6:3, 4, where the great God appeals to rebellious Israel in these words: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Here we find a woman occupying a position equal to that of Moses and Aaron, God's chosen servants to lead the millions of Israel from the house of bondage.

The next case is that of Deborah, mentioned in Judges 4:4-10: "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim; and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulan.

"And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisters, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee, notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulum and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet; and Deborah went up with him."

Notice the following particulars in the foregoing statements:—

1. Deborah was a prophetess. She received divine instruction from Heaven, and taught the people.

2. She was a judge in Israel. The people went up to her for judgment. A higher position no man has ever occupied.

The next cases of honorable mention are Ruth and Esther. The books of these two women hold places in the book of God with his holy prophets. Their position in the work of God was such as to give their history a place with the sacred writings translated into

hundreds of languages and dialects, to be ready by millions down to the close of probationary time.

The prophet Joel, as quoted by Peter, Acts 2:17, 18, describes the last days thus: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. And on my servants, and on my handmaidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Here, too, women receive the same inspiration from God as men.

And Paul speaks of the labors of Christian women in the highest terms of commendation and regard as follows: "I commend unto you Phebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succorer of man, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." "Greet Mary who bestowed much labor on us." "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis which labored much in the Lord." Rom. 16:1-4, 6, 12.

The prophet Simeon, and Anna the prophetess waited for the consolation of Israel at the close of the Jewish age, and with joy embraced the infant Saviour.

The Christian age was ushered in with glory. Both men and women enjoyed the inspiration of the hallowed hour, and were teachers of the people. "Philip," the evangelist, "had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." Acts 21:8, 9. And the dispensation which was ushered in with glory, honored with the labors of holy women, will close with the same honors. Thus says God by his holy prophet: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Acts 2:17.

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APPENDIX 10

“A WOMAN ENCOMPASSES A MAN” (JER 31:22)

BY SIGVE TONSTAD

How easy things would be if all we are asked is to honor the norms of the past! How uncomplicated it would be to define policy if we could count on established practice to be our trustworthy guide, our task mostly not to deviate to the right or to the left! How simple it would be to prescribe the correct course of action if it will suffice to assemble all the texts telling us what God said to do in the past, confident that God will not say or do anything to overturn the instruction! How effortless it would be if we could rely on chemists and Euclidean methods to write our manuals, undisturbed by poets and prophets!

How much simpler it would be if we did not have to reckon with a prophet like Jeremiah! How complicated he makes it; how he upsets the apple cart; how he scrambles the familiar equations when he prescribes something that has never been as the norm! How much work we shall have to do, now that the prophet tells us to navigate by a map we have not known and by new lights suddenly appearing in the dark!

I am not making this up.

Jeremiah is without peer the Old Testament prophet of novelty. Not only does he map the way to an unimagined future for which there is no precedent, he also rethinks and reimagines the past. Indeed, Jeremiah switches back and forth between the re-remembered past and the re-configured future so as to cast a dizzy-spell on the reader.

And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the LORD, *they shall no longer say*, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.” It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made. *At that time* Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will (Jer 3:16-17).

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. *For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt*, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them, “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you” (Jer 7:21-23).

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when *I will make a new covenant* with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. *It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors* when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, says the LORD (Jer 31:31-32).

How long will you waver, O faithless daughter? *For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth*: a woman encompasses a man. (Jer 31:22)

Jeremiah’s remembrance of things past has so baffled readers that some have wondered, as

scholars often do, whether some uncouth editor or redactor has been tinkering with the text. This possibility has been dismissed on the logic that it would take a prophet of Jeremiah's stature to 'remember' things this way in the first place. The sayings are authenticated precisely for being so unique and unexpected. Jeremiah weans his audience away from an orientation toward the past, the good old days when God took Israel out of Egypt (Jer 23:7-8; 31:32), gave them the Ten Commandments (3:16-17), established the tabernacle (7:3-7), and instituted the sacrificial system (7:21-23). Again and again he shrinks all of this to a virtual nothing. Even if we accept Jacob Milgrom's explanation that the sacrifices and offerings that God did not command in Jeremiah's recollection refer to individual sacrifices and not to the temple cult (Jer 7:21-23),¹ the revisionary impact remains. Jeremiah constantly privileges ethics over cultic activity, *rights over rites*. The prophet touches on all the main elements that are important to people's identity and sense of distinctiveness.² While, at the very least, he prioritizes "the supremacy of ethics over ritual" to the point of casting doubt on the sacrificial system,³ the orientation toward the future and away from the past is the most striking feature. It is the unknown, yet-to-be described future that counts.

In those days... they shall no longer say (3:16; 23:7; 31:29).

Behold, the days come (23:7; 31:31).

The new reality cannot flourish as long as the old reality is in place, especially when people's understanding of God's original intention is flawed. This is fully in keeping with the texture of Jeremiah's call and ministry. Was he not appointed "over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant"? (Jer 1:10). Must not the old, whether past instruction or people's perception of past instruction, be removed before the new can rise? Must not the demolition crew finish their work before the builders can get started?

The Shape of the New

Chapter 31 is the most important chapter detailing the shape of the new reality. This chapter is also the most important chapter from the point of view of the New Testament (cf. Heb 8:8-12). Above all, the new will be built on a foundation of hope. Hope, in turn, is nourished by memory. God delivered Israel in the past, and God's commitment has not been rescinded.

The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers (Jer 31:2-4).

Hope is an item of luxury in this book because Jeremiah's ministry unfolds in the context of crisis. The crisis, moreover, is national and political as much as it is personal and spiritual.

We have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale? (Jer 30:5-6)

Hope is proclaimed precisely when bewilderment, hopelessness, and panic prevail. No one seems to know what to do. Males are especially discomfited, even males represented at their most masculine as warriors and protectors (*geber*). In Jeremiah's analysis, masculinity counts for nothing. He sees "every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor" (30:6).

The gender representation is important: it follows the stereotype of male and female. Women are the childbearing sex, and the act of giving birth is fraught with exceptional vulnerability. Here a role reversal is in the making in the sense that males suddenly seem to be pregnant, given over to the pain and panic that accompany birth. Much cannot be expected from the males in Jeremiah's representation.

In the setting of crisis hope must count on exceptional means and unprecedented action. The action could be unmediated divine action or divine action mediated by new ways and means. It is the latter option God will choose. We have now reached the key text.

How long will you waver, O faithless daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: *a woman encompasses a man* (Jer 31:22).

Novelty, indeed! And so much so that it is hardly possible to describe the promised divine action in more radical terms.

The text says that *in a time of crisis, there will be divine action*. God does not stand by idly, arms folded, allowing ruin to run its course. The precise wording is important, some terms especially worthy of note. "For the LORD has created (*bārā*) a new thing (*h ādāsh*) on the earth" (31:22). The verb *bārā* denotes an action concerning which God alone can be the subject and has creation as its reference point. Genesis should come to mind. Creation is reconstituted and refitted to match the demands of the new reality. This is the only occurrence of this word in Jeremiah and therefore "an expression that merits close attention."⁴

'New' (*h ādāsh*) is the other big word, occurring only twice in this book and in the very same chapter, the second occurrence describing the new covenant the Lord will make (31:31). If *bārā* denotes action for which God alone can be the subject, the newness (*h ādāsh*) that comes into view carries the prestige of direct divine agency. God's intervention, in turn, plays out against the horizon of the future state of things. The covenantal overtone invests the vision with normative powers: it has the connotation of being definitive. We have in our hands a piece of late-breaking news from the Creator.

And now to the content of the novelty. Jeremiah specifies a spectacular gender role reversal that must be read in slow motion in order to be fully appreciated: "a woman (*n^e qēbā*) encompasses (*t^e sobēb*) a man (*gābar*)" (31:22). First, Genesis is again in view, the word for

woman retraces the terminology of the creation story: “male and *female* (*n^e qēbā*) he created them” (Gen 1:27). The original configuration of gender and gender roles are given a new shape and content. Second, the woman is described by actions normally attributed to males. Indeed, the action borrows luster from Old Testament memories that depict God’s intervention as liberator and protector. Thus, for the verbal action, when God found Israel in the wilderness, “he *shielded him* (*j^e sob^e benhu*), cared for him, guarded him as the apple of his eye” (Deut 32:10). A similar caring, *pastoral* action is now envisioned for woman in Jeremiah (Jer 31:22). The verb in Jeremiah conveys a *surrounding*, *shielding*, and *protecting* activity. Third, the man that will be encompassed by the woman is represented in his warrior role. The root (*gbr*) is associated with warfare and calls to mind the strength and vitality of the successful warrior. It is the panicked warrior represented earlier as a woman in labor (30:6) that will benefit from the intervention of the caring and protecting female in Jeremiah’s vision of the future (31:22).⁵

As to specifics, William Holladay suggests at least three options for the role reversal in the text, all of them possible and legitimate. First, “a female shall encompass a hero” suggests that the female shall be the man’s equal if not the initiator in sexual relations.⁶ If this seems touchy, it seizes on an area of life where gender role reversal can be captured in a way that shows. Second, the text casts the woman in the role of protector.⁷ In the context of crisis and panicking males, God comes up with a novel remedy. It is as if he says to Israel, “Your warriors have become female? Look: the female will surmount the warrior! Take heart; come home.”⁸ Third, the text proposes a broad role reversal that is metaphorical as well as practical. That is to say, the straitjacket of assigned, traditional role patterns is loosened and reconfigured to fit the new reality and the extraordinary need. One metaphorical option is *transformation*, the woman cast in the role of transforming agent.⁹ For all these options, hope, possibility, and divine resourcefulness are at the root. Jeremiah’s vision, though radical in every way, “is not a curse, but a promise, as may be seen from passages elsewhere in the writings of the Hebrew Bible prophets.”¹⁰

Novelty as Norm

What we see in this text, then, is not only novelty upending convention. To some extent it is also novelty as the new norm. While the new norm is configured to match urgent needs, Jeremiah’s notion of ‘new’ also has an eschatological texture. We are entering the home stretch, as it were. As he sees the old world falling apart, the ‘new’ that will arise does not refer to temporary emergency measures until the old order is back in place.

Such a vision is a hard sell because norms are usually set by convention. Conventional norms, by their very nature, resist novelty and are to some extent the bulwark against novelty. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has for some time been grappling with this challenge on the subject of women’s ordination. The side that argues against women’s ordination has produced an array of biblical texts to preserve ordination as a privilege and prerogative for males only, contending that this is the pattern in the Bible. The NO-side appeals to the Bible as the great wall of defense against erosion and novelty, implicitly talking as though the issue

has been forced upon the church mostly by outside, secularizing trends in society. A biblical mandate—or more unnerving—a biblical and prophetic injunction for restructured traditional gender roles has in the eyes of this group seemed like a daydream. The NO-side has rained rhetoric on YES- people like me that is unflattering in the extreme: ‘spiritualism,’ ‘strange fire,’ ‘rebellion,’ and ‘apostasy’ among their weapons of warfare.

Here, by contrast, we see in Jeremiah’s text not accommodation to the ways of the world but reordering of God’s ways within the world.

Jeremiah’s vision of new things in the earth (31:22) throws a wrench into arguments based on convention, and it scrambles the lines with regard to gender roles. An argument from convention is a broken reed before a novelty that is divinely ordained, and the broken reed metaphor applies to the issue before us because the divinely ordained novelty in Jeremiah speaks specifically to the subject of gender roles.

What drives *this* change, however, is largely left out from the debate. Where the side that is opposed to women’s ordination appears to envision a stable, reliable, resilient institution within a fundamentally stable world, Jeremiah speaks of a new, unprecedented response in a world that is fundamentally unstable. Instability in the world calls for measures that are hitherto unimagined. The novelty that will be the new norm is superior—above all—for taking the better measure of the world. It plays a tune that should be especially familiar to the Seventh-day Adventist ear although much of the debate suggests that few ears have heard it. The radical reassignment of gender roles in Jeremiah is God-inspired and world-informed, Jeremiah perceiving the world at the point of dissolution.

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger (Jer 4:23-26).

For a world and to a need thus perceived God tailors a response that will be up to the task. According to Holladay, we should see the prophet’s context the following way.

Jeremiah here indicates two convictions: first, that the situation is far worse than people could imagine so that Yahweh must move all the way back to Genesis 1 to make it right; and second, that Yahweh will make it right even so. The reassignment of sexual roles is innovative past all conventional belief, but it is not inconceivable to

¹¹
Yahweh.

What drives the change, in other words, is present need, not past norms. The undoing of the world creates new urgency. Need and urgency combine to unleash action of a new kind and on a different scale. If people, in Jeremiah’s time or now, object that the heralded change in gender roles is unwarranted and contrary to biblical precedent, they are at fault not only because they run afoul of the divine plan but also because they fail to take the correct measure of the world. “Against such an eschatological backdrop it is not unexpected to hear what is foreseen in Jer 31,22b, namely that the woman will assume a strange new role

definition in the future world,” says Paul Kruger.¹²

Exactly.

In the new reality and new form of existence, it can even be said that “*an inverse order of things is the norm.*”¹³ This would be a risky claim to make if not for the fact that novelty is writ large and all over the place in the immediate context of the verse to which we have listened. The prophet’s attention is turned to the future and not to the past. He talks of novelty and not of tradition. He thinks big and not small—ultimately not for reasons of crisis but because of what was God’s plan all along.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt-- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer 31:31-34).

With his profound sense of God’s purpose, Jeremiah promises a change touching more than entrenched gender roles, narrowly conceived. The institutional structure is in for a major overhaul. “The reassignment of sexual roles is innovative past all conventional belief,” as noted, “but it is not inconceivable to Yahweh.”¹⁴ Women’s ordination falls well within the mandate envisioned by Jeremiah, but he aims for a bigger prize. In his vision, all those who have been forgiven and whose sins are remembered no more are authorized to speak authoritatively on God’s behalf. Jeremiah’s vision diminishes the need for the specially illuminated person to shoulder the task, including some that now speak in utter disregard of the messages from the Old Testament prophet of novelty. By Jeremiah’s criteria, women’s ordination may only be a half- way house, for us now at least a step in the right direction.

May the late-breaking news from the God of novelty break the present impasse! “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known” (Jer 33:3).

¹ Jacob Milgrom, “Concerning Jeremiah’s Repudiation of Sacrifice,” *ZAW* 89 (1977), 273–75.

² William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 262.

³ Moshe Weinfeld, “Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel,” *ZAW* 88 (1976), 53.

⁴ W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1989), 195.

⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 157-158.

⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 195.

⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 195.

⁸ William Holladay, "Jer. Xxxi.22B Reconsidered: The Woman Encompasses the Man," *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966), 239.

⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 195.

¹⁰ Paul A. Kruger, "A Woman Will 'Encompass' a Man: On Gender Reversal in Jer 21,22b," *Biblica* 89 (2008), 386.

¹¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 195.

¹² Kruger, "A Woman Will 'Encompass' a Man," 387. ¹³ Kruger, "A Woman Will 'Encompass' a Man," 387. ¹⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 195.

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APPENDIX 11

ELLEN WHITE'S RULE

“If it be asked, Where are your plain texts of scripture for holding church property legally? we reply, The Bible does not furnish any; neither does it say that we should have a weekly paper, a steam printing-press, that we should publish books, build places of worship, and send out tents? Jesus says, “Let your light so shine before men,” but he does not give all the particulars how this shall be done. The church is left to move forward in the great work, praying for divine guidance, acting upon the most efficient plans for its accomplishment. We believe it safe to be governed by the following RULE: *All means which, according to sound judgment, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations, should be employed*” (Ellen White, Review & Herald, April 26, 1860 emphasis mine).

It follows, logically, that since the Bible does not expressly command or forbid the ordination of women, we are free to employ all means that will advance the cause of truth.

Ty Gibson expands on Mrs. White's comment:

Scripture contains no explicit statement, explanation or mandate regarding the matter either for or against. And this is precisely why the church should refrain from dictating a universal rule on the matter. It is not a matter of doctrinal orthodoxy, nor is it a matter of moral imperative, to ordain or not to ordain women. Therefore, it does not constitute a test issue that determines fellowship.

Where Scripture makes no command, neither should we. We simply cannot draw a line in the sand where Scripture draws no line. We should be aiming for maximum freedom and minimum restriction in matters that involve no heresy and no sin. Women's ordination is simply one of those matters concerning which we must say, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Romans 14:5), and that includes women.

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