

Chapter 2: A Biblical and Historical Reflection on the Theology of Ordination and Whether Women May be Ordained as Ministers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

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In this paper the theology of ordination will be explored, with particular emphasis on the question as to whether women may be ordained as ministers in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. Addressing this question is a challenging and complex task. The fact that the SDA Church has tried on at least five previous occasions to resolve the issue, with people in favour and opposed both claiming to be faithful to Scripture, demonstrates convincingly that there are more layers to this issue than many care to admit.

I shall attempt to synthesize and re-examine a number of facets of this important topic, beginning with possible historical roots for the current practices employed in the ordination of SDA pastors. A review of the biblical practice of setting people apart for various types of leadership follows, with a view to identify the role of Adventist ministers. Next is a discussion of various models of the Church, and how different models determine how ministry functions and is viewed by various faith traditions. Finally I shall provide examples of biblical women who were spiritual leaders, and the issues that some people believe prevent modern women from following in their steps.

Before drawing conclusions, I refer to an instance in denominational history when a husband-and-wife team was so vocal in its opinions that Ellen White felt impelled to confront them and ask them to be quiet.¹ It so happened that what they were teaching was correct, but their attitudes were splitting the Church. There was a larger issue at stake. The tragedy of our time is that not only does this issue have the potential to split the Church, but while we hesitate in indecision, multitudes are dying every day who have not heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:204-209.

Origins of the Adventist Idea of Ordination

The pioneers of the SDA Church shared the Protestant Reformers' distaste of the medieval Catholic view that ordination is a sacrament of the Church. This view was considered to bring about a wide separation between ordained clergy and non-ordained laity. The Reformers tried to bridge this gap, and spoke of the priesthood of all believers.² They saw ordination as an act of prayer, so with the laying on of hands, a special blessing or spiritual gift was transferred in some way. But the dividing line between clergy and laity still appeared blurred until it was decided that the distinguishing factor between a minister and his church members should be the authority to baptize and to administer the Lord's Supper.³

However, in the early days of the Wesleyan (Methodist) tradition, from which tradition Adventism grew, very few ministers were ordained. When John Wesley travelled to the United States, he ordained men who would later become leaders of the Methodist Church and called them "elders," and the head of the Church he called "superintendent." Thus by the nineteenth century the term "elder" would become a title for ministers in America in many denominations. Their function was to act as travelling evangelists, which left local churches without a resident minister. Because of this, Wesley arranged for the Lord's Supper to be celebrated only once each quarter, to give the travelling "elders" the chance to visit their far-flung parishes.⁴ From this practice arose the need to ordain lay elders to officiate at the Lord's Supper and to care generally for the local church during the travelling elder's absence, causing confusion between the functions of these two types of elder. It was this terminology of elder, model of ministry and Church organizational structure that was adopted in the Adventist Church in its formative years.⁵

2 As Peter Matheson observes, "References abound to Luther's *Appeal to the German Nobility* and especially to his teaching on the priesthood of all believers." Peter Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation* (London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 90.

3 Russell L. Staples, "A Theological Understanding of Ordination," in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 144.

4 Ibid., 145.

5 Ibid., 145-146.

Biblical "Ordination"

It is appropriate to ask from where did the idea of ordaining ministers come? What are the biblical roots of this practice? The word "ordain" does not have an exact equivalent in the original languages of Scripture. Instead there are up to 30 different Hebrew and Greek words that have been used to convey the sense of the English word "ordain/ordination."⁶ In the Old Testament (OT), when the idea of ordination is presented, the Hebrew uses such expressions as "lay hands on" (Num. 27:18–23), "fill the hands of" (Exod. 28:41), "set in place" (2 Kings 23:5), "made to stand [in their place]" (2 Chron. 11:15), "to arrange [everything in its place]" (Ps. 132:17), "made" (Num. 28:6) and "put" (Ps. 81:5). The literal meanings of the New Testament (NT) words include "to make" (Mk 3:14), "to assign or arrange" (1 Cor. 9:14), "to put in charge" (Heb. 5:1), "to stretch out the hand" (Acts 14:23), "to place" (1 Tim. 2:7), and "to appoint or choose" (Acts 14:23).

In other words, what the Church today may think of as "ordination" and what the people of biblical times understood may not be the same thing. The various biblical contexts convey concepts of empowerment, of strengthening the hand of a leader for a particular task, or of being in one's place in order to contribute to some grand scheme. The verbs that denote standing in a certain place or taking one's stand both have military connotations, depicting a soldier being in position to guard or to defend. These concepts may be quite different from those that people have in mind today.

Similarly, the expression "laying on of hands" occurs 25 times in the OT, but only five of those relate to people being set apart.⁷ Most of the others refer to placing hands on an animal before it is sacrificed. A related term that is used is "to fill the hand," referring to the empowering of someone for a task.⁸ This particular term is only used to describe the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests. In the NT, "laying on of hands" occurs 20 times, but

6 Staples, "A Theological Understanding of Ordination," 139.

7 Three references refer to Moses' ordination of Joshua (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9); one refers to the Israelites consecrating the Levites (Num. 8:10) and one refers to the congregation laying hands on a blasphemer (Lev. 24:14); see Keith Mattingly, "Laying on of Hands in Ordination: A Biblical Study," in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 60.

8 Exod. 28:41; 29:9, 35; Lev 8:33. It has the sense of consecrating something in Ezek. 43:26.

only five of these relate to setting apart for a special role.⁹ Most of the other occurrences relate to acts of healing.

So the particular activity of laying hands on someone for the purpose of setting them apart for ministry is not the main use of the phrase. The less-frequent usage relating to setting apart is outnumbered by the usage in reference to the confession of sin on a sacrificial animal, or to the act of healing someone.

The Act of Consecration

Another aspect of the setting apart of leaders in the OT is the description of the ceremonies that were employed to do this. There were different ceremonies for each of the various classes of "minister" mentioned above. The consecration of the priests (Exod. 29) including washing them (verse 4), clothing them (verse 5), anointing them (verse 7), placing coats, hats and sashes on them (verse 9), sacrificing a bull and two rams (upon which hands had been laid, verses 1, 10–20), dabbing blood on their right earlobe, thumb and big toe (verse 20), sprinkling a mixture of blood and anointing oil on their clothes (verse 21), presenting wave offerings (verses 22–28), then eating portions of the sacrifices (verses 31–34). The consecration of the Levites (Num. 8:5–26) began by sprinkling them with water. Then they were required to shave their whole body, then wash. This was followed by a public ceremony of laying on hands. Aaron then presented the Levites as a wave offering to the Lord to set them apart from the rest of the Israelites.¹⁰

The recognition of prophets appears to be a little simpler. Elijah gave Elisha his cloak and Elisha asked him for a double portion of his Spirit (2 Kings 2:1–14). Isaiah saw a vision of God before he was *sent* (6:1–8). God also *sent* Ezekiel (2:3), but he *consecrated* and *appointed* Jeremiah (1:5); he *revealed mysteries* to Daniel (2:19); and the *word of the Lord came* to Hosea (1:1), Joel (1:1), Jonah (1:1), Micah (1:1), Zephaniah (1:1), Haggai (1:1), and Zechariah (1:1). Furthermore, Amos (1:1), Nahum (1:1), Habakkuk (1:1), and Malachi (1:1) shared the oracles or visions that God gave them. But it is more difficult to determine the public nature of those demonstrations—except for the case of Elisha, whose commissioning was witnessed by 50 students from the school of the prophets.

It is clear, then, that the act of consecration was something significant, that it confirmed something that God had already decided. From all the

9 The five texts that mention laying on hands in the context of consecration are: Acts 6:6; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6, see Mattingly, "Laying on of Hands in Ordination," 67.

10 Mattingly, "Laying on of Hands in Ordination," 61–62.

above examples we may conclude that the current concept of “ordination” in the Adventist Church is only a very thin slice of the biblical concept of setting apart. In fact, what we see today is perhaps a development of tradition rather than being a mirror of biblical practice. In addition, and as previously outlined, the priestly function involved in the sacrificial system does not parallel Adventist ministry today.

It may be helpful, by way of clarification, to examine the consecration of three individuals; first Joshua, then Paul and Barnabas. When Joshua was consecrated as the new leader (Josh. 1:1–9), Moses first spoke words of encouragement, then spelled out his duty, assured him of God’s help and, lastly, charged him always to obey God.¹¹ The commissioning of Paul and Barnabas receives Ellen White’s most extensive comments on the subject of the function of laying on of hands.¹² She stresses that God had already chosen both Paul and Barnabas before the ceremony, and that no new grace, qualification, or virtue was added. It was the Church’s recognition of God’s prior appointment to office.¹³

In sum, there are some features of biblical rituals of setting apart and consecration to which we can relate. These may include: ensuring the solemnity of the occasion; making sure that the service publicly affirms the call that God has already given; offering words of encouragement; spelling out the work to be done; giving assurance of God’s help; charging the person to be obedient to God; and in the tradition of inaugurating a new prophetic voice, praying that God will fill the new minister with his Spirit.

Models of Ministry

Since there is no clear biblical pattern to copy as a basis for the ordination of Adventist ministers, there is a need to determine which biblical leadership role best parallels the role of the Adventist minister today. Is an SDA minister the equivalent of a priest, Levite, prophet, scribe, or Pharisee?

In most discussions on the topic it seems to be assumed that the *priests* of the OT form the pattern for ministry today. However, the main function of the priest was to officiate at the sacrifices.¹⁴ The priests also had special

11 Ibid., 64.

12 Staples, “A Theological Understanding of Ordination,” 142.

13 Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1911), 161–162.

14 Jacques Doukhan disagrees. He includes administrative and prophetic functions in the role of priests. See Jacques B. Doukhan, “Women Priests in Israel: A Case for their Absence,” in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University

access into the holy parts of the wilderness tabernacle (when it came time to move camp), and later, the sanctuary. At the time of the Exodus, the priests were to cover and then carry the Ark of the Covenant and the incense altar on poles borne on their shoulders. So the question remains, what function/s of priesthood do Adventist ministers perform in the twenty-first century? Very few, it would seem.

The *Levites* ensured the smooth running of the sanctuary and later the temple, and when it came time to move on in the wilderness, they gathered all the elements of the tabernacle, loaded them on to ox-carts and reassembled everything again at the new campsite. Before breaking camp they were to wait for the priests to cover up all the items of the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place and place poles through the rings on each item (Num. 3-4). Only then could the Levites carry the sacred items to the next campsite (Num. 4:15). Other Levite clans were responsible to load the remaining curtains and all the planks and fittings onto ox-carts. They were also responsible for organizing the water and firewood supply and carrying out the other duties required in the daily operation of the sanctuary. Thus the work of the Levites seems to be related to the work of today's deacons rather than that of pastors.

Prophets were called by God to be his mouthpieces. They did not need to come from a particular family line as did the priests and Levites, and they could come from any social stratum or background. Although prophets are popularly known for telling the future, that was not their main work. Their main calling was to proclaim fearlessly the "Word" that came to them from God. Neither Samuel, Elijah, nor John the Baptist, are known for predicting the future, yet Jesus called John the Baptist the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:28). These were powerful people who were fearless in their proclamation, and were greatly respected by king and commoner alike.

Scribes, mentioned in the NT, were, as their name suggests, able to read and write. They specialized in the knowledge of and the teaching of the law. In their ranks were those who were responsible for training the young to follow the traditions of the elders.

Since Pharisees and Sadducees are not thought of today in a very positive light, it is unlikely that they would be considered as being acceptable role models for ministers.

Press, 1998), 32. But it could be argued that these functions did not figure very largely, and were superseded by separate orders that primarily dealt with prophecy (the school of the prophets), teaching (the scribes) and administration (the scribes).

The OT Best Model for the Adventist Minister

Which of the above roles of priest, Levite, prophet or scribe best parallels the Adventist minister? If it is that of priest, the function of Adventist minister would be primarily to perform sacrifices as the Catholic priest does in the daily sacrifice of the mass. In contrast to this model, Adventists recognize that since NT times there is no need for priests, as there is only “one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). As Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie affirm, “nowhere in the New Testament are church leaders called ‘priests.’”¹⁵ So the OT priest does not seem to be the best parallel for the Adventist minister.

What of the Levites? Is it the first responsibility of the Adventist minister to care for the physical plant? I suggest that this is not the case unless they perform the work of the deacons—and there may be some pastors who try to do this. Do the Scribes provide a good role model? Ministers may well have a teaching role, but the Church relies heavily on lay people to fulfil that function.

So perhaps the best OT parallel to the Adventist minister is that of prophet—someone called of God to deliver his Word to a people, warning them of judgment to come, and assuring them of God’s incredible patience in the face of human rebellion.

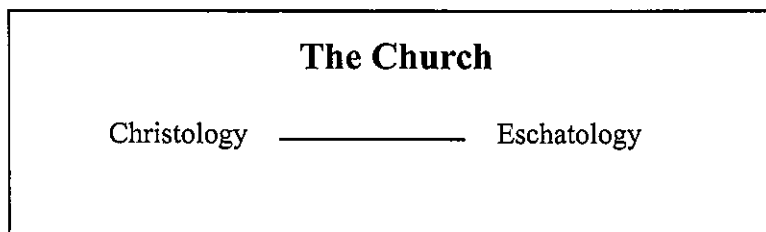
The Nature of the Church

The variety of biblical practices described above, and the fact that the practice of Adventist ordination developed from Christian tradition rather than from a specific biblical model, suggest that any discussion of ordination for Adventist ministers must begin with an understanding of the nature of the Church. Christians through the centuries have developed a number of definitions of “church,”¹⁶ and each one has an impact on determining how people are set apart for ministry. Therefore it is necessary to identify the ecclesiological context that drives our own views of Gospel ministry and ordination.

15 Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, 2004 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 291.

16 See, for example, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002). Kärkkäinen identifies seven ecclesiological traditions, representing Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Free Church, Pentecostal/Charismatic and Ecumenical perspectives.

Russell Staples has developed a very helpful overview. He considers that from the many metaphors for “church” in the NT (including “salt of the earth,” “a letter from Christ,” “branches of the vine,” “the bride of Christ,” “ambassadors,” “a chosen race,” “a holy temple,” “the body of Christ,” “a new creation,” “citizens of heaven,” “the household of God,” and “a spiritual body”), two dominant focal points can be identified. The first of these is Christology—the Church being the body of Christ; and the second is eschatology—the Church being a last-day movement with a unique mission to fulfil (see figure below).¹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann succinctly describes the relationship between the two when he states: “the Christological foundation always points toward the eschaton” making the Church “Christologically founded and eschaologically directed.”



From this basic framework, four main views of the Christian Church have developed:

1. Merged Christology and Eschatology
2. Primary Emphasis on Christology
3. Primary Emphasis on Eschatology
4. The Two in Balance

Merged Christology and Eschatology

An example of the first structure, where both focal points are merged, is medieval Catholicism. Both Christ and the end times are swallowed up in the Church, so the Church replaces the promise of heaven and the new earth. In the Catholic tradition, because the priests stand in the place of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church it would therefore be impossible for a woman

¹⁷ Staples, “A Theological Understanding of Ordination,” 135. There is also a helpful section on the nature of the Church in Raoul Dederen, “The Church,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, SDA Bible Commentary (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 12:538–581. The citation from Jürgen Moltmann that follows is cited in Kärkkäinen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 127.

ever to become a priest. How could a woman priest relate to the Church “nuptially” as a bridegroom to his bride?¹⁸

Furthermore, with the Church understood as the intermediary between God and humanity, priests are empowered to perform sacraments that give divine blessing. Therefore ordination is understood as “the sacramental conferral of an indelible grace.”¹⁹ In other words, according to the understandings of medieval Roman Catholicism something divine is imparted to the priest at his ordination.

Primary Emphasis on Christology

The second pattern, in which the primary emphasis is on Christology, is seen among communities of faith that have a high regard for the Church as being the “mystical body of Christ”—the invisible Church. The inherent danger of this model is that Church can become self-absorbed, despite its preference to speak only of Christ. In this model, eschatology can be understood in terms of personal salvation, and it is possible that there is little or no sense of the Church having a mission to the world. Although there may be a deep sense of piety and devotion among these communities, there is no over-arching mission focus. Ministers ordained in these groups are seen as instruments of divine grace, and when they are ordained, they too receive a “downward flowing of grace from God.”²⁰

Primary Emphasis on Eschatology

The third pattern, in which the primary emphasis is on eschatology, embodies a profound sense of urgency fired by a passionate belief in the return of Jesus. This so preoccupies the Church that the matter of being the “body of Christ” can be seen as less important. Rather, the Church is seen as “an institution to be organized and directed in ways that enhance the business-like efficiency of spreading the good news.”²¹ Ministers in these faith communities are set apart for service—mostly evangelism—and little seems to differentiate clergy from lay leaders (especially church elders) except “clerical vocation and office.”²²

18 George Weigel, *The Truth of Catholicism: Inside the Essential Teachings and Controversies of the Church Today* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2002), 68.

19 Staples, “A Theological Understanding of Ordination,” 136-137.

20 Ibid., 137.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

The Two in Balance

The fourth pattern emerges when the twin foci of Christology and eschatology are in balance. This type of Church views itself as a divinely constituted community of faith but also as having a responsibility to proclaim the coming kingdom of Christ—"there is a balance between what the Church is and what it does."²³ Ministers to these congregations sense a divine call, and the community of faith confirms that call. They not only evangelize but also nurture. They not only promote the health of the body, but also maintain the mission of the Church in order to reach a lost world.

Seventh-day Adventists probably fall under the third category. They follow the pattern set by the Methodists, and in their concern for mission they appear to be driven more by practical concerns than by theological reflection. However there is much to commend the fourth option.

Women as Ministers

Does any of the foregoing shed light on the appropriateness of having women serving as ordained ministers in the Church? This question has in no small way exercised the minds of Christians in many denominations. As Richard Rice observes, "[Adventists] on both sides find support for their position in the Bible. Those in favour of ordaining women point out that both the biblical doctrines of creation and salvation affirm the equality of women,"²⁴ while those who oppose the ordination of women

... also appeal to the Bible to support their position. They observe that there is no Biblical command to ordain women, nor any record in the New Testament that women were ever ordained. In addition, there are several passages that seem to indicate that women are intended to occupy a place in human affairs that is distinct from, if not inferior to, that of men.²⁵

Reasons for not Ordaining Women

There are a number of reasons given by those who advocate against ordaining women, the main ones being:

No Female Priests in Ancient Israel

Despite the fact that a number of women mentioned in the Bible fulfilled very significant roles, there is a perceived difficulty in their doing the

²³ Ibid., 138.

²⁴ Richard Rice, *Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-Day Adventist Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1997), 251.

²⁵ Ibid., 252.

same today. One reason for this is based on the observation that there were no women priests in ancient Israel.²⁶ However, we have already seen that the sacrificial function of priests does not equate to the function of today's SDA minister. Furthermore, Jacques Doukhan explains that God wanted the Israelites to avoid any connection with the goddess-fertility rituals of the surrounding nations. The religious traditions of the non-Israelite people encountered by the Israelites were associated with temple prostitution and gross immorality, and were focused on the priestesses.²⁷ To avoid these excesses, women did not become priests in the Hebrew temple.

Doukhan also makes the point that in Hebrew thinking, women from Eve onwards were acknowledged as life-givers, and since a woman symbolizes life-giving, it was totally unacceptable for a woman to participate in sacrificial rituals involving slaughter and death. Rather, her duty was to be the expectant mother of the Messiah, ready to bring life and hope to God's people.²⁸

However, if ministry is seen as a reflection of the prophetic ministry rather than the priesthood, then this objection becomes a non-issue. It certainly makes a lot more sense in the light of Adventist ecclesiology in which the church is viewed as a last-day movement upon which God pours out the "latter rain" of his Spirit. Then sons and daughters will prophesy, the old men will dream dreams, the young men see visions, and even the young servants—male and female—will be an integral part of the "loud cry" (Joel 2:23, 28-29; Matt. 25:6.)

Women Created Subservient to Men

Bacchiocchi suggests that one of the main reasons women should not be ordained is because women were created in a subservient role from Creation. This assertion is based on two things: Eve was created second, and she

26 Doukhan, "Women Priests," 29. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim uses this point to begin his case against the ordination of women, see Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1995), 15. C. Raymond Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1994) makes the same assumption, as does Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987).

27 Doukhan, "Women Priests," 31.

28 Ibid., 33-34.

was to be “for man.”²⁹ This is a misunderstanding.³⁰ As Holmes correctly observes, Eve was “the crowning act of creation.”³¹ And Richard Davidson notes that in every occasion when submission is mentioned in the NT it refers to the home, not the Church.³²

More significant is the connection between an understanding of the Godhead and the nature of the Church. As Moltmann observes, “where there is a hierarchical notion of the Trinity, a hierarchical view of the Church follows.”³³ In other words, where Father Son and Spirit are seen as equals, the Church “is a communion of equals,” but if Father is elevated above Son, and Son is elevated above Spirit, then the Church becomes closed and exclusive.³⁴ It is evident that such a discussion leads easily into the Arian position of Christ’s being a created being and eternally subordinate to the Father.

The “headship” argument fails on this very important implication. It is interesting that Jesus never affirms his headship—quite the opposite in fact: “Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant” (Matt. 20:26); he “made Himself of no reputation...[took] the form of a bondservant...[came] in the likeness of men... humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7-8). How many times did the disciples plot to become key leaders in Christ’s new kingdom, and how many times did Jesus have to remind them that his message had nothing to do with headship, and everything to do with humility?

Women Should Not Have Authority over Men

This point is related to the previous one. To suggest that women should not have any authority in church leaves Seventh-day Adventists wide open to the rejection and abandonment of the ministry of Ellen G. White. If women are not supposed to have any authority over men, then not only is Ellen White in trouble, but so are all of the Bible’s women prophets, especially

29 Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church*, 31. He seems to waver on this point, see *ibid.*, 192.

30 See Richard M. Davidson, “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture,” in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 259-295.

31 Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, 77.

32 Davidson, “Headship,” 276-281.

33 Kärkkäinen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 128. For a fuller treatment of this theme, see Millard J. Erickson, *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009).

34 *Ibid.*

Deborah. She was a judge as well as a prophet (Judges 4:4—16), and very few positions had a higher authority than that.

Women Should Keep Silent in Church

A further related issue is the injunction for women to remain silent in the church (1 Tim. 2:12). As Jo Ann Davidson points out, this letter was written to the church in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3)—a church that had real struggles with the Mother-goddess cult (Diana of the Ephesians). This cult taught that a female goddess gave birth to the world, and that in order to achieve the highest exalted position, women must achieve independence from all males and from childbearing.³⁵ To avoid that influence, it is suggested that Paul simply told all women in that church to be quiet. Paul makes the same statement to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 14:34), so this issue is more widespread than just Ephesus. Richard Davidson, in explaining Paul's directive, suggests that the issue is marriage harmony rather than the subjection of women to all men in the congregation.³⁶ He concludes his study by declaring:

Perhaps the most crucial finding of this survey is that all of the New Testament passages regarding "headship" and "submission" between men and women are limited to the marriage relationship.³⁷

To suggest otherwise is to prohibit all women from teaching a Sabbath School class. What chaos would this bring? Again, Ellen White's writings still inform the Church to this day. Must that ministry now be stopped because of the concern that women should not teach men?

Ordained Deacons and Elders Should Have one Wife

The issue of an ordained person being the husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2, 12) is seen by some as a reason for an exclusively male ministry.³⁸ To demand that in biblical grammar all masculine nouns apply only to males creates untold difficulty and confusion. For example, God's statement, let us create *man* in our image and after our likeness (Gen. 1:26), would suggest that females were excluded from creation, despite the Scriptures later (Gen. 5:1,2) explaining that, "male and female he created them." Clearly "man" in this context refers to both genders. Similarly the term "children of Israel" in Hebrew literally means the "sons of Israel." The Exodus consisted of both

35 Jo Ann Davidson, "Women in Scripture: A Survey and Evaluation," in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 178.

36 Richard Davidson, "Headship," 276—281.

37 Ibid., 281.

38 See, for example, Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church*, 190; Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, 146—147; Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*, 16.

men and women, so to hold the strict gender-exclusive position here would mean only men and boys came out of Egypt, and all the women and girls were abandoned back in Egypt. Thus terms such as “son,” or “man,” and even “husband” could refer to either gender.

The issue here is hermeneutics, not the theology of ordination. To say that “the husband of one wife” only applies to men is to impose a Western understanding on an Eastern text. Such a reading is not justified.

Women Would Not be Accepted as Ministers in All Parts of the World

Those that argue that women ministers would not be acceptable in all parts of the world Church point to the issue of the unity of the Church. While unity is of utmost importance, this objection has no substance. In current practice, no minister has the right to appoint himself to any new field of labour. The authority for granting ministers credentials lies with the Union, and the Union Committee makes the final decision as to who is, or who is not, suitable for employment in their field as a minister. Although in theory, a minister, once ordained, is considered eligible to serve anywhere in the world, the reality is that most ministers are placed in a defined field where their language and social skills best apply. For that reason, when ministers are considered for employment in another geographic region, some may be regarded as being unsuitable for the new task, so those names are passed over and someone else is considered. If women were in this mix, they would simply be appointed to a place where their ministry was going to be accepted and appreciated. To deny them that possibility is simply to say that we know better than God when it comes to the call he places upon the people of his choice.

Women as Leaders in the Bible

Therefore the question arises, is it ever appropriate to appoint women as leaders in the Church? It is interesting to note that at times in biblical history, God called and empowered women to senior leadership roles that paralleled, and even surpassed, those of men. It did not seem to be the norm, but during times of crisis, transition and social upheaval, God commissioned women to do the work that the men were either afraid or unable to do.

Probably the most dramatic of these leadership roles has been that of prophet. Biblical tradition recognizes more than 29 men and four women as prophets.³⁹ Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings

³⁹ Aaron, Abraham, Ahijah, Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Gad, Habakkuk, Haggai, Hananiah, Iddo, Isaiah, Jehu, Jeremiah, Jonah, Micaiah, Moses, Nathan, Oded,

22:14), Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:3), and the false prophetess Noadiah (Neh. 6:14, are found in the OT;⁴⁰ while in the NT we find Anna (Lk 2:36), the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), and the false prophetess Jezebel (Rev. 2:20). In this role, the women have just as much authority as the men. Deborah, for example, as well as being called a prophet, was also seen as a judge (Judg. 4:4). The rabbis had great difficulty with the idea of a woman having so much power and, rather than simply ignoring it, they actually contradicted Scripture to declare that she was not a judge.⁴¹

As well as the female prophets mentioned above, there also are a few very influential women found in the NT. In Romans 16, Paul greets 26 different people, nine of whom are women. Phoebe, the first person mentioned in the list (verse 1) is said to be a deacon. Although some Bible translations say she was a "servant," the same biblical word is used to describe her as to describe male deacons.⁴² Furthermore, Paul also uses the same word in Romans 15:31 to describe his work—as a minister of the Gospel. So this is not just a description of serving tables and collecting offerings for the poor.

Another woman Paul mentions is Prisca (Priscilla) who is mentioned before her husband (Rom. 16:3), suggesting she was the more prominent teacher of the two. Another example of a female leader in the early Church, in the same chapter, is Junia. According to Robert Johnson, Andronicus

Samuel, Shemiah, Zechariah, and the anonymous, but clearly male prophets of Judg. 6:8; 1 Kings 13:11, 18; 20:13, 38; 2 Kings 9:4; 2 Chron. 25:15. However, this list includes only men whom the Biblical record labels "prophet." If we were to include those men who bear the titles of "seer," "man of God," and the like, the total would be even higher. See Susan Ackerman, "Why is Miriam also among the Prophets? (And is Zipporah among the Priests?)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 49.

40 Rabbinic tradition says that there were 48 prophets and seven prophetesses who arose during Israel's history. The female prophetesses are enumerated by name, but, surprisingly, the male prophets' names are not given. The women designated as prophets are Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. See Leila L. Bronner, "Biblical Prophetesses through Rabbinic Lenses," *Judaism* 40 (March 1, 1991): 171–183.

41 See the Mishnah, T.B. Niddah 60b; Tosafot Niddah 49b, 50a, cited in Bronner, "Biblical Prophetesses," 179.

42 Davidson, "Women in Scripture," 177. The feminine ending does not denote a separate class of church worker and is not equivalent to the modern word "deaconess." The noun is still masculine in the way it follows the declensions, but functions as a feminine if the subject is feminine (correspondence with Dr Kim Papaioannou).

and Junia (verse 7) were a husband-and-wife “apostolic team.”⁴³ This is by no means a unanimous understanding, but it raises interesting possibilities about the leadership role of women in the early Church.

Women as Teachers and Leaders before Jesus Returns

Since Joel gave his prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days, the Church has been put on notice that God intends to do something remarkable and out of the ordinary. The whole point of ordination is a human recognition of a divine calling. To ignore that on the basis of gender is something that Joel knew nothing about. He simply proclaimed that “all people” (all flesh) would be eligible (Joel 2:28–30). Notice how he lists the different types of people: sons, daughters, old men, young men, and male and female servants. There is no suggestion here that any of those groups are unable to devote themselves fully to God in full-time ministry. The urgency of the message at the end demands the participation, not exclusion, of all the types of people just listed. To deny that is to walk to the beat of a different drummer.

Learning from History

Knowing how to relate to and to apply all this information is a challenge. But there is one fascinating story from Adventist history that—to me at least—puts this discussion in context. The year was 1858, and the place was Battle Creek. A certain “Brother A,” who has since been identified as Stephen Haskell, was trying to convince his fellow church members on an issue that he had discovered in the Scriptures. He and his wife had pushed and agitated so much that Ellen White decided to step in to the argument.⁴⁴ She was concerned that Haskell and his wife were both heading for certain ruin.

I saw that all was not right with you. The enemy has been seeking your destruction.⁴⁵

[You] rush on without divine guidance, and thus bring confusion and discord into the ranks....I saw that you both must speedily be brought where you are willing to be led, instead of desiring to lead, or Satan will step in and lead you in his way.⁴⁶

43 Robert M. Johnston, “Shapes of Ministry in the New Testament and Early Church,” in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 47.

44 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 1:204–209, written October 21, 1858, nearly five years before the significant health vision of 1863.

45 Ibid., 204.

46 Ibid., 207.

Your souls are withering beneath the blighting influence of your own errors... You are deceived. You cannot bear the plain, cutting testimony... [you are] setting up your judgment and notions as a rule for others... you have overreached the mark.⁴⁷

The remarkable thing about this story is the issue of contention—eating swine's flesh. She continues:

I saw that your views concerning swine's flesh would prove no injury if you have them to yourselves... If God requires His people to abstain from swine's flesh, He will convict them of the matter... If it is the duty of the church to abstain from swine's flesh, God will discover it to more than two or three. He will teach His church their duty... Some run ahead of the angels that are leading this people; but they have to retrace every step, and meekly follow no faster than the angels lead. I saw that the angels of God would lead His people no faster than they can receive and act upon the important truths that are communicated to them.⁴⁸

This testimony came nearly five years before the great health vision of 1863 that confirmed to the young Church that it should, in fact, abstain from swine's flesh. But notice the issue at stake here. Ellen White's concern is not the topic of discussion, but how certain people were trying to push their views onto the Church. This is not God's way. As Ellen White stated, God (the angels) leads his Church as a whole, and progresses at a pace that the Church as a whole can keep up with. And that is in fact what happened in this case.⁴⁹

Therefore in the discussion of the sensitive topic of ordination, God must be allowed to be the one to lead the Church, and not the disciples who claim they are seated at the right hand or at the left of the Saviour.

Conclusion

In considering whether it is appropriate to ordain women to the Gospel ministry, there are a number of things to ponder, including:

1. What is the model of ecclesiology adopted?
2. What is the biblical pattern for understanding the ordination of ministers?
3. What is the best way of commissioning ministers?
4. Is the Church today living in "normal" and "stable" times, and if not, is it time to consider what happened in biblical times of instability—and allow God to appoint women as leaders?

This chapter has argued that the ways in which Churches relates to Chris-

47 Ibid., 208.

48 Ibid., 206-207; emphasis in original.

49 Ibid., 205.

tology and Eschatology have had a significant impact on whether or not they consider that women could be ordained as Gospel ministers. If Christology and Eschatology are merged into the Church itself, it would be quite unacceptable to have female priest-pastors. In that model, the Church replaces Christ and the physical return of Christ to establish his literal kingdom to be established for his people is not required, so the decision made by such a Church not to ordain women priests makes perfect sense.

However, if Adventists see themselves instead as part of an end-time movement, upon which God will pour out his Spirit (on all flesh and not just on the men), then they need to be ready as a community of faith to accept the ministry of those “daughters,” and “handmaids” that the Bible tells us will be proclaiming the Word just before Jesus returns. The Church should be recognized as more than just a movement that is looking forward to the Second Coming, but that it is also the Body of Christ, in which every different part works together under his call, and his direction.

If we want to see the full latter rain and the return of Christ in our lifetime, then maybe it is time to consider the possibility that God is indeed pouring his Spirit out on ALL flesh. Is this something we desire above all else, or would we rather wait another generation or two until we are all of the same opinion?