

**JOHN LORENCIN**



# **PRIESTLY MINISTRY**

**IN THE OLD AND THE NEW  
TESTAMENT**

*Should women be ordained?*



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# FOREWORD

The discussions about the ordination of women prompted me to study deeper the subject of priestly ministry in the Old and New Testament. As a leader of one of the biggest Protestant Churches in the former Yugoslavia where the main religions were: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Moslem, I was naturally against the ordination of women and I expressed it clearly in public discussions. My arguments, as most of the others, were based on the tradition in the Christian Church and the fact that no woman served as a priest in the Old Testament neither in the New. However, I felt that the arguments for and against the ordination of women were weak, so when I retired I took time to research more deeply the priestly ministry in the Old and New Testament.

I was very impressed that Christ's priestly ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, where He went after His resurrection and ascension, is the most important work that He is doing before He fulfils His promise to come again to take home His own. He is declared to be the head of His church – His body. His followers are called the People of God (1 Pet. 2:10). Everything done in His church has a purpose and a meaning only in connection

with what He is doing today as our High Priest in the Heavenly Sanctuary. Without this ministry of His, every ministry in the Christian Church becomes meaningless and without value for the eternal life He has promised. My impression is that most Christians are ignorant about this aspect of Christ's ministry today. We very seldom, and in many Christian Churches never, hear about this aspect of Christ's ministry which was clearly and forcefully described in the Bible. This work will draw our attention to study deeper this subject in the light of Bible teaching.

*John Lorencin*

*February 2012*

# INTRODUCTION

Priestly ministry is prominent in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. The reason why it is important is fairly simple: without the ministry of a priest there could be no forgiveness of sins. This is true in both Testaments. Without God's forgiveness of sins, man remains condemned before God by his sins. In such a situation there is no hope of eternal life which was promised to man by God in His Word. Being that priestly ministry plays such an important part in clearing the guilt of a sinner, it will be of great significance for us to ponder the meaning of priestly ministry in the Old and New Testaments.



# PRIESTLY MINISTRY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament a priest is first mentioned in Genesis 14:18. Melchizedek, king of Salem, was also the priest of God Most High, to whom Abraham gave a tithe of all, a fact which will be mentioned later in the New Testament. (Heb. 7:1-2.)

The second priest of importance mentioned in the Bible was Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law (Ex. 3:1; 18:1.) Although he was a Midianite, he was evidently a God-fearing man because he gave God-inspired advice to Moses regarding the hierarchy of leadership: God was to come first, then Moses, then his helpers. Moses was to "stand before God for the people" in order to bring difficulties to God. "And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do" (Ex. 18:19-20.) Jethro advised Moses to take these helpers only under one condition: "If God so commands you" (Ex. 18:23). Since Moses instituted this organisation, he obviously consulted God about Jethro's advice. This is a good example of how God used a man who respected and obeyed Him, regardless of his nationality.

During the patriarchal period, the head of the family performed the work of a priest. He was not referred to as a priest, but he led his family in worshipping God. Abraham was the best example. Wherever he went, he built an altar on which he offered the sacrifices that God had established after the fall of man. In return, God said of him: “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Gen. 18:19).

At Sinai, after God had brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage, He gave them this commandment: “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). God gave Moses exact instructions regarding the design and services of the sanctuary. God stressed that everything should be exactly as He ordered: “And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain” (Ex. 25:40). In the inspired writings of E.G. White we find this thought, why did God give the Israelites these instructions for the Sanctuary: “Accustomed as they had been in Egypt to material representations of the Deity, and these of the most degrading nature, it was difficult for them to conceive of the existence or the character of the Unseen One. In pity for their weakness, God gave them a symbol of His presence: ‘let them make me a sanctuary,’ He said; ‘that I may dwell among them.’ Ex. 25:8” (E.G. White, *Education*, p. 35).

The sanctuary and the services in it were given to the Israelites and through them to the world, to illustrate God’s plan

to save sinful man. The system taught a sinner how to deal with his sin and receive forgiveness. First he must become aware of his sin. Then he had to find an animal for a sacrifice for his sin. Next he brought this sacrifice to the priest who officiated in the sanctuary. He confessed his sin and the priest sacrificed the animal according to the strict instructions regarding sacrifices. The blood of the animal was the cleansing agent, and the priest was the one who mediated between God and the sinner. The priesthood in the nation of Israel was given to Aaron, his sons and their descendants. The position was inherited by birth.

Chapters four through six of Leviticus detail different kinds of sins for different kinds of people: if a person sinned unintentionally (Lev. 4:2); if the anointed priest sinned (Lev.4:3); if the whole congregation of Israel sinned (Lev. 4:13); if a ruler sinned (Lev. 4:22); if a common person sinned (Lev. 4:27); if a person sinned by witnessing an oath and not telling it (Lev. 5:1); if a person sinned by doing anything forbidden by the commandment of the Lord (Lev. 5:17); and if a person committed a wilful sin (Lev. 6:2-5.). In each case, the sinner was to become conscious of his sin; then he had to confess it and a priest had to offer the sacrifice that the sinner had brought. When all these things were done the sinner was forgiven: “So the priest shall make atonement for them (or him), and it shall be forgiven them (or him)” (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 16, 18; 6:7). If you wanted forgiveness for your sins, you could not bypass the priest and his ministry in the Old Testament sanctuary.

# PRIESTLY MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, the title of “priest” (Gr. hiericus or archiereus – the high priest) is given only to those who ministered in the sanctuary at Jerusalem. Clearly, the Old Testament way of the cleansing of sin is still in progress. But then, a great change! The Messiah has come: Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. All along, the sanctuary service was pointing to Him, the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world (John 1:29; Heb. 10:11). When Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross for all sinners, the shadows (Col. 2:17) met their substance, the Old Testament system of forgiveness of sin was swept away. This was symbolised when the veil dividing the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom (Mat. 27:51). Jesus opened a new way of forgiveness to every sinner (Heb. 10:9,10,19,20).

While Jesus was on Earth, He chose twelve disciples who were called apostles (Luke 6:13; Mat. 10:1-2), and they became a part of the foundation of His church (Eph. 2:20). Interestingly, there were no priests in the Apostolic (later, Christian) church (Acts 11:26). The Old Testament priest simply disappears in the



New Testament. Well, almost! There is one New Testament priest officiating in the Christian church, and that is Christ Himself! He is officiating in the heavenly sanctuary, where He went after His resurrection (Heb. 12:2). He entered the real sanctuary (the one of which the earthly sanctuary was a copy), so that in the presence of his Father, He might “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:24, 26).

The New Testament clearly teaches that the blood of animals can never take away sin (Heb. 10:4). Hebrews 10:8-14 sums up how a man really goes from sinner to saint: “First he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them’ (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.” (NIV)

The eyes of New Testament believers are directed to the only Priest, the High Priest – Jesus Christ who ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at

the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:1-2). Only He can give us pardon and cleansing from sin. It comes from His “Throne of Grace” (Heb. 4:15-16). The sinner’s only hope is in His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary (Heb.2:14-15). If sinners “come to God through Him, He is able to save to the uttermost, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). There is only “one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim. 2:5). The New Testament does not recognise any other mediator apart from Him. If we come to Him and “confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). This is the only way a sinner can deal with his sin. Romans 3:23-26 expresses it well: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

This justification by faith in Christ Jesus changes the life of a sinner completely: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10). When we come to Christ, our High Priest, He not only forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness, but we become “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

Here, Paul says that justification by faith is not devoid of good works; however, they are not the result of our efforts, but the result of our union with Christ, our High Priest who sends us help in our time of need from the Throne of Grace (Heb. 4:16). This is the new birth by the Spirit that Jesus told Nicodemus about (John 3:5). In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul sums up this new birth with these words: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” One who is in Christ is a changed person. He desires to do the will of God and the only way to do it is through his union with Christ, his constant connection with his High Priest who sits on the Throne of Grace (John 15:4,5).

# MINISTRIES IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christ is the only recognised priest in the Apostolic church and only His ministry can save sinners. This is why there are no earthly priests in the Apostolic church. But there are servants with other titles: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). All these people are in the church for one reason: “For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). And that body is His church, but it is God who equips these people for the church ministry. “To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:7). In 1 Corinthians 12:1, they are called “spiritual gifts”. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Cor.12:4-6). Here, the church is called the body of Christ (1 Cor.12:27). Through the endowment of spiritual gifts, “God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties

of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28). Priests do not appear in this list, nor in Ephesians or anywhere else. Of course, they are not complete lists of church ministries since there are diversities of gifts.

One of the earliest new ministries in the Apostolic church was deacons (Acts 6:3-6). As the church expanded, other ministries were needed. Eventually, church ministries included elders (Gr. presbuteros) and overseers (Gr. episkopos). These were synonymous expressions, frequently applied to the same people. This is clearly seen when Peter speaks to the elders about their duty: “The elders (presbuteros) who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder (presbuteros) and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers (episkopos), not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3). The Greek words for elders (presbuteros) and overseers (episkopos) are used throughout because later in the Christian church these two expressions will be used in a completely different way and meaning than they had been used in the New Testament times.

As experienced men, elders were to oversee church activities to ensure that they were in harmony with Christ’s commission to His disciples: “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). The special duty of

elders (presbuteros) and overseers (episkopos) was to teach all nations to observe all things that Christ commanded. Among other qualities, the elder was to hold “fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Tit. 1:9).

When the apostle Paul met with the elders (presbuteros) of Ephesus for the last time (Acts 20:17-18), he told them about their responsibilities in the church. He also prophesied about what some of them would do: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [notice that the elders, presbuteros, are here referred to as overseers, episkopos] to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves [elders/overseers] men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:28-30). This was a sobering thought, that some elders/overseers (presbuteros/episkopos) would lead Christ’s flock astray. In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul states that already in his day “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” Indeed, what he foretold in Acts 20:30 happened very early on in the Christian church.

# PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

The New Testament teaches of the priesthood of all believers. “But you [who believe, 1 Pet. 2:7] are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (hierateuma), a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Pet. 2:9). This passage is clearly speaking of Christ’s church, starting from verse 5: “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood (hierateuma).” This is what the apostles believed and taught as instructed by Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They believed in the priesthood of all believers, recognised Christ as the only High Priest (arhierous) who can forgive sins, and taught that He is the one to whom we should confess our sins in order to be forgiven (1 John 1:9).

Therefore, the function of the New Testament “holy priesthood” was not to listen to the confessions of sinners and offer them absolution, but rather their duty was “that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). The Greek word “arête” used here is translated “praises” and also means “excellence” and “virtue” (which should be praised). Christians are called to proclaim the excellence of Him who called them out of darkness into His wonderful light. They should point people,

not to themselves, but to their great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who ministers for them all in the heavenly sanctuary. “He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant” (Heb. 8:6).



# SPECIAL HUMAN PRIESTS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

There is a great difference between what the Bible teaches and what some well-known Christian churches teach today. For example, some churches teach that if you want forgiveness for your sins, you must go to a Christian priest who is duly ordained to that office by the church and confess your sins to him; then, he will give you, in the name of Jesus, forgiveness, absolution for your sins. He will also give you Holy Communion – Christ’s body – which, the priest explains, takes the place of the Old Testament sacrifices which were required for forgiveness.

That teaching is not found in the New Testament. The New Testament does not mention a special human priest (hiereus) who is to give forgiveness, as was the case with the Old Testament priest (Heb. kohen). How, then, is it that there are priests and bishops in modern Christian churches with special ecclesiastical powers to listen to confessions and offer absolution for sins? With no basis for that in the Apostolic or early Christian church, we must look into the history of the Christian church to discover when and how that change was introduced. In harmony with

the apostle Paul's prediction, the slow change had begun to take place already in the second century.

A well-known historian of the Christian Church writes: "The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people, with the accompanying notion of sacrifice and altar, passed imperceptibly from Jewish and heathen reminiscences and analogies into the Christian church. The majority of Jewish converts adhered tenaciously to the Mosaic institutions and rites. And a considerable part never fully attained to the height of spiritual freedom proclaimed by Paul, or soon fell away from it. He opposed legalistic and ceremonial tendencies in Galatia and Corinth; and although sacerdotalism does not appear among the errors of his Judaizing opponents, the Levitical priesthood, with its three ranks of high-priest, priest, and Levite, naturally furnished an analogy for the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, and came to be regarded as typical of it. Still less could the Gentile Christians, as a body, at once emancipate themselves from their traditional notions of priesthood, altar, and sacrifice, on which their former religion was based. Whether we regard the change as an apostasy from a higher position attained, or as a reaction of old ideas never fully abandoned, the change is undeniable, and can be traced to the second century. The church could not long occupy the ideal height of the apostolic age, and as the pentecostal illumination passed away with the death of the apostles, the old reminiscences began to reassert themselves". ("History of the Christian Church" by Philip Schaff, vol. 2 p.123.) Even though

this change started in the second century, false teachings do not become truth with the passing of time.

Continuing: “The New Testament knows no spiritual aristocracy or nobility, but calls all believers ‘saints’ though many fell far short of their vocation. Nor does it recognize a special priesthood in distinction from the people, as mediating between God and the laity. It knows only one high-priest, Jesus Christ, and clearly teaches the universal priesthood, as well as universal kingship, of believers. It does this in a far deeper and larger sense than the Old; in a sense, too, which even to this day is not yet fully realized. The entire body of Christians are called ‘clergy’ (hleroi), a peculiar people, the heritage of God”. (Ibid. p. 124)

The New Testament clearly speaks of elders (presbuteros) and overseers (episkopos). “But these ministers are nowhere represented as priests in any other sense than Christians generally are priests with the privilege of a direct access to the throne of grace in the name of their one and eternal highpriest in heaven. Even in the Pastoral Epistles which present the most advanced stage of ecclesiastical organisation in the apostolic period, while the teaching, ruling, and pastoral functions of the presbyter-bishops are fully discussed, nothing is said about a sacerdotal function” (Ibid p. 125).

The third century represents a landmark in introducing the priesthood into the Christian Church. “Tertulian was the first who expressly and directly asserts sacerdotal [relating to priests] claims on behalf of the Christian ministry, and he calls

it ‘sacerdotium’, although he also strongly affirms the universal priesthood of all believers. Cyprian (d. 258) goes still further and applies all the privileges, duties, and responsibilities of the Aaronic priesthood to the officers of the Christian Church, and constantly calls them ‘sacerdotes and sacerdotium’. He may therefore be called the proper father of the sacerdotal conception of the Christian ministry as a mediating agency between God and the people. During the third century it became customary to apply the term ‘priest’ directly and exclusively to the Christian ministers, especially the bishops” (Ibid. p. 126).

Becoming a priest wasn’t easy. It required a special process. “Solemn ‘ordination’ or consecration by the laying on of hands was the form of admission into the ‘ordo ecclesiasticus’ or ‘sacerdotalis’. In this order itself there were again three degrees: ‘ordines majores,’ as they were called, the diaconate, the presbyterate, and the episcopate – held to be of divine institution... Thus we find, as early as the third century, the foundations of a complete hierarchy” (Ibid. pp. 127-128). This practice, with some minor changes, has prevailed until this day.

How did it happen that the clergy was separated from the laity? “With the exaltation of the clergy appeared the tendency to separate them from secular business, and even from social relations – from marriage, for example – and to represent them, even outwardly, as a caste independent of the people, and devoted exclusively to the service of the sanctuary.” (Ibid. p.128). Celibacy was not yet enforced at this time, but was left optional. Only later did it become a condition for priestly ordination in

the Roman Catholic Church. In the Orthodox Church, marriage has been left as an option for priests. However, the bishop of the Orthodox Church must be an unmarried man. “It is the authority of the church alone which has made a distinction between clergy and laity” (Ibid p. 129).

Three orders of clergy were originally ordained: deacons, presbyters and bishops. The New Testament presbyters – elders and bishops – overseers who were originally elders of the early Christian churches – have now become, by church decree, special people with special ecclesiastical powers which increased as the Christian church expanded. The power of bishops, or bishops, gained importance, especially for those situated in secularly important cities such as Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. Over time, the bishop of Rome was considered most important and was finally made the Pope. By the decree of the first Vatican Council (1869-1870), he was declared infallible. This is still the teaching of the Roman Catholic church.

Today in Christianity there are four generally recognized forms of church government:

1. Episkopal – the church is governed by bishops, priests and deacons.
2. Papal – the supreme authority is vested in the Pope. The church is governed by cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests who are subject to his authority. The local church or individual member has no authority in church administration.

3. Independent – the local church congregation is supreme and final within its own domain. This is usually referred to as congregationalism.
4. Representative – church authority rests in the church membership, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers for the governing of the church. This form of church government also recognizes the equality of the ordination of the entire ministry. (SDA Church Manual, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, pp. 25,26.)

# MINISTRIES IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

The representative form of church government prevails in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church. There are four constituent levels: the local church, the local conference or mission, the union conference or mission, and the General Conference which embraces all unions in all parts of the world.

Local churches choose delegates who elect local conference officers. Local conferences choose delegates who elect union conference officers. Unions choose delegates who elect General Conference officers. Thus, every member of the church has, directly or indirectly, a voice in the choosing of church officers. (SDA Church Manual, 17th edition, p. 26.)

“The General Conference in session and the Executive Committee between sessions, is the highest organisation in the administration of the church’s worldwide work, and is authorised by its constitution to create subordinate organisations to promote specific interests in various sections of the world; it is therefore understood that all subordinate organisations and institutions throughout the world will recognize the General

Conference as the highest authority, under God, among Seventh-day Adventists.” (Ibid. p. 27).

The General Conference, under God, is the highest authority in the SDA church. This means that God is still the head of the Church and that what He has revealed in His Word holds the highest authority in the Church. All the actions of the General Conference must harmonize with it. The advantage of the SDA church is that it also has revelation and instruction from the Spirit of Prophecy regarding modern world situations.

The SDA church is also called the Advent Movement, and rightly so, because it must move forward in the search as to what is the right thing to do in the world we live in. Times change. Some practices come into the church by tradition; tradition is good as long as it does not conflict with Bible teachings. Basic Bible teachings must always have pre-eminence over tradition.



# NEW TESTAMENT ORIGIN OF ORDINATION

God has placed different ministries in His church (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28), and none of them involve priests! However, some specific church ministries are recognised by the laying on of hands to those who have been chosen and set apart for that special work. The first example of this mentioned in the Bible was with deacons (Acts 6:6). The apostles summoned the disciples and told them to choose seven deacons from among themselves who had specific qualifications for the work they were to do: “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3). When the seven deacons were chosen by the believers, they were “set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them” (Acts 6:6). This public laying on of hands was recognition that they were separated for the work they were chosen to do.

Acts chapter 13 provides the next mention of laying on of hands as a sign of separation for a specific work within the Apostolic church. The situation here was different. “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and

teachers... As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:1-3).

Here, the Holy Spirit – not the believers – appointed Barnabas and Saul for a specific work. The church recognised that and set them apart by laying hands on them. At that time, there were no apostles in Antioch. This is the only mention of Saul’s ordination, and no apostle laid hands on him; it was the leaders of the Antioch church who laid hands on Barnabas and Saul. This sheds an interesting light on the idea of apostolic succession!

As the church grew, it needed organisation that would bring order and harmony to its activities. For that purpose, elders (presbuteros) and overseers (episkopos) were appointed in the church. These two terms were applied to the same people. In Acts 20:17, Paul calls together the elders (presbuteros) from Ephesus, and when he speaks to them, he tells them that they are overseers (episcopos) (Acts 20:28). In Titus 1:5, Paul instructs Titus “to appoint elders in every city,” and details the qualifications an elder (presbuteros) must have. In verse seven, he refers to the same person as an overseer (episcopos).

Obviously both terms were originally used to describe the same people. Only later, in the second and third centuries, did the church make a distinction between them and gave them meanings which are not supported in the New Testament. In 1 Peter 5:1, Peter calls himself an elder (presbuteros), not bishop

or overseer (episkopos). However, the Roman Catholic Church insists that he is a bishop, an overseer (episcopos). They are correct, since the terms were used interchangeably in the New Testament. The only difference is that Peter was not an overseer (episcopos) as the Roman Catholic Church defined it. Neither he, nor the early Christian church, made that claim.

The elders played an important role in the Apostolic church, as they still do today. In her book, *Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen G. White writes: “Addressing the church elders regarding their responsibilities as undershepherds of Christ’s flock, the apostle wrote: ‘Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.’”

“Those who occupy the position of undershepherds are to exercise a watchful diligence over the Lord’s flock. This is not to be a dictatorial vigilance, but one that tends to encourage and strengthen and uplift. Ministry means more than sermonizing; it means earnest, personal labour. The church on earth is composed of erring men and women, who need patient, painstaking effort that they may be trained and disciplined to work with acceptance in this life, and in the future life to be crowned with glory and immortality. Pastors are needed – faithful shepherds – who will not flatter God’s people, nor treat them harshly, but who will feed them with the bread of life – men who in their lives feel

daily the converting power of the Holy Spirit and who cherish a strong, unselfish love towards those for whom they labour.

“There is tactful work for the undershepherd to do as he is called to meet alienation, bitterness, envy, and jealousy in the church, and he will need to labour in the spirit of Christ to set things in order. Faithful warnings are to be given, sins rebuked, wrongs made right, not only by the minister’s work in the pulpit, but by personal labour” (E.G.White, Acts of the Apostles pp. 525-526).

E.G. White calls all elders “undershepherds,” whether they are elders with full time work – whom we call pastors – or local church elders who are not working full time in ministry. The Bible lists the qualifications they must have (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). The greater the responsibility they will be given, the more stringent the aptitude test must be by the church members who elect them.

Elders are not instructed to demand obedience and honour from believers, but rather, they are called to faithfully serve the believers with love (1 Pet. 5:2-3). In turn, the New Testament calls on all believers to recognise the ministry of elders and overseers and show them honour and respect: “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17 NIV). “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb. 13:17 NIV). “Now we

ask you, brethren, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other” (1Thess. 5:12-13 NIV).

Peter adds this to his counsel on submission and obedience: “Yes, all of you [young and old] be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility” (1Pet. 5:5 NKJ). This means that all relations in the church must be imbued with brotherly love, and not with the spirit of power on one side and subjection on the other.

Timothy was appointed by the church to the ministry when the elders laid their hands on him (1Tim. 4:14). Paul also participated in laying hands on Timothy (2 Tim. 1:6). It was common practice in the Apostolic church to set apart elders or overseers for service in the church by laying hands on them. Paul instructs Timothy to take care in selecting those who will be set apart as elders and overseers of a church congregation (1Tim. 5:22). For that reason, he gives a list of qualities which an elder or overseer must have to both Timothy (1Tim. 3:1-7) and Titus (Tit. 1:5-9).

# E.G. WHITE ON THE MEANING OF ORDINATION

Today, we refer to the laying on of hands as “ordination,” and this practice is described clearly by E.G. White in the book *Acts of the Apostles*: “Both Paul and Barnabas had already received their commission from God Himself, and the ceremony of laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification. It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office and a recognition of one’s authority in that office... And when the ministers of the church of believers in Antioch laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, they, by that action, asked God to bestow His blessing upon the chosen apostles in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed” (pp. 161-162).

This act of ordination “added no new grace or virtual qualifications. It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office, and a recognition of one’s authority in that office.” But, ordination in today’s Christian churches means something quite different.

# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHING ON ORDINATION

The Roman Catholic Church regards ordination as follows: “The word ‘order’ in roman antiquity designated an established civil body, especially a governing body. ‘Ordinatio’ means incorporation into an ‘ordo’. In the church there are established bodies which Tradition, not without a basis in Sacred Scripture (Heb. 5:6; 7:11; Ps. 110:4) has since ancient times called ‘taxeis’ (Greek) or ‘ordines.’ And so the liturgy speaks of the ‘ordo episcoporum,’ the ‘ordo presbyterorum,’ the ‘ordo diaconorum’” (Geoffrey Chapman, “Catechism of the Catholic Church” p. 343, the edition of year 1999).

We read that in today’s usage of the word “ordination” is: “Reserved for the sacrament act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters or deacons.” It does not simply mean election, designation, delegation or institution by the community. It means much more because: “It confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a ‘sacred power’ (sacra potestas) which can come only from Christ himself through his church.” (Ibid. p 344).

We are told that: “Through the ordained ministry, especially that of bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community of believers.” (Ibid. p.347).

Catholic doctrine and constant practice: “Recognizes that there are two degrees of ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ: the episcopacy and the presbyterate.” The diaconate is not in this category because it is intended to help and to serve them. “For this reason the term ‘sacerdos’ in current usage denotes bishops and priests but not deacons.” (Ibid. p.348).

It is important to notice the following fact: “As in the case of Baptism and Confirmation this share in Christ’s office is granted once for all. The sacrament of Holy Orders, like the other two confers an INDELIBLE SPIRITUAL CHARACTER and cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily” (Ibid. p. 355).

The Catechism further explains why women cannot be ordained into Holy Orders: “The Lord Jesus chose men (viri) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever active reality until Christ’s return. The Church recognises herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible” (Ibid. pp. 353-354).



# THE WORD ORDINATION IN THE BIBLE

How did we obtain the expression “ordination”? There is not a single word in the New Testament to express this idea. In Mark 3:14 which tells that Jesus ordained the twelve, the Greek word “poieo” is used, meaning “to make or do.” The King James version translates this word “ordained twelve,” but the New King James and New International Versions translate “appointed twelve.”

In John 15:16, where Jesus said that he has chosen the twelve and “ordained” them (KJV), the Greek word “etheka” from “tithemi” is used, meaning – among other things – “advise,” or “appoint.” The NKJV and NIV translate this word “appointed.” Acts 14:23. (KJV) says that Paul and Barnabas “had ordained elders in every church.” Here, the Greek word “hierotoneo” is used, literary meaning “to extend the hand.” This expression in the NKJV and NIV is translated “appointed.” Obviously, what we know today as “ordination” was known by different expressions in the New Testament.

The word “ordination” was established when the Christian church introduced Holy Orders and made them a sacrament of the

church which made a “permanent impression” on ones character, and for that reason it could not be repeated. Ordination denotes that a particular person is initiated into Holy Orders – ordained. This notion is present in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches, where apostolic succession is also seen as an important part of ordination.

Protestant churches have a different understanding of ordination. Luther, particularly, revived the New Testament teaching of the priesthood of all believers. The doctrine of Holy Orders was questioned in the light of this teaching and found wanting. Protestants also ordain people into church office but not into Holy Orders. Although they use the same expression, “ordination” has a different meaning for them. It does not mean initiation into Holy Orders, but a setting apart for a specific ministry.

# ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The question of whether or not women should be ordained has become a much discussed issue. For thousands of years women were treated as second class citizens, and some countries still treat them as such today. The availability of the Bible to a broad public made it possible for people to find out what was written in it, and not depend on the priests saying what is in it. Naturally people noticed the difference in what was written in the Bible and what they were taught as the truth. This questioning was noticeable ever since Wyclif and others started to translate the Bible in the language people could understand. But when the Bible was broadly available after the organisation of the Bible Society and when the Bible was translated into more and more languages; more questions were asked. The question of women's involvement in church work came strongly on the agenda.

It is interesting to see how things developed: "Some theological colleges were opened to women in the 1880s, but the numbers remained small, about 5%, until the 1960s. New non-ordained ministerial roles were opened to women, such as deaconesses, foreign missionaries and Christian educators.

Women in theological colleges were mostly preparing for these non-ordained ministries. Unitarians, Universalists, Congregationalists, and Methodist Protestants began to ordain women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but mainline Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans rejected women's ordination, seeking to direct women instead to non-ordained ministries." (Christianity the Complete Guide, edited by John Bowden, published by Continuum, 2005, p.1238).

A greater development took place in the second half of the 20th century: "In the United States the major advance towards women's ordination took place in 1956, when the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church, USA, changed their regulations to admit women to full clergy status... Women had served pastorates in many churches in Germany and Scandinavia during World War II. After the war these women insisted on continuing in ministry and called for full ordination. In the late 1950s and early 1960s women's ordination was accepted in these Lutheran and Reformed churches". (Ibid. pp. 1238, 1239).

"Women in the mainline Protestant churches began to attend theological seminaries in growing numbers. From 10% in 1972, the numbers of women in theological colleges in the United States jumped to 27% in 1987. In 2003 in liberal seminaries it is common for women to be 50% or more of the students of theological schools... More and more seminaries began to include women as professors in all fields of study." (Ibid. p. 1239).

The natural consequence of these developments was that a greater number of women were ordained to the ministry. “After some struggle, the Episcopal Church granted women’s ordination in 1976. Most mainline Christian Protestant churches now ordain women, and their numbers have grown to 20% or more of the clergy... After much struggle the Church of England accepted women priests, but has not yet accepted women bishops.” (Ibid p. 1239).

However, the main Christian Churches and some Protestant Churches rejected the possibility of the ordination of women: “The Southern Baptist Church in the USA has not only rejected the possibility of women’s ordination but has insisted that women’s subordination under male headship is integral to biblical faith. Roman Catholicism also rejected women’s ordination in a declaration issued in 1976 by the ‘Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, On the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood.’ This asserts that women are not ordainable by their very nature as females” (Ibid. p. 1239). The Orthodox Church has also rejected the possibility of ordaining women to a priestly office.

The SDA Church is still among those who have not yet officially accepted the ordination of women. It has been discussed at General Conference sessions more than once, but until now it has not passed. The official reason given for its rejection is that it would divide the church. Since the SDA church is a worldwide church, operating in different cultures and traditions, it is not easy to come to agreement on such an issue.

I was against the ordination of women, having been President of the former Yugoslavian Union, where all the major religions – Catholic, Orthodox and Moslem – had no place for a woman in ecclesiastical office, and I freely expressed my opinion at the General Conference Session. However, I thought that the arguments for and against the ordination of women were weak and not sufficiently studied in the light of Bible teaching on priestly ministry. So when I retired I took time to study this question deeper. What I read in the New Testament made a deep impression on me. Christ's priestly ministry is a central part of His ministry after His resurrection and ascension! Christian Churches are practically silent about it. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church has it as a main doctrine from its beginning, but when discussing the ordination of women it seems that we tend to forget how Christ has organised His church. The changes that His sacrifice on the cross brought to the relations between Him and His followers and also among His followers, it seems, are not sufficiently understood. Do men and women have the same or a different relation to Christ and also to His church?

The SDA church must choose between tradition and the New Testament teaching about priestly ministry in the Christian church. If we accept the Holy Orders institution, we do not point people to the High Priest, Jesus, in the heavenly sanctuary; instead, we point them to earthly priests in the Christian Church, who are by ordination vested with the authority to hear the confessions of sinners and give them absolution for their sins, just as Old Testament priests did. With this attitude, we deny

the New Testament instructions as to how our sins are forgiven – only if we come to the Throne of Grace through Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

If we choose tradition over Biblical instruction, we join the little horn of Daniel 8, of whom it is written: “He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down” (Dan. 8:11).

The sanctuary in the New Testament is not on earth but in heaven, where the Prince of the heavenly host – Jesus – officiates. If we say that people must come for confession and forgiveness to God’s representatives on earth, we simply cast “the place of His sanctuary” down to earth.

The dilemma about what to do with the old traditional customs and the teachings of the New Testament has a parallel in the Apostolic church. When Jesus came to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world, when the redemption on the cross of Calvary was accomplished, it changed the whole sanctuary system. The ministry of the Old Testament priests and the sacrifices found their fulfilment in Jesus and from then on their activity was no longer needed. Actually, those who still offered up sacrifices denied that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Even those Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah struggled with wanting to keep the tradition of the Mosaic law, which was given by God for a special purpose: to point to the Lamb of God who would take on Himself the sins of the world. It is no wonder, then, that in our day, we who are accustomed to the centuries-long church

tradition of Holy Orders have problems to deal with it in the light of the New Testament teaching.

In the New Testament, there were no priests invested with special authority as in the Old Testament Aaronic priesthood. God has given various gifts of the Spirit to different believers for the development of Christ's body, His church (Eph. 4:11-12; 1Cor. 12:7, 27-28).

The Bible nowhere says that some gifts are reserved for only male or female believers. It is the Holy Spirit who gives these gifts "to each one individually as He wills" (1Cor. 12:11). The church must recognise that a gift was given to a particular person, whether male or female. If it is church tradition to set apart a person with a particular gift for a ministry by laying hands on them as a sign of public recognition, it is in harmony with the Bible teachings. However, the New Testament does not teach that this recognition is reserved for male believers only. "The ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification. It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office and a recognition of ones authority in that office" (E.G. White, Acts of the Apostles, pp. 161-162). Why should this "recognition of one's authority in that office" be reserved only for male believers? Especially when the New Testament says that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to every individual as He wills (1Cor. 12:11).

Some may suggest that women's subordination under male headship is integral to Biblical faith.\* (See the Appendix). The first pages of the Bible seem to indicate that when the first pair



fell into sin, the result was that man would rule over the woman, or be her master (Gen. 3:16). And truly throughout history, man has taken this literally and frequently ruled over woman with an iron hand. In the New Testament, however, the picture changed. Here, the relationship between a husband and wife is compared with Christ's relationship to His church. In Ephesians 5:22, 23 and 25, it says: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

Here, Christ – as the head of His church – is not ruling over her, but so loves her that He gave His life for her. In return, the church recognises Him as her Head. In the same way, this counsel is useful for the husband–wife relationship. One does not rule over the other, but there is a mutual and loving relationship. The heavy-handed ruling of one person over another is the result of sin. When we come to Christ, the situation changes completely.

Christ came to free us from the bondage of sin (Heb.2:14,15). When we accept Christ, we become one with Him and one with each other. Paul writes this to the Galatian believers: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28). When we become Christians, we do not cease to be part of a particular nationality or gender: that's not the message of this text. We become one with Christ and one another, and

no one has any advantage in his or her relationship to Christ or His church because of nationality, gender or anything else. We are all equal before God and His church. To claim that some nationality or gender has priority in the church is not in harmony with the whole concept of salvation through Jesus Christ. Say a church recognises that a woman, a church member, has a gift for organisation. This gift supposes some kind of leadership. If we tell her that she may not use this gift because she is a woman, being that women should not be involved in any kind of leadership in the church, would it be in harmony with the Bible teaching about spiritual gifts and their use?

The obedience of a wife to her husband, and the love of a husband for his wife is Biblical counsel for marriage. But in the church, we are all one in Christ Jesus whether we are male or female, Jew or Greek. No one is above another. We may have different people with different ministries in the church, but we are to serve one another with the gifts we have received, not try to rule over others. The New Testament is very clear about that.

The SDA church would not go against any New Testament instructions by recognising that a woman has a gift for a particular office in the church and set her apart for that ministry by laying hands on her. Technically, a person can efficiently carry out a ministry without the laying on of hands since this act adds “no new grace or virtual qualification” (E. G. White, Acts of the Apostles p. 162). However, we are inconsistent if we ordain males and not females for a particular office, that is, unless we accept the traditional doctrine of Holy Orders found

in major Christian churches. Then, we are free to say that there is no place for women in some church ministries, regardless of their gifts.

There should be consideration for those parts of the world where the common cultural understanding is that women have no part in ecclesiastical office because it is reserved for men only. In some cultures and religions, men and women do not even stand side by side at worship time! However, even in these places, in an appropriate way, the Church should strive to point people toward our great High Priest, Jesus, who ministers for all people in the heavenly sanctuary. But certainly in the cultures where people are more enlightened regarding Biblical teachings, Seventh-day Adventists should not be reluctant or apologetic about practices which are in harmony with the Bible.

# THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND CHRIST ITS PRIEST

In Old Testament times a sinner could not get forgiveness for his sin without the mediation of an earthly priest who was ministering in the earthly sanctuary by Aaronic priesthood. No one could bypass them if they wanted forgiveness from God.

In New Testament times the situation is radically different. When Jesus came, to whom the services of the earthly sanctuary pointed, and offered Himself on the cross of Calvary for the salvation of all people, the Old Testament system came to an end. The Aaronic priesthood and their service in the Sanctuary served its purpose. Shadows met with the reality. In the New Testament the only High Priest and the mediator between God and man is Jesus Christ. By the Holy Spirit He gives different gifts to His followers on Earth which they should use “for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12), His church. The new Testament teaches that all believers in Christ are His “royal priesthood” (1Pet. 2:9). Their duty is not to listen to the confessions of people’s sins and give them absolution for confessed sins, but rather they should proclaim the excellence of Him who called them out of darkness into His wonderful light

(1Pet. 2:9). The duty of Christ's church and all the believers in it, is to point all people to the Heavenly Sanctuary where Jesus ministers as High Priest for all people. The Apostle John writes: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1John 2:1-2). "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him [not through earthly priests], since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). The New Testament recognises only one mediator between God and man: "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus" (1Tim. 2:5). If Christ's followers do not point people to Him alone, but to some earthly mediators, by that act they would cast down to the Earth the place of His Heavenly Sanctuary (Dan. 8:11).

As Christ's followers we are encouraged (and as His holy priesthood, we should encourage all others) to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). As long as we live on this sinful earth, we continuously need to come to the Throne of Grace. When we are tempted to sin, we can receive help from the Throne of Grace to overcome temptation. But if we succumb to a temptation and commit sin, we need the Throne of Grace for forgiveness.

Forgiveness and power to overcome sin's temptation comes only from the Throne of Grace! We can approach it directly,

without any earthly mediators – always, anytime, anywhere, wherever we are. Christ hears our petitions and offers immediate help to all who ask for strength to overcome temptation or forgiveness. The Throne of Grace answers those prayers immediately!

One who asks God for strength to overcome temptation is not willing to sin. Even if he or she does succumb to temptation, forgiveness is always available. How can we lose the battle with sin when we have such a wonderful Saviour?! Let us, therefore, come boldly, directly to the Throne of Grace!

John Lorencin

# APPENDIX

The question of the relationship between man and woman is as old as humanity. It is still discussed in our day. Since the Bible addresses this question, we shall take a look to see what the Bible teaches on the subject.

When God created man and woman, He created them as equal partners. Both were created in the image of God, and both were entrusted to “fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over every living thing.” (Gen. 1:27,28). However, when sin entered the world, things drastically changed, including the relationship between man and woman. God said to the woman: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” (Gen. 3:16) There is no more equality. Why? I found the best explanation, and an inspired one, in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*. “In the creation God had made her (Eve) the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God – in harmony with his great law of love – they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other. Eve had been the first in

transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her husband. Had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden." (E.G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 58,59.) Sin caused this disharmony.

The whole Bible is the story of what God has done and how He has endeavoured to restore harmony in the relationship between Himself and men and also in the relationship between members of humanity. In Hebrews 2:14,15, we read: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Yes, He came to free us from the bondage of sin and death, both men and women. He invites us to abide in Him, and He in us, in order to be a new creation in Him. (John 15:4,5; 2Cor. 5:17.)

When we look through history, we see that man has indeed abused the supremacy given him and has too often made a woman's life burdensome. Women were treated as second-class citizens. Their right was to obey man, whether he was right or wrong. A man could divorce his wife and take another if he



“detested” her – was not pleased with her. It was embedded in the Mosaic law. (Deut. 24:1-3.) When a census was taken, only men were counted, not women and children. In wars women were treated as a part of the spoil and could be taken by men to satisfy their desires. This was also the case in Israel, although with specific instructions. (Deut. 21:10-14.) In the Old Testament we find that the families were designated by men’s names. Female names were seldom mentioned, only if they were of some significance. The interesting case is Jephthah’s daughter, who was a cause of an Israelite’s tradition, but we do not know her name, even though she was his only child. (Judges 11:39,40.)

When Christ came, He had to face a long tradition of men misusing their power. It is interesting to note how He corrected false concepts. He associated with all people: men and women. The Pharisees accused Him because of that. (Mat. 11:19; Luke 15:1,2.) His association with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus was especially noted. (Luke 10:38-42; John 11:5.) There were other women who served Him by providing for His needs. (Luke 8:3.) By practical lessons He endeavoured to teach His disciples to break the barriers sin has caused.

A significant example is the story of the Canaanite woman. Jesus took a long journey with His disciples to the regions of Tyre and Sidon in order to teach that lesson. The woman recognised Christ as Lord and the Son of David, although she was a heathen woman. She asked for help, but Jesus ignored her. Only when His disciples intervened (because they did not

like a woman following them and begging for help, and that in a foreign country) did Jesus stop and ask her what she wanted from Him. On her appeal for help Jesus simply answered: “It is not good to take children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” (Mat. 15:25,26.) Here, Jesus was acting like a good Pharisee. This was the general attitude of the Israelites towards the Gentiles. When Jesus commended her faith and healed her daughter, it was an experience which the disciples would never forget. Actually, it had a great influence on them when the time came to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. This long journey from Galilee to this region and back was undertaken by Jesus only to teach His disciples not to consider any human being as inferior or unworthy of God’s love and attention.

Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees to explain some practices in Israel in Old Testament times. They came to Him with the question: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” Jesus drew their attention to God’s original plan at creation. But how can He justify that Moses allowed it? (Mat. 19:3-7; Deut. 24:1-4.) Jesus’ answer is very significant: “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” (Mat 19:8.) Jesus points them again to the beginning, God’s ideal. Some solutions under the influence of sin are far from the ideal. He permitted it, not because it was good, but “because of the hardness of your hearts!” (Mat. 19:8.)

Jesus drew the disciples’ attention to some acts done by women. A poor widow putting two mites into the church

treasury. (Luke 21:2-4.) Mary anointing His feet with costly fragrant oil. Jesus said, “Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” (Mark 14:8,9; John 11:2.) I wonder when Jesus said that, did He think that only men could preach and not women? Or, should women preach only by their deeds and not words? Or that only men can preach with words?!

When Jesus rose from the dead, the women were the first to whom He appeared. Did He tell them, then, to keep quiet because they were women, and in the evening, He would break the news to the disciples? No! The angels and Jesus Himself told them to go and tell it to the disciples and especially to Peter. (Mat. 28:5,7; John 20:17,18.) Notice that the women were told not to be quiet, but to go and tell, which they did.

After Christ’s ascension, we find the disciples in the Upper Room together with the women. (Acts 1:14,15.) The Holy Spirit came down on all present, women included. Let us not ignore this fact. It was the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy: “That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy (not keep silent)... And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.” (Acts 2:16-18.)

The first convert in Europe was a woman, Lydia. (Acts 16:13,14.) It turned out to be a good, loving, and prosperous church. Usually first converts give tone to the future developments of a church. In his letter to the Philippians Paul specially mentioned “women which laboured with him in the

gospel.” (Phil. 4:3.) Obviously in the New Testament women were worshipping together with men and were active in the church.

The text in 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 states that women should “keep silent in the church.” It may suggest that they may be present but only as spectators, not as participants. And this is the attitude that some sincere Christians take, and here they have a Bible text to support such an attitude. On the one hand Christ gives the commission to women to go and tell: here they are told to be silent. An apparent contradiction. What is the meaning of the above text in the light of the overall teaching of the Bible about the place of women in the church?

When we accept Christ as our personal Saviour we become one with Him but also with one another. For Jesus it was of paramount importance. This was the burden of His prayer in John 17. “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us... I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:20-23). And indeed, when we accept Christ and become one with Him, we also come close one to another. We become one in Him. This relationship is well described in Galatians 3:27,28. “For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This unity is described in the Bible by the picture of a body. Christ is the head, but His church, together with men and women, represents His body. (Eph. 5:23.) Man, according to the Bible, should be the head of his family, not of the church. Christ is the head of His church.

To His body, the church, Christ has given the gifts of the Spirit. “There are diversities of gifts... But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each for the profit of all.” (1 Cor. 12:4,7.) Here are mentioned some of the gifts. (1Cor. 12:8-10,28.) Of these gifts we are told that the Spirit is, “distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1Cor. 12:11.). In Ephesians 4:12 we read that all these gifts were given “for the equipping of the saints (male and female) for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Nowhere in the Bible do we read that some gifts are reserved only for male or female members of the church. The Holy Spirit is the One who decides to whom he will give a particular gift.

In the context of the gifts of the Spirit, we are told, “that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” (1 Cor. 12:25. NIV) To all Christ’s followers it is said, “You are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Cor. 12:27.). To exclude one part of the body and to deny the participation in its upbuilding, would be contrary to God’s expressed will. By that we create division in Christ’s body – His church. In this context the text in 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 would do just that. And Christ does not allow us to do that. What, then, is the message of this text?

In Greek and Roman culture, women were excluded from public leadership or a say in politics and their religions. If the new Christian religion disregarded this rule, the church would be accused of creating trouble and propagating anarchy. So, the apostle Paul gives the order for women to keep a low profile in the church. The church in Corinth was, in some aspects, a specific church and for that reason, the apostle had to give it some special instructions that, “God is not the author of confusion but of peace... Let all things be done decently and in order” (1Cor. 14:33,40).

Some take 1Timothy 2:12 to mean that it speaks of the relationship of men and women to the church. Here the apostle Paul speaks of the relationship between a man and a woman, not the relationship of either of them towards the church. And the Bible instruction for a husband/wife relationship still stands: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church... Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:25,22). There were always some self-assertive and dominating women and unloving husbands, so both of them would do well, for their own good, to heed this Bible instruction. The relationship of men and women to the church, as we have seen, is set on quite a different foundation.

This principle of paying attention to a specific situation and adapting to it as much as possible is well-illustrated in the Bible. We have examples in Christ’s ministry. When Jesus healed a man of leprosy, He charged him to tell no one (Luke 5:12-14). On another occasion, when He healed the man who “had demons,”

Jesus tells him, “Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you” (Luke 8:38,39). When God sent Samuel to anoint David as king, Samuel had a problem: “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.” The Lord instructs him: “Take a heifer with you, and say: ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord’” (1 Sam. 16:1,2). The main reason for the elders of Bethlehem was “to sacrifice to the Lord,” while actually the main reason was the anointing of David as king (1 Sam 16:4,5).

What is the lesson from these examples? When it is a question of the place of women in the church the Bible teaches that we are all equal before God and that men and women are part of His body – the church. He gives spiritual gifts to men and women to use them, not to bury them (Mat. 25: 14-30). There are no special gifts reserved for men or women only. The Holy Spirit decides what gift He will give to whom. So on what authority can the church forbid women to serve with their gifts in the church? This is not a question of culture, but of a basic Bible principle.

However, in some cultures in the world, today, women are still second-class citizens. They do not even stand side-by-side with men at worship. In such cases, the church is justified to adapt its work to the situation. The Bible allows that. But it must not be the reason to impose it on the whole, universal church. This must be an exception, not the universal rule for the church. The church must know its mission and fulfil it with its full potential and not be hindered by some principles wrongly applied, namely exceptions to the rule. The time has come that

the church must go wisely throughout the world with its full potential (that is, with all the gifts given to men and women) and use it to the maximum!

John Lorencin





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