

**SACRED TEXTS AND SOCIAL CONFLICT**  
**The Use of Bible in the Debate over Women's Ordination in the Seventh-day**  
**Adventist Church**

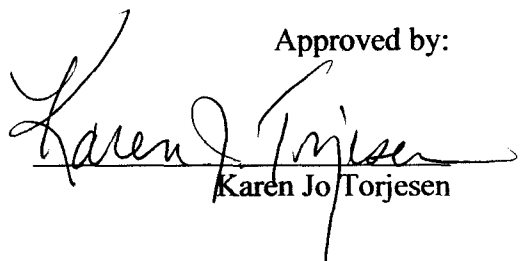
BY

**Olive J. Hemmings**

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Faculty of Religion

Claremont, California  
2004

Approved by:



Karen Jo Torjesen

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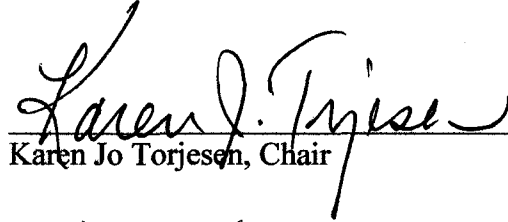
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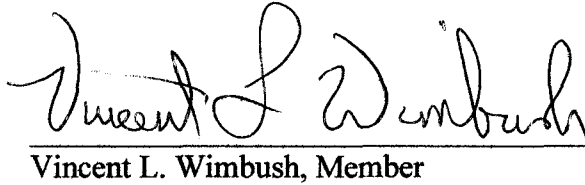


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Abstract of the Dissertation

**Sacred Texts and Social Conflict**  
**The Use of Bible in the Debate over Women's Ordination in the Seventh-day**  
**Adventist Church**

By

**Olive J. Hemmings**

Claremont Graduate University: 2004

The major source of authority outside of the Bible for Seventh-day Adventists is the writings of a woman, its founding prophet, Ellen White. Yet, it has resisted women's ordination based on the biblical argument of male authority. This has engendered a debate over women's ordination in which two opposing sides defend their arguments using the same basic biblical interpretive approach. The conflict, therefore, cannot be reduced to a problem of biblical interpretation. Rather, it indicates a process of scripturalization defined by a larger social process involving the denomination's response to the pressure to uphold full gender equality, its separatist stance, and the Protestant Fundamentalist resistance to liberal religion. The study examines the manner in which the particular theological, ecclesiological and political dynamics within Seventh-day Adventism interacted with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century antiliberal religious subculture and the two waves of the women's movement, to evaluate the use of Bible in the debate over women's ordination. Not only does the official inerrantist stance of Seventh-day Adventism *not* place it in opposition to women's ordination, but its roots in American revivalism inclined it towards women's ordination. However, its need to protect its separatist stance from the inroads of Spiritualism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and higher criticism

in the 20<sup>th</sup> century halted two definite moves to ordain women. The denomination's most powerful ally in maintaining its separatist stance is Protestant Fundamentalism which has constructed an inerrantist institutional world where resistance to women's ordination and full gender equality symbolizes resistance to liberal religion. Because Spiritualism and higher criticism represent liberal religion, women's ordination took on symbolic weight as an enemy of the denomination. This gives the opponents of women's ordination the advantage, and makes the debate a hermeneutical struggle in which each side of the debate seeks to present biblical arguments that both support its position, and affirm the separatist stance of the denomination. As such, the issue of women's ordination became a scapegoat in the denomination's struggle to protect its identity, and the debate became essentially an ideological struggle in which the Bible is more an accessory than it is instructive.

**To the prophet**  
**May her vision flourish**

## **Acknowledgements**

This work began with a proposal that focused on gender ideology in Western society. The present work has evolved from this with the help and direction of various persons. I first acknowledge my mentor and advisor Karen Torjesen, Dean of the School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University for directing me to the rich and fertile ground for research in my own tradition, Seventh-day Adventism. I further acknowledge Zack Plantak, chair of the Department of Religion at Columbia Union College for brainstorming with me and pointing me to sources that helped me determine what I wanted to focus on as far as gender in Adventist Ministry. Coupled with this, my consultation with Bert Haloviak, Director of the Office of Records and Archives at the Seventh-day Adventist World Headquarters lead me to my final topic and the primary unpublished resource materials to begin with.

I further acknowledge those who have graciously given me their help and advice. First I thank Dr. Harold Leigh, president of the Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for handing over to me valuable unpublished primary resource materials, and great encouragement to complete this project. I also thank the administrative staff of Columbia Union College for lending me six months of teaching time to focus on this project. The sense of accountability that such generosity has inspired in me has been the chief motivating factor in the completion of this work.



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## INTRODUCTION

In 1968 the Northern European Division of Seventh-day Adventists sought counsel from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists regarding ordination of women, particularly in Finland. Later in 1970, the Far Eastern Division of Seventh-day Adventists sought similar counsel. This set off the 20<sup>th</sup> century debate on women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with the North American Division becoming the major contender in the question. Twice voted down at the 1990 and 1995 General conference sessions, the issue of women's ordination continues to foment as more and more women take up positions in the denomination as pastors, evangelists, theology professors, and church departmental leaders.<sup>1</sup>

This debate serves as a case study for the way communities in conflict engage sacred texts. The resistance of women's ordination by a denomination whose founding prophet is a woman has engendered several scholarly investigations during the last decade of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> However, none of these has paid singular attention to

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<sup>1</sup> At present the denomination has accommodated those regions in the developed world which are culturally inclined to grant women full clergy rights, by granting women a credential one step short of the Ordained Minister Credential, the highest working credential granted by the denomination. This credential, the Commissioned Minister Credential, affords them limited clergy rights. They can only function as clergy in the locality where they are commissioned, and they cannot ordain or legally start a congregation. Chapter I will discuss this in more detail.

<sup>2</sup> The works Steven Daily ("The Irony of Adventism: The Role of Ellen White and Other Adventist Women in Nineteenth Century America," D. Min diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1985) and Laura Vance (*Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion* [Urbano and Chicago: University of Illinois Press], 1999) focus on the issue of women's role in the denomination and recognize the importance of the Bible in the issue. The latter has however not been a central focus and therefore these works have not been able to comprehensively evaluate the extent to which the Bible figures in the conflict. Other works such as Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Zdvraiko Plantak, *The Silent Church: Human Rights and Adventist Social Ethics* (London: MacMillan Press, 1998.),

the way in which the Bible functions as the most powerful force in the conflict. For Seventh-day Adventists, the major source of authority outside of the Bible lies in the writings of its founding prophet; yet the denomination has resisted women's ordination based on the biblical argument of male authority. Besides this, the two opposing sides of the debate find justification from the Bible for their arguments, using for the most part the same basic interpretive approach. What then are the underlying factors driving this biblical conversation? In answering this question, this study demonstrates a reality in the use of the Bible that several scholars<sup>3</sup> have recently begun to legitimize as an area of biblical studies, namely that in a culture defined by dominant and conflicting socio-religious ideas, the end of biblical interpretation is not the text; rather, it is the particular social agendas that interpreters take to the text.

The present position of the denomination regarding female clergy represents a concession in a process to ordain women that began in the 1970s and took a dramatic turn by the onset of the 1980s. In 1973, a major committee (General Conference *ad hoc* committee) on the role of women in the church, comprising thirteen men and fourteen women from North America, met to review twenty-nine papers on the issue. By all appearances, this was the committee that would steer the denomination towards the ordination of women.

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and Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989) treat the issue among several social-ethical issues in the denomination. While these also recognize that the Bible play an important part in the issue, their multiple focus does not lend them the scope to fully analyze the use of Bible in the debate.

<sup>3</sup> Major works in this area are: Vincent Wimbush, ed., *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (New York: Continuum, 2001); Wimbush, *The Bible and the American Myth: A Symposium on the Bible and the Construction of Meaning* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999); Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading From this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

This committee was convened by the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>4</sup> At this time, its director, Gordon Hyde, was a major protagonist among Seventh-day Adventist administrators for the ordination of women. As he states, he was an advocate for new opportunities and wider authority for women in the church.<sup>5</sup> While, as Hyde admits, there were papers at Camp Mohaven that argued against the ordination of women,<sup>6</sup> the resulting document, *The Role of Women in the Church*, appeared with only twelve of the twenty nine papers reviewed by the committee, all presenting biblical arguments *for* the ordination of women. The committee recommended that women be ordained as local elders,<sup>7</sup> that those in theological training be hired as “associates in pastoral care,” and that a pilot program should be established immediately leading to ordination of women in 1975.<sup>8</sup> Why then, does a rule against granting women full clergy rights still remain in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Around the same time that Seventh-day Adventism was considering granting women full clergy rights (the 1960s and 1970s), other Christian denominations,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The BRI is the section of the world Church responsible for providing the biblical perspective from which the denomination may approach the major issues that arise.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Hyde, “The Mohaven Council: Where it all began,” *Adventists Affirm*, Fall 1989, 43

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The position of an ordained local elder is a voluntary lay position unlike the ordained pastor who is employed by the denominations and has full clergy rights. The question of women’s ordination in this study refers to the granting of full clergy rights that entail full rights to congregational leadership. Chapter I will take up the details regarding the various ordained positions in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

<sup>8</sup> Kit Watts, “The Long and Winding Road for Adventist Women’s Ordination: 35 Years and Counting,” *Spectrum* 31:3 (Summer 2003): 56.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive list of all the Christian denominations which entered into the conflict on women’s ordination and which have granted full clergy rights to women see, Mark Chaves, *Ordaining women:*

including the American Lutheran Church, the Episcopal Church, the Reformed Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and the Roman Catholic Church had entered into a similar conflict. Except for the Roman Catholic Church, all these denominations granted full clergy rights to women during that period. Roman Catholicism, according to Mark Chaves, is particularly resistant to women's ordination because of its practice of sacramental ritual.<sup>10</sup> Thus it remains among the more than seventy percent of sacramental denomination which have not began to ordain women. Another group which Chaves identifies as resistant to women's ordination comprises those he calls "biblically inerrant denominations." Chaves does not use the term "inerrant" here to signify an alliance with Fundamentalism. Rather he uses the term "to refer more broadly to those denominations with an intellectual commitment to the basic consistency and authority of the Bible."<sup>11</sup> In this latter sense Seventh-day Adventism falls into the category of "biblically inerrant denominations." These denominations are intellectually committed to the classic Protestant method of interpretation, the historical-grammatical method which asserts the consistency and authority of the Bible. This principle of inerrancy operates on two basic axioms. The first is that the Bible is the authoritative source of every aspect of human life. The second asserts that it can contain no internal contradictions. Yet, as Chaves has

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*Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 14, ff.; 158, ff.

<sup>10</sup> Chaves calls denominations in which the communion ritual actually changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ sacramental denominations. These also include Episcopalian, Eastern Orthodox, and to a lesser extent, Lutheran churches. In these denominations, those who oppose women's ordination argue that for the sacramental act of changing bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ to be efficacious, the agent must resemble Christ. Maleness, they argue, is the essential factor in that representation. Ibid, 84, 86.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 201.

argued, “biblical inerrancy does not cause resistance to women’s ordination as a matter of logical deduction.”<sup>12</sup> The Camp Mohaven document, *The Role of Women in the Church* demonstrates this. We are, therefore, still confronted with the question of why the process to ordain women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to a halt and engendered a conflict that continues to the present. This is the focal question of this study.

Chaves’ use of the term inerrant appears to be unusual, but useful to this study. He distinguishes this general use of the term from its original use which is rooted in the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversies of the 1920s. He notes that in the original sense the term carries “symbolic weight as a signifier of alliance with fundamentalism.”<sup>13</sup> This latter use does not involve a different methodology, but carries with it a cultural symbolism of resistance to modernity.<sup>14</sup> In order to carry forth the Fundamentalist agenda, this approach to inerrancy tends to stress the second axiom on which the principle operates, namely that the Bible can contain no contradictions. As such the approach tends to universalize certain practices in the Bible (such as gender inequality) that reinforce the cultural status quo. As we shall see in Chapter II, the traditional Protestant methodology, the historical grammatical methodology, does not necessarily lend itself to this approach. Chaves’ anachronistic use of the term to describe the

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<sup>12</sup> Chaves, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Modernity here refers to what William Hutchison defines as “the conscious, intended adaptation of religious ideas to modern culture. See William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1976, 310. It views the progress of the kingdom of God as inseparable from the progress of civilization, especially in science and morality. See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 24. This study equated the term with the term “liberal religion.”

traditional Protestant approach to scripture makes it easy for him to distinguish between those denominations that hold to the authority of scripture, and those which do not, such as Christian Science. In the present hermeneutical controversy within Seventh-day Adventism, specifically as it surrounds women's ordination, advocates for women's ordination use the term "inerrant" to refer to the fundamentalist approach to scripture that leads to a resistance of women's ordination.

Based on Chaves' definition of inerrancy, this study works around three levels of inerrancy. Besides the traditional Protestant inerrantist stance, and the fundamentalist stance (which, as we shall see, is really not based on a different methodology, but on a different use of the traditional Protestant methodology to resist liberal modernity), I am arguing that there is one other level of inerrancy at work within the Seventh-day Adventist theological academe. This latter is embraced by the majority of Seventh-day Adventist scholars. They are willing to use the tools of higher criticism where they find them helpful, while maintaining a broader inerrantist stance that assumes biblical authority and consistency in spite of the less than supernatural means by which the revelation of scripture may at times come.<sup>15</sup> Fundamentalist inerrancy is embraced by a powerful minority within the Seventh-day Adventist theological academe who

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<sup>15</sup> A book by Alden Thompson a popular Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholar, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1991) represents this approach. It appeared in the heat of the debate of women's ordination and biblical hermeneutics. Though his work argues against the inerrantist literalism of scripture, I argue that Thompson's stance is also inerrantist, because though it recognizes certain sources of biblical revelation to be not supernatural, or that the story of creation for example, may not be literal, it assumes that there is a divine purpose and direction in the biblical authors' use of those sources or stories. This is to say that it affirms biblical authority and inspiration, and an internal consistency. The consistency, however, is not with reference to the accounts, but with reference to the broader principles of scripture such as love and justice. It is willing to look more closely at the human element in the process of revelation, rather than to gloss over it as do fundamentalist scholars. His is a non-conservative inerrancy. This will be further discussed in Chapter II.



vehemently oppose women's ordination. To use any of the tools of higher criticism is, for this group of fundamentalist scholars, to walk in dangerous waters as regards the denomination's identity as the true church. This is because the denomination established its identity based on a use of the traditional Protestant method. The mainstream inerrantist stance of the denomination is labeled as a conservative approach. The fundamentalist scholars identify themselves with this conservative approach calling themselves "historical Adventists." This label, "historical Adventist," conveys the idea that the fundamentalist scholars do not countenance any modification in the traditional beliefs and practices of the denominations which includes its rules on women clergy. Those who utilize the tools of historical criticism have been labeled by the fundamentalist clique as "liberals" or "progressive liberals." These "progressive liberals" tend to embrace modernity in the sense that they believe that the denomination, like any other social institution is a dynamic institution that grows with the growth of human understanding. This does not mean that it changes its basic identity, but that it remains contextual within a changing world. These three inerrantist approaches, as we shall see in this study, represent the core of the politics of "scripturalizing as it surrounds the question of women's ordination. They appear as political strategies in the attempt to make a case for or against women's ordination while appearing to preserve the denomination's identity as the true church of Bible prophecy. This hermeneutical politics on the part of those who defend women's ordination becomes necessary because the most powerful opponents of women's ordination, on their part have been able to convince the denomination at large, that its identity and survival was at stake in the issue of women's ordination. How was this possible?

It is of vital significance to this study that the fundamentalist faction in Seventh-day Adventism vehemently opposed to women's ordination includes the two major figures who lead the **move towards the ordination** of women at the 1973 Camp Mohaven Conference. These two were the major forces driving the denomination towards the ordination of women in the 1970s, and the two major forces who lead the resistance against it. One of these figures was the most prominent biblical scholar in Adventism at the time, Gerhard Hasel. His argument for Gender mutuality based on Genesis 1-3 opened the Camp Mohaven document. The other figure is Gordon Hyde who convened the Mohaven conference. He, along with Hasel, represent the twin pillars of Adventism that steer the progress of the Church – biblical scholarship and church administration. What was the cause of this dramatic turn around?

It is significant to note that the opposition by these persons who formerly defended women's ordination does not indicate a shift in hermeneutical approach.<sup>16</sup> The difference in interpretation lies in the alliance with Fundamentalism. This alliance on their part appears as a safeguard against the larger issue of feminist interpretation which arose at the onset of the 1980s to challenge the patriarchal heritage of scripture. Yet it appears that the feminist challenge of patriarchy is not that which primarily incites this group. What incites this group is the feminist use of historical-critical methodology (higher criticism) to defend women's ordination, a method which it perceives to be inimical to Adventist foundational theology. *Fundamentally*, higher criticism does not

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<sup>16</sup> Chapters II and III will examine Gerhard Hasel's arguments in defense of ("Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3," in *The Role of Women in the Church*), and his arguments in opposition to ("Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, and the Role of Women," Unpublished Manuscript, prepared for the Commission on the Role of Women, March 1988) women's ordination, in order to demonstrate this.

assume that there is consistency in the Bible or that it carries divine authority. This method of biblical interpretation in the perception of the fundamentalist clique, poses a serious threat to the very identity and survival of Seventh-day Adventism as the true church of Bible prophecy. This is because the fundamental doctrines of the denomination, including the doctrine of the Seventh-day Sabbath are invested in an assumption of biblical authority and a literal interpretation of biblical accounts such as the Genesis account of creation. Women's ordination consequently took on symbolic weight as the enemy of the denomination. To defend it became a symbol of disloyalty to the denomination.

Over the last decade, several studies began to emerge that may explain the problem we are about to examine in this study. Two particular areas of research prove relevant to this study. One emerges from the discipline of sociology and the other from the discipline of biblical studies. Mark Chaves, and Sally Gallagher and Christian Smith<sup>17</sup> represent the first area. The works of Wimbush, Segovia and Tolbert, and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza<sup>18</sup> represent major works in the second area. Chaves attempts to explain sociologically why biblical inerrancy or sacramentalism leads to resistance to women's ordination on the part of some denominations, while it does not on the part of others. For Chaves biblical inerrancy and sacramentalism serve as symbols of resistance to modernity and liberalism. When he speaks of biblical inerrancy as a symbol, he refers to it as a fundamentalist institution which he calls an "inerrantist

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<sup>17</sup> Sally K. Gallagher and Christian Smith, "Symbolic Traditionalism and Pragmatic Egalitarianism: Contemporary Evangelicals, Families, and Gender," in *Gender and Society* 13:2 (2 April 1999):211-214.

<sup>18</sup> See also her work, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

institutional field” or an “inerrantist institutional world.”<sup>19</sup> This inerrantist institutional world represents the Protestant antiliberal subculture of resistance to modernity. According to Chaves, it defines itself in opposition to the world of liberal religion, and once this definition catches on, it becomes difficult to combine inerrancy with support for women’s ordination.<sup>20</sup> Gallagher and Smith answer the question of why some denominations advocate gender-role inequality in a social climate that tends to assume it. That is, they explain how the resistance to modernity as regards gender roles can be possible in the late twentieth-century. They label the phenomenon “symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism.” It is for them, an attempt to uphold “ideals of hegemonic masculinity”<sup>21</sup> based on an ideology of male headship. This, she argues, is to create a secure space for males in a changing economic structure that relies on the economic viability of both men and women.

The second area of research from which a new area of biblical studies is emerging produces a theory that comprehensively explains what is occurring in the debate on women’s ordination. This theory assumes that when groups in conflict engage in biblical interpretation, it tends to reflect in particular sociocultural and political constructions based on the particular social location and political interests of a group. Here, the primary concern is not with investigating precise methods of biblical interpretation with a view to finding out a single true meaning of the sacred text. Rather, the concern is with the ways in which the sacred text may serve as the most powerful force in the

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<sup>19</sup> Chaves, 101.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>21</sup> Gallagher and Smith, 111.

construction and deconstruction of meaning. Wimbush's work, *The Bible and the American Myth* demonstrates this approach to biblical studies. It advocates that biblical studies should no longer begin with the text, but with the people and their interaction with the text.<sup>22</sup> I will proceed to present the key issues for consideration in this study in the light of the arguments that emerge from these studies.

It appears that the initial steps which the Seventh-day Adventist Church took to establish gender equality through women's ordination occurred as a response to external pressures.<sup>23</sup> One may describe this "pressure" as the cultural dynamics in twentieth century America that increasingly regarded gender equality as a given. The halt in the move towards women's ordination in Seventh-day Adventism is not reducible to what Chaves generally identifies as the pressure to resist gender equality.<sup>24</sup> Without exception, all those involved in the formal arguments against women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church underline their arguments with affirmations of the ontological equality of the genders. This is in keeping with the official position of the Church.<sup>25</sup> What those who oppose women's ordination display, is a resistance to what they call gender-role equality. Very significantly, their resistance to gender-role equality is based on the Fundamentalist affirmation of male headship. This seeming contradiction

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<sup>22</sup> Wimbush, "And the Students Shall Teach Them: The Study of the Bible and the study of meaning construction," in *The Bible and the American Myth*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Chaves, 38, ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) in 1975 affirms the belief that "all people, male and female, are created equal, in the image of a loving God. See, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, Communications Department, *Statements, Guidelines, and Other Documents: A Compilation* (Silver Spring, MD: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1996), 65

regarding gender equality is for Gallagher and Smith a way that evangelical Christianity tends to “reconcile the contours of modern economic life with their ideals for personal family life.”<sup>26</sup> It is this phenomenon that they label “symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism.”

Gender-role equality, however does not seem to be the initial concern in the major arguments against women’s ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The initial concern, we must stress, is an approach to scripture that must preserve the basic principles of interpretation by which Seventh-day Adventism formed its identity as the true remnant church continuing from the Old Testament.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the reaction essentially occurs specifically against the broader arena of biblical scholarship, and becomes internalized as a need to safeguard the Church’s identity as the true church.<sup>28</sup> The arguments for male headship mask the atmosphere of theological tension within the denomination. Gender inequality is therefore symbolic of this deeper theological concern within the denomination.

It is important to underscore at this point that both sides of the debate, for the most part, defend their arguments with the same basic guidelines stipulated by the denomination.<sup>29</sup> Each, nevertheless, comes away with opposing conclusions, because as

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<sup>26</sup> Gallagher and Smith, 112.

<sup>27</sup> Two major works that display this concern are: Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle* (Berrien Spring, MI: Berean Books, 1996); C. Raymond Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry* (Wakefield, MI: Pointer Publications, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> Pearson notes this as a “fear” for the possible effects on Adventist theology in general of a hermeneutic that justifies women’s ordination. According to him, “those basic critical tools which are necessary to an explication of texts which have been the basis of subordination of women in the church clearly threaten traditional Adventist hermeneutical principles.” See Pearson, 180.

<sup>29</sup> We shall look at these guidelines more closely in Chapter II.

Chaves argues, it is hard for an observer to avoid the conclusion that the Bible is not conclusive on the issue of women's ordination.<sup>30</sup> Indeed this was the conclusion of the initial studies by the denomination regarding the issue, and remains the official position of the denomination.<sup>31</sup> This is because, as the debate demonstrates, biblical inerrancy does not necessarily cause resistance to women's ordination. If those who oppose women's ordination are to be consistent, then they should argue against any kind of public teaching by women in the church. This being obviously not possible, since the Bible is ambivalent on the point, the argument for male headship becomes the biblical argument by which those scholars in the denomination who oppose women's ordination persuade the denomination against women's ordination. This is to say, they align themselves with Fundamentalism in order to make a case against women's ordination.

The fact that women do function in the denomination in significant ministerial roles equal to men profoundly demonstrates that the rules regarding women clergy in the denomination lie deeper than the denomination's biblical conviction. Besides the fact that the founding prophet of Seventh-day Adventism, Ellen G. White is a woman, the reality in Seventh-day Adventism today is that women function both as clergy and theology professors. There is no rule in the Seventh-day Adventist Church that prevents

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<sup>30</sup> Chaves, 92.

<sup>31</sup>In 1973 the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists provided for the Annual Council of the Church a statement declaring that there is nothing in scripture (or the Spirit of Prophecy writings [writings of Ellen G. White]) which forbids the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. The document states: "All could wish that the scriptures somewhere explicitly gave us a statement or principle that would have universal application regarding the question under discussion. The fact is that it nowhere explicitly discusses this question." See, Gordon M. Hyde to Union Conference Presidents, North American Division, 5 December, 1973, transcript in the Office of Archives and Statistics, Seventh-day Adventist World headquarters, Silver Spring, MD.

women from *functioning* as clergy<sup>32</sup> (albeit not fully<sup>33</sup>) or prevents them from teaching and preaching and making disciples. The latter occurs among Seventh-day Adventists all over the world. Chaves describes this phenomenon as “extensive loose coupling between rule and practice.”<sup>34</sup> According to him, “formal rules about women clergy are best understood as a symbolic display that is part of a broader process by which denominations construct their public identities.”<sup>35</sup> Based on Gallagher’s argument, this symbolic display is a statement to society that a denomination is preserving the ideology that secures male hegemony in an economic culture that affirms gender equality. Again, while this may be true of Seventh-day Adventism, the deeper politics behind this display is the perceived need by a powerful minority in the Adventist theological academe to protect the denomination’s foundational theology. They draw upon this symbolic display to pull Seventh-day Adventism into the wider circle of resistance to gender equality where inerrancy and resistance to women’s ordination function as symbols of an antimodern stance. This Protestant religious subculture<sup>36</sup> of resistance becomes their most powerful ally to push the ecclesiological agenda of safeguarding the denomination’s traditional theology. Once women’s ordination becomes identified with liberalism, it

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<sup>32</sup> This function is only confined to regions of the world that are not culturally disinclined towards women’s ordination. This includes North America and Europe.

<sup>33</sup> Though women may receive clergy rights, only an ordained clergy may raise up a congregation or perform an ordination. Chapter I will elaborate on the limitations of women clergy in the denomination.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Also, based on the argument of Gallagher and Smith, it is a denomination’s statement to society that it is preserving the ideology that secures male hegemony regardless of the economic structure that necessitates gender equality.

<sup>36</sup> The term in this study is used to indicate the religious entrenchment of gender inequality in the mainstream culture. In essence it defines the status quo of Western culture as essentially religious.



becomes a target for fundamentalist attack.<sup>37</sup> Thus members within the denomination, who tend to be fundamentalist by cultural inclination, join in the opposition to women's ordination without necessarily knowing the real root of the heated debate.

In the real sense then, inerrancy does not function as a *symbol* in Seventh-day Adventism because it is the basic approach to scripture that establishes it as the "true church" over against all others regardless of whether they are inerrant. It is its guarantee to doctrinal integrity. This is what makes the debate essentially a hermeneutical debate. Yet, this separatist stance made it easy for the fundamentalist scholars within the denomination to pull the denomination into the inerrantist institutional world where inerrancy and gender inequality is symbolic of the resistance to liberal religion. To the extent that Seventh-day Adventism is involved in the resistance of liberal religion which higher criticism represents, its agenda coincides with the agenda of the Protestant Fundamentalist movement. However, to the extent that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is primarily concerned about its identity as the true church, it has a specific agenda that is radically separate from the agenda of the Protestant fundamentalist movement. It must join in the resistance to liberal religion because liberal religion does not allow for a separatist assertion. Thus arguments against the corrupting influences of feminism/liberalism on the part of those Seventh-day Adventist scholars who oppose women's ordination effectively mask this deeper ecclesiological issue.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Chaves, 112.

<sup>38</sup> This masking is evident in Raymond Holmes' *The Tip of an Iceberg*. The "iceberg" is higher criticism which threatens to sink the denomination. Yet his arguments are essentially against the inroads of modernity.

Because the hermeneutical debate revolves around the question of the identity of the denomination, the debate appears in a mode that places the opponents of women's ordination on the offensive where they indict the advocates for women's ordination with Biblical unfaithfulness and denominational disloyalty. Advocates for women's ordination in turn find themselves on the defensive, arguing for the legitimacy of their hermeneutic with reference to Seventh-day Adventist theology. Though the major arguments *for* women's ordination have remained within the conservative inerrantist boundaries of the denomination, women's ordination had already taken on symbolic weight as an enemy of the denomination. Thus opponents of women's ordination came to equate defense of women's with the use of a higher-critical methodology.<sup>39</sup> For Seventh-day Adventist Theologians such as Samuel Koranteng-Pipim,<sup>40</sup> C. Raymond Holmes,<sup>41</sup> Gerhard Damsteegt<sup>42</sup> and Samuelle Bacchiocchi,<sup>43</sup> to be faithful to scripture is to abide by the gender roles prescribed by the status quo of scripture. It is also to take the symbolic representation of God as Father literally, and to take the maleness of Jesus as an indication that the role of head of the family and of the church belongs exclusively to the male. They have embraced the Fundamentalist movement's anti-liberal agenda in order

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<sup>39</sup> This is especially evident in Holmes' *The Tip of an Iceberg*, and Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1995).

<sup>40</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*.

<sup>41</sup> Holmes, 63, ff.

<sup>42</sup> Gerard Damsteegt a professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary presented the argument against Women's ordination at the 1995 General Conference session where women's ordination was voted down. He opened his argument with this indictment. See, "Thirteenth Business Meeting, Fifty Sixth General Conference Session, July 5, 1995," *Adventist Review*, 7 July 1995, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Samuelle Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study of the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), 20-26.

to defend the denomination against the inroads of higher criticism. This position taken by those who oppose women's ordination may be described in the words of Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza as "the resurgence of the religious Right, which claims the power of naming and defining the true nature of religion."<sup>44</sup>

This subtle power play that characterizes the debate over women's ordination deserves close attention. It occurs on two levels, and those who oppose women's ordination inevitably dominate because they have placed themselves among those who claim the right to define the true nature of religion. The first level is the theological level and lies at the heart of the struggle. Here Adventist theology is the primary object of defense. As we have noted, opposition to women's ordination *symbolizes* opposition to higher criticism, and by extension becomes a symbolic display of the church's identity as the true church of Bible prophecy.

The second level is social. This is the point at which the reaction to feminist methodology (higher-criticism) translates into a reaction to the cultural influences of feminism and/or liberalism. Already we have noted that the initial step to ordain women in the 1970s was a response to the general cultural climate that increasingly assumes gender equality. Later, in the interest of Adventist theology this morphed into a reaction against the cultural influence of feminism and liberalism. The drive to defend the social status quo of male authority places the opponents of women's ordination in the dominant position. It is the dominant position because male authority represents the status quo of

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Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 4.

scripture, and because it remains entrenched in Western culture as the social status quo. Thus we see a social struggle in Western culture occurring at the site of scripture.

When we add the first level of struggle – the hermeneutical struggle in Adventism itself - to this second level of struggle in society in general we have an overpowering opposition to the ordination of women. As Chaves notes, as biblical inerrancy took on the symbolic weight of defining an antiliberal Protestant religious subculture, it became very difficult to combine inerrancy with support for women's ordination.<sup>45</sup> This may explain why the Seventh-day Adventists Church is listed among those denominations which have remained resistant to women's ordination since the onset of the conflict in the 1970s.<sup>46</sup> A decided effort on the part of influential leaders in the denomination to find biblical reasons for ordaining women transformed into a political struggle occurring at the site of scripture.

At this point it is important that we look more closely at the biblical hermeneutical implications of the issue. This hermeneutical power play in the conflict over women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church may be defined in terms of the general power dynamics between the dominant and the dominated in Western culture. Wimbush, profoundly explains this in the case of the relationship between Europeans and Africans who settled on American soil. He argues that when the African Americans decided to use

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<sup>45</sup> Chaves, 102.

<sup>46</sup> Chaves lists six other denominations beside Seventh-day Adventism in which the conflict regarding women's ordination arose in the 1970s. These include the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Mennonite Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is listed among the three denominations which remain resistant to women's ordination. The other two are the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. See Ibid, 162-163.

a biblical hermeneutic different from that which reinforced the dominant culture to enunciate their own meaning, it became an “interruption.”<sup>47</sup> It was an interruption to what he terms the “hermeneutical-cultural spin.”<sup>48</sup> The feminist critique that arose in the 1980s had just such an effect. It shocked the dominant religious subculture out of its safe haven of absolute truth and assumed patriarchy. In the case of Seventh-day Adventism, those who oppose women’s ordination found themselves defending a hermeneutic by the most powerful means available, that of fighting a cultural foe, feminism/liberalism. The “hermeneutical-cultural spin” of male dominance became their most powerful ally. In this way Seventh-day Adventism was pulled into the mainstream cultural conflict.

Our observation of this particular case in Seventh-day Adventism cannot concern itself with investigating whether the Bible is being interpreted based on precise scholarly principles – whatever that means.<sup>49</sup> This is not material to the question in this study. We are here observing a particular mode of the “public-political discourse” that may characterize biblical scholarship.<sup>50</sup> The argument in this paper is that the arena of biblical

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<sup>47</sup> Wimbush, in *African Americans and the Bible*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> “Scholarly” interpretation may take any number of approaches. In the case of the African American experience for example, Wimbush proposes the study of history and of the text as the primary agenda. (Ibid, 14.) Here Wimbush is assuming that such a methodology can determine a correct application of the text. There is also the literary rhetorical approach used by feminists such as Meike Bal that may accommodate any agenda that one takes to the text. By this she reads women’s political interest into the Bible because she assumes the Bible to be neutral. Bal makes no apology for her approach because she recognizes it to be that used by the dominant to maintain power. See, Meike Bal, *Lethal Love* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University press, 1987). However the use of the Bible in the Seventh-day Adventist debate over women’s ordination is a far more subtle politics that does not, unlike Bal, declare itself to be political. This is what makes the case problematic.

<sup>50</sup> This “public-political discourse” in Schussler Fiorenza’s argument refers to “the kinds of role the Bible plays today in the social construction of reality, and in the discursive formations that determine individuals, religious communities, and society as a whole.” This, according to her should be a legitimate aspect of

studies is a political arena in which method and meaning emerge from the place at which one stands. Schussler Fiorenza argues, “what we see depends on where we stand.”<sup>51</sup> Yet, here the study is concerned with more than what we *see*; it is concern with what we *look for*. The debate over women’s ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church demonstrates this.

We are observing, therefore, the real nature of biblical power. We are observing here a rigorous engagement of scripture in the social process. We are observing a process in which both dominant and dominated groups use the Bible as the tool of domination and the means of empowerment. (Already, we have established that those who oppose women’s ordination represent the dominant, while the advocates represent the dominated in the conflict over women’s ordination). The case we are attempting to analyze here may be described in the words of Wimbush as the “problematics of the interaction of society and culture and sacred texts in general.”<sup>52</sup> While Wimbush’s conclusion that the Bible “cannot be understood as a transcendent ahistorical force”<sup>53</sup> does not arise here as a relevant issue (since we are not engaged in determining precise interpretive methods), it is significant to point out that this is precisely how those who oppose women’s ordination attempt to read the Bible. It is this fundamentalist approach to the Bible that reinforces

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biblical studies. See, Schussler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ehtic*, 11. For a demonstration of this approach see Wimbush, ed., *The Bible and the American Myth*.

<sup>51</sup> Schussler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Wimbush, *African Americans and the Bible*, 14. In this particular instance Wimbush refers to the Use of Bible in contemporary African American Society. Yet the particular case of Seventh-day Adventism and women’s ordination draws upon the similar principle of interaction between the Bible and society.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

their dominance. This is because this approach to Bible is the most powerful means of resisting liberalism and affirming the social status quo.<sup>54</sup> This does not deter the advocates of women's ordination, because they call upon the same power that those who resist women's ordination call upon - the Bible. They match the politics of the dominant by affirming biblical authority and inspiration - albeit without the fundamentalist/inerrantist approach<sup>55</sup> - and by distancing themselves to varying extents from higher criticism.<sup>56</sup> This allows them to remain in the debate. This demonstrates that biblical authority may be, *functionally*, about the power that social groups in conflict wield and seek out by their interpretation of sacred texts. Thus Wimbush's argument that the Bible must be seen "as a decidedly sociocultural, political, historical construction"<sup>57</sup> is relevant here only at the level of interpretation by social groups in conflict. Fernando Segovia describes this as the "fundamental issue of real readers... and the reading process in the construction of meaning."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Wimbush argues that though the Bible cannot be seen as a transcendent ahistorical force, it is nonetheless a "dangerous and powerful force." (Wimbush, *African Americans and the Bible*, 14) With reference to the African American experience, he refers to the scriptures as the locus of power for the whites. (Ibid., 15) My argument however, is that it is dangerous and powerful *because* it is seen as transcendent and ahistorical. This perception of scripture occurs on all levels. This is to say that regardless of methodology, the fact that social groups seek its intervention in their social struggles suggests that they place it above them as a transcendent authority.

<sup>55</sup> See Thompson. His work is an eloquent representation of this struggle against fundamentalist inerrancy in Seventh-day Adventism.

<sup>56</sup> A majority of Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholars utilize some if not all of the tools of higher criticism but unanimously reject its antisupernaturalist stance. Chapter II will elaborate on this.

<sup>57</sup> Wimbush, *African Americans and the Bible*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Fernando F. Segovia in *Reading From this Place*, 3.

So far, we have analyzed the conflict as it currently appears in Seventh-day Adventism. However, the conflict is as old as the denomination. Whereas Chaves locates the beginning of the conflict over women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 1970s, the fact is that the conflict first arose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>59</sup> with the rise of the women's movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and died with the prophet Ellen White. The conflict returned in the 1970s with the resurgence of the women's movement. In both instances the conflict took on the mode of *response to*, and *reaction against* the feminist movement.<sup>60</sup> Reaction against the feminist movement became the decisive factor that prevented the ordination of women.

This 19<sup>th</sup> century debate is a significant consideration in this study because the 20<sup>th</sup> century debate mirrors this earlier conflict. The resolution by the 1881 General Conference to ordain women seems to have been a positive response to pressure from the women's movement.<sup>61</sup> In both periods the Seventh-day Adventist Church was engaged in constructing its public identity as the "true church." Major 19<sup>th</sup> century feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton who pushed for equal clergy rights for women, rejected the

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<sup>59</sup> This early debate seems to have climaxed with the resolution of the 1881 general conference session at Battle Creek Michigan, to ordain appropriately qualified women to the ministry. The matter was discussed, and referred to the general conference committee where it died. This was reported in *Review and Herald*, 20 December, 1881.

<sup>60</sup> Vance argues that in its infancy the Seventh-day Adventist Church transcended the gender-role struggles which were present in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. The argument in this study is that this is precisely not the case. While women held administrative and ministerial positions in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in those early stages at a proportionately far greater degree than they did for the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it occurred as part of a religious awakening that formed the cradle of the more secular women's movement. Once the women's movement took on a shape that was contrary to the traditional hermeneutical culture in general, and to the beliefs and practices of Seventh-day Adventism in particularly, then feminism became a major external foe to Seventh-day Adventism.

<sup>61</sup> The 1948 Woman's Rights Convention held in Seneca, New York and other State level conventions included resolutions for the equal clergy rights for women. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Women Suffrage*, vol. 1: 1848-1861 (Rochester, New York: Charles Mann, 1881), 67, 808-855.



inerrantist claims to biblical authority.<sup>62</sup> Yet even prominent supporters of gender equality at that time rejected Cady Stanton's *Woman's Bible*.<sup>63</sup> This suggests that disassociation from "objectionable" elements of the women's movement does not necessitate disassociation from the full commitment to gender equality. Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church's identity has been constructed by a traditional Protestant inerrantist approach to scripture, in both periods of conflict it allowed itself to be pulled into the mainstream "hermeneutical-cultural spin" that assumed male supremacy<sup>64</sup> as it fought to maintain its identity. This separatist stance based on biblical inerrancy explains why a denomination whose prophet and co-founder is a woman remains resistant to women's ordination, while other movements such as Christian Science,<sup>65</sup> in which women play a prominent role, ordained women.<sup>66</sup>

How does the phenomenon of Ellen White, the founding prophet of Seventh-day Adventism figure in this conversation? Her writings which are referred to as "The Spirit of Prophecy Writings" or "The Testimonies," embody a unique feature in Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutics. While this study focuses on the use of the Bible in the debate,

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<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* [New York: Arno Press, 1875], 8.

<sup>63</sup> Antoinette Brown of the Women's Christian Temperance Movement (WCTU) and Catherine Booth, for example supported equal status for women with strong affirmations of biblical authority. See Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 100.

<sup>64</sup> See Pearson, 180.

<sup>65</sup> Christian Science is neither Sacramentalist nor inerrantist. As in Shakerism and Spiritualism, the divine is not perceived in terms of gender, the doctrine of the fall which blame woman is toned down, and there is no stress on marriage and motherhood as the only appropriate place for women. See Catherine Wessinger, *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations outside the Mainstream* (Urbano, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women in Seventh-day Adventism held administrative and ministerial positions at a proportionately far greater degree than they did for the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This demonstrates the "loose coupling" that results from a church's anxiety over its public identity.

Seventh-day Adventists regard these testimonies as a body of sacred texts. However, they stand as sacred only because the denomination believes that they comply with the teachings of scripture. On this basis this study does not treat these separately as a body of sacred texts, but references them as an example of the way the Seventh-day Adventist Church engages the Bible. Because this body of writings remains authoritative among Seventh-day Adventists, the hermeneutical-cultural climate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which Ellen White's writings reflect, continues to influence the denomination's decision on the issue of women's ordination.

Ellen White however, made no statement against the ordination of women. Indeed her only statement regarding women's ordination, albeit to the deaconate was affirmative.<sup>67</sup> What those who oppose women's ordination tend to reference are her statements regarding women's role and status - statements that reflect the ideology of male dominance that arose to counter 19<sup>th</sup> century feminism.<sup>68</sup> Yet her writings on the issue of gender role and status are not clear-cut.<sup>69</sup> Rather, they indicate a certain

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<sup>67</sup> This is a major reference for proponents of women's ordination. The statement reads: "Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set aside to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. (Ellen G. White, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," *Review and Herald*, 9 July 1985.

<sup>68</sup> Without exception, the major contenders against women's ordination cite the following statement by Ellen G. White: "*Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband's side in her Eden home; but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it.*" (Ellen G. White, *Patriarch and Prophets* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1958], 59. Here she reflects a dominant hermeneutic advanced by Howard Bushnell a congregational theologian who published in 1869 a very influential book opposing the rising women's movement. Based on Genesis 3, he argued that women's appearance in the public sphere was unnatural. See Horace Bushnell, *The Reform Against Nature* (New York: Scribner, 1869), 75, 76.

<sup>69</sup> For example she writes in 1898: "There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God. .... But the enemy

ambivalence and even subversion of the gender role status quo that stems from her role as a leader and authoritative teacher in the denomination against the backdrop of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian ideal of womanhood. They also reflect her ambivalent interaction with nineteenth-century feminism, an ambivalence which stems from her solidarity with the movement on the one hand, and on the other, her need to distance herself from those elements of the movement that were incongruent with Seventh-day Adventist self-identity. Besides all this, her own credibility as prophet was being challenged.<sup>70</sup> Here we may be able to place in perspective her conformity to the “traditional symbolism” that does not reflect the reality of her own practice as prophet and co-founder of Seventh-day Adventism.<sup>71</sup> The denomination then, as now, has been constrained by the external gender conflicts into which it consistently allows itself to be pulled.

So far we have noted that Seventh-day Adventism does not exactly fit into the general category of denominations which identify themselves (as antimodern) based on their policies regarding female clergy. Its unique doctrinal structure that identifies it as the “true church” is what draws it into the conflict in the first place, and forces it to identify with this Fundamentalist movement that makes inerrancy a symbol of antimodernism. Seventh-day Adventism may not have been pulled into this “inerrantist

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would be pleased to have women whom God could use to help hundreds, binding up their time and strength on one helpless little mortal, that requires constant care and attention.” (MSS Release, vol. 5, 1898, 324.) For elaboration on this issue, see Chapter IV.

<sup>70</sup> The proceeding of the 1919 Bible conference held in Takoma Park Maryland reveals that Ellen White’s plagiarism was long known by leaders of the church, but was kept hidden from the general Adventist population. The effects of this on Ellen White’s ability to influence the predominantly male leadership of the denomination on a matter so closely associated with feminism’s denial of biblical authority will be further discussed in Chapter IV.

<sup>71</sup> Daily’s work is a focused study on this question of Ellen White’s role in Adventism *vis a vis* the Church’s resistance to women’s ordination.

institutional field” if its fundamentalist scholars had not convinced it that its identity as the true church was at stake in the issue of women’s ordination. This study seeks to explain the internal dynamics of Seventh-day Adventism that pulls it into the Protestant religious subculture culture of resistance to women’s ordination and necessitates the politicizing of scripture in the conflict.

Methodologically, the study is socio-historical. A hermeneutical analysis is itself socio-historical in that it is a way of observing how a community has engaged scripture in a significant social struggle that coincides with its theological identity. The works by Plantak, Pearson, Vance, Daily and Bull and Lockhart that include or focus on the conflict over women’s ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church have not paid any significant attention to the politics of “scripturalizing” in the debate. Daily and Vance<sup>72</sup> do not focus on the hermeneutical dynamics, but on the general social dynamics that bear upon the issue of women’s role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The socio-cultural dynamics on which they focus is important and helpful, but they cannot fully account for the opposition, when the Bible is the single most powerful force in the conflict. This study argues that the process of “scripturalizing” is the determining factor surrounding the issue of women’s ordination. Thus this study pulls together the external socio-cultural factors that interact with the internal dynamics of the denomination, and assesses them as part of the process of “scripturalizing” that essentially characterizes the conflict over women’s ordination.

The first step in constructing my thesis is to argue that the doctrinal and organizational structure of Seventh-day Adventism determines the way the debate

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<sup>72</sup> Vance recognizes the theological issue of church identity, but it is not a singular focus in her work.

proceeds, and gives the opponents of women's ordination the political advantage. This is the purpose of Chapter I. In arguing this point, I will draw upon denominational history from both early and current documents. These will include Seventh-day Adventist policy statements, arguments surrounding the issue in denominational periodicals,<sup>73</sup> and correspondence between major Seventh-day Adventist church administrators regarding the issue.<sup>74</sup> I will evaluate the basic administrative structure and policies of the denomination as they affect the issue of women's ordination to show that there is a structural base that circumscribes the debate. The affirmation of Seventh-day Adventism as the true remnant church of Bible prophecy is the single important force that drives the denomination. This dictates that the arguments for or against women's ordination must be based on an approach to scripture that in no way challenges this separatist affirmation. At the 1995 General Conference in Utrecht where women's ordination was last voted down, the arguments focused on the biblical basis for the decision. Yet the motion taken to the floor was to allow particular divisions of the world field to decide on ordaining women based on the prevailing cultural inclinations.<sup>75</sup> Thus, when the world Church voted, it voted against women's ordination, and not necessarily against allowing divisions to decide to ordain. A major reason why Seventh-day Adventism remains resistant to women's ordination is that by constituency, it is no longer an American church, but a world church. Non-North American Seventh-day Adventists are overwhelmingly fundamentalist (not necessarily by intellectual choice, but by cultural exposure). This

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<sup>73</sup> See major periodicals listed below.

<sup>74</sup> These are primary sources obtained from the Office of Archives and Statistics, and the Ellen White Estate at the Seventh-day Adventist World Headquarters.

<sup>75</sup> If this motion had passed then North America and Europe would have decided to ordain women.

allows the minority of fundamentalist biblical scholars in North America who oppose women's ordination to pull the rest of the world into the decision-making process knowing full well that the majority of delegates (those from developing nations) are less inclined to grant full clergy rights to women. Chapter one explains this political dynamic as crucial to understanding the present stance of the denomination regarding women's ordination.

Chapter II picks up from Chapter I to explain why the question of interpretive methodology is crucial to the debate. For the most part, interpretive methodology is crucial to the extent that it affirms and reinforces the separatist stance of the denomination. The issue of women's ordination seems to have been a bystander when the debate over methodology began in the denomination. It became a casualty in the struggle to defend the denomination's traditional theology against the inroads of higher criticism, because the issue of full gender equality became associated with liberal religion. Resistance to women's ordination masks the air of theological insecurity within the denomination and functions as a symbol of resistance to higher criticism. Consequently, resistance to women's ordination became a symbol of denominational loyalty.

The question of hermeneutics preceded the debate over women's ordination. Chapter II essentially evaluates representative samples of the hermeneutical debate as they appeared in major denominational periodicals<sup>76</sup> since the late 1970s along with two

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<sup>76</sup> Not all of these periodicals are officially Seventh-day Adventist periodicals. Those used in this study that fall under the category of "official" include *The Adventist Review* (Since the time of its establishment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has modified its name several times. However, all of these names include the words *Review* and *Adventist*), and *Ministry*. The major independent Seventh-day Adventist periodical used throughout this paper is *Spectrum*. Other independent magazine includes *Adventist Today*, and *Adventist*

major and opposing books<sup>77</sup> on the issue of hermeneutics in Seventh-day Adventism, and reports from the major theological consultations and symposiums conducted by the denomination in wake of the hermeneutical crisis.<sup>78</sup> This will determine the extent to which concern for the authority of the Bible and concern for the fundamental doctrines of the denomination motivate the hermeneutical controversy. In order to lay the ground for this, the chapter does two basic things. First, it examines statements in the Spirit of Prophecy writings regarding biblical authority and inspiration in order to provide a perspective for the arguments regarding interpretive approach and their claim to denominational loyalty. Secondly, it evaluates the two major interpretive approaches under contention, namely higher criticism and grammatical-historical method using literature that describes them and points to their historical source. Along with this evaluation, it looks at the salient arguments surrounding higher criticism as they appear in the general theological literature to explain the specific manner in which higher criticism poses a challenge in the Seventh-day Adventist academe.

Because resistance to women's ordination became a symbolic display of denominational loyalty, the proponents of women's ordination have been compelled to make a case for denominational loyalty. This became vital in the politics of interpretation that characterizes the debate. Thus, using the same basic conservative

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*Affirm.* The two major scholarly journals published by the Seventh-day Adventist theological academe are, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* and *Journal of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies*. These represent the more conservative side of Adventist Scholarship, and the less conservative side respectively.

<sup>77</sup> The major sources here include: Thompson, *Inspiration*; and Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word*.

<sup>78</sup> Two major documents in this regard are: "Methods of Bible Study," the result of a conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 1976 in response to the mounting crisis over hermeneutics in the Seventh-day Adventist academe; and *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed., Gordon M. Hyde, (Washington, D.C: Review and Herald, 1974), the result of the initial conflicts surrounding higher criticism in the 1970s.

inerrantist approach, the contenders in the debate seemed to have been engaged in an ideological struggle (surrounding male headship and gender equality) in which the Bible is more an accessory than it is instructive. Chapter III demonstrates the politics of this struggle. In making this argument, the chapter proceeds to demonstrate that contenders in the debate prove their point without going outside the inerrantist boundaries of the denomination. The chapter argues that because women's ordination had already taken on symbolic significance as a hallmark of liberal religion, those who oppose women's ordination began to equate defense of women's ordination with the use of higher criticism. This becomes evident as the chapter looks closely at the arguments regarding methodology which preface the major books<sup>79</sup> that were published in defense and opposition of women's ordination both before and after the Utrecht convention. Chapter III demonstrates that the interpretive guidelines of the denomination are fluid enough to allow a "fundamentalist" approach, and a "liberal" approach to the issue of women's ordination. In this vein, it analyzes the arguments at Utrecht and those that appear in the literature before and after Utrecht,<sup>80</sup> to conclude that interpreters on both sides of the debate go to the Bible with an ideological agenda. Because of this, they overlook or explain away obvious contradictions to their positions.

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<sup>79</sup> Three major books are relevant in this regard. They are: *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Women in the Ordained Ministry*, eds, Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart (Langley Park, MD: TEAMPress, 1995); *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998); and *Prove all Things*, ed, ed, Mercedes H. Dyer (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000).

<sup>80</sup> The major sources here include those listed above along with the Camp Mohaven Document, *The Role of Women in the Church*, Unpublished papers from the Commission on the Role of Women in the Church established in 1983 by the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, and three major books that oppose women's ordination. The latter include: Samuelle Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study of the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987); Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*; and Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg*.



Chapter IV argues that the problem of women's ordination in Seventh-day Adventism is not about what the Bible says or about what its prophet counsels, but about how Seventh-day Adventism positioned itself against the cultural foment in America brought on by the two waves of the women's movement. The basis of this argument lies in Chaves' conclusions regarding the resistance to liberal religion. The chapter assesses in detail the way in which the conflict over women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church references the Protestant religious subculture of resistance to liberal religion. In doing this, it first analyzes the way the denominational conflict interfaces with the general social climate. Here it draws upon arguments from the debate over women's ordination.<sup>81</sup> It then exposes the root of the cultural dilemma in 19<sup>th</sup> century Seventh-day Adventism. By drawing upon Seventh-day Adventist historical records, both published and unpublished,<sup>82</sup> along with other studies<sup>83</sup> on the nineteenth-century religious climate, especially as it surrounds women's religious experience, Chapter IV provides historical evidence that Ellen White did not oppose the ordination of women though she was circumscribed by the general religious subculture of resistance to liberal religion. The necessity of the latter to protect the denomination's separatist stance, and the crisis regarding her own authority as the denomination's prophet, effectively silenced her on the matter of women's ordination. Yet, her actions and much of her statements

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<sup>81</sup> These arguments appear in the sources of the debate cited above.

<sup>82</sup> These have been obtained from the Office of Archives and Statistics and the Ellen White Estate at the denominations world headquarters.

<sup>83</sup> Three major sources in this regard are: Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001); and Wessinger, *Women' Leadership in Marginal Religions*.

regarding gender roles seem to be subversive of the status quo, and inclined towards ordination of women. Thus, what has been articulated as a hermeneutical crisis in Seventh-day Adventism is in reality a cultural dilemma which biblical arguments for and against women's ordination tend to obscure.

The Seventh-day Adventist membership in general is unaware of the fountain head of the present conflict. It has simply picked up where the debate entered the mainstream cultural conflict of resistance to the status quo of male headship, and the counter-resistance that results. Thus, major contenders against women's ordination such as Raymond Holmes and Samuel Koranteng-Pipim have, with little difficulty, persuaded regions which are culturally less inclined to ordain women, by the powerful weapon of scripture.<sup>84</sup>

This study makes no evaluation of the separatist stance of Seventh-day Adventism. It merely recognizes it as the basic factor in the resistance to women's ordination. At the same time, this study does not assume that the only factor driving the resistance to women's ordination is the resistance to higher criticism. We cannot contest the fact that the majority of the denomination's members who oppose women's ordination do so from their own socio-cultural interaction with the Bible. Yet the denomination has a center of power that is directly impacted by its academe. The denomination is native to North America which houses its center of power and academic center. It is therefore possible for academic interest groups centered in North America to

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<sup>84</sup> Holmes' book *The Tip of an Iceberg*, and Koranteng-Pipim's *Searching the Scriptures* have served as two prominent propaganda tools among the Seventh-day Adventist mass, especially those culturally disinclined to gender equality.

influence the denomination at large, specifically those culturally disinclined towards gender equality. Thus Koranteng-Pipim is only partially right when he argues that the crisis facing the denomination today is not necessarily due to a clash of two cultures – “the church in the West” and “the rest of the church,” but is due to hermeneutics.<sup>85</sup> The hermeneutical debate is waged in the West – the home of the denomination, and the rest of the world is called into the fray without necessarily knowing what the conflict is really about, because the organizational structure, as we will see in Chapter I, facilitates this. This is basically how the conflict over women’s ordination ensued.

Chaves’ study helps us to understand the deeper motivation of resistance to modernity driving the resistance to women’s ordination in general. It points us to the fact that the biblical text provides a formidable source of authority regarding the issue because of its suprahistorical status within biblically inerrant denominations.<sup>86</sup> This study takes this general observation and focuses it on the specific case of Seventh-day Adventism. This allows the study to answer the question in a manner that Chaves’ study does not. That is, it does not simply provide a sociological explanation for the *resistance* to women’s ordination, but demonstrates how biblical authority becomes the means by which a community attempts to resolve its conflict. By showing how Seventh-day Adventism references the general culture of resistance to modernity, it is able to lift the hermeneutical mask from the conflict over women’s ordination, and demonstrate how each side of the conflict politicizes the sacred text in the interest of its specific agenda.

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<sup>85</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word*, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Chaves, 187.

The unique features of Seventh-day Adventism – its doctrinal and organizational structure, and its historical roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century American revivalism that opened the door to women’s religious leadership<sup>87</sup> – provide the lens through which we may observe how this particular community in conflict references the sacred text. In essence this study defines how biblical authority functions for a particular community engaged in a social struggle at the site of the sacred text.

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<sup>87</sup> In recent years some evangelical feminist historians have attempted to identify 19<sup>th</sup> century Evangelicalism as the real roots of feminism. In particular, Donald Dayton has identified the American revivalism of Charles Finney that gave rise to the religious subculture of women’s speaking in the public meetings. This, he argues, led to the practice of full ordination for women. See Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1976), 88.

## CHAPTER I

### **The Direction of the Debate over Women's Ordination: Organizational Structure and Hermeneutical Politics**

While Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal identity serves to ignite the hermeneutical debate over women's ordination, it may be singled out as the *decisive* element in the debate in the sense that the organizational structure of the denomination stands in service of its doctrinal structure. This doctrinal structure declares the denomination to be the true church of God on earth. The present policy regarding women clergy, as in virtually every U.S. denomination, results from internal struggles between those who want one policy, and those who want a different policy.<sup>1</sup> While Chaves recognizes this, the scope of his work does not allow for an investigation into the particular organizational and doctrinal structure within any given denomination that may give a unique color to the struggle. In the case of Seventh-day Adventism, this is necessary. The argument here is that the decisive element in the current hermeneutical politics surrounding women's ordination does not lie merely in its doctrinal identity, but lies even more fundamentally in its organizational structure. The structure is of such that it may serve to give the opponents of women's ordination the political advantage in the debate. This may be because the organizational structure results from the doctrinal structure of the denomination, and stands in service of it.

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<sup>1</sup> Chaves, 158

The Seventh-day Adventist Church considers itself to be the true church of Bible prophecy, called by God in 1844, and entrusted to carry forth the third angel's message of Revelation 14. This third message is the final of three angels' messages in Revelation 14: 6-12.<sup>2</sup> These represent essential warning messages to the world that precede the second return of Christ to the earth. Seventh-day Adventists believe that William Miller, the famous Methodist revivalist preached the two first messages until the Great Disappointment of 1844, when Seventh-day Adventists took up from where he left off to preach the third angel's message.<sup>3</sup> The third message was understood to have begun in 1844 after the Great Disappointment when, according to Seventh-day Adventists, Christ entered the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary to begin his final phase of judgment. This message warns the world of the fate of those who receive the mark of the beast. The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes the mark of the beast as the institution of the first day Sabbath. It refers to this as "Sunday Law." In opposition to this is the seventh day Sabbath stipulated in the fourth commandment which represents the seal of God. Those who will be saved when Jesus returns will have this seal upon their foreheads (in their minds). This belief is based on what the denomination holds to be a correct interpretation of Scripture. This is the basis on which it invites people into its

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<sup>2</sup> The first message (Rev. 14: 7) states: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water." The second message (Rev. 14: 8) states: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." The third message (Rev. 14:9-10) states: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on their forehead or in the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath...."

<sup>3</sup> In the strictest sense the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as regards its perception of its mission to the world, does not separate the three messages. The denomination believes that they are all connected in their call to a specific way of worshipping God, namely through an embrace of the seventh day Sabbath as stipulated in the fourth commandment in Exodus 20: 8-11 ("Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy....")

membership. The denomination's body of doctrines is built upon this exclusive claim to biblical truth and this claim defines its reason to be. As such, the denomination has developed an organizational structure to secure this identity.

Responding to its prophetic mandate, the denomination has grown from being a small nineteenth-century North American sect into a world wide denomination with the majority of its membership residing outside of the West. Its identity and mission also mandate that it remains a unified body in belief and purpose. As such, its organizational structure may not allow for particular sections of the world to make crucial decisions without the consent of the world-wide body. The ministerial credential given to those ordained to full clergy rights in the denomination is the highest working credential of the denomination. Thus, while North America and Europe are ready to grant full clergy rights to women, this cannot occur because the majority of the denominations residing outside of the West are not ready to do so. This is the basis on which the minority of fundamentalist biblical scholars in North America is able to carry its agenda against the ordination of women. The motion on the floor at Utrecht where women's ordination was last voted down was to allow divisions to decide. This motion seemed to have been brushed aside as the delegates at the conference were persuaded with biblical arguments for and against the ordination of women. The fact that it was not difficult to persuade the majority of delegates who come from the developing world already culturally disinclined to grant women full clergy rights becomes the decisive element in the hermeneutical politics. Merely appealing to the doctrinal identity of the denomination is clearly not sufficient. As I have noted at the onset and will demonstrate in Chapter III, biblical inerrancy does not necessarily lead to resistance to women's ordination. Thus the clergy

rights granted to women in North America and Europe are accommodative to these regions only, in light of the vote against women's ordination, and do not lend them full clerical authority in the world body of the denomination.

When we speak the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we speak not merely of administrative structure, but doctrinal structure. Its doctrinal structure sets it apart as a denomination, while its administrative structure separates and prioritizes the general interests of the church from and over local or particular interests. These two structures, administrative and doctrinal are therefore not mutually exclusive. The question of the ordination of women is entangled within these ecclesiastical structures. The aim of this chapter is to acquaint the reader with this structure and show how it qualifies the hermeneutical politics of women's ordination.

### **Doctrinal Structure: The basis of Organizational Structure**

Confession of the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the single major criterion that qualifies one as a leader in the denomination. This is most significantly so for those involved in theological and religious instruction in the denomination. Indeed the final part of the baptismal vow asks: "Do you accept and believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy and that people of every nation, race, and language are invited into its fellowship?"<sup>4</sup> This helps us to understand why an appeal to the fundamental doctrines of the denomination becomes the major

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<sup>4</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 16<sup>th</sup> edition (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 33.



strategy for the fundamentalist opposition of women's ordination. It is important therefore that we observe closely the deep significance of the doctrinal structure of Seventh-day Adventism.

Basic to the Seventh-day Adventist self-identity is the doctrine of the Sanctuary.<sup>5</sup> This doctrine, first preached by the Methodist William Miller, the nineteenth-century Methodist revivalist, is the key to unlocking the mystery of the end of the earth, and validates the Seventh-day Adventist calling as a distinct group with a distinct message for the end of time. Inseparable from this doctrine is the doctrine of the Seventh-day Sabbath, and the recognition of Spiritual gifts in the person of Ellen G. White.

From his study of Daniel's vision in Daniel 8, particularly Daniel 8:14 ("Unto two thousand three hundred days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" [KJV]), Miller calculated that Jesus would return to the earth on October 22, 1844.<sup>6</sup> After the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, various segments developed from the Millerite movement; groups of believers who had not given up hope in the advent of Christ. In the spring of 1844, based on the insights of Frederick Wheeler, one New England based segment developed the doctrine of the Seventh-day Sabbath. Later that year, soon after

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<sup>5</sup> This doctrine assumes that the Hebrew sacrificial system in the Old Testament (Exodus 25-30) is a type of a real sanctuary in heaven. It holds that the daily and yearly sacrifices performed in the Hebrew sanctuary (or tabernacle), as well as its furnishings point to a real plan for human salvation that is taking place in heaven.

<sup>6</sup> Adventism inherits the principle on which Miller made his calculations. This principle called the "year-day principle" uses Numbers 14:34 ("*For forty years – one year for each day you explored the land – you will suffer for your sins....*"), and Ezekiel 4:6 ("*After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you forty days, a day for each year.*") to determine the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14 as 2,300 literal years which began in 457 B.C.E. The calculation based on the year-day principle has its starting point at 457 B.C. This is the date of the decree of Cyrus of Persia to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, which, based on Daniel 9:25, ff marks the beginning date of the fulfillment of Daniel's vision. Thus 2,300 years from 457 B.C.E. ends in 1844 C.E.

the great disappointment, this group lead by Joseph Bates was convinced that keeping the Seventh-day Sabbath was necessary to salvation.<sup>7</sup>

Another segment of the disappointed Millerites, based in Western New York, began to reinterpret Daniel 8:14 regarding the cleansing of the sanctuary.<sup>8</sup> The key figure here was Hiram Edson, a Methodist farmer. This group, notes Charles, Teel “affirmed Miller’s emphasis on the advent while admitting his error in chronology.”<sup>9</sup> Based on their intensive studies of the Old Testament Hebrew sacrificial system, they believed that Miller had accurately anticipated an important event in 1844, but this was not the return of Christ. Rather, the cleansing of the sanctuary pointed to the final phase of Jesus’ ministry in a literal sanctuary in heaven. When Jesus ascended after his resurrection, he entered the holy place of the sanctuary to atone for sins. In 1844 Christ moved to the holy of holies as did the Hebrew priest on the yearly Day of Atonement. This was the time of the cleaning of the sanctuary in the ancient Hebrew sanctuary. The real purpose of the Day of Atonement which began on October 22, 1844, states a leading Seventh-day Adventist historian, Richard Schwartz is to prepare a cleansed people.<sup>10</sup> Central to this doctrine, notes Schwartz is the idea that “the Hebrew sanctuary system was a complete

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<sup>7</sup> Godfrey T. Anderson, *Sectarianism and Organization, 1846-1864*,” in *Adventism in America: A History*, ed. Gary Land (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 38.

<sup>8</sup> In the Old Testament Hebrew sanctuary, there was a yearly cleansing, or a yearly sacrifice that signified the cleansing of sins from the camp of Israel (Leviticus 16). This day, called the “day of atonement,” signified for Miller, and later the Seventh-day Adventists, the time of judgment when Christ would finish his work of intercession, and return to the earth to redeem the righteous.

<sup>9</sup> Charles W. Teel, Jr., “Remnant,” in *Remnant and Republic: Adventist Themes for Personal and Social Ethics*, ed. Charles W. Teel, with an introduction by Martin E. Marty (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Center for Christian Bio Ethics), 7.

<sup>10</sup> R.W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), 63.

visual representation of the plan of salvation with every type having its antitype.”<sup>11</sup> George I. Butler, one of the earliest leaders of the movement, states that “through the types of the Old Testament they saw that our Lord and Savior had entered upon his last and closing work.”<sup>12</sup> Seventh-day Adventism refers to this cleansing of the sanctuary as the *investigative judgment*. It differs from the final judgment, in that at the time of the investigative judgment, Christ is going through the books of God’ remembrance (Revelation 20:12).<sup>13</sup> This is the phase of his high priestly ministry in which Christ brings up the names of the living and the dead throughout history to determine who will be finally saved or lost. Once one’s name comes up in the investigation, one’s faith is sealed depending on one’s spiritual condition at that time. This is the time of the third angel’s message with which Seventh-day Adventists are entrusted. This doctrine of the investigative judgment describes a process of time which will end with the return of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. For details on the doctrine of the sanctuary see Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary: Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald publishing Association, 1993)

<sup>12</sup> George I Butler, “The Gradual Development of the Truths of the Third Angel’s Message,” *Review and Herald*, 10 March 1885, Advent Experience—N0., 5

<sup>13</sup> This is set forth in No. 23 of the 27 fundamental doctrines of the Adventist church: *There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Heb. 8:1-5; 4:14-16; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; 1:3; 2:16, 17; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6; Lev. 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:12.) For further explanation see, W.E. Read, “The Investigative or Pre-Advent Judgment: Does the Bible Reveal the Time for this Phase of the Judgment to Begin?” in *Doctrinal Discussions* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, n.d.), 53-64.*

Christ to earth to deliver the righteous (who bear the seal of God on their foreheads) from the earth. The Church finally came to accept that this time is completely unknown to anyone. This interpretation of the “cleansing” of the sanctuary in Daniel 8: 14, and the idea that the earthly sanctuary is a symbol of a literal sanctuary in heaven is based on Hebrews 9 particularly verses 24, ff: “For Christ did not enter a man made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; but he entered heaven itself, now to appear in God’s presence.”

Concurrent with the development of this doctrine, and the doctrine of the Seventh-day Sabbath was the recognition of spiritual gifts in the person of Ellen White.<sup>14</sup> Born in Portland, Maine as Ellen Gould Harmon, Ellen White was only seventeen years old when she began in December 1844 to receive her prophetic visions which from the start became the unifying and faith defining force of the disappointed Millerites who later formed the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A major impact of her initial visions was to steer the early Adventists away from further date setting regarding the return of Christ.<sup>15</sup> This helped to focus the group on their earthly mission, and became the motivation for the later development and global expansion of the denomination in various ministries.

In 1846, Ellen White first met Joseph Bates. Bates convinced Ellen and her newly wed husband James White through his pamphlet, *The Seventh-day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign*, that the true Sabbath was not Sunday the first day of the week, but

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<sup>14</sup> Anderson, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Schwarz, 66.

Saturday, the seventh-day. Later Bates came to hold the conviction that the spirit of prophecy was present with the movement in the person of Ellen White.<sup>16</sup>

While Ellen White's initial visions had the effect of encouraging the group to maintain hope in the advent of Christ,<sup>17</sup> by 1846 her visions began to serve the purpose of confirming the new doctrinal discoveries that others were making. Her vision regarding the Sabbath was connected to the sanctuary. In the Holy of holies she saw the Decalogue in the ark. The fourth commandment, regarding the Sabbath seemed to be surrounded by a halo. The vision also confirmed what Joseph Bates had noted in his Sabbath tract, that the Sabbath was closely connected with the third angel's message of Revelation 14.

Thus this early group of believers began to fan the dying embers of the Millerite crusade by effectively uniting the findings of Joseph Bates regarding the Seventh-day Sabbath, the findings of Hiram Edson regarding the heavenly sanctuary and its cleansing, and the belief in the prophetic gift entrusted to Ellen White. This sect known as the Sabbatarian Adventists were now assured of God's leading of the Advent people through the Great disappointment to this point where He has called out a faithful remnant to continue the work began by William Miller. Basic to this was an understanding of God's purpose for the world in the plan of salvation revealed by the Hebrew sanctuary system. The Sabbatarian Adventists saw themselves as part and parcel of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 as read in the light of Revelation 12, Revelation 14, and Revelation 19. Out of this prophetic framework has emerged the three distinguishing features of Seventh-day

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<sup>16</sup> Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1915 ), 98

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 64-68.

Adventism by which it identifies itself as God’s true remnant church of prophesy. Here is a brief summary:

1. The sanctuary was cleansed in 1844. Christ entered into the last phase of his ministry on October 22, 1844. This Sabbatarian Adventist group emerged from the 1844 cleansing.

God is now preparing a remnant upon the earth “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12: 17). At this final stage of earth’s history, in the midst of the 1844 disappointment, the message of Revelation 14:12 refers to the Sabbatarian Adventists: “Here is the patience of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.” Thus in 1885, the then General conference president, George I. Butler writes: “They believed they had reached the time of the patience of the saints—the waiting watching time.”<sup>18</sup>

2. The Sabbath: Very significantly, the Sabbath doctrine distinguished the group as those who keep the commandments of God in Revelation 14:12. As I have noted, this Sabbath doctrine was sealed by Ellen White in vision. The mark of the beast of which the third angel of Revelation 14 speaks is a Sunday law which America will legislate<sup>19</sup> and the rest of the world will follow.<sup>20</sup>

3. The Spirit of Prophecy: The movement reads the question of the “testimony of Jesus” in Revelation 12:17 also described as the “faith of Jesus in Revelation 14:12 in light of

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<sup>18</sup> Butler, *Advent Experience*—No. 5

<sup>19</sup> White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1957), 592.

<sup>20</sup> Idem, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5 (Oakland, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1885-), 464-465

Revelation 19:10: “Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophesy.” In 1851, James White drew on Joel 2: 28, 29<sup>21</sup> to explain that the remnant experienced the last day outpouring of spiritual gifts. From this he concluded that the “spirit of prophesy” was an identifying mark of the remnant church. He further concluded that the “spirit of prophesy” was present in the Seventh-day Adventist church through the ministry of Ellen G. White.

Herein lies the foundation of Seventh-day Adventism, and the basis of its identity as the remnant church which in the words of G. Ralph Thompson “rose out of the ashes of the Millerite hope.”<sup>22</sup> These three doctrines discovered by different people in different places, argue prominent Adventist historian Leroy Froom “formed the base of a coordinated system of truth.”<sup>23</sup> James White described it as “harmonious in all its parts,” thus to destroy one is to destroy an entire system of truth<sup>24</sup> which identifies the church as the remnant of prophesy.

Coupled with this prophetic assurance is the urgency of mission, realizing that their work was not done, that “the message was to go to ‘peoples, nations, tongues and kings’.”<sup>25</sup> This is fully stated in No. 12 of the 27 fundamental doctrines of the church:

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<sup>21</sup> “And afterward I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

<sup>22</sup> G. Ralph Thompson, “No Cunningly Devised Fables,” *Adventist Review*, 1 July 1995, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Leroy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1971), 87.

<sup>24</sup> James White, *Review and Herald*, 7 January, 1858, Ellen G White, *Early Writings of Mrs. White. Experience and Views, and Spiritual Gifts, Volume One* (Battle Creek, Michigan: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1882), 254, 255.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.)<sup>26</sup>

This system of prophetic interpretation based on Daniel and Revelation, declares the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be the ultimate eschatological fold,<sup>27</sup> a movement raised up by God to be the “depository and exponent” of the message to keep the commandments of God (special emphasis on the fourth commandment), and bear the testimony of Jesus (the writings of Ellen G. White).<sup>28</sup>

This doctrinal structure is based on the belief in biblical authority. The Church arose out of a movement that focused on the Bible to understand the meaning of the times and the ultimate destiny of humanity. It is from diligent study of Scripture, and divine revelation of the accuracy of their interpretation through Ellen White, that the Church assures itself of its divine election.<sup>29</sup> In the first declared statements of beliefs in 1872,

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<sup>26</sup> This understanding of its mission came out of the two-week long 1952 Bible Conference held in Takoma Park, Maryland, at which conference, the church, through rigorous Bible study solidified its basic beliefs. See in particular, R. A. Anderson, “World Evangelism Our Basic Task,” in *Our Firm Foundation*, vol. 1, 478, *en passim*.

<sup>27</sup> While the Church believes that the prophecies of Revelation 14:6-12 and 12:17 point specifically to its history and work, “Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that they alone constitute the true children of God today. While they hold that the SDA movement is the visible organization through which God is proclaiming the last message for the world at this time, they also heartily accept the words of Jesus, “other sheep I have that are not of this fold” (John 10:16)”. See “Church, Nature Of,” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald publishing Association, 1996), 373.

<sup>28</sup> R.A. Anderson, *et al.*, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1957), 192.

<sup>29</sup> For some insight into the rigor of Bible study in which the church engages see *Our Firm Foundation*, 2 vols., A Report of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conference Held September 1-13, 1952, in the Sligo



the initial statement reads: "...we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible." Thus Adventists have referred to themselves as "people of the book." To question its doctrines is to question the authority of Scripture, and to question Scripture is to threaten the very foundations of Adventism. For example, any dismantling of the Adventist understanding of six literal days of creation undermines the very foundation of Adventism – the Sabbath doctrine.<sup>30</sup> It is at this point that we may understand the insecurity of some in face of the challenge of higher criticism.

How does this basic doctrinal structure of Adventism affect the debate on the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? A fundamental effect of this doctrinal structure is that, the denomination's identity as God's remnant has placed it historically in an apologetic and polemic position. It has stood constantly under the pressure of supporting its claims by demonstrating consistency in its hermeneutical, social, and political positions. This lies at the heart of its resistance to women's ordination. Yet the understanding of "consistency" is by no means monolithic. As the denominational constituency comes from all sectors of the social fabric, so views and interpretations on particular issues differ. However, on each of the significant issues, the denomination has been obligated to make an official statement. These statements for the most part, reflect the main stream dominant position. On the question of the ordination of women, the denomination has made no official stand for or against. This is an issue that remains.

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Seventh-day Adventist Church, Takoma Park, Maryland (Washington D.C: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953).

<sup>30</sup> Chapter II elaborate on this.

However, in 1973 the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists provided for the Annual Council of the Church a statement declaring that there is nothing in Scripture (or the Spirit of Prophecy writings [writings of Ellen G. White]) which forbids the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.<sup>31</sup> The document states:

All could wish that the scriptures somewhere explicitly gave us a statement or principle that would have universal application regarding the question under discussion. The fact is that it nowhere explicitly discusses this question.<sup>32</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not ordain women to the ministry because a majority of delegates (largely from the two thirds world)<sup>33</sup> to the general conference sessions at which the issue has been debated and voted on has voted against it.<sup>34</sup>

What we have remaining then, is an ebbing and flowing debate, with people on each side drawing the Church's attention to the Scripture, while advocating particular methods of interpretation, and different understandings of inspiration and authority that affirms the denominations doctrinal identity. Thus, what characterizes the hermeneutical debate is careful navigation of the depths of biblical waters. Thus far, the dominant voice (not by virtue of numbers, but by virtue of the weight of tradition) in the Adventist academe through prolific writing cries against modern methods of interpretation (such as historical-critical and feminist approaches) that they believe water down or otherwise

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<sup>31</sup> Gordon M. Hyde to Union Conference Presidents, North American Division, 5 December, 1973, transcript in the Office of Records and Archives, Seventh-day Adventist World Headquarters Silver Spring, MD.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> The second section of this chapter explains the process of delegation to the General Conference sessions.

<sup>34</sup> In the second section of this chapter we will see why the Church must have the full consent of the corporate global body to decide on the issue

undermine the authority of Scripture.<sup>35</sup> This for them is an opening of “the Pandora’s box” which we are not sure the Church may be able to close.<sup>36</sup> For the Church to move into any direction that calls into question its very foundation is a challenge that seems to enervate any rigorous review of its social conscience. The argument here however, is that such a question needs not arise in the debate over women’s ordination. Where it does, it functions mainly as a political strategy in light of the denominations tight reign over its doctrinal identity.

Other effects accrue from the doctrinal structure of the Church. First, the Church has maintained a stance of eschatological urgency in light of the present cleansing of the sanctuary which began in 1844. Those on each side of the debate have referred to this urgent eschatology as reason to ordain or not to ordain women. On the one hand, those preparing for the soon coming of Christ should concern themselves with the preaching of the gospel rather than with matters that do not bear on the salvation of souls. On the other hand those who believe that if we are seeking urgently to preach the gospel then all the gifts in the Church should be utilized and affirmed, ordination to the gospel being an official means of affirmation. The following statement by Ellen G. White turns up almost everywhere there is an argument for ordination, based on the urgent needs for the spread of the gospel:

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<sup>35</sup> The question of biblical authority and the “survival of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the force it has been in the world” is the major concern of C. Raymond Holmes, one of the most strident opponents to women’s ordination. See C. Raymond Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry* (Wakefield, MI: Pointer Publications, 1994). This sentiment has also been echoed by his student Samuel Koranteng Pipim in his books, *Searching the Scriptures: Women’s Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1995), and *Must We be Silent? Issues Dividing Our Church* (Ann Arbor, MI: Berean Books, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “Biblical Authority and Feminist Interpretation,” *Adventist Affirm*, Fall 1989, 21.

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands....This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work. Place the burdens upon men and women of the church that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness.<sup>37</sup>

Those who oppose ordination, while affirming the importance of the work of women in the preaching of the gospel, argue that women do not need ordination in order to preach the gospel.<sup>38</sup> To accede to what some regard as feminist demands, is to divert from the mission of the Church to finish the work of the gospel, towards matters that are worldly in nature and Satanic inspired. Thus, from both sides of the debate, the Church's eschatological integrity comes into question.

In summary, the Church's identity as the true remnant "people of the book," is the axis on which the debate over women's ordination revolves. Outside of that axis no one can make any significant contribution to the debate. Yet the hermeneutical debate has proceeded in a manner that some see as threatening in this regard. In Chapter II we shall examine this procedure in more detail.

### **Administrative Structure: The Key to the Outcome of the Debate**

The basic purpose of the administrative structure of the denomination is to carefully monitor the activities of the organization around its basic identity, mission and purpose.

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<sup>37</sup> Ellen G. White, "The duty of the Minister and the People," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 9 July 1895. While many have justifiably argued that the prophet was not referring to the official act of ordination to the gospel ministry, the statement has been moved out of the social setting of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, into the context of the present time. Its use by Ginger Hanks Harwood ("Women and Mission," in *The Welcome Table*), 275-276, is representative of the use of the quotation in service of the argument for ordination.

<sup>38</sup> See for example, Samuelle Bacchiocchi, "Women: Ministry Without Ordination," *Ministry*, October 1996, 4-7.

For this purpose, every aspect of its work around the globe is coordinated and directed towards a unified effort of the denomination. As such, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the most organized Protestant denomination. This is what facilitates the politics of the decision regarding women's ordination. What has resulted is that a denomination, birthed, nurtured and financially sustained by America is now democratically governed by the will of the developed world which lags behind developed nations in matters of justice and even biblical understanding. Thus North America must obey the dictates of the developing world regarding women's ordination. In whose interest has the Seventh-day Adventist realization of the American dream of freedom of religion, free enterprise and global expansion worked? It is important that we closely observe how this structure becomes a key element in the hermeneutical politics of the debate.

The present organization of the Seventh-day Adventist church grew out of a primary concern for scriptural unity. At first the scattered Sabbath-keeping Adventists depended on the strong leadership of James White, Ellen White, and Joseph Bates to maintain its unity.”<sup>39</sup> In 1861, James White expressed grave concern that they were losing ground with respect to scriptural unity. Here he cited an instance where, because of the lack of organization, persons with beliefs contrary to that held by the group were coming into their congregations to teach.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, prior organization was simply the

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<sup>39</sup> “Organization, Development of, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald publishing Association, 1996), 258.

<sup>40</sup> James White, “Organization,” in *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 27 August 1861, 39.

Sabbath Conference which, according to Schwartz, “brought general agreement among the Sabbatarian Adventists” on foundational doctrines.<sup>41</sup>

Further, a significant body of writings regarding beliefs and practice had begun to emerge from these conferences. What was occurring was a ferment of biblical teaching and preaching that threatened to explode into splinters. Thus, the first organized body in Seventh-day Adventism appeared in the form of a publishing house. After adopting the name Seventh-day Adventist (a name which fully articulated their mission and purpose), the small sect began its first steps towards a fully organized church body.<sup>42</sup> Initially the leaders of the sect proposed three levels of organization – local churches, district conferences, and a general conference to represent all the churches and to speak on their behalf.<sup>43</sup> The General conference consisted of delegates from local conferences and not individual churches. This, as Schwartz notes “not only set the pattern for the indirect hierarchal structure adopted by the denomination<sup>44</sup> but “set the Advent Movement on a coordinated, organized course.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Schwarz, 69.

<sup>42</sup> In spite of the initial resistance to organization as “Babylon,” Ellen White wrote decisively, “As our members increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. Thus she puts forward the purposes of organization as 1) to provide for the support (financial) of the ministry, 2) for carrying the work to the fields, 3) for protecting both the church and the ministry from unworthy members, 4) for holding church property, 5) for the publication of the truth through the printing press, and 6) for many other objects. Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers*,

<sup>43</sup> “Ministers’ Report,” *Review*, June 1861.

<sup>44</sup> Schwarz, 97.

<sup>45</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 16<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), xix.

A basic concern of any group is economic. While it may not necessarily be its chief motivation, it becomes the chief means by which a group is sustained, and thus becomes a major preoccupation. A first step in organization was concern for the economic viability of the group. Thus on June 3-6, 1859, in Battle Creek, Michigan, James White put forward a plan for sustaining the work of the gospel.<sup>46</sup> From this developed the system of tithing as a doctrinal position, and the giving of offerings to sustain the church. This remains the major means by which Adventism is sustained throughout the world. It is out of concern for its survival as a self-sustaining entity that it sought through organization, to address the need for a name and a corporate existence, which would allow it to hold church property and other assets which were multiplying to the church.<sup>47</sup>

By 1901, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had grown considerably in gospel ministry, medical, and educational institutions, and had spread to far regions of the world – Europe, Australasia, Africa and all across the American continents. At this time the centralized leadership of the church proved inefficient in handling the many issues of various church entities around the world.<sup>48</sup> Thus the Church set about to reorganize itself so that the world fields could have more control over the work in their regions, and that local leadership could have more autonomy in the areas of their responsibility. Bert

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<sup>46</sup> J. N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists With Tokens of God's Hand in the Movement and a Brief Sketch of the Advent Cause* (Battle Creek, MI: General Conference Association of the Seventh-day Adventists, 1892), 224.

<sup>47</sup> "Organization, Development of, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 258.

<sup>48</sup> A major concern was that too many demands were being made of the General Conference president, and too much authority was centered in the president and a small group of men. At time, Ellen White wrote strongly against "kingly power" and "Jerusalem centers," and urged that there be further decentralization.

Haloviak, director of the Office of Archives and Statistics at the World Church notes that this decentralization of the Church's leadership took place at the most relevant level."<sup>49</sup> Thus the various conferences in different regions were organized into Union Conferences. At the Union level, local conferences addressed matters directly related to that particular field.<sup>50</sup> This process was described as the "democratization" of Adventism. At first, it was only at the Union level that the leadership was dispersed. That is, instead of local conferences reporting directly to the General conference, they reported directly to a Union conference, which was a union of local conferences in a particular region such as Europe or Canada. With further growth of the organization, the authority became further dispersed. In 1913 the Division Conferences were organized. Thus the Unions in various divisions of the world were represented at the division level, rather than at the General Conference level. This allowed the matters of institution in North America Europe, Asia, Africa and so on to be governed by officers within those regions themselves. This led to the development of a significant problem in North America. The North American Division, with its own officers and treasury had taken over the complete administration of the work in North America. This left the General Conference, born raised and resident in

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<sup>49</sup> Haloviak, "Approaches to Church Organization," unpublished paper from the Office of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1993, prepared for the Commission on World Church Organization, Cohutta Springs, March 23-29, 1993.

<sup>50</sup> For example, the West Indies Union comprises of the Bahamas, Conference, the Turks and Caicos Conference, and West, Central, and East Jamaica Conferences. All the hospitals and colleges are directly administered by the Union. However, the elementary schools and high schools are administered directly by the conferences in which they are located. All areas of the work are represented at the Union level. The tertiary institution is directly administered by the Union in the form a board of trustees of which the Union President is Chair, and the College President, Secretary. The ministerial director of the union administers matters directly related to church administration and evangelism in all areas of the conferences. The Education Director administers matters regarding education in all the conferences, and so on. Thus while leadership was dispersed, there remain a system of co-ordination that moved all the way up to the General conference level.



North America, without a territory to administer. The then General Conference president, A.G. Daniels described the situation thus:

I consider it a very serious situation to have a strong, self-directing, practically independent organization thrown in between the General Conference and its resources. ...It transfers the control of base of supplies from the General conference to the division.<sup>51</sup>

This political impasse along with this division conference structure, argues Adventist Historian George Knight, “opened the possibility for a strong personality to lead a large sector of the church out of the denomination.”<sup>52</sup> Thus in 1918, the General Conference in session abolished division conferences as separate legal entities with their own constituencies, making them instead, “divisions or extension of the General Conference in a given territory.”<sup>53</sup> With this model, the General conference in session (a quinquennial session) would appoint the leadership in each division, and the president in each division would be a vice president of the general conference. The treasury of each division would be a sub-treasury of the General Conference, from which mission funds are distributed to the world fields. This new format, notes Knight, while it dispersed authority in the world fields allowed the denomination to “protect its unity as a global movement and at the same time better facilitate its mission to the world.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> A.G. Daniels to W.A. Spicer, October 9, 1917, quoted by Bert Haloviak, “Approaches to Church Reorganization,” 4.

<sup>52</sup> George R. Knight, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001), 139.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. This is further elaborated as having a threefold reason: “(1) to preserve the structural unity; (2) to place on every section of the church membership the responsibility of supplying funds and men [sic] for the whole world, including unentered fields; and (3) to avoid in the future, some of the difficulties in administration, communication, and finance caused by World War I, when parts of one division conference were separated by war front.” See “Organization, Development of, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” 269.

At the 1919 session, the North American Division did not receive the same divisional status as did the rest of the world divisions. “The delegates concluded that there was no need to make a division in the territory containing the General Conference. Thus the division was seen not as a *division* or *extension* of the General Conference, as were the other world divisions, but as a *part* of it. Beach and Beach note the major reasons for this “special relationship” as a largely pre-World War I perception of the church as an American Church.<sup>55</sup> This was, they explain, “so far as membership, finance, polity, policy, leadership, institutional strength, and foreign missionary force were concerned.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed before 1945, leadership roles in less developed nations went to missionaries from North America (mainly), Europe, Australia, and South Africa. Thus, dispersal of authority essentially allowed for more North Americans and other leaders in the developed world to take on leadership roles throughout the world. The latter half of the nineteenth century “saw indigenous leaders taking over from the missionaries up through the division level of the General Conference.”<sup>57</sup> Thus Asians were directing the work in Asia, and Africans were directing the work in Africa, and so on. This marked the first step to a fully representative organization.

#### The North American Struggle

The debate on the Ordination of women had begun to heat up in the 80s, and many in the two thirds world (developing nations) perceived it as a North American

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<sup>55</sup> Walter Raymond Beach, and Bert Beverly Beach, *Pattern for Progress: The Role and Function of Church Organization* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), 63.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

issue, but one which they will not allow North America to decide, since the Church is a world church. Such political issues and others<sup>58</sup> remain key issues in the ongoing struggle of the North American Division to become a legitimate *extension* of the General Conference, rather than a *part* of the General conference. The sentiment from North America observes Cottrell, is that such relationship of the General Conference to North America “has worked to the serious disadvantage of the North American church and hindered its mission to the people of North America.”<sup>59</sup>

This political situation in North America with reference to the organizational structure is significant. This is because the debate on ordination of women, issues from North America, with a far greater percentage of women engaged in pastoral ministry and other leadership ministries than in any of the other world fields. Also, as we have noted, the church by origin and polity is North American. Its structural development, its democratization, and global outreach epitomize the American dream of freedom of religion, free enterprise and global expansion. Despite the cultural nuances in different parts of the world, the Church generally reflects North American standards and values. Education of the Church at large issues from North America. Very significantly, North America as a division of the world church is ready to ordain women.

Because Adventism was born in America, it became very difficult until the 1980s for the North American Division and the General Conference (which comprises the world

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<sup>58</sup> Chief among these is financial reasons. The overwhelming majority of funding for the World Church comes from North America. It becomes very difficult for the General Conference to sever intimate connection with the North American Division due to the “concern that North America might use its financial resources to pursue its own priorities and undermine the unity of the world church. (See Raymond F. Cottrell, “The Case for an Independent North American Division,” *Spectrum* 13:1 (January 1982): 2

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

church) to organize as separate entities. Indeed, until the early 1980s the General Conference in Washington D.C. was staffed and run almost exclusively by Americans.<sup>60</sup> By this time, however, the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventist was located outside of North America. Thus there was sentiment in the world field that the Church should no longer be defined as a North American Church. Now the General Conference though still mainly staffed by North Americans, has become more international in its leadership, to reflect its composition as a world church. The North American Division though still not as fully bearing the status as other divisions, is able to maintain its distinct identity as the North American field of the World Church (The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist) whose headquarters is now located in Silver Spring, Maryland. This very distinction has done anything but aided the American case for women's ordination.

#### Agents of Cohesion and the vote against women's ordination

What we may observe so far is a continuing effort by the Church to maintain a unified structure with one major governing body, in spite of reorganization and dispersal of authority. This prevents any section of the world from diverting from the decisions made by the Church regardless of their particular inclinations or convictions. This has worked to the disadvantage of those inclined to ordain women. That the two thirds world comprises the large majority of the delegation, and women a minute percentage makes it impossible for the case for women's ordination to go forward.

The General Conference issues a yearly revised edition of the complete *Working Policy*, (a publication said to contain more words than the Bible) that reflects "the authoritative voice of the Church in matters relating to the administration of the work of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in all parts of the world,” and “to be adhered to by all denominational organizations.”<sup>61</sup> The two other major documents of cohesion are the Church Manual, and the 27 fundamental beliefs. The former, a manual that prescribes the manner of operation and ministry of the local church, was developed in 1946, and can only be changed by the action of the General Conference in session. The latter was developed in 1980, and also can only be adjusted by the General Conference in session. Any member, local church, local conference or union conference that chooses to operate outside the stipulations and policies of those documents, stand the risk of losing representative status within the organization.

The following diagram<sup>62</sup> outlines the basic organizational structure of the Church.

**General Conference:** the largest unit of organization embracing all union conferences/missions and other church organizations in all parts of the world.

**Divisions of the General Conference:** Sections in which the General Conference conducts its work. Each of these sections operates within a specific territory in harmony with General conference policies. The division section embraces all the local or union conferences/missions/fields in its assigned area of the world. Through the division conferences, the world church is effectively coordinated into a united whole.

**Union Conferences and Union Missions within Each Division:** A united body of conferences/missions within a larger territory.

**Local Conferences and Missions within Each Union Conference:** A united organized body of local churches in a state, province or territory.

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<sup>61</sup> “Introduction,” *General Conference Working Policy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001-2002 edition).

<sup>62</sup> This diagram is based on Knight, 140, ff.

**Individual Churches within Each Local Conference or Mission:** A united body of individual believers.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates with a representative form of church government. This form of Government, according to the Church Manual, “recognizes that authority in the church rests in the church membership, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers, for the governing of the church.”<sup>63</sup> It further states that this kind of church government recognizes also the equality of the ordination<sup>64</sup> of the entire ministry.” Election of officers at the various levels of the church organization is by delegation. The implications of this kind of delegation and the “equality of ordination to the entire ministry” may be placed in perspective when one notes that key leadership positions at all levels of the institution can only be held by an ordained minister.<sup>65</sup> Representation however, begins at the local church level. The officers of a local church and the delegates to the local conference are chosen by the local church board. From that point the local church has no representation except that which it has chosen to represent it at the upper level.

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<sup>63</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 26.

<sup>64</sup> This ordination does not refer to the ordained pastoral ministry which appoints the pastor as head of the church congregation.

<sup>65</sup> Bert Haloviak notes an “informal” reorganization of the church in the 1920s which required that leaders for certain key positions that most directly touched the local church were to be preferably ordained ministers. Therefore, he notes, women being ineligible for ordination “were legislatively eliminated from the departmental leadership roles they had traditionally held. The result, he argues, was a change in the composition of the leadership structure of the church. See Haloviak, 6.

Delegation occurs at all levels up to the General conference in session in which the ultimate authority of the Church resides. The debate on the ordination of women to the ministry is largely a struggle for the minds of the individual church members. Members choose delegates based on the nature of ministry, and the ideal of leadership which they, by tradition, have come to embrace.<sup>66</sup> At the 1995 General Conference where the major item on the agenda was the ordination of women to the ministry, women comprised less than 5% of the nominating committee. Of the 2,669 selected delegates, only 300 or 11.2% were women<sup>67</sup> in a denomination where roughly 60% of its membership comprises of women.

The General Conference, the Unity and Identity of the Church, and the decision on women's ordination.

It is important to underscore the importance of the General Conference because it has the ultimate responsibility of preserving the identity of Adventism as the remnant an

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<sup>66</sup> Raymond F. Cottrell interprets this kind of government differently however. He argues that the representative form of government that the Church attests to is only at the local conference level. According to him, above that level "the polity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is hierarchical with authority flowing downwards and members in local congregations having virtually no voice." He goes on to say that above the local conference level, "the Seventh-day Adventist church is a closed, self-operating, and self-perpetuating system similar to the Roman Catholic Church, in which those in authority are not responsible to lower echelons." Cottrell further argues that above the local conference level, "those in authority are not elected by, representative of, or administratively accountable to, local congregations or the membership at large." See Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Varieties of Church Structure," *Spectrum*, 14: 4 (March 1984): 41. In 1985, Walter Raymond Beach and Bert Beverly Beach wrote to the contrary saying, "The general Conference is not an entity apart from the churches, conferences, and unions that comprise the world Seventh-day Adventist Church. The General conference is the 'sum of all these' (quoting General Conference Working Policy, B 12 15). It is the main Manifestation of the worldwide nature of the church." See Beach and Beach, 127.

<sup>67</sup> Steve Daily notes that "this is particularly noteworthy when one considers that a strong majority of "active SDA church members" are women. The reason for this inequity becomes clear when one recognizes that the vast majority of GC delegates are ordained denominational employees who generally hold high administrative offices in the church. For example, only 18.2 percent of the delegates at Utrecht were laypeople, and only 3 percent were pastors, teachers or other "front-line workers." The remaining 78.8 percent come from a large officialdom in the church that is for the most part closed to women." Steve Daily, Editorial, *Adventist Today*, July/August 1995, 2.

identity which depends on its unity as a single unified body. This helps us to qualify the resistance to women's ordination as a result of the doctrinal/organizational structure of the denomination, and not necessarily a reflection of the general tendency of the denomination. This continues the explanation of how a minority of biblical scholars can persuade an entire denomination.

The General Conference operates as an executive committee and as a World Church body in session. The General Conference Executive Committee through its subcommittees administers the affairs of the world church. "Generally referred to as the General Conference Committee, it formulates policy, amends its constitution and bylaws, decides matters of church doctrine, and considers other matters appropriate to its jurisdiction."<sup>68</sup> It comprises headquarters staff, representatives from all the divisions of the world field, and the presidents of all union conferences/missions, "and therefore speaks for the world church."<sup>69</sup> While meetings of the executive committee may be called at any time to deliberate on matters of urgency, it meets as an Annual Council to consider "major items affecting the world Church. The *General Conference Working Policy* unequivocally states: "The authority, therefore, of the Executive Committee is the authority of the world church."<sup>70</sup> The General Conference in session meets quinquennially as a body of delegates from all levels of the organization at which time it appoints by vote officers for the world field at the Division/General Conference level. Here it votes on all issues affecting the world church, and from it issues the annual *Working Policy*.

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<sup>68</sup> Cottrell, "the Case for an Independent North American Division," 6.

<sup>69</sup> See *General Conference Working Policy*, Article XII, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



The General Conference in session represents the will of the entire body of believers from all parts of the world.

It is by the representative system of government that the Church preserves the unity of will and purpose of the entire body. Ellen White appeals for the maintenance of this unity in that it constitutes the vital evidence of the Church's call.<sup>71</sup> C. C. Crisler who has written a history of the organizational development of the Church, describes this organizational development as a sign of God's leadership of His church, of His guidance in its affairs, and the marvelous unity that remains in spite of the many issues by which its has been challenged over the years.<sup>72</sup>

Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church identifies itself as being "in a unique way God's visible church on earth today,"<sup>73</sup> it believes that God, in spite of human limitations that cause them to at times err in judgment, "guides in the decisions they make and overrules when an error in judgment or action would be fraught with grave consequences for the Church." Thus the Church believes that "the General Conference in Session, with representatives of the Church from around the world present constitutes the agency through which God guides and directs his cause on earth today." In the words of Beach and Beach "derives its authority from God through the people of God, led by the Holy Spirit"<sup>74</sup> Ultimately then, as stated in Fundamental Beliefs No. 11, "the Church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word, and from the scriptures

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<sup>71</sup>Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5, 619-620.

<sup>72</sup> See for example, C.C. Crisler, *Organization: Its Character, Purpose, Place, and Development in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1938).

<sup>73</sup> "Church, Nature of," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 374.

<sup>74</sup> Beach and Beach, 127.

which are the written Word.” Thus, the organizational structure stands in service of its doctrinal structure which includes its mission and purpose as God’s remnant church with the message of the third angel of revelation 14 to take to the whole world. This tradition the Church’s prophet advanced and fought for as she defended the organizational structure as the means by which the work of God may advance cohesively.<sup>75</sup> In essence, as Mario Veloso observes, “the corporate power of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is exercised by the assembly of the General conference, during which time the church acts as a united body under the action of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>76</sup> Here, as Veloso states, its decisions “embrace all the levels of the church organization in the world so that the Church maintains unity in its universal practices.”<sup>77</sup> As such, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the only protestant Church that is organized and governed on a worldwide basis.

The crucial nature of the process by which the church governs its affairs becomes more significant in light of the image of the Church and its mission as God’s true remnant. Beach and Beach state it succinctly:

Adventism does not see its antecedents just in the great Second Advent Awakening of the nineteenth century. Adventism returns to the New Testament and Old Testament Church, without discontinuance or divorce. The Seventh-day Adventist Church sees itself not as just one denomination among countless others, but as an inheritor of God’s church since the foundation of the earth, from everlasting to everlasting. She considers herself to be a “repairer of the breach,” a restorer of “the foundations of many generations” (Isa. 58:12, R.S.V.), a consummator through the church of the Remnant (Rom. 9:27; Rev. 11:13; 12:17; 19:21) of the apostolic belief and practice, all in the context of the age-long controversy between good and evil.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See for example, White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1923), 32, ff; 489.

<sup>76</sup> Mario Veloso, “Unity, The Nonnegotiable Sign of the Church,” *Ministry*, 25 May 1995, 17. [16-18]

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Beach and Beach, 131

The affirmation to its separateness and special call gained reinforcement by the current president of the World Church, Jan Paulsen, at a gathering of the Church's leaders and several scholars to discuss the topic "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church." Paulson notes: "There is no change in our being separate; neither do we need to change our basic prophetic scenario."<sup>79</sup> This essentially describes the ecclesiological platform from which Adventism operates as a world church with representation at its highest level, the General Conference. This is the essence of its organizational structure. Thus to be eligible for ordination to the Seventh-day Adventist Clergy one must besides believing in the Scripture believe in the organizational structure of the church, that it is a structure ordained by God to maintain unity. This effectually silences any protest against the decision at Utrecht. This brings us to the question of the nature of ministry.

#### The Ordained Clergy: The Center Ministry

The work of preaching the gospel is the defining factor in Adventism. It is the central place from which it fulfills its calling in 1844. The individual with full clergy rights has symbolically been given the highest recognition as a participant in the fulfillment of the denomination's mission. It is important therefore to see how this central aspect of Adventism figures within its ecclesiological structure to see why no one division may be allowed to decided on women's ordination. In doing so, we will compare the ordained clergy with the various aspects of Adventist ministry and the organizational policies that govern them.

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<sup>79</sup> Jan Paulson, "The Theological Landscape," *Review and Herald*, 13 June 2002, 9.

There are three basic levels of credentialing persons involved in pastoral work. First there is the highest level, Ministerial Credential which bestows full clergy rights upon the individual. Up until September 2002, all denominational wages revolved around the wage of the ordained minister. Thereafter, wages have been based purely on qualification, expertise, rank, etc. However, the ordained credentialed ministry remains the paramount ministry of the church. Full clergy rights in the denomination gives one authority over the world church, not just a given local church or region.<sup>80</sup> The ordained minister alone receives a *Ministerial Credential*. This is the highest level of working credential issued by the Church.<sup>81</sup> Prior to ordination, a ministerial license is issued which indicates that the candidate is on the path towards ordination.

Secondly, there is the Commissioned Minister Credential. This is a second tier of ministerial credential usually given to persons engaged in denominational leadership (such as college presidents and departmental directors at all levels above the local church), but do not by engagement qualify to be ordained ministers. This level of credentialing is the means by which women in divisions inclined to ordain women grant women clergy rights. Such rights are limited to the particular division, and do not allow

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<sup>80</sup> *General Conference Working Policy*, 386 L 40, L 45 05.

<sup>81</sup> This hierarchy comes from a gradual history of development. In 1853, there was only one credential which was a Card of Recommendation signed by "leading pastors". (At this time the ordination of ministers was not an immediate problem because the first ministers had been already ordained. The card of recommendation was meant to prevent unauthorized person from preaching in the meetings. [see "Organization, Development of, In the Seventh-day Adventist Church," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 258]) In 1862, the church started granting *Ministerial Credentials* to those holding *Certificates of Ordination*. Two years later a third tier, *Ministerial License* was added. In 1883, it reverted to two credentials; *Ministerial Credential* and *Ministerial License*, the latter given to those in ministry, but not ordained. This group included women. By 1997 the Church was granting 16 working licenses and credentials for all categories of workers, the four top being Ministerial, and the others Non-ministerial. See, Ernie Furness, "Credentials for Dummies: Towards Understanding the Incomprehensible," Unpublished Research, Ministerial Department, South Eastern California Conference, 2001.

them to start a church or ordain another person. In 1977 the Annual Council of the General Conference voted to refer to those persons employed on pastoral staffs, but who are not in line for ordination “Associates in Pastoral Care.” To obtain the Commissioned Minister Credential persons must have at least five years experience in denominational work. Those with less than five years, receive a Commissioned Ministerial License.

Thirdly there is the ministerial license which is usually given to individuals who are on the path toward ordination to the gospel ministry. Commissioned ministers holding licenses or credentials<sup>82</sup> are not normally on the path toward ordination to the gospel ministry.<sup>83</sup>

#### The Politics of Licensing and Ordination:

It is worthy to note that at a March, 1975 meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee voted to end the church’s 100-year policy of granting women ministerial licenses – the same license granted to those on track for ordination. In effect, prior to 1975 when the debate on ordination began to heat up, there was no distinction between the ministerial license offered to women and men. The council recommends that women interested in ministry become Bible workers<sup>84</sup> or assistant pastors. They could only be granted a missionary license which in the General Conference Working Policy, is a license given to non-ministerial employees.

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<sup>82</sup> Each level of ministry has two steps: *licensed*, and then *credentialed*

<sup>83</sup> Prior to March 1985, Ministerial Credentials (ordination) was granted to men who were not in true ministerial work. This seems to have been a concessionary act in the face of the protests and debate regarding women’s ordination.

<sup>84</sup> Bible workers are specialized workers engaged in the work of soul-winning in evangelistic efforts, or in the local church, by giving personal one on one or small group bible instruction.

In the mid 1970s, licensed ministers in North America, on track for ordination were seeking I.R.S. benefits as self-employed individuals. The North American Division sought this status for them by allowing them at the October 1979 Annual Council to perform marriages (a civic function), and other ordinances of the church such as baptism and communion. It however did not make this allowance for the women with similar license.<sup>85</sup> This act coincided with the debate on ordination which had begun to gain momentum. It effectively closed the door to the ordination of female ministers which was, *by policy*, open up until then. After much protest on the part of particular local churches and conferences, the delegates at the October 1989 Annual Council voted 187-97 in favor of allowing divisions to permit qualified women to baptize and perform marriages etc., while rejecting by the same vote, women's ordination.

In effect, the Church allows qualified women in ministry the same duties as the ordained minister, but withholds from them the Ministerial Credential. This action of allowing women to perform the ordinances of the church is, however, confined to divisions which may allow it. It is a permission given to Divisions to exercise discretion in this regard. Ordination on the other hand, is not allowed on the division basis, because ordination to the ministry is understood as ordination to the world church. Thus all Divisions of the world must embrace it by means of two thirds majority vote. Ordination to the ministry, as we have seen, involves a credential which supercedes all other credentials in the church. Therefore, when a person is ordained, he or she must be recognized and be able to function as a credentialed minister anywhere in the world. For

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<sup>85</sup> Even though the practice of granting women ministerial licenses ended in 1975, there were still women who had ministerial licenses prior to the vote.

this reason the motion has to be passed by the General Conference in session which represents more fully the entire body of Adventist believers.

This view of the ordained ministry may be fully understood in light of the mission of the Church, its identity as the remnant church constituting the true church of God. The ordained minister is the supreme earthly representative of the mission of the church to the world. The church is a world church held together most effectively by a representative form of government. Thus to make decisions regarding the ordained ministry outside of the representative body of the world church is to threaten the very substance that glues the Church – the nature and purpose of the ministry of the gospel. While women in particular divisions may be allowed to perform the sacraments of the Church, such women may not be allowed to do it in any division since some divisions do not permit it.

Denomination rules do allow divisions to decide whether women should have authority over the local church. This is with reference to the office of elder. A brief look at the leadership in the local church is important in better understanding the issue of authority.

#### Leadership in the local Church

The local church is usually led by someone who is credentialed or licensed. This may be male or female, except in those regions where women are not allowed to lead the church because of cultural inclinations or social mind-sets.<sup>86</sup> Foundational to the ministry of a local church however, is the ministry of the elder and the deacon. These are usually voluntary part time ministries invested by election for a one year term. However, these positions invest the individual holding them with certain authority.

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<sup>86</sup> This idea will be further explored in Chapter 3.

An ordained elder in a local church exercises more authority in the performance of the ordinances of the local church than does the “pastor” who is not ordained either as a minister of the gospel or as an elder. Thus ordination as an elder is a requirement for receiving a Ministerial License or Credential or a Commissioned Minister License or Credential. The ordained elder can only serve the local church to which he she is ordained as elder. The ordination service for an elder must be performed by an ordained minister with credentials from the local conference/mission/field. The licensed minister (on track for ordination) or commissioned minister (not on track for ordination) cannot perform a marriage ceremony unless he/she is an ordained elder. The role of elder, therefore, is a leadership role that invests the elder with authority over the local church. In the absence of the pastor the elder is the religious leader of the church.

The person elected as a deacon, must be ordained in order to function as a deacon. This role is basically a supporting role in which he helps in the preparation of the ordinances (not perform them), visit the sick, and so on. While this study focuses on the ordination of women for Ministerial Credentials, the question of ordination in general entered into the debate when it began to escalate in the 1970s. There was a less difficult concession towards the ordination of women to the diaconate in 1975<sup>87</sup> due largely to statements by Ellen White regarding the laying on of hands on women to do certain work which the church seems to associate with the supporting role of the diaconate.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> This does not indicate that the practice began in 1975. The record shows that as early as 1900 women were being ordained to the diaconate. See Arthur N. Patrick, “The Ordination of Deaconesses,” *Adventist Review*, 16 January 1986.

<sup>88</sup> Her statement seems to have been a call for involvement of the laity in which she states: “Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to the work by



However, it became more difficult to concede to the ordination of elders, since this role gives the person authority over the local church. In short, it is seen as a headship role and as such the most strident opponents of women's ordination also oppose their ordination as elders.<sup>89</sup> However, at the same 1975 council, the General Conference Executive Committee permitted women to be ordained as elders if "the greatest discretion and caution" is exercised. This of course facilitated, by policy, the granting of Commissioned Minister Licenses and Credentials to women who were engaged in pastoral ministry, allowing those Divisions which would allow it to engage them as full fledged pastors, and also allowed those in North America the I.R.S. benefits as self-employed individuals.

What we see therefore, is that the ordained elder is invested with authority over the local church, while the Ordained Minister is invested with authority over the church at large. Thus as an ordained elder, the individual takes the initial and basic step towards authority over the church at large. In the case of women, the church at this point does not allow them by policy to move beyond the local church, since the only ordination they may receive is that of Elder. Thus the authority of a woman who is hired as a senior pastor by a local conference, does not extend beyond that division as far as the world church policy dictates. The present voted policy of the world church effectively allows Divisions which are willing, to hire female pastors as head of congregations, but by general policy it limits their authority in the body of the World Church, since they cannot at his time receive a Ministerial Credential.

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prayer and laying on of hands...." Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 72: 28 (July 9, 1895): 434.

<sup>89</sup> Koranteng\_Pipim, in the effort to maintain a consistent argument for male authority argues that the New Testament makes no essential difference between the role of the elder and the pastor (person with full clergy rights). See Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*, 28.

The question that remains here is, how could the denomination allow divisions to decide on ordination of women elders, and it could not do the same with reference to women pastors? Well we seem to have answered the question. We noted that the role of the ordained credentialed minister is one that invests him with authority over the world church. But this does not seem to fully resolve the question. Why could the Annual Council of the General Conference Committee not decide the question of full clergy rights for women, as it did in the case of their ordination to the offices of elder and deacon? A closer look at the decision making process of the world Church will give us some insight into the way the organizational structure has worked in favor of the opponents of women's ordination.

### **The Decision Making Body of the World Church and the Debate over Women's Ordination**

The case for granting full clergy rights to women could have been resolved by the General Conference Committee where leaders of the denomination from all over the world meet annually. At the time when the issue was most prominent on the agenda of the denomination, North America could have had the advantage at the annual council. The case for allowing divisions to decide could have had majority support. The move to take the issue to the general conference to allow delegates from all over the world, most of whom are unaware of the hermeneutical politics, would be to the advantage of the opponents. The following explains this.

When the general conference was formed in 1863, only three individuals formed the GC Executive Committee. It was these three who formed the executive committee

that discussed the resolution to ordain women in 1881 and shelved it. This number increased to five in 1883, and then seven in 1888. By 1995, the GC Executive Committee made up of individuals from around the world comprised of 362 individuals. Forty four percent of those comprising the committee were from North America. Besides this, many members outside of North America did not attend even the two major annual meetings, due to lack of finances and time constraints. This gave North American members much more voice and vote in committee matters. At the 1992 annual council held in Silver Spring, Maryland, for example, 64 percent of the members were North-American based, and only 34 percent were from the other 10 divisions. We can see therefore why it was to the advantage of opponents to women's ordination to have the matter voted on at the general conference session.

When the world church voted against the ordination of women in 1990, the North American Division decided that this was a division need, thus the Annual council decided that the issue regarding ordination<sup>90</sup> would be the question of allowing individual divisions to take the initiative to ordain women as the need arises and as the social circumstances allow. Yet the general membership of the denomination with voting power was constantly called into the decision making process, making it difficult for the North American agenda to pass. The large majority of the Church residing in South America, the Caribbean, and Africa, comprising the majority of delegates, voted against the issue in both the 1990 and 1995 debate.

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<sup>90</sup> It was not the will of executives of the North American Division to vote on the matter at the General Conference, since it was to be a Division decision. With a General conference president not fully committed to the issue, and other political maneuvers, it was present for vote, where it was sure to be voted down with the majority of the delegates having social conviction that disallowed women significant positions of authority.

### Persuading the Denomination at Large

It does not seem that it was enough to argue at the general conference to allow division to decide on the question of ordination. While the motion taken to the floor in 1990 and 1995 was to allow divisions to decide, in both instances, the argument whether it was biblical to ordain women to the ministry was the focus. The issue boiled down to the question of the unity of the world church on an issue which the denomination at large was now convinced was a theological issue. In essence therefore, the majority of delegates voted against allowing any section of the world church to make a decision which they determined to be theologically unsound. Yet the issue seems to be more complicated. For the world church to allow North America to ordain women would be to open the proverbial Pandora's Box. There are many women involved in ministry in the developing world, and many who favor ordination. America tends to set the pace for the rest of the world. To let it pass in America would be to, in those parts of the world pull the masking tape from a festering wound.<sup>91</sup>

### The North American Loss of Power and the Fate of Women Clergy

The 1995 General Conference session, not only saw the defeat of the motion to allow divisions to decide to ordain women, but it also saw the wresting of power from North America. This diminished the possibility for North America to have its agenda for women's ordination passed. Very significantly, this meant that the fundamentalist clique in the academe now has the power over the majority of biblical scholars in the

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<sup>91</sup> This fomenting discontent came to light in Jamaica in 2002 when for the first time West Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventist appointed a trained female minister as an associate pastor who had been serving the church in various other capacities for many years. When the president announced the appointment at a large gathering of Seventh-day Adventist Church members from across the island, the audience broke out in a vibrant and prolonged applause.

denomination who support women's ordination. This is a result of significant structural changes in the decision making process of the denomination.

The General Conference Executive Committee was reorganized to reflect the fact that nine tenths of the church membership is outside North America with the bulk of those from the two thirds developing world. For those in North America, and all over the world who desire the ordination of women, the “overtones are troubling, moans Raymond Cottrell. “The present hierarchical structure of the church,” Cottrell argues, “means very simply but realistically, that top-level decisions will now be made, even as at Utrecht, by people who vocally expressed their opposition to a motion designed to help the church in North America fulfill its mission more effectively.”<sup>92</sup> Besides that, the reorganization ensured that every member attends the yearly council by having the General Conference pay all traveling and accommodation expenses for every member. Thus we see that as of 1995, the power of decision was essentially taken from North America, and the two thirds world now holds substantial decision making power in the world church (“and is now in control of the church in North America”<sup>93</sup>) at the most significant levels – at annual councils, and at General Conference sessions. Thus the 1995 General Conference Session at Utrecht was a time of triumph both for the two thirds developing world, and those in North America who drove the argument against the motion. With “glee and vengeance” some of them toasted their triumph over North America, reports Cottrell.<sup>94</sup> Of course the celebration included North American based

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<sup>92</sup> Cottrell, “The Old Order Changeth,” *Adventist Today*, September-October 1995, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., quoting a General Conference person.

biblical scholars and laity who depend on this section of the world to carry forward their ideological agenda regarding the role of women in the church. Given a North American (and Trans-European) constituency, however, the vote would have carried for the ordination of women.

The debate has been, and continues to be fought in North America because the Church is essentially a North American Church, financially sustained for the most part by North America. The fact that developing nations where the leadership role of women is less understood as appropriate comprise ninety percent of the Church's membership made it easy for those on the opposing side of the debate to have their agenda carried. It is for this reason that the administrators of the North American Division did not want the motion voted on at the world Church in 1995.<sup>95</sup> It was at the Annual Council level (1989) that the Church allowed women to *function* as ordained ministers. However, the very organizational structure, and the Church's concept of ordination made it arguably necessary to bring the issue of ordination itself to the General Conference in session.

To a great extent the Church seems to be reflecting the cultural preferences of constituencies that had no part in the Church's formation, and contributes relatively little financially to its general operation. Thus the vote may reflect not only cultural biases that lag behind the American social process regarding male/female roles, but to a significant extent, reflect anti-American sentiments. It is to this constituency that the minority of biblical scholars who oppose the ordination of women depend to engage their agenda.

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<sup>95</sup>To try to pass the motion at the general council level in future will make no difference as the general council after 1995 was restructured to ensure that decisions made at that level do not reflect purely North American interests.

Now that the General Conference Committee has been reorganized to reflect this majority in the developing world, it may prove more difficult for the North American representation to pre-empt the General Conference in session by having its interests voted at the Annual Council.

### **Structural Diversions: Who will have the Last Word on Women's Ordination?**

Mark Chaves makes reference to what he terms "irregular" or "illegitimate" ordinations with reference to women's ordination. He registers instances of this in the Episcopal Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in America, and the Southern Baptist Convention. These actions protest the denominations' decision to deny women full clergy rights. The same has been true in Seventh-day Adventism. Yet this occurred in light of the perceived need and inclination of the North American Division, and the politics surrounding the Utrecht vote.

In spite of the working policy of the denomination, those local churches and conferences that have allowed "irregular ordinations" remain a part of the official body of Adventism. Following the vote against ordination in 1995, some local congregations have gone ahead and ordained women as pastors. In September 1995 two months after the motion to ordain women failed to pass at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, Sligo Church on the campus of one of the Church's oldest colleges Columbia Union College ordained three women to gospel ministry. In December of that same year Victoria Church in Loma Linda, and the La Sierra University Church ordained a total of three women to gospel ministry. This practice on the part of local churches in California has continued up unto the point at which Southern California Conference in 2000 adopted

equal credentials for male and female pastors. Arizona Conference followed this practice that same year and at this point Northern California Conference constituency is pushing for the Conference to adopt this same practice. The General Conference does not recognize this ordination, but on the local level they remain effective.

The above is a very interesting phenomenon because over the past two decades the Church has put up a constant fight against congregationalism,<sup>96</sup> a system of organization which has the potential of dividing the Church into myriad splinters and pulling away the Church's funds from the upper levels of administration. Based on what has been discussed so far, this would be to mutilate the very identity of Seventh-day Adventist, and to obliterate any sense of its calling in 1944 as the people with the third angel's message to preach to the world, and that with one voice. Its present system of representation is integral to its doctrinal identity. The issue of ordination of women has been one that carries the threat of congregationalism.<sup>97</sup> This indicates that while the discussion of the issue seems to have died on the global level, on the local level, especially in North America, it remains. It also indicates that the World Church is paying careful attention to the needs of those constituencies that wish to ordain women to the gospel ministry. Indeed a Special feature of the Summer 2003 issue of the Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums,<sup>98</sup> *Spectrum* under the general theme "Women and the Church" indicates that the issue is coming to the fore once more. One of the articles by

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<sup>96</sup> This form of church government places authority in the local church. Thus the local church is administered based on its peculiar needs.

<sup>97</sup> This is a system of church government that allows local congregations to determine their basic governing policies.

<sup>98</sup> Chapter II will say more on the role of this organization in the shaping of Adventist beliefs and practices.



Kitt Watts special projects coordinator at the La Sierra University Women's resource Center titled "The Long and Winding Road for Adventist Women's Ordination: 35 years and Counting,"<sup>99</sup> gives a historic summary of the progress made by the Church so far regarding the issue of women's Ordination. Other articles by Doug Tilstra<sup>100</sup> and Doug Matacio<sup>101</sup> challenge the Church to act based on its nineteenth-century history and on a the need to contextualize ministry in the midst of cultural diversity. Thus the debate remains, not only as an ideological struggle, but as a social struggle on the organizational level, and we are not yet sure where it will end.

What keeps the debate alive despite the Utrecht vote? Why could Utrecht not be the last word on women's ordination? The debate continues because of a vibrant academe that lies at the heart of Seventh-day Adventism. A brief insight into the structure and politics of the academe will take us closer to the heart of the hermeneutical politics as it relates to women's ordination?

### **The Seventh-day Adventist Academe: The Center of Hermeneutical Politics**

The basic foundation of Adventism resides in its educational institutions. They prepare the bulk of workers for the organization, and through them, the Church maintains its

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<sup>99</sup> Kitt Watts, "The Long and Winding Road for Adventist Women's Ordination: 35 Years and Counting," *Spectrum* 31:3 (Summer 2003):56-57.

<sup>100</sup> Doug Tilstra, "Women's Leadership in the Church: Lessons from Church Planters," *Spectrum* 31:3 (Summer 2003): 51-53.

<sup>101</sup> Doug Matacio, "Contextualization and Women in the Church," *Spectrum* 31:3 (Summer 2003): 58-61.

identity fosters its growth. The final statement in the General Conference Working Policy regarding the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education states:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has accepted the task of conveying to the world a message of God's grace ultimately to culminate in his ideal society on earth. Its educational institutions at all levels are indispensable to the fulfillment of this task. Whatever degree of success they have may be attributed to the strong support the church gives to them, to the dedication of the faculties to the philosophies and objectives of these unique institutions...and above all to the blessing of God upon an enterprise which endeavors to pattern its existence, its purpose, and its activities after His revealed will.<sup>102</sup>

The Working Policy goes on to make statements regarding specific branches of the Adventist educational system. With regards to higher education, it makes specific statements concerning graduate education. It affirms the Church's commitment to fostering on the graduate level, to a greater degree than the undergraduate level, critical and explorative thinking. It notes however, that while the Christian Educator and Advanced student utilize the systems of evidence of reason and science, it recognizes the validity of divine revelation, which is accorded a *paramount* [italics supplied] position.<sup>103</sup> To ensure the implementation of such educational policies, the Church institutes International and Division Boards of Education. Specific to these are International and Division Boards of Ministerial and Theological Education. These underline the paramount importance of the ultimate mission of the church. Chief among the purpose of these boards is to "foster a dynamic theological unity in the world church."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Working Policy*, 242.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

The heart of the hermeneutical debate lies at the Church's paramount Seminary the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Andrews as a whole has been dubbed the "Mecca" of Adventist Education. Seventh-day Adventists from across the globe converge there, especially at the seminary and return to their respective fields to serve the Church. Most Adventist Religion and Theology professors, especially in North America, have studied at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary even though a large number of them receive terminal degrees from non-Adventist institutions. While one would deduce that the theological viewpoint of the seminary does not reflect the views of North Americans on the issue of ordination of women, but the views of Adventism as a whole, such is not necessarily the case. The majority of its influential scholars are North Americans. Interestingly however, the greater percentage of the most strident opponents of women's ordination within Adventist biblical scholarship are not North Americans by origin, but come out of cultures that tend to curtail the presence of women in leadership positions. Andrews University falls under the Jurisdiction of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, as the World Church, not as the North American Division.<sup>105</sup> It may be argued therefore, that the Seminary represents the Adventist academe, for all that it stands, to maintain the basic beliefs and mission of

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<sup>105</sup> By organizational policy, all Universities fall under the jurisdiction of the General Conference. Within North America, this refers to the General Conference as the World Headquarters itself. In the case of the rest of the world, this is the particular Division in which the university is located as extension of the General Conference. Thus the Seminary, as the rest of the university, falls under the direct jurisdiction of the World Church. Senior Colleges (except for Oakwood College in Alabama which falls under the direct jurisdiction of the General Conference), fall under the jurisdiction of the Union Conference in which they are located.

Adventism through (or in spite) the increase of knowledge and the findings of scientific investigation.

The Seminary reflects divergent views on approaches to theology and biblical interpretation. This divergence is demonstrated in two seemingly opposing Academic societies that have emerged from the Seminary – the Andrews Theological Society (ATS), and the Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS). These meet annually as sub-sections of the American Academy of Religion, and Society of Biblical Literature. The ATS in general (though not all of its members) stridently opposes the ordination of women to the Ministry, tends towards biblical inerrancy, and refer to themselves as “historical Adventists” or “conservatives.” They are committed to avoiding any approach to Scripture that may undermine the foundational doctrines of Adventism. Membership to this society is by invitation only. The ASRS comprises a majority of Adventist scholars in North America (also including scholars from around the world) and wholeheartedly supports the ordination of women to the ministry. It opens its doors to all Seventh-day Adventists in the discipline of religion and related fields. This group has been referred to as “liberals” by those on the other side of the debate, while they (ASRS) refer to themselves as “progressive Adventists.” This is an apt demonstration of the legerdemain by which the Seventh-day Adventist Church maintains a unified body under a representative system of Church government, in spite of the divergent views on the approach to Scripture. John McLarty, editor of *Adventist Today* states it thus in his editorial note:

Theology divides us because no two theologians agree on everything. Doctrine can unite us, even when we are arguing with it. The doctrinal core which the denomination transmits from one generation to the next forms the seedbed from which the infinite variety of our thoughts emerge. It provides

the common ground for arguments among us, the common bond that keeps us from degenerating into a loose aggregation of clever, lonely individuals. There is a delicious sense of adventure in roaming beyond the confines of doctrine....The SDA denomination provides an ideological, social, spiritual, and yes, even institutional center from which creative thinkers can and will diverge.<sup>106</sup>

Any approach that one takes to Scripture must allow one to affirm the basic doctrinal structure of Adventism. As we will see, many on one side of the debate on ordination accuse those on the other side of using approaches that undermine the doctrinal foundation of Adventism, namely, the authority of Scripture. This study will question whether people are clear as to what they mean by “biblical authority,” by actually demonstrating the way it is working in this debate.

We may therefore observe that the focus of Seventh-day Adventist learning is the protection and proliferation of its beliefs. The church achieves this goal for its academe largely through the efforts of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI). The BRI is lead by a General Conference field secretary and three associate directors all of whom are trained in biblical and theological studies. In addition to its administrative committee, the institute works with two subcommittees. One deals with biblical and theological matters (BRICOM), and the other deals with the interaction of science and religion (BRISCO). This work of the BRI was of vital importance at a time when challenges were mounting as academics exposed to broader theological view points, and current tools of biblical scholarship find enough footing to more closely scrutinize the Church’s stand on certain doctrines, and its ethical responses to such issues regarding women’s right, race and war. The BRI has among its purpose and goals to (1) identify areas in which biblical research is needed in the Church; (2) Conduct research in the Bible and related areas; (3) evaluate

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<sup>106</sup> John McLarty, “Doctrine and Theology: What’s the Difference?” *Adventist Today*, January-Feb 1998, 2.

manuscripts referred to it by the North American Unions and overseas divisions; (4) assist the General Conference administration on matters of biblical interpretation, doctrines and church trends; (5) Maintain contact with Adventist seminaries; and (6) foster and maintain contact and good relationships with the community of Adventist scholars in biblical studies, theology, and related areas.<sup>107</sup>

The BRI was the major organ by which the church conducted the study on the ordination of women prior to the issue being voted at the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Sessions. It is through the BRI that views from both the Academe, and the field at large are brought together, regarding the issue of ordination, and recommendation given, on which the church takes action. Through the BRI therefore, the denomination maintains a firm grip on the major theological issues that affect it. It is, however, the keeper of the gate of the denomination as regards its separatist stance, seeking to close out any method of interpretation that it perceives to be detrimental to the fundamental doctrines of the Church. Thus, those who direct the BRI appear to comprise a monolithic group as far as regards hermeneutics.<sup>108</sup> The fact that this is not representative of Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholarship as a whole fans the flame of the hermeneutical debate.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has been an attempt to show how the doctrinal and organizational structure by which Seventh-day Adventists identify themselves as God's true church has

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<sup>107</sup> "Biblical Research Institute," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 205-206.

<sup>108</sup> This refers to traditional approaches to Scripture which they perceive as the only approach that can maintain Adventism's traditional theology.

functioned to give the political advantage to the opponents of women's ordination. We have observed that the quest to maintain unity is part and parcel of the denomination's identity as the true church. The organizational structure has been an effective means by which the church continues to maintain its doctrinal unity, and to demonstrate its calling as the remnant people who "keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus," in the midst of great cultural and theological diversity.

The question of women's ordination takes on particular significance in light of the image of the Church and its mission as God's true remnant. This is because in any theological debate in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the underlying assumption must affirm its identity as the remnant and hence the question of unity becomes crucial. It is at this point that opponents of women's ordination find the political advantage. By first making the issue a theological one that calls into question the church's own foundational theology, the opposition begins to make its case. The organizational structure comes further to its aid. At this point, it is able to not only call the denomination into a hermeneutical struggle, the deep politics of which the laity is scarcely aware, but is able to make the case against one section of the world making the decision on such an issue. Because the ordained ministry is the highest order of the Church the case has been made, in the process of the conflict, that any decisions regarding it must affirm its unity. As such, it is not difficult to insist that the General Conference in session must decide regarding women's ordination.

The motion at the 1995 debate implied that the issue is a socio-cultural rather than a theological one. Yet the major arguments in the debate focused on the biblical theological basis for ordaining women. This was the means by which the

fundamentalist clique in the denomination gained the upper hand as it pulled the Seventh-day Adventist church into the hermeneutical conflict over women's ordination. The fate of women's ordination appears to have been sealed at Utrecht as the church restructured its decision making process. The section of the world that mostly opposes the issue now comprises the active majority of the decision makers at the preliminary level of decision making in the world church.

The politics at Utrecht has not silenced those who seek full clergy rights for women. We have seen that "illegitimate ordinations" followed the Utrecht vote, the denomination remains intact, and the hermeneutical debate continues. All that we have said so far has this major significance to the debate; it is that when Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholars go to the Bible to make a case for or against women's ordination, they take along with them an agenda. That agenda includes first and foremost the issue of Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal position. This is a common component on both sides. Both sides go there with a strong affirmation of biblical authority, yet each come away with a different conclusion on women's ordination. It can only mean there is significantly more to the agenda than an affirmation of the denomination's doctrinal stance. All this is to say that the major contenders in the conflict are marching against each other with the Bible in hand, and with different intents as to how they will use it to win in the struggle. Already we have seen the formidable strategy of the opponents of women's ordination, that of working with the doctrinal/organizational structure. As a result of their strategy proponents must place aside any method of biblical interpretation that may be offensive to the Church. In this vein the ensuing two chapters will explore



the deep politics of hermeneutics that accompany the biblical arguments for and against women's ordination.

## CHAPTER II

### **Women's Ordination and the Conflict over Methodology**

The question of interpretive methodology is important to the debate over women's ordination because of its significance to the denomination's identity as the true church. This identity is based on the assumption of biblical inerrancy. Yet, this established identity as the true church seems to take primary place in the hermeneutical deliberations. As a result, interpretive methodology becomes secondary to outcomes that the users of the methodology deem advantageous to Seventh-day Adventist theology. This is to say that the real object of defense in the hermeneutical conflict is less an appropriate methodology than it is the veracity of the fundamental doctrines of the denomination. Because of its association with higher criticism, opposition to women's ordination is symbolic of a defense of the denominations fundamental doctrines. As such, it functions as a symbol of denominational loyalty.

Chaves' argument is that official resistance to women's ordination is part of a broader resistance to liberal modernity, and inerrancy (as well as sacramentalism) symbolizes this resistance. In Seventh-day Adventism (particularly the theological academe) the resistance to women's ordination functions primarily as a symbol of resistance to higher criticism. Because higher criticism became the method used by major feminists to defend gender equality, the issue of women's ordination became associated with a methodology that refutes biblical authority. Higher criticism became a hallmark of liberal religion. As a result, the general culture of resistance to liberal modernity becomes a powerful means by which the opponents of women's ordination in

the denomination's theological academe carry forward their biblical methodological agenda. In the conflict over methodology, therefore, higher criticism is the major foe for which the issue of women's ordination becomes an accessible scapegoat.

Inerrancy is a given in mainstream Seventh-day Adventism, and not a symbol. It identifies the conservative stance of the denomination in its approach to scripture. Yet, the powerful fundamentalist clique in the denomination adheres to a mode of inerrancy that *is* symbolic of a resistance to any issue may be associated with a methodology that may undermine the denomination's doctrinal identity. We have also argued at the onset that there is a third mode of inerrancy at work in the denomination. I refer to this as a non-conservative strand of inerrancy that utilizes tools of higher criticism while affirming the Biblical authority and consistency based on the broad principles of scripture. Alden Thompson's book, *Inspiration: Hard Question and Honest Answers* represents this approach. This approach, the fundamentalist clique in the theological academe deem offensively associated with higher criticism.<sup>1</sup> Opponents of women's ordination seem to consider themselves comfortably situated within the confines of the denomination's traditional theology as they indict those who defend women's ordination with biblical (and denominational) unfaithfulness.

The resistance to higher criticism by major opponents of women's ordination did not necessarily begin with the feminist critique. Rather, it coincided with a period of

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<sup>1</sup> Koranteng-Pipim refers to it as "moderate liberalism," and argues that such theological moderates "give the appearance of being conservatives" while holding to a "liberal agenda." See Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word*, 60. Others such as Raymond Holmes regard any association with women's ordination as association with the feminist agenda, and thus with higher criticism. The basis of all his arguments regarding methodology is that to adhere to biblical authority is to adhere to Paul's council to Timothy concerning the role of women in ministry. To say that such a council was based on a male dominated culture is to reject the authority of scripture. This a methodological loophole through which the hermeneutical politics of opponents to women's ordination seem to fall. See Holmes, 31-71.

rigorous challenges to traditional Adventist beliefs and practices, chief of which are the foundational Sanctuary Doctrine and the inspiration and authority of Ellen G. White. The cultural and intellectual climate of the sixties served as a precursor to those challenges. The Association of Adventist Forums<sup>2</sup> appears to be the representative body in Adventism that engaged the denomination in closer scrutiny of its beliefs and practices.

In a statement regarding its formation, the Association of Adventist Forums states:

During the uproar of the 1960s the younger generation questioned everything. It focused its attention on such major issues as the Vietnam War, civil rights, traditional morality, and ecology. Patriotism, rules, and values were no longer taken for granted. Seventh-day Adventist students were no exception. As more and more church members began to attend non-Adventist universities and colleges they applied critical thinking learned in their studies to other topics - including their church's beliefs and practices - that meant much to them.<sup>3</sup>

Thus when the issue of women's ordination came to the fore, the denomination had already entered into a period of intellectual foment that created an atmosphere of theological insecurity within the denomination.

This chapter first looks at the challenges to foundational doctrines within Adventism that initiated the present hermeneutical conflict. This serves to elaborate the major motivation behind the debate over interpretive methodology, and to show how the push to ordain women in the 1970s became a casualty of the historical critical challenge.

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<sup>2</sup> The Association of Adventist Forums is an umbrella organization of diverse discussion groups throughout the world – a result of the gathering of Seventh-day Adventist graduate students to discuss current issues affecting the church, and to closely examine the churches traditional beliefs and practices. While many Adventist believe this organization to be the “liberal” wing of the church, it has sought to avoid this label. In 1968 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists officially endorsed the association in *Adventist Review*. The Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums is *Spectrum*. This journal provides the richest source of published information concerning the ethical, doctrinal, theological and ecclesiological issues that have affected the Seventh-day Adventist church since the 1960s, and is an excellent reference for issues that have affected the church throughout its history.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.spectrummagazine.org/aaf/index/html>

It demonstrates that the arguments over methodology results mostly from an anxiety over the survival of Seventh-day Adventism, and that women's ordination became the scapegoat in the process. What Ellen White had to say regarding biblical inspiration and authority is important in this chapter because it demonstrates the way the denomination defends itself against fundamentalism on one hand, and liberalism on the other, as regards the Bible.

### **Methodology or Doctrine? The Real Challenge**

The Biblical Research Institute headed by Gordon Hyde had as a major concern in the early 1970s besides that of women's ordination, the challenge of higher criticism. While at first they seem to have been treated as separate concerns, they eventually commingled, leading to the major opposition to women's ordination. Yet the official response of the denomination to the initial challenges cannot be reduced to consistency in the use of the method it deems appropriate. We are about to see that in at least one instance the denomination embraced (wittingly or unwittingly) a tool of higher criticism, because it seemed to have been the only means available to protect its doctrinal identity. We will also observe that some proponents of women's ordination, who admittedly use the tools of higher criticism, also use it in a way that affirms the foundational beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism.

The Church's initial response to the concerns regarding higher criticism came in the form of a symposium on biblical hermeneutics conducted by the Biblical Research institute in 1974. A significant result of the symposium was a published document prepared by the Biblical Research Institute and edited by Hyde titled, *A Symposium on*

*Biblical Hermeneutics*.<sup>4</sup> In the preface of this document, Hyde notes that while Seventh-day Adventist have been historically a “people of the Book” and have “accepted its authority in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, holding to the principle of *sola scriptura* and allowing the scripture to be its own interpreter, “recent generation of the Church in their quest for advanced education have had increasing exposure to the presuppositions and methodologies that have challenged the protestant principle.”<sup>5</sup> Again we must underscore that it is not so much the Protestant principle that became the object of defense, but the doctrinal identity of the denomination that developed from that basic principle. In Chapter I we saw that the denomination survives by this identity. Thus the challenges we are about to observe must be seen in this very crucial light if we are to grasp the deep politics that accompany the debate over interpretive methodology.

The publication of the book, *The White Lie*, in 1982 by Walter Rea which questioned the divine inspiration of Ellen White because of her alleged extensive copying from other sources,<sup>6</sup> and the challenge to the foundational doctrine of the Sanctuary and

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Washington D.C: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>6</sup> (Turlock, CA: M&R Publications, 1982). Rea’s work was only the climax to a long debate over the authority and inspiration of Ellen white that culminated in 1919 with a Bible conference in Takoma Park, Maryland. Land observes regarding the conference that vital issues regarding the literary sources of her writings were shelved. (See Gary Land, “Coping With Change 1961-1980,” in Land, 219) The conference was an effort to establish the rightful authority of the testimonies of Ellen White as divinely inspired, but not taking the place of scripture. In a 1970 Issue, *Spectrum* (2:1 [Autumn, 1970]) resumed the conversation that began in 1919, but in a different direction. Articles written by Roy Branson and Harold Weiss, Frederick E. J. Harder, William S. Peterson, and Richard B. Lewis forced the church to look at the question of Ellen White’s use of literary sources – though she testified to having received the testimonies in vision, and suggest a revision of its concept of revelation. Walter Rea who from his early teens was a devotee of Ellen White and became who became a prominent Adventist pastor and theologian, discovered through his own devoted obsession with her testimonies that the book *Sketches of the Life of Paul* by E. G. W. published in 1883 was never reprinted because it was almost identical to the book *Elisha the Prophet* by Alfred Edersheim. He also discovered that *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Desire of Ages*, also two very widely read books by Ellen White were copied from Edersheims works on Old Testament History and

the Investigative Judgment by Desmond Ford<sup>7</sup> a leading Australian Adventist theologian brought to a head fomenting concerns among Seventh-day Adventist theologians. These theologians, having been exposed to critical tools of exegesis, had been discussing these issues in various forums, chiefly the Association of Adventist Forums. The official response of the denomination to the allegation regarding Ellen White is significant. It suggests that the fundamentalist version of authority regarding the sacred text is not necessary to maintaining an inerrantist stance. It also suggests that the use of source criticism, a tool of higher criticism does not necessarily indicate a shift from the inerrantist stance, and that the denomination is willing to use it if it helps to defend its

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New Testament History respectively. Rae was further shocked to discover that the authorities of the White Estate at the General Conference knew of this matter but “stonewall the matter and use as much pressure and double talk as possible” to divert attention from it. (For more information on the conflict regarding Rae’s discovery see [www.ellenwhite.org/rea/bio.htm](http://www.ellenwhite.org/rea/bio.htm)). The proceeding of the 1919 Bible conference reveals that Ellen White’s plagiarism was long known by leaders of the church, but was kept hidden from the general Adventist population. The following for example is an excerpt from the interrogation of A.G.Daniells then General Conference president who was suspected as not having sufficient regard for the authority of the testimonies of the prophet White: **A. G. Daniells:** *Yes; and now take that "Life of Paul,"— I suppose you all know about it and knew what claims were put up against her, charges made of plagiarism, even by the authors of the book, Conybeare and Howson, and were liable to make the denomination trouble because there was so much of their book put into "The Life of Paul" without any credit or quotation marks. Some people of strict logic might fly the [52] track on that ground, but I am not built that way. I found it out, and I read it with Brother Palmer when he found it, and we got Conybeare and Howson, and we got Wylie's "History of the Reformation," and we read word for word, page after page, and no quotations no credit, and really I did not know the difference until I began to compare them. I supposed it was Sister White's own work. The poor sister said, "Why, I didn't know about quotations and credits. My secretary should have looked after that, and the publishing house should have looked after it."* (For a transcript of the proceedings, see *Spectrum* 10:1 [May 1979]: 23-57).

<sup>7</sup> A major problem that Ford has with the doctrine is that there is no biblical basis for the “year-day principle” on which the doctrine recones 2,300 day in Daniel 8:14 to be 2,300 years. Fords arguments reveal that the texts of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 that Adventists use to prove the year-day principle are taken out of context. He argues that the 2,300 evenings and mornings met their original fulfillment when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple in Jerusalem. He however proposes the “apotelesmatic” principle as a solution to the damage this may cause to the doctrine. This principle assumes a twofold application of prophesy, one primary and contextual, and one secondary. He therefore expresses his belief in the 1844 event that gave rise to Adventism as part of the Divine providence. 2) Based on a contextual interpretation of Hebrews 9, the high priest’s ministry in the holy of holies symbolizes the whole period from the cross to the return of Christ, not a period that began in 1844. Thus he argues that the Adventist doctrine of an “investigative judgment” that began in 1844 is not biblical. (See Desmond Ford, Daniel 8:14 and the Day of Atonement,” *Spectrum* 11:2 (Nov. 1980): 30-36

identity. Through its official organ the *Adventist Review*, the Church presented a concept of inspiration that does not preclude an inspired author using other literary sources. For example, in 1980 Harold J. Calkins argues that Ellen White's use of sources is similar to the Gospel writer's use of sources. He concludes: "Ellen White was guided by God in selecting and arranging some of the thoughts and words of others that fit in with the information provided her."<sup>8</sup> This remains the essential and official response of the denomination to the long-standing allegations of plagiarism by Ellen White. The articles also call attention to the life of Ellen White as proof that she was used by God, comparing it with those of other Bible prophets, and noting that she, like them, was also human, but sought to do the will of God.<sup>9</sup> Articles such as that of Donald McAdams in the *Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums* indicated that the forum in general recognizes Ellen White as the inspired prophet of Adventism. According to Adams, "most of those who investigated the writings of Ellen White in the 1970s were thoroughly committed Adventists who showed that using words of others did not detract from Ellen White's claim to inspiration. ... Her inspiration cannot be proved or disproved. The decision to believe is one of faith informed by facts."<sup>10</sup>

The response to Ford's challenge was major. Ford's was a challenge to the very foundations of Adventism – a challenge to that which is, as Land reports it "absolutely essential to its *raison d'être*."<sup>11</sup> As we have seen in Chapter I, this doctrine is what gives

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<sup>8</sup> Harold L. Calkins, "How Inspiration Works," *Adventist Review*, 14 February 1980, 8.

<sup>9</sup> See for example "God Speaks with a Human Accent," *Adventist Review*, 14 July 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Donald R. McAdams, "The Scope of Ellen White's Authority," *Spectrum* 16:3 (August 1985): 1.

<sup>11</sup> Land, 224.



Adventism its identity as the true church. Yet what Ford regarded as significant hermeneutical flaws in the doctrine does not seem to arise from a methodology that opposes the traditional Protestant principle. He admits to using what he terms the only valid method of interpretation, the historical grammatical methodology.<sup>12</sup> What Ford did was to simply place the proof texts used in the 2,300 days prophecy in their proper literary and historical contexts. This as we shall see, is a strict application of the historical grammatical method.

Ford's challenge resulted in a landmark meeting between 115 theologians and administrators from around the world at Glacier View Ranch in Denver, Colorado, historically referred to as the Glacier View Sanctuary Review Committee. Here Ford was allowed to present his arguments, and different theologians and administrators were allowed to respond to it. Raymond Cottrell reports concerning the meeting that the majority of scholars at Glacier View agreed with Ford's identification of the problems of exegesis and interpretation as far as the Sanctuary doctrine, though they did not all agree with his solutions.<sup>13</sup> Cottrell further reports that though the consensus report reflected at particular points the conviction of each delegate, every delegate did not necessarily find it an accurate expression of the truth.<sup>14</sup> The crucial difference he notes is a difference in methods of interpreting scripture - a difference that tends to draw a line of demarcation between administrators and theologians in general. The meeting ended with the dismissal

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<sup>12</sup> Ford, 31.

<sup>13</sup> See Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Sanctuary Review Committee and its Consensus," *Spectrum* 11:2 (November 1980): 27.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

of Ford from the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church<sup>15</sup> and a consultation to discuss the relationship between theologians and administrators.<sup>16</sup> This consultation was the first of two consultations (Theological Consultation I and Theological Consultation II) between the denomination's theologians and administrators. The second meeting convened in Washington D.C. from September 30, to October 3, 1981. These consultations recognized the suspicion<sup>17</sup> in which Seventh-day Adventist scholars were held, and represent an attempt to, according to Alden Thompson, "rebuild bridges between the church's scholars and administrators."<sup>18</sup> The tension remains at present, and reflects an atmosphere of theological insecurity that seems to be mitigated only by a subtle politics of interpretation that demands an affirmation of the special call of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1844.

Seventh-day Adventist scholars have demonstrated that a use of the tools of tools of higher criticism does not necessitate a disavowal of the separatist stance of the denomination. This was true in the late 1970s when evolutionary theory and new findings in archeology posed a serious challenge to the theory of a 6,000 year old earth

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>16</sup> For a report on this consultation see Warren C. Trenchard, "In the Shadow of the Sanctuary: The 1980 Theological Consultation," *Spectrum* 11:2 (Nov. 1980): 27-30.

<sup>17</sup> An article in the *Adventist Review*, by Richard Leshner the then Director of the Biblical Research Institute reflected the suspicion that resulted from the Glacier View Issue. In the article he said: "*These landmark doctrines are to be received and held fast, not in formal fashion but in the light of divine guidance given at the beginning of the movement and made our own. Thus we become part and parcel with the movement, and the beliefs that made the original Seventh-day Adventists make us Seventh-day Adventist too.*" (Richard Leshner, *Adventist Review*, 13 March 1980, 7.)

<sup>18</sup> See Alden Thompson, "Theological Consultation II," *Spectrum* 12:2 (December, 1980): 40.

based on the genealogies in Genesis.<sup>19</sup> This also posed serious challenges to the doctrine of the Seventh-day Sabbath. In view of what appeared to be plausible objections to a literal account of Creation in Genesis, some of the denomination scholars sought a solution to the Creation account dilemma. The January 1979 issue of *Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums*, *Spectrum* ran special section under the general title “Creation.” These articles examined the Genesis account of creation from the standpoint of traditional Adventist views, and from a biblical theological standpoint, while seeking for a solution that does not lessen the authority of scripture, diminish faith in God as Creator, or challenge the seventh-day Sabbath. For example, Harold Weiss’s article argues that the Genesis account of creation is a theological statement, rather than a scientific one.<sup>20</sup> Thus he argues, “nature as such is an abstraction about which the Old Testament knows nothing at all.”<sup>21</sup> Regarding the Sabbath, he explains that it is the sign of God’s creative power, and of the covenant with creation.<sup>22</sup> In a 1982 issue of *Spectrum* Larry G. Herr argues that the Sabbath describes nothing of the universe. Rather, he says, “it is a symbol of, and provides the daily meaning for, the miraculous creative activity of God.”<sup>23</sup>

The *Adventist Review*, the official organ of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the other hand has guided the discussion around cautionary statements such as that by

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<sup>19</sup> For an account of this and the Adventist response and involvement see Lawrence Garaty, “The Geoscience Field Study Conference of 1978,” *Spectrum* 9:4 (January 1979): 31-41.

<sup>20</sup> Harold Weiss, “Genesis, Chapter One: A Theological Statement,” *Spectrum* 9:4 (January 1979): 54-61.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. For a similar viewpoint see also Larry G. Herr, Genesis One in Historical-Critical perspective,” *Spectrum* 13:2 (1982): 50-61.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

George Reid director of the Biblical Research Institute. Reid asserts, "... discussions of this kind is not just about origins, but runs through our whole theology: sin, God and his intentions, & salvation. Such matters relate to wide parts of scripture."<sup>24</sup> An article in that same issue of the *Adventist Review* by Michael G. Hasel director of the Institute of Archeology and associate professor of Religion and Near Eastern Studies at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee outlines the "wide parts" of scripture to which Reid refers.<sup>25</sup> These parts in Hasel's article appear as a summary of the 27 fundamental doctrines of Adventism. Among these parts, Hasel notes primarily that the belief in a progressive creation<sup>26</sup> or theistic evolution<sup>27</sup> challenges the trustworthiness of scripture and the belief in a literal seven days creation which in turn challenges the belief in God's institution of a Seventh-day Sabbath.

The discussion on creation and science in Adventism has evolved to the present into a discussion on "faith and science,"<sup>28</sup> and presents a rigorous examination of

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Gallagher quoting George at the General Conference Annual council, September 25-27 2001, in *Adventist Review*, 25 October 2001, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Michael G. Hasel, "In the Beginning," *Adventist Review*, 25 October 2001, 24-27.

<sup>26</sup> Progressive creationists change the meaning of "day" in the creation account from a single rotation of the earth to a long indefinite period of time, maybe millions of years each.

<sup>27</sup> This theory purports that God initiated the "big bang" and occasionally stepped in to supercede natural forces.

<sup>28</sup> The most recent discussion of the issue among Seventh-day Adventist theologians, scientists and administrators took place at the Glacier View Ranch in Denver, Colorado August 13-20, 2003. Larry Evans reports that the stated objectives of the conference were: (1) to increase clarity regarding the church's understanding and witness about the biblical account of origins; (2) to identify a strategic plan for the church to communicate science and faith issues; (3) to foster a positive atmosphere for open communications among theologians, scholars, and church administrators; and (4) to heighten the awareness of the importance of the tensions between science and religion issues and to promote an attitude of caring and humanity during this time of process. (See Larry R. Evans, "Theologians, Scientists Discuss Vital Issues," *Adventist Review*, 2 October 2003, 40.) Reports on the conference indicate that even though there are wide ranging views on the inspiration of the Bible (from the view of Joanne Davidson that "all the accounts are fully accurate, whether the topic be nature, history, or theology," to the view by Ed Christian

Adventist hermeneutics, and biblical inspiration and authority. Articles in the *Adventist Review*, *The Journal of the Adventist Theological Society (JATS)*, and the independent “side kick” of the JATS, *Adventist Affirm* (recognized to represent the extreme conservative vigilante wing of the Church), seek to affirm the literal seven days of creation without which there is no basis for the doctrine of the Sabbath.

The continuing tension in the 80s regarding hermeneutics culminated at a conference among the denomination’s leaders in Rio de Janeiro in 1986. The report of the meeting took the form of “Methods of Bible Study”<sup>29</sup> which has become the official statement of Adventism regarding hermeneutics. The outstanding feature of this statement is that it rejects any kind of association with the historical-critical methodology. This had the effect of increasing the polarity within Adventism regarding hermeneutics, the details of which will be discussed later in this chapter. It is however sufficient to say at this point that in spite of a published official statement regarding Adventist hermeneutic, there is no consensus among Adventist Administrators and scholars on any one method of interpretation. The present conversation on hermeneutics reflect a struggle between the impulse to maintain “historical Adventist hermeneutic”<sup>30</sup> which the 1974 symposium identifies with the Protestant Reformation and the need for modifications of it based on the selective application of the tools of historical-critical

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that given its literary form “we should not expect Genesis 1 to present a factual account of the events of creation” [See Richard Rice, “3003 Faith and Science Conference,” [www.spectrummagazine.org/conversationcafe/index.html](http://www.spectrummagazine.org/conversationcafe/index.html).], none of those present disregard the authority and import of scripture. The problem is rather one of approach and methodology.

<sup>29</sup> See the appendix of this chapter for a transcript of the report.

<sup>30</sup> George W. Reid, “Another Look at Adventist Methods of Bible Interpretation,” *Adventist Affirm*, Spring 1996, 51-55.

methodology. Yet all affirm the authority, inspiration and consistency of scripture from their various standpoints.

What is at stake in the entire issue? Is it the authority of scripture, or the authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the maintenance of its traditional beliefs? Cottrell's Glacier report on the Glacier View Sanctuary Review Committee that these two sides of the issue stand in tension as the church faces the question of hermeneutics. In his report he notes:

The consensus statement sets forth several new and seemingly plausible reasons for retaining our traditional interpretation, but at no point does it face up to even one of the exegetical and hermeneutical problems posed by Ford or make an attempt to deal with it on the basis of 'the Bible and the Bible only as our rule of faith and doctrine.' In the thinking of the majority at Glacier View, Adventist Tradition was the norm for interpreting the Bible, rather than the Bible for Tradition.<sup>31</sup>

The ensuing portion of this chapter discusses the ins and outs of Adventist biblical hermeneutics based on a representative sample of those involved in the conversation and then shows how the issue of the ordination of women factors into the conversation. By this latter, it begins to pinpoint the underlying issues in the debate on women's ordination.

### **Ellen White and Hermeneutical Politics**

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<sup>31</sup> Cottrell, 18. For more insight into the discussion of Church Authority versus biblical authority see: Roy Naden, "The Authority Paradox," *Ministry*, April 2000, 16-20; Douglas Clark, "Are Adventists Still People of the Book?" *Spectrum* 25:1 (September 1995): 25-29; Raoul Dederen, "The Church: Authority and Unity," Supplement to *Ministry*, May 1995; and C. E. Bradford, "The Authority of the Church," *Adventist Review*, 19 February 1981, 4-6.

First and foremost, it is important to note that while the Seventh-day Adventist Church holds as its sole rule of faith and practice,<sup>32</sup> the Bible, its hermeneutic is fundamentally colored by the writings and counsels of its founding prophet Ellen G. White.<sup>33</sup> Any claim to the Adventist denominational identity, and any clamor for the ears of the Adventist populace at large, must carry with it recognition of the authority of the voice of the prophet.<sup>34</sup> Indeed any document regarding hermeneutics published by the Church includes a section on Ellen White.

It was a vision received by Ellen White which sealed the doctrine of the Sabbath. The Church, by the direction of James White, identifies her testimonies with Revelation 19:10 (“the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy”), thus referring to her writings as “The Spirit of Prophecy Writings,” or “The Testimonies.” It was the authority of Ellen White, established through her visions that kept the early Adventist believers together. Harold Weiss notes that for the “disappointed and confused flock, her visions meant that in spite of the believer’s confusion, God was with them.”<sup>35</sup> He further notes that it was

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<sup>32</sup> Ellen White wrote in *The Great Controversy*, 595, and *Selected Messages*, book 1, 416: “*The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union....Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, the Bible our rule of faith and discipline.*”

<sup>33</sup> Raol Dederen explains: “As interpreter of the Bible, Ellen White’s most characteristic role was that of an evangelist - not an exegete, nor a theologian as such, but a preacher and an evangelist....The prophetic and hortatory mode was more characteristic of her than the exegetical....The people to whom she was preaching - or writing were more the object of her attention than the specific people to whom the individual Bible writers addressed themselves. (Dederen, “Ellen White’s Doctrine of Scripture,” in “Are There Prophets in the Modern Church?” *Ministry*, July 1977, Supplement, 24H.

<sup>34</sup> Ellen White saw her purpose as bringing people back to the Bible which she considers to be often neglected. According to her, “the written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart, the truths of inspiration already revealed in the Bible. See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1888, 1907, 1911), 665. While her writings were never held in the same light as scripture, her counsels have been carefully heeded by the church at large. Her many counsels, themselves have had to be interpreted and contextualized even as the Bible itself.

<sup>35</sup> Harold Weiss, “Formative Authority, Yes; Canonization, No,” *Spectrum* 16:3 (August 1985), 8.

Ellen Whites visionary experiences that continued to inform the Church in the development of its doctrine.<sup>36</sup> For this reason, he argues that while her authority in Adventism is formative she cannot be canonized.<sup>37</sup>

While Weiss' statement may be representative of the denomination, it has not captured the subtle politics of social control surrounding the writings of Ellen White. While Chapter IV highlights this, it is important to note here the political importance of agreement with Ellen White in crucial matters such as doctrinal positions. Here methodology seems to take a secondary position to Church authority. The controversy with Desmond Ford regarding the doctrine of the Sanctuary and the Investigative Judgment threatened to shatter this authority<sup>38</sup> of Ellen White because Ford demonstrated that she was wrong regarding the sanctuary.<sup>39</sup> This indicates that the question of biblical interpretation and the authority of Ellen White intermingle.<sup>40</sup> To question her authority regarding meaning in scripture is also to question biblical authority. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim associates any questionable approach to biblical inspiration and authority to the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> During its formative stages as the Church struggled over biblical doctrines, Ellen White would receive visions that confirmed a particular position.

<sup>39</sup> See Warren C. Trenchard, "In the Shadow of the Sanctuary: The 1980 Theological Consultation," *Spectrum* 11:2 (Nov., 1980):28.

<sup>40</sup> Robert H. Pierson then retired General Conference president expresses this vividly in a letter he sent to the Glacier view Sanctuary Review Committee. The letter read: "*As I read Ford's manuscript. I felt a sense of abandonment. Is our message to be tested by the norms of unbelieving theologians and scientists? Are we to be asked to accept an emasculated view of Ellen G. White? Is it intellectually honest to affirm faith in Ellen White and then attack what she wrote?*" See report in Cottrell, 12.



inspiration and authority of Ellen White.<sup>41</sup> However, the following statement by Weiss presents a cautionary perspective of this understanding among Adventist scholars. He writes: “Genuine Adventism is committed to the truth. It does not claim that we already have the truth as the basis of confirmatory authority peculiar to our own. The Spirit of prophecy does not give a handle on truth; it enables us to search for ‘present truth’.”<sup>42</sup> The doctrinal position of the denomination clearly defines Ellen White’s authority as one that does not supercede, supplant, or even equal the Scriptural canon.<sup>43</sup> Thus the Rio document “Methods of Bible Study” includes Ellen White’s exposition of scripture as an important guide in the understanding of scripture in a cautionary fashion. It states: “Seventh-day Adventists believe that God inspired Ellen G. White. Therefore, her expositions on any given Bible passage offer an inspired guide to the meaning of texts without exhausting their meaning or preempting the task of exegesis.”<sup>44</sup> In light of what we have noted regarding Ford’s challenge, this statement appears only to be politically correct, but does not necessarily pass the test of consistency when the foundational doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism are at stake.

It is based on the prophetic foundation of Ellen White that all sections of the continuum approach Bible, coming away with opposing and often subtly inimical views.

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<sup>41</sup> Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, “An Analysis and Evaluation of Alden Thompson’s Casebook/Codebook approach to the Bible,” in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers, eds., Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), 62.

<sup>42</sup> Weiss, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Gary B. Patterson, “Three Approaches to Sacred Texts,” *Adventist Review*, 26 September 1991, 17.

<sup>44</sup> “Methods of Bible Study,” 3.

Ellen White, Adventist Hermeneutics, and the Issue of Women's Ordination: How Much Say did the Prophet have?

It is important to note that while the present official position of the Church is that there is no clear instruction in scripture to forbid or advance the ordination of women to the ministry, the extensive research done in the writings of Ellen White regarding the matter<sup>45</sup> suggests that if Ellen White had instructed that women be ordained, the Church would have no problem.<sup>46</sup> However this study works with the assumption that Ellen White and the other founders, no less than the Church today seems to have had the same hermeneutical dilemma. As we shall see, Ellen White had no more power to advise ordination than the prevailing hermeneutical climate in her time would allow. At the 1888 General Conference for example, she engaged and was engaged in theological controversy, and demonstrated, and encouraged an earnest desire to know the truth. In essence she was not given automatic infallible revelation regarding the meaning of scripture, but is part of a community that was engaged in the search for meaning from the scripture.<sup>47</sup>

What seems evident is that nineteenth century Adventism had debated the issue of ordination of women leading up to the 1881 resolution to ordain women. That Ellen White was both absent and silent (at least publicly), may suggest something beyond

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<sup>45</sup> See for example, Roger W. Coon, "Ellen G. White's View of the Role of Women in the Church," (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference of S.D.A.)

<sup>46</sup> At the 1980 theological consultation between administrators and theologians that convened immediately after the Sanctuary Review Committee, Neil Wilson then General Conference president established that "if scripture was not explicit and Ellen White did not contradict scripture, the church would support Ellen White. However, if scripture was explicit and Ellen White did not agree in the view of the church, the Church must stand by scripture." See the report in Trenchard, 42.

<sup>47</sup> See Ellen White, "To Bretheren Assembled at General Conference," MS 15, November 1888.

complicity. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter IV there were strong currents within the ranks of early Adventism that posed significant challenge to the influence of Ellen White in the Church. Thus it does not seem accurate to assume that she had unquestioned authority in the Church. However, because Ellen White's counsels remain foundational today, this chapter presents the writings of Ellen White as a pointer to the way the Seventh-day Adventist Church approaches the Bible.

### **The Conflict over Biblical Inspiration and Authority: Who is Right?**

The inerrantist stance of Seventh-day Adventism demands a belief in the inspiration and authority of scripture. All Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholars involved in the hermeneutical debate affirm this belief. This is prerequisite to engaging in any hermeneutical conversation. This is because the Seventh-day Adventist Church invests its identity as the true remnant church with continuity from ancient Israel, on the phenomenon of scripture, its inspiration and authority. However the mode of articulating this affirmation is not monolithic, and this is where the controversy over methodology begins. On the one hand are those who associate any use of the tools of higher criticism with the antisupernaturalist presupposition of higher criticism, and on the other are those who believe that an adequate understanding of the text must involve the use of critical tools. We are about to see that this does not necessitate a denial of the inspiration and authority of scripture.

Raoul Dederen, professor emeritus and former dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Andrews University, notes that "the interpreter's understanding of the whole message of scripture and his view of the nature and authority

of the Bible largely determine his hermeneutical methods.”<sup>48</sup> Ekkehardt Mueller an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute argues that “our view of the nature of scripture will influence our selection of a hermeneutical method as well as the exegetical procedures we employ as we come to the Bible.”<sup>49</sup> Thus Dederen admits that with such a presupposition objectivity is absent. Robert M. Johnston, then Chair of the New Testament Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary puts it thus: “The choice is not between God’s word and human judgment, but between one human understanding of God’s word and another human understanding of God’s word.”<sup>50</sup> These admissions echo an idea advanced by H. Richard Niebuhr<sup>51</sup> regarding the total abstraction (and in Niebuhr’s view, non-existence) of the person without presuppositions. Thus we approach the question of hermeneutics by investigating presupposition.

#### Ellen White on Biblical Inspiration and Authority: Solving the Divine-Human Puzzle

It goes without saying that Seventh-day Adventists do not regard the inspiration of scripture in the way Muslims regard the inspiration of the Koran. It was not dictated to its authors by the divine. The standard Adventist view is that the Bible is not without inaccuracies, but this does not mean that it is not a consistent witness to the divine message in it. This is a position held largely through the guidance of the prophet Ellen

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<sup>48</sup> Dederen, *Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics*, ed., Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974), 3.

<sup>49</sup> See also, Ekkehart Mueller, *Ministry*, April 2000, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Robert M. Johnston, “The Case for a Balanced Hermeneutic,” *Ministry*, March 1999, 11.

<sup>51</sup> See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1963). While Dederen may not have had in mind Niebuhr’s philosophy, it may be interesting to know how he accounts for the many presuppositions there are, and whether he, like Niebuhr, perceives any coherence in the “One” beyond the many.

White. Her clarity on the human dimension of inspiration and how it works may be due to the fact that she herself received revelations, was a prophet and therefore was in an ideal position to understand how inspiration actually works. This would give her both a high view of inspiration and a clear sense of the human dimension. As a human being, she has also articulated the concept in the interest of her denominations' survival, and we may understand the ambivalence of her views in this perspective.

While some of the early pioneers may have attempted to put forward the idea of verbal inspiration,<sup>52</sup> Ellen White wrote that while the Bible points to God as author, it was written by human hands.<sup>53</sup> By the latter she means that what the authors of the Bible write is not God's mode of thought or expression, but that of humanity. Thus she concludes:

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or expressions, but on the man himself.... The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of man are the words of God.<sup>54</sup>

This idea by Ellen White concerning biblical inspiration is fundamental. In spite of what seems to be a clear-cut statement, Adventist scholars have come up with differing ideas of inspiration based on it. By it, Ellen White does not mean to say that men become God, rather, that the words of men become the words of God by virtue of the condescension of

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<sup>52</sup> See Knight, "The Case of the Overlooked Postscript: A Footnote on Inspiration," *Ministry*, August 1977, 9-11.

<sup>53</sup> Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958-1980), 21.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

God to humanity<sup>55</sup> and not by the transcendence of man to the Divine. This has great implications for the fundamentalist concept of inerrancy. Kenneth Wood, editor of the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, in addressing the question of scriptural inerrancy which had become a national issue in 1976, notes, based on the writings of Ellen White, that the Bible comprising elements of the human and the divine, bears marks of imperfection.<sup>56</sup> He argues that this imperfection, in the context of the whole is not a reason to throw out the Bible as authoritative. Thus he affirms the standard Adventist position that the Bible is an infallible authority in matters of faith and practice but is not inerrant.<sup>57</sup>

The inerrantist views of Ellen White cannot be labeled as fundamentalist. . . . While there is no record of the use of the word, regarding the Bible in her writings, the context of her explanations of biblical inspiration and authority explains this. It appears that Ellen White's position on whether the scripture is inerrant has to be looked at in a holistic sense. She seems to at once refer to ideas, and then to the thoughts of God in human words. Thus when she says that "the Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words," she seems to be saying that the Bible, though the words of God "is, as a human product, incapable of grasping the infinite. She writes:

Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite

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<sup>55</sup> Idem, *Great Controversy*, 22. Ellen White explains that God's condescension meets fallen beings where they are.

<sup>56</sup> Kenneth Wood, "Battle over Inerrancy," *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, 153 (17 June 1976): 2

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. Here he means that it is not without inaccuracies.

vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory.--Letter 121, 1901.<sup>58</sup>

In these statements, the prophet seems to be answering questions regarding the seeming contradictions, and the accuracy of the written record of the Bible given its process of transmission. Yet she pushes the argument further by noting that the Bible is not given in grand superhuman language, since everything human is imperfect, rather the Bible was given for *practical purposes*.<sup>59</sup> It is in this context that one may understand her statement regarding its mystery. This mystery should be understood in the holistic plan of God in condescending to the human. This she refers to as “Bible religion,” as God’s working in situations that the human perceives as too lowly for God. Thus when she says that Bible religion is not made up of theological systems, creeds, theories and tradition, she is not referring to the Bible per se (for the Bible does contain those), but to the kind of religion that emerges from a literary phenomenon that appears to epitomize divine condescension. Thus “the worldly” would not “understand it through their natural abilities.”<sup>60</sup> This is to say that, until God is seen as part of the large picture then the real nature and intent of scripture may not be understood. Instead people will focus on its apparent imperfections<sup>61</sup> as evidence that God is not involved in its production, or will struggle to derive precise

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<sup>58</sup> Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. [italics mine]

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. This idea by Ellen White seems to echo Jesus’ teaching regarding the Mosaic Law on marriage and divorce for example. In Matthew 19:7, 8, Jesus notes that Moses allowed men to divorce their wives because of the hardness of their hearts.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 16

creeds and theological systems from it which is not its intent.<sup>62</sup> It is in this context that Ellen White says: “I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible.”<sup>63</sup>

Ellen White’s holistic view of scripture came as a pragmatic response to the challenges of historical criticism which were developing at the time. Indeed the Church’s first and still very young Battle Creek College came under the influence of such skepticism towards the Bible. George I. Butler, one of the Church’s then eminent leaders published a series in the *Review and Herald* of 1884 that subscribed to the idea of degrees of inspiration, judging some part of scripture as more inspired than others. Ellen White’s response “when men, in their finite judgment, find it necessary to go into an examination

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<sup>62</sup> She made these statements following the 1888 General Conference which was “one of the most explosive and significant meetings the denomination has ever had.” This was a time when the pillars of the Adventist faith, namely the importance of Law (particularly the seventh day Sabbath) was being reviewed. This was not a review to change the basic stance of the Church, but to place the law into the perspective of righteousness by faith in Jesus. Ellen White clearly stood on the side of those who wanted to reform the church’s legalistic stance, and focus on Jesus rather than on law as the means of salvation. For many, this was a serious breach of Adventist tradition, but Ellen White stood her ground, thus attempting to lead the church into a more balanced approach to doctrines. As a result of this controversy, she began to stress in her writings the love of Christ and his righteousness. (See George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1999), 94.

Gerald Wheeler points to a very interesting aspect of Ellen White concerning her attitude to church tradition. He observed through research that at the 1888 conference Ellen White wore jewelry in the form of a “heavy metallic chain which hung suspended near her waist.” This was a bold violation of Adventist beliefs regarding dress based on I Timothy 2:9: ...not with braided hair or gold or pearls....”(See Gerald Wheeler, “The Historic basis of Adventist Standards,” *Ministry* 62 (October 1989): 10. This is material to the discussion in showing how the prophet was no fanatic in her approach to Bible and tradition. Her concern was the proper use of money for a growing movement that needed all the resources available to spread the gospel, and not necessarily the wearing of jewelry *per se*. (See White, *Testimonies*, Vol 5, p. 156). This is significant too, because as we shall see, those who argue for biblical fidelity by not ordaining women to the ministry, cites the wearing of jewelry as one other way, besides ordaining women, in which the church stands the risk of falling away.

<sup>63</sup> White, *Selected Messages*, book 1,17.



of scriptures to define that which is inspired and that which is not, they have stepped before Jesus to show Him a better way than He has led us.”<sup>64</sup> She goes on to say:

I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *Review*, neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college. Where men venture to criticize the word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground, and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting some as inspired, and discrediting some as uninspired.<sup>65</sup>

Again this should be read in light of the large picture of Divine providence and condescension. In essence, she argues for a consistency in the concept of inspiration. This she presents in light of the fact that different persons from different backgrounds were involved in the production of the scripture, both in the original, and the reproduction.<sup>66</sup> The former present the words of God from their own experiences<sup>67</sup> the latter may have edited materials to suit their own theological biases.<sup>68</sup> In spite of all these White sees God working. In summary fashion Ellen White says regarding inspiration:

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>68</sup> White, *Early Writings*, 220, 221.

<sup>69</sup> White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, 21

This is a radical concept of the way God works in spite of the human. Within this broad view of inspiration the prophet seems to leave room for all kinds of human imperfections, including error in judgment, copying errors, cultural constraints and biases, and so forth. Yet she is able to balance this against the idea of God's providence. She maintains that "God has given us in the scriptures sufficient evidence of their divine character," thus "we are not to doubt his word because we cannot understand all the mysteries of His providence."<sup>70</sup> This common sense approach to the concept of inspiration is seminal to the continuing discussion on inspiration and hermeneutics in Adventist circles on all sides of the right/left continuum.

What one should note, however, is that such broad and radical view of inspiration by Ellen White, not only lends scope to human common sense and judgment, but is meant in its ecclesiological context, to protect the basic doctrinal positions on which the Seventh-day Adventist Church stands. In effect, Ellen White's was a practical common sense approach that maintains the authority on which the Seventh-day Adventist Church posits itself as a movement of prophecy, in spite of what she is willing admit to be the imperfect human element, not only in words, but in mode of thought. The historicity of biblical reports such as a seven day creation, and a 6,000 year-old earth basic to the doctrine of the seventh-day Sabbath, at that time came under challenge by Julius Wellhausen. It was in this context that she writes that the "lives recorded in the Bible are authentic histories of actual individuals. She then makes a statement most troubling to some Adventist, since it contradicts everything she has been saying so far: "The scribes of God wrote as they were *dictated* [italics mine] by the Holy Spirit, having no control of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

the work themselves.”<sup>71</sup> Was this an effort on the part of the prophet to stand up to the serious challenge that historical criticism<sup>72</sup> posed to the biblical account of origins?<sup>73</sup> What we know is that this part of Ellen White’s statements is not embraced by main stream Adventism. In spite of the latter statement (the exact motive or reason for its utterance by the prophet, we are not sure), we know that Ellen White accepted the humanness of the scriptures, but clearly asserted confidence in its full inspiration and authority. Yet it may be a profound example of the way communities engage the sacred text in the interest of their survival.

Much of the controversy regarding inspiration and biblical authority is an attempt to perform this balancing act concerning a view of the human and divine element, an act on which White herself is not judged based on her status as the Church’s prophet. What we may perceive for the most part are different applications of her approach that may be measured by their effect to maintain a common sense approach without going to the extreme left, or the extreme right.

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<sup>71</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4 (Mountain View, CA: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 9.

<sup>72</sup> We will look more closely at the challenge of historical criticism as the chapter proceeds.

<sup>73</sup> An answer to this may be found in Ronald D. Graybill’s “The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and other Woman Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century” (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1983), 113, ff. Graybill discusses the authority which charismatic women religious founders such as Ellen White and Mary Baker Eddy exercised as interpreters of the Bible for the purpose of not only solidifying and unifying their church, but of maintaining their own position of influence in the movement. It seems that Ellen White’s many statements that makes her positions regarding the nature of inspiration appear ambivalent is the result of a characteristic charismatic effort at curbing deviant beliefs that may threaten the foundations of Adventism.

Making the Case for Biblical Authority and Inspiration:

The Adventist approach to biblical authority and inspiration in general interpretively reflects that of the prophet White. This interpretive approach thus results in differing approach among Adventist biblical scholars. Such approaches serve the purpose of the interpreters as they go to the scripture to find authoritative meaning in the conflict over women's ordination. In the mainstream, it is essentially an attempt to master the art of maintaining a "high view of scriptural authority, while at the same time recognizing the limitation of scripture."<sup>74</sup> The Rio Document, *Methods of Bible Study* demonstrates this.<sup>75</sup> It is important to observe the basic arguments that have gone on regarding authority and inspiration of the Bible because it signals the starting point at which each side of the debate seeks to make a case that is both biblically and ecclesiastically authoritative.

The views fall into two basic categories: (1) The Fundamentalist inerrant view which holds that if the church is not living up to all the scripture's command regardless of culture it is not subscribing to "*sola Scriptura*," and (2) The view that asserts "*sola scriptura*" based both on the timeless principles in scripture, and on an understanding of revelation that recognizes the timeless being and activities of God and humanity. Samuel Koranteng Pipim the most strident proponent of the former view labels his views as the "Historic Adventist Approach," and the latter view as "moderate or progressive

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<sup>74</sup> George R. Reid, "Is the Bible Our Final Authority?" *Ministry*, November 1991, 8.

<sup>75</sup> In point m (8) under "Methods of Bible Study," the document states: "...God chose to reveal Himself to and through human individuals and to meet them where they were in terms of spiritual and intellectual endowments. ... Every experience and statement of scripture is a divinely inspired record, but not every statement or experience is necessarily normative for Christian behavior today."

liberalism.”<sup>76</sup> These two understandings of “*sola scriptura*,” co-exist in Adventism reflecting the differing approaches, and enough sayings of the Church’s prophet to substantiate each approach.<sup>77</sup> Robert Johnston, then chair of the New testament Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary argues in defense of what Koranteng calls “moderate liberalism” saying that “few if any Adventists have been attracted to the kind of radical liberalism that superciliously dismisses the scripture or subject it to destructive criticism.”<sup>78</sup> However Johnston refers to the view represented by Koranteng-Pipim as “a sort of neo-fundamentalism”<sup>79</sup> which, he states was vigorously promoted<sup>80</sup> during the last three decades by certain teachers at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and some members of the Biblical Research Institute.<sup>81</sup> The literature reveals that these seminary teachers include Gerhard Damsteegt,<sup>82</sup> associate professor of church history and the presenter of the argument against the ordination of

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<sup>76</sup> See Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, “Crisis over the Word,” *Adventists Affirm*, Spring 1996.

<sup>77</sup> Angel Manuel Rodriguez an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute states that the former group represented by Koranteng-Pipim is influential mainly among lay people and a limited number of church Administrators. The latter group he notes is influential in academic circles and tends to impact denominational workers, particularly pastors. See Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “Wrestling With Theological Differences,” *Ministry*, April 1999, 5. [5-9]

<sup>78</sup> Robert M. Johnston, “The Case for a Balanced Hermeneutic,” *Ministry*, March 1999, 11.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> While the introductory section of this chapter has intimated a reason for this development in Adventism, the last section of this chapter will explain the possible reasons for this vigorous promotion of what Johnston describes as “neo-fundamentalism.”

<sup>81</sup> See Johnston, 12.

<sup>82</sup> See Gerard Damsteegt, “Scripture Faces Current Issues,” *Ministry*, April 1999.

women at the 1995 General Conference, while members of the Biblical Research Institute session include George W. Reid.<sup>83</sup>

The most articulate proponent of the view labeled “moderate liberalism” is Alden Thompson, a professor of Biblical Studies at Walla Walla College, one of the Adventism’s premier colleges. In spite of its “liberal” label, this approach is an inerrantist approach because it affirms biblical authority and inspiration. It assumes a consistency in scripture; but not one based on the accounts themselves, but one based on the whole message of scripture. Thompson has attempted to capture the seemingly balanced approach of Ellen White in his book *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*. Thompson presents a hermeneutical approach in light of a concept of inspiration that attempts to apply the commonsense approach of the denomination’s prophet.<sup>84</sup> He brings together quotations from Ellen White with a higher critical approach to scripture that does not undermine its authority, but places the events and oracles in their separate genre and in order to appropriately apply them. For example, he argues that the New Testament is not illuminating the Old Testament *per se*, but displays the ways in which the inspired authors of the New Testament appropriate the Old Testament texts. This does not undermine the authority of either Testament; rather, it relies on each Testament to tell the full story of what it is about.<sup>85</sup> Thus he notes that Mathew’s use of

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<sup>83</sup> See the following articles by George Reid: “Another Look at Adventist Methods of Bible Interpretation,” *Adventist Affirm*, Spring 1996, 51-55; and “Is the Bible our Final Authority?” *Ministry*, November 1991, 6-9.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-207.

Old Testament proof texts “cannot jeopardize either the Old Testament or his own place in scripture.”<sup>86</sup>

In the pivotal chapter 7 of his book, “God’s Word: Casebook or Codebook,” Thompson presents two models in scripture - “casebook,” which refers to the instruction given based on the cultural conditioning and consequent judgment of the author, and “codebook,” which refers to specific commands such as the ten commandments. In Chapter 8 he places these commandments on an upward trajectory of love as an enduring principle “applying to all mankind [sic] at all times everywhere,” and places love on a downward trajectory of external commands that reflect the inability to act out of a sense of love. Here he uses Jesus’ saying in Matthew 19:8 as an example (“*Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard*”). In Thompson’s line of reasoning, this is to say that where the eternal principle of love was lacking, Moses resorted to a rule to keep the peace. But this rule was a case rather than a code. This was Moses’ common sense approach given the historical circumstances. Thus the fact that Paul based his statement regarding male authority on the fact that man was created first is for Thompson, “Paul’s logic” and “not necessarily God’s.”<sup>87</sup> He uses Ellen White as his defense in making this point; “God has not placed Himself on trial in the Bible in words, logic or rhetoric.”<sup>88</sup> Based on these arguments Thompson believes that he moves in the direction of the prophet in a holistic and balanced view of inspiration.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>88</sup> See citation above.

The literature so far indicates that Thompson's position is prevalent in Adventist biblical scholarship. This coincides with the fact that the Adventist Society for Religious Studies, the less conservative of the two scholarly societies in Adventism<sup>89</sup> carries the majority of Adventist biblical scholars. The following views by two of Adventism most erudite scholars further reflect Thompson's basic approach.

First Raoul Dederen attempts to avoid the extremes regarding revelation and inspiration - that of an all or nothing approach on either side of the extremes. While he may not go as far as Thompson to say that the order of creation logic is Paul's logic and not God's logic,<sup>90</sup> he presents a view of inspiration within the framework of Revelation similar to that presented by Thompson. Revelation he believes is not to be thought of as divinely authenticated truths or correct doctrines, an idea which he admits Adventist have often given the impression to embrace.<sup>91</sup> Dederen is not sure whether this is truly what Adventists believe. He asserts on the basis of scriptural data his conception that revelation is a self-disclosure of God himself, "giving man [sic] a brief glimpse of the mystery of His being and love." Thus for him, belief in God comes before belief that the scripture says something, and therefore, to receive the God as disclosed is to receive His word. Dederen concludes that the Bible is "firmly established on the earth," a "human

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<sup>89</sup> See Chapter I for a description of these two societies.

<sup>90</sup> As the defender of ordination of women at the 1995 General Conference, he upheld the Pauline view of male authority (in the family and not in the church), and thus as Charles Scriven reported weakening his argument. See Charles Scriven, "World Votes No to Women's Ordination," *Spectrum* 25:1 (September 1995): 31.

<sup>91</sup> Dederen, 7.



document,” “involved in the flux of human events” and thus should be interpreted with the tools necessary to derive its meaning.<sup>92</sup>

An even clearer explication of inspiration from the standpoint of a view of revelation comes from Fernando Canale, professor of Theology and Philosophy at the S.D.A. Theological Seminary. He argues that it is hardly helpful to approach the question of revelation and inspiration “exclusively from a biblical perspective.”<sup>93</sup> By this he means that the Bible does not provide a technical explanation of its origin, thus one cannot derive a theory of revelation and inspiration from the Bible. He argues therefore that once, through research we discover the actual source of the biblical writings, we can perceive of those sources as the “cognitive process in which God and human agencies are involved.” This argues Canale, is an *a priori* condition to the act of inspiration in which the divine and human agencies are involved. Revelation and inspiration for him are complimentary since revelation originates the content that inspiration put into writing.

Representing the other side of the conversation is Samuel Koranteng-Pipim an Adventist pastor, a long standing student of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological seminary, author of several works on Bible and interpretation as they relate to various issues in the Church chief among which is the ordination of women. Among Adventist scholars, he stands as one of the most strident opponent of the ordination of Women. Koranteng-Pipim’s works seem to express the concern for maintaining the biblical

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>93</sup> Fernando Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration: Methods for a New Approach,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 31 (Autumn 1993):172.

authority upon which the Seventh-day Adventist identity stands. Koranteng-Pipim along with other proponents<sup>94</sup> of this view such as Raymond Holmes in his work *The Tip of an Iceberg*<sup>95</sup> sees “moderate liberalism” as a threat to the biblical foundations of Adventism.

While this threat seems to have been a major concern of the Church’s prophet, Koranteng-Pipim’s approach in his book *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle*, seems to exclude the common sense approach of the prophet which Thompson attempts to capture. While Ellen White recognizes the presence of errors and other human imperfections, Koranteng-Pipim wants to deny that they exist assuring his readers that prayerful study will shed more light on these questions.<sup>96</sup> On the question of the New Testament use of Old Testament, Koranteng-Pipim wants to make the inspired New Testament writer the final authority on the meaning of the Old Testament.<sup>97</sup>

Admittedly, Koranteng-Pipim does refer to the scripture as a blend of the human and divine. However, this divine and human blend of scripture, he equates to the divine and human nature of Christ as articulated in the Nicene Creed. Thus, for him, the Bible is really God incarnate. In the context of his conversation the emphasis is not upon the possibility of human errors in scripture, but on the incarnate Christ who remained sinless.

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<sup>94</sup> It is interesting to note that the kind of literature regarding Bible and other issues from this so-called neo-fundamentalist group are not usually published by the official periodicals or by the official publishing houses of Adventism. Rather they are published in an independent periodical called *Adventist Affirm*, and its parent Publisher Berrien Books. This group of publications is largely associated with the Adventist Theological Society and independently published.

<sup>95</sup> See Holmes, 63, ff.

<sup>96</sup> *Receiving the Word*, 60-61. See also Koranteng\_Pipim’s critique of Thompson’s book *Inspiration*, “An Analysis and Evaluation of Alden Thompson’s Casebook/Codebook approach to the Bible,” 61.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

According to him, “as Jesus had authority to speak, command, and give life to those who accepted Him, so does the Bible claim the same. These claims, according to him “are evident in the manner in which the New Testament Writers quoted the Old Testament,”<sup>98</sup> and “all the claims that the Bible makes on any subject – theology, history, science, chronology, numbers, etc. – are absolutely trustworthy and dependable.”<sup>99</sup>

In his critique of Thompson, Koranteng-Pipim argues that Thompson’s incarnational model is a compromise which, according to him is insufficient to bridge the gulf between theological liberalism and Bible-believing scholars.<sup>100</sup> Koranteng-Pipim is unable to countenance any idea of fallibility in the Bible. Thus he argues that the conservative Bible-believing Adventists whom he represents “accept the inspired writers of the Bible as more authoritative for the interpretation of the scripture than any uninspired modern scholar,” and that “there are no ‘inconsistencies’, ‘inaccuracies’ or ‘errors’” in the Bible. Rather, these are difficulties on which prayerful study may shed light.<sup>101</sup>

Johnston refers to Alden Thompson’s approach as a middle way. Yet Tim Crosby, in 1998, editor at large at the Review and Herald Publishing Association attempts a further middle way, that between the views of Koranteng-Pipim and

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<sup>98</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word*, 51-52.

<sup>99</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, “An Analysis and Evaluation of Alden Thompson’s casebook/codebook approach to the Bible,” 62.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*.

Thompson.<sup>102</sup> His approach displays a political strategy by which he attempts to distance himself from the conflict, while eventually articulating the views of the dominant side of the conflict, namely the fundamentalist clique. Crosby analyzes the standpoint from which each argues, noting that Koranteng-Pipim is a systematic theologian while Thompson is a biblical theologian. Thus he believes that the former tends to bring assumptions to the Bible, while the later tend to take assumptions from it, particularly to find out how the Holy Spirit actually works.”<sup>103</sup> He interprets Thompson’s allusion to cultural norms and ideals as a “selective acceptance of scripture,”<sup>104</sup> and dismisses Koranteng-Pipim’s system of inerrancy as “a bridge too far.”<sup>105</sup> Thus his summary evaluation of the two views is that Koranteng-Pipim claims too much for the scripture, while Thompson claims too little for it. Crosby attempts to establish his middle ground by arguing that though the prophets were culturally conditioned as much as we are the difference between their bias and ours is that “they wrote under a recognized divine inspiration.”<sup>106</sup> Thus he establishes biblical authority and a kind of cultural inerrancy without appearing to express a bias towards any of the two views.

Two views in inspiration and authority often stand in confrontation in Adventism with efforts such as Cosby’s above to disassociate from either view which indict each

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<sup>102</sup>Tim Cosby, “The Bible: Inspiration and Authority,” *Ministry*, May 1998, 18-20.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 19. Cosby notes that Koranteng-Pipim tends to use deductive logic as a Systematic theologian, thus he takes the statement “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and proceeds to deduce what a book inspired by God would look like. The biblical scholar, he notes, surveys the phenomenology of scripture to find out how the Holy Spirit actually works. Thus he says that the systematician looks at the blueprint while the biblical scholar examines the building, delving for structural integrity.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

other as “liberal” and “fundamentalist”. This “middle ground” seems to be a safe ground when scholars in each camp throw subtle charges and invectives against each other. As we have seen those such as Koranteng-Pipim and Damsteegt who wish to make all the practices of scripture binding regardless of history and culture, are seeking for biblical models to determine practice. Only then, for them, can the Bible be truly authoritative. They are not sure that human “reason”<sup>107</sup> can be trusted to do what is right, based merely on principle. Those who analyze the extent of the human element based on the socio-historical context are not claiming selectivity in the sense of throwing out some of the Bible. Rather, they recognize the divine condescension, and therefore, based on what is, they attempt to appropriately apply what was. Such application may mean the recognition that a particular command is not currently necessary, though the underlining principle is binding. This does not appear to be a dismissal of biblical authority, or selectivity in biblical authority, but a different understanding of it. This defines the biblical feminist Phyllis Trible’s “principle of selectivity”<sup>108</sup> which Gerhard F. Hasel, calls selectivity of biblical authority.<sup>109</sup>

It is important to underline that in the conversation on inspiration and authority no one has questioned the authority of scripture. All these views are inerrant views. Rather one side – namely those who refer to themselves as “conservative Bible believing” indict

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<sup>107</sup> By “reason”, these scholars refer to conclusions regarding the meaning of a text based on the technical explanations of the sources of revelation independent of scripture, as discussed by Canale.

<sup>108</sup> The principle of selectivity according to Trible separates the “descriptive and culturally conditioned texts from prescriptive and existentially valid ones.” See Phyllis Trible, “Postscript: Jottings on the Journey,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 147.

<sup>109</sup> Gerhard Hasel, “Biblical Authority and Feminist Interpretation,” 13.

the other of questioning the full inspiration and authority of scripture. The latter has consistently argued that Adventism has never adopted fundamentalist inerrancy, though some Adventist scholars hold that view.

### **Hermeneutics:<sup>110</sup> The Heart of the Debate**

The conversation regarding biblical inspiration and authority is part and parcel of the conversation regarding hermeneutics. As we move closer to the heart of the debate over interpretive methodology, we may perceive more clearly how the problem with methodology takes on deep ecclesiological significance in the Seventh-day Adventist theological academe. The conversation between two opposing sides in Adventism regarding inspiration and authority represents two opposing interpretive methodologies. They are the *historical grammatical* methodology on the one hand, and a selective use of the *historical-critical* methodology on the other. The conversation emerges from the challenge to the traditional presuppositions regarding inspiration and authority of the Bible held by Seventh-day Adventists. The challenge has been brought on by the arrival of the historical-critical methodology in seminaries and religion schools by the mid 1970s. It is an object of Fundamentalist attack, because it represents liberal religion. In order to clearly understand the nature of the conversation, it is important to first take a closer look at the two competing methods that have occupied a place in Adventist hermeneutics – the historical-grammatical method, and the historical-critical method. This will help us to evaluate the consistency of the arguments over interpretive methodology.

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<sup>110</sup> “Hermeneutics” in this study refers to interpretive methodology.

The Historical Grammatical Method:

This method also bears the label “plain-sense” method of interpretation. The Reformers promoted it in the effort to reclaim the common sense meaning of scripture from the mystifying subjectivism of the allegorical method that predominated in Medieval Christianity.<sup>111</sup> It carried with it the Reformation claim to *sola scriptura* which was an attempt to wrest authority from the church<sup>112</sup> and place it in scripture which, according to Calvin, is the only repository of the actual knowledge of God.<sup>113</sup> The purpose of this method was to arrive at a fully intended meaning of the author of the text by a study of the language along with the literary historical and cultural contexts. While it presupposes that the text is the work of the Holy Spirit, its account of the historical context and the grammatical choices made by the author is similar to the approach to literature. Thus when the Protestant reformers discouraged a move beyond the text to discover the meaning,<sup>114</sup> what they were concerned about, was the imposition of meaning

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<sup>111</sup> By this method of interpreting scriptures, the church maintained exclusive right to doctrinal authority even where in Luther and Calvin’s view they did not harmonize with the biblical message. It was the Reformers attempt to engage the people in personal involvement rather than in ritual affirmation of the church’s theological tradition. See Hans J. Hilerbrabd, ed, *The Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), xxi, ff. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. II, ed., John T. McNeil, trans., Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.), 1149, ff. Here Calvin speaks out against the unbridled authority of the church that according to him has lead to the corruption of pure biblical doctrine.

<sup>112</sup> Hillerbrabd argues that the stress upon *sola scriptura* propounded a new norm for religious authority. He states that only the Bible was acknowledged as a true source of Christian truth. Hillerbrand thus recognized that the protest of the Reformers had, beside a theological dimension, a decided political dimension. See *Ibid.*, xxii-xxiii.

<sup>113</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. I, 69.

<sup>114</sup> Luther protests that there is nothing recondite in scripture. He goes on to say, “many passages in scripture are obscure and hard to elucidate, but that is due not to the exalted nature of the subject, but to our linguistic and grammatical ignorance; and it does not prevent in any way our knowing all the contents of the Scripture.” See John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (New York:Doubleday,1962), 172.

in the allegorical method used by Origen<sup>115</sup> which was highly subjective, and therefore gave the text no fixed meaning. This invested the church with the exclusive authority to determine meaning of a given text.

This method presumes that scripture, though given through human historical and cultural vehicle, is God-breathed and thus true in all parts. Thus, it presupposes a unity in scripture which must be sought in interpretation. This is to say, when a statement appears questionable, the interpreter is committed to seek for an explanation. In explaining the relevance of the text, it proposes the principle of analogy which assumes that humanity has the same issues throughout history, thus the text of the past, speaks to issues in the present.

The historical-grammatical method seeks to find the meaning of texts based on evidence internal to the document itself, thus significantly reducing the degree of subjectivity possible by the use of the allegorical method. It however assumes coherence, based on a presupposition about the way biblical inspiration works. Such a presupposition leads to the assumption that because God cannot contradict Himself, there are **no** true Bible contradictions, thus it seems that the interpreter must find unity at all cost. This not only forces the use of proof texts, but opens the way for fundamentalist inerrantist approaches. Raymond F. Cottrell argues that it rejects the dictation/verbal theory of inspiration, but relies on a theory of revelation equivalent to that theory.<sup>116</sup> This

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<sup>115</sup> Origen believed that only those with higher rational powers could understand obscure passages in scripture. See "Homily XXVII on Numbers," in *Origen*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press).

<sup>116</sup> Cottrell, "A Guide to Reliable Interpretation: Determining the Meaning of Scripture," 83.



is to say that although it rejects the idea of verbal inspiration, the presupposition that scripture is God-breathed and thus true in all its parts makes it difficult to assume that inspiration does not extract the individual from his social location or preclude the use of materials already available to him in order to express the word of God. This however, is not a necessary presupposition in the use of the method. Contextualization of the historical circumstances out of which a text arose does not necessarily violate the basic inerrant principle of historical grammatical methodology. In Chapter III we shall see how arguments for women's ordination have been crafted in this manner.

#### The Historical Critical Method:

This method, argues Edgar Krentz, culminates the reformation legacy of concern for the historical sense of the Bible.<sup>117</sup> Also referred to as “higher criticism,”<sup>118</sup> it takes literary analysis further than the historical-grammatical by analyzing not just its context and language, but its form, content and source. Like the historical-grammatical, it seeks to determine the authentic meaning of the biblical text as a literary document. It takes that further however, by seeking to determine the historicity or the extent to which the factual is present in a given text. For example, unlike the historical grammatical, it does not assume Mosaic authorship for the Pentateuch, but proposes multiple authorship based on a more detailed and critical historical research. This was most fully developed in Julius Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis. Also this method for example, contests the

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<sup>117</sup> Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method*, ed. Gene M. Tucker (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 87.

<sup>118</sup> In contrast to “lower-criticism” which involve the comparing of variant readings of particular biblical texts in ancient Bible manuscripts?

authorship and date of the fourth Gospel based on its content. Based on this too, it proposes that the form of the narratives of Genesis is more legendary and mythical than historical, and that the patriarchal narratives answer questions that relate more to the tribal history of Israel, than questions of a universal nature. In the New Testament it analyzes the content of books to determine authorship, and the possibility of editing either by the author (in the case of the gospels, regarding the life of Jesus), or by later copyists.

Like the historical-grammatical the historical-critical method analyzes the Bible as any other human text, but without the assumption of supernaturalism. This is the classical approach which stands over an approach which assumes supernaturalism. The classical approach was first articulated by the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Troeltsch proposed three principles of “scientific exegesis,”<sup>119</sup> correlation, analogy and criticism. Correlation means that events should be explained in terms of historical process, not in terms of supernatural intervention. Analogy means that history is homogeneous and thus the past can be explained by observation of the present historical process. Criticism means that our judgments are only probabilities, not truth. We see this latter principle for example, in the arguments of The New Testament scholar Rudolph Bultmann. He argues that the Gospel accounts

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<sup>119</sup> For more detailed explanation see Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Lincoln, Nebraska: College View Printers, 1985), 73, ff.

were essentially a product of the creative imagination of the early church, an expression of their faith, rather than a record of accurate events.<sup>120</sup>

The great shortcoming of the historical-critical method is, of course, the shortcoming of positivism itself, which is the assumption that all events must be historically verifiable. However, its basic methods of investigating sources, and analyzing content have proven indispensable not only to biblical scholarship but to contemporary historical research. To the extent that both methods run parallel up to the point where both agree that study of the original language, literary structure and historical background is important to understanding the scriptures, they are often indistinguishable. However, there is a point of departure as far as biblical studies where the historical-critical method moves beyond the historical-grammatical to social criticism, source criticism and redaction criticism. The historical-critical approach bears a natural bias against the historicity of the events, while the historical-grammatical comes with a natural bias in favor of the historicity of the events in the Bible. Yet the difference between the conclusions by both methods depends more upon their *a priori* presuppositions rather than the procedures they follow.

#### The Challenge of the Historical Critical Method to Biblical Studies:

The biggest challenge of higher criticism is the challenge to the ability and/or willingness to disassociate its antiscientific presuppositions from the critical tools that it brings to the biblical research. It is the challenge to recognize the investment of the

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<sup>120</sup> See R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed. (New York, 1976).

divine in the human. For example the famous New Testament theologian George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary published a book in 1967 titled, *The New Testament and Criticism*.<sup>121</sup> In it he discusses what he perceives to be the challenges of the historical-critical method to traditional interpretation. For Ladd, the major challenge of the historical-critical method lies in its presupposition that has the effect of relegating the Bible to a purely human document.<sup>122</sup> He objects to its rationalistic view of history which discredits the biblical supernatural actions in scripture and which slights the theological dogma that accompanies the biblical accounts.<sup>123</sup> The historical-critical method invests human reason with authority over scripture.<sup>124</sup>

Yet it is not the classical formulation of the historical-critical method that poses the sharpest and most subtle challenge to biblical scholarship. Theological studies for the most significant part remains the fountain head of the faith community. It is rather the adoption of the tools of the method that poses the challenge. It presents a serious threat particularly to the Fundamentalist movement because it represents liberal religion. *Source, form and redaction* criticism are the major tools which biblical scholars find indispensable to biblical research and understanding. The use of these tools reflects a modification of the presuppositions regarding biblical inspiration. For example, while the historical-grammatical methodology assumes that the Genesis account of creation is

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<sup>121</sup> G.E. Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967)

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 53.

<sup>124</sup> Kurt Marquart expressed this in 1974 who argues that “the critic and his reason are judge and jury, while the Bible, like other ancient documents is on trial....” See Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion* (Fort Wayne, TX: 1977), 114.

an accurate account of creation, the use of form criticism assumes the method to be part of a literary form called *myth* the import of which is theological ideals rather than historical or scientific data. Historical criticism also treats the biblical writings as historically conditioned. This is to say that some ideals in scripture are located in the historical setting out of which they emerge, and do not necessarily apply to the present. Source criticism also assumes that the Genesis account of creation was adopted from similar Babylonian myths and passed down orally from generation to generation until it finally took on written form, while the traditional method of interpretation assumes that God revealed it to Moses. Neither method denies the inspiration of the Genesis account. Rather, each has a different view of the content of inspiration and the nature of the revelatory process. In essence historical criticism treats the Bible more as proclamation than as precise facts.

The challenge here is not to the inspiration of scripture per se, but to the Reformist presuppositions regarding inspiration and authority of scripture. In this regard, the Lutheran Robert Preus argues that to treat the biblical records as historically conditioned is to call into question the Bible's inspiration and trustworthiness.<sup>125</sup> In this same Marquart questioned whether a Lutheran could use the historical-critical method with Lutheran presuppositions.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Robert Preus, "May the Lutheran Church Legitimately Use the Historical-Critical Method?" *Affirm*, Spring, 1973, 32.

<sup>126</sup> Marquart, "The Historical Critical Method and Lutheran Presuppositions," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 8 (1974): 106-124.

Krentz's work *The Historical Critical Method* presents a vivid description of the way the theological discipline has struggled with historical-critical methodology. His concluding statement in this regard is worthy of note:

Theology cannot return to a pre-critical age; this is the common view in current exegetical literature.... Christian theologians may greet the acceptance of historical methods as 'one of the greatest events in the history of Christianity' or long for the simpler past, but they can in the present only seek to use historical criticism in the service of the gospel. Historical method is in its general axiom at best hostile to theology, at worst a threat to the central message of the scripture. Theology must either justify the use of historical criticism and define its nature or be willing to reformulate the Christian faith in terms of a positivist truth that historicism alone can validate. Most theologians argue that the former course is open and give a theological justification for historical criticism.<sup>127</sup>

Krentz opts to justify the use of historical criticism in theology by arguing that it is not a threat to the scriptures because it is congruent with its object, the Bible. This congruence is due to the fact that "the Bible is an ancient book addressed to people of long ago in a strange culture, written in ancient languages." In light of this, he concludes, it is historical criticism that facilitates the most precise significance of the words for the people then and brings out the full impact of the Christian ideas it expresses. Krentz goes on to iterate the positive results of historical criticism. Among those results the tenth point listed is worthy of note. He argues that "criticism frees us from the tyranny of history and makes the vulnerability of faith clear."<sup>128</sup> This is to say that historical criticism demands that we free ourselves from the need for the crutches of historical verification and rely more on faith in the divine providence in human history. It is a challenge to both classical historical criticism, and historical grammatical which are both concerned with historical

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<sup>127</sup> Krentz, 61.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

facts. Thus Krentz states: “It makes us hear the biblical proclamation as the first Christians did – without any security outside of the proclamation that confronts us with its demand for believing response- and this alone gives certainty of faith.”<sup>129</sup> This sense of security that historical criticism has stripped from the theological enterprise has greatly contributed to the polarization in methodology, the demonstration of which we are about to see in Adventist hermeneutics.

The Adventist Approach to the Historical-Grammatical and the Historical-Critical Methodologies:

The two methodologies in question in the Seventh-day Adventist academe are merely tools in the hermeneutical politics. They are rejected and embraced as they suit particular purposes. Already we have noted that the denomination embraced source criticism to defend the prophetic integrity of Ellen White. It rejected historical grammatical methodology when Ford’s application of it challenged its classic formulation of the sanctuary doctrine.<sup>130</sup> What Ford seems to have done was to follow the method strictly by deriving meaning based on the literary and historical contexts of the texts in question.<sup>131</sup> Cottrell in his report on the Glacier View Sanctuary Review Committee recognizes a “crucial difference in methodology.” Yet this crucial difference

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Desmond Ford states clearly in his 991-page manuscript - the object of close scrutiny at Glacier View, that he followed the historical-grammatical method as “the only valid means of doing full justice to the Scripture.” Ford, 31.

<sup>131</sup> As we have observed, this is an element which the method shares with the historical-critical method. However, the presupposition of unity in scripture, and the principle of allowing the scripture to interpret itself tend to eclipse this principle in the historical-grammatical methodology.

spells out the way each side of the conflict is coming to the text from a particular place, and thus with a particular intent. He explains that the use of the *historical method* by the decided majority of Adventist scholars and the use of proof text by most non-scholars has been responsible for practically every theological difference of opinion since the 1940s, including the question of the Doctrine of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment posed by Ford.<sup>132</sup> By “proof text” Cottrell is referring to the *historical-grammatical* method as “historic Adventists” (fundamentalists) apply it.<sup>133</sup> By “historical method” he refers to an approach that attends to all the relevant contexts of scripture in the process of interpretation. Because of this, the approach appears to be associated with historical criticism, and thus “historical Adventists” may brand it as a dangerous variant of *historical-critical methodology*.<sup>134</sup> The most effective use of the proof text aspect of historical grammatical method in Seventh-day Adventism is by the fundamentalist scholars. Is Cottrell’s association of the use of proof text by non-scholars an indicator that scholars know better?

The 1980 and 1981 Theological consultations between Adventist Theologians and church administrators considered the use of the historical-critical method.<sup>135</sup> Robert

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<sup>132</sup> See Cottrell, “The Sanctuary Review Committee and its New Consensus,” 18.

<sup>133</sup> Cottrell argues that the historical-grammatical methodology as the basis of the fundamentalist hermeneutic that entered mainstream Adventism in the early 1970s is essentially “scholarly investigation of the Bible under the control of fundamentalist proof-text principles and presuppositions, and appears to confirm proof-text conclusions by scholarly procedures. This is to say that the attempt to find unity of ideas in the Bible leads to a process of matching texts with texts even though they may not mean the same given the individual contexts of those texts. (See Cottrell, “A Guide to Reliable Interpretation: Determining the Meaning of Scripture,” in *The Welcome Table*, 79, ff.)

<sup>134</sup> See, *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>135</sup> Robert K. McIver, “The Historical-critical method: The Adventist Debate,” *Ministry*, March 1996, 14.



McIver a professor of theology at Avondale College an Adventist College in New South Wales Australia reports that several of the tools of higher criticism “were generally considered helpful if used apart from their negative antisupernatural presuppositions.”<sup>136</sup> The December 1982 issue of *Spectrum* demonstrated this in two articles<sup>137</sup> among several articles which ran the general heading, “Ways to Read the Bible.” In 1985 Gerhard Hasel published his book *Biblical Interpretation Today* opposing any use of the tools of historical-criticism. Mentor of Koranteng-Pipim, Hasel traces the development of the historical-critical method and reviewed major arguments against the use of the method by prominent theologians. He concludes by outlining a method of interpretation which he states is “in harmony with our great Protestant heritage.”<sup>138</sup> The basic presuppositions of the method regarding biblical authority and inspiration are reflected in the arguments of

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>137</sup> See: (1) John C. Brunt, “A Parable of Jesus as a Clue to Biblical Interpretation,” *Spectrum* 13:2 (December 1982):34-43. Here Brunt not only applies the method to the reading of the Gospels, but uses a quotation from Ellen White as his preamble: “Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, and a John, a Paul, and all the writers who have born testimony in regard to the life and ministry of the Savior? Why could not one of the disciples have given us a connected account of Christ’s earthly life? Why does one writer bring in points that another does not mention? Why, if these points are essential, did not all the writers mention them? – It is because the minds of men differ. Not all comprehend things in exactly the same way. Certain scripture truths appeal more strongly to the minds of some than others.” (Ellen White, *Counsels to Teachers* [Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1913], 432). In his article, Brunt demonstrates how source, form, and redaction criticism are valuable tools in understanding the gospels and what they say about Jesus. He demonstrates their use by such conservative scholars as Ralph P. Martin, and George Eldon Ladd, to argue that liberal conclusions are not a necessary outcome in the use of historical criticism. (2) Larry G. Herr, “Genesis One in Historical-Critical Perspective,” *Spectrum* 13:2 (December 1982): 50-62. In this article Herr demonstrates that a historical-critical analysis of Genesis one does not necessarily destroy confidence “in proclaiming the truth of the Sabbath as some would hold.” (61). He notes that the primary purpose and intent of the author in Genesis one was cosmogonic, in that he attempted to explain an orderly creation by one God *vis a vis* the ANE cosmology of a disorderly creation by many gods. He notes that the Sabbath is “in no way part of the cosmology” in that it “describes nothing of the universe. Rather “it is a symbol of, and provides the daily meaning for, the miraculous creative activity of God.” “As such,” he concludes, “it is part of the central theological message of the chapter.” (Ibid.) Thus the fact that some parts of Genesis I does not conform to our “known” view of the universe, should not destroy confidence in proclaiming the “truth of the Sabbath.”

<sup>138</sup> Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today*, 114.

Koranteng-Pipim above. Very significantly it specifically affirms Genesis 1-11 as factual and not mere theology, and affirms the reliability of any biblical writing that declares their origin from a given author. Hasel's proposed principle and procedures of biblical interpretation *appears*<sup>139</sup> as the historical-grammatical method, yet his reference to particular key beliefs in Seventh-day Adventism betrays the motivation of his methodology.

### The Rio Report

In 1986 the Rio Document "Methods of Bible Study" received the official stamp of the Church at the 1986 Annual Council. The reader may refer to the document in the appendix but certain features of the document need to be pointed out here. The document rejects any use of the historical-critical method. It points to the fact that the classical formulation of the method operate on the basis of presuppositions that "reject the reliability of accounts of miracles and other supernatural events in the Bible." Thus it states: "Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism that subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists." The document presents the basic principles and presuppositions of the historical-grammatical method without excluding cultural and historical context as a consideration, a feature lacking in Hasel's suggested methodology. The document states: "every experience or statement in

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<sup>139</sup> While Hasel deals with the matter of "context" under the heading "Principles and Procedures of Biblical Interpretation," he lists under this heading "word," "thought," "literary" and "biblical" context. He however does not list historical context. He attempts to treat this latter under "Thought context." Here he states that "while various cultures have various points of contact with the Bible, it is by no means true that biblical truth and faith is merely a reflection shadow or reinterpretation of its surroundings. The Bible is God's unique self-revelation which transcends all human thought. The biblical context is determinative for the 'thought' context of what the Bible writers wrote." (see 106-108). It appears that the method falls to the weakness which Cottrell explains as inherent in historical-grammatical methodology.

scripture is a divinely inspired record, but not every statement or experience is necessarily normative for Christian behavior today. Both the spirit and the letter of scripture must be understood.” Very significantly, it notes that dissimilarities may be due to, among other things such as scribal errors, “differing emphases and choice of materials of various authors who wrote under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit for different audiences under different circumstances” (quoting from Ellen White). This feature is absent from Hasel’s formulation though he admits to both intentional and unintentional errors in copying. The document also carefully outlines the principles of interpreting prophesy which have very important implications for Adventist identity as the remnant church. However, the basis of the “year-day” principle in the Daniel 8:14 prophecy is not immediately apparent. Most significantly, there is no sign of a presupposition of fundamentalist inerrancy in the document. There is nothing in this document that is tailored against an interpretation of scripture that may allow for women’s ordination.

#### Responses to “Methods of Bible Study”

“Methods of Bible Study” represents the official hermeneutics of Adventism. Yet it appears that this does not simplify the question of hermeneutics in Adventism. If anything, it seems to have complicated it. The “conservative” wing of Adventist biblical scholarship the Adventist Theological Society embraced “Methods of Bible Study,” as the official methodology of Adventism when it came into existence in 1987. Its criteria for membership include the rejection of the use of any form of the historical-critical

method in Bible study.<sup>140</sup> Both Koranteng-Pipim and Holmes have appended “Methods of Bible Study” to their books *Receiving the Word*, and *The Tip of an Iceberg* as an indicator to those who use the tools of historical-criticism that the Adventist Church has a method that rejects theirs. Alden Thompson’s published his book *Inspiration*<sup>141</sup> in 1991. It signaled the rejection of “Methods of Bible Study” by a majority of Adventist biblical scholars. McIver reports that some involved in the hermeneutical debate have perceived *Inspiration* as the “archetypical product of historical-critical methodology.”<sup>142</sup> In *Inspiration* Thompson demonstrates that tools of historical-criticism allow the exegete to perceive the imperfection that the human brings to the process of inspiration and consequently to engage the faith community in a process of growth centered more on love as it is demonstrated by Christ than on the cultural norms and ideals of the ancient past. His arguments reveal an attempt to rescue the Bible from the “all or nothing”<sup>143</sup> approach that results in either rejection of scripture or fundamentalist inerrant approaches.<sup>144</sup> It is significant that the premier Adventist publishing house Review and Herald Publishing Association published Thompson’s book. This is because in spite of its embrace of the tools of higher criticism, it still assumes an inerrantist stance, namely, the inspiration, authority, and consistent principle of scripture. It presents this as the most honest way of approaching the scripture without diminishing its authority.

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<sup>140</sup> McIver, 15.

<sup>141</sup> See a discussion of this work above under “Biblical Inspiration and Authority.”

<sup>142</sup> McIver, 15.

<sup>143</sup> This is the phrase that Thompson uses to describe Koranteng-Pipim’s approach to scripture. See Thompson, “En Route to a Plain Reading of Scripture,” *Spectrum* 26:4 (January 1998): 51.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 87, ff.

The Adventist Theological Society dedicated its 1991 meeting to the critique of *Inspiration*, and several of the papers of that meeting comprise the book *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*. The latter book reflects the general fear of “human reason” and the human element in scripture as does the Rio document; but goes further than the Rio document in attempting to prove that there are no contradictions by using evidence internal to the texts themselves. The Rio document provides a basis for explaining what seem to be contradictions, that of differing emphasis and choice of materials.<sup>145</sup> Thompson sees contradictions and tries to explain them in view of a concept of the revelatory process that does not rely on exact data, but on the purpose of the writer that determines his choice of materials.<sup>146</sup>

#### Biblical Interpretation or Church Tradition? The Real Problem

In effect the arguments against the use of critical tools in biblical interpretation portray it as an attempt to replace the sure word of scripture on which Adventism places its identity as the remnant of Bible prophecy.<sup>147</sup> What “historic Adventists” perceive as a challenge to biblical authority “progressive liberal” Adventists see as a challenge to traditional theology. The former perception relies upon the methodology that informs traditional Adventist Theology. The latter expresses the concern to listen to what the Bible says. Both seem to be listening to scripture but hearing different things because

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<sup>145</sup> See 4, o.

<sup>146</sup> Thompson, 139-146.

<sup>147</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, “Crisis Over the Word, 15, ff.

they go there with different presupposition regarding what it says and how it says what it says.

The rejection of “Methods of Bible Study” by a large section of Adventist biblical scholarship results mainly from the document’s unequivocal exception to historical-criticism. Fritz Guy, professor of Theology at La Sierra University, articulates an underlying concern regarding the Church’s exception to any departure from traditional methodology when he argues that scripture is the servant of tradition rather than its master.<sup>148</sup> The conversation confronts us with the question of biblical authority *vis a vis* the Church’s authority. Does the denomination equate its traditional theology with biblical authority? As we have noted so far, no one involved in the conversation on hermeneutics, questions the inspiration and authority of scripture. We have seen that both sides of the conversation use methods that maintain the foundational doctrines of the denomination and affirm the prophetic gift of Ellen White. Very significantly too, we have seen that Ford’s challenge is not one of historical-critical methodology. He follows the method the Church regards as the only legitimate method, but seemingly in a strict sense, by not allowing the presuppositions of historical-grammatical methodology to decoy him into proof text methodology. Ford’s findings on the doctrine of the Sanctuary challenged the denomination to revise its theology based on what he sees as the biblical

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<sup>148</sup> Fritz Guy, “How Scripture Should Function in Theology,” *Ministry*, March 1999, 19.

evidence.<sup>149</sup> The problematic approach for Ford was more that of his approach to Adventist theology than it was that of his approach to scripture.

It is important to note that scholars who differ in some way to some of the Church's traditional positions appear to affirm confidence in the foundations of Adventism. What they see as viable solutions to the problems usually accompany the challenges. Fritz Guy expresses it thus:

Every theology...faces the challenge of unanswered questions, loose ends, unfinished business; and Adventist theology is no exception. The questions that are involved here, however, are manageable and need not be felt as threatening to the validity and viability of Adventist theology as a whole. On the contrary, they can be regarded not merely as problems to be solved, but as occasions for theological growth.<sup>150</sup>

Already we have seen some solutions to the question of seven literal days of creation as it regards the seventh day Sabbath. *Spectrum* dedicated its November 1980 issue entirely to the Glacier View Sanctuary Debate, the arguments objections and implications. It included an article by Fritz Guy that focuses on the salvific implications of the sanctuary, noting that "the basic meaning of the sanctuary is that God continues to act redemptively."<sup>151</sup> Also, Desmond Ford underlined his belief in the providence of God that rose up the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1844. He explains that it marked the

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<sup>149</sup> As we have seen, Ford's attention to the historical context of Daniel 8:14 coupled with his literary contextual interpretation of Hebrews 9 results in his disagreement with the Adventist position regarding the real sanctuary of which Daniel 8:14 speaks, and regarding the events of 1844. Based on his observation of the literary context of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 he concluded that these could not apply as the principle for determining what 2,300 days meant in Daniel 8:14.

<sup>150</sup> Guy, "The Church and its Future: Adventist theology Today" *Spectrum* 12: 1 (September 1981): 7.

<sup>151</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Confidence in Salvation: The Meaning of the Sanctuary." *Spectrum* 11:2 (November 1980): 45-52.

beginning of another era of revival of the truths symbolized in the sanctuary, but that for him is the secondary application of the Daniel 8:14 prophecy based on his apotelesmatic principle. Thus he concedes that “the year-day principle as regards its practical essence has always been correct.”<sup>152</sup>

Thus the question of Church tradition versus biblical authority arises on all sides of the hermeneutical debate in Adventism. What we are seeing in this regard, is the struggle between a firm grounding in tradition by maintaining traditional hermeneutics on the one hand, and the spirit that seeks for relevant growth and change using as Guy puts it “traditional understanding” as “a foundation”<sup>153</sup> by an approach to scripture that facilitates it. A conversation in *Spectrum* between Charles Scriven the then president of Columbia Union College, one of the oldest Adventist colleges, and Koranteng-Pipim reflects this tug-o-war. Scriven describes the attitude that Koranteng-Pipim represents as “hostility to truth...to the Spirit of the risen Christ,” and as “stifling the Church’s quest to deeper understanding.”<sup>154</sup> He goes on to describe the attitude thus:

...the knowledge of God’s will and way is not so much a quest as an achieved state, and the Bible not so much a life-changing story as a catalogue of proof texts. It does not challenge present thinking but only validates it. The object of study is to learn a sacrosanct (as opposed to sacred) tradition or to fend off criticism of that tradition, rather than open the heart and mind to a God who is always ahead of us and is always inviting us to take the next step of the journey.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> See Ford, “Daniel 8:14 and the Day of Atonement,” 34.

<sup>153</sup> Guy, 18.

<sup>154</sup> Charles Scriven, “Embracing the Spirit,” *Spectrum* 26:3 (September 1977): 31.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*



Koranteng-Pipim responds<sup>156</sup> by arguing that the Spirit was not, nor indeed can be given to supercede the Bible. He then uses a proof text<sup>157</sup> to make his point. He goes on to say regarding Scriven's lamentations:

The author...sees the Adventist Church 'drifting' in the direction of fundamentalism. Yet he fails to notice that his observation of the church comes from the vantage point of one who is riding a fast train of change called the 'adventure for truth.' Could it be that those riding this speeding train are rather the ones who are 'drifting' away from Adventism toward an unknown destination.<sup>158</sup>

The above conversation aptly reflects that an apparent concern for the community in one form or another is what drives the general conversation. Significantly too, it appears to demonstrate Krentz's conclusive statement regarding the challenge of historical criticism. Is it better to maintain a secure historical footing, or to remain open to the challenges of a faith that relies less on historical verity? Only, it appears that the matter is not simply a challenge of historical criticism, but a matter of a perceived challenge to the Church's self identity. One side requires the security of faith in an established system of beliefs, while the other challenges it to venture out with the certainty of faith. Desmond Ford defends the latter<sup>159</sup> by the use statements by Ellen White.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, "In the Spirit of Truth: Pipim Responds," *Spectrum* 26:3 (September 1997): 38-44.

<sup>157</sup> Isaiah 8: 20: "To the law and the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>159</sup> Ford, "Ellen White was right: Increasing Light Is to Shine upon us," *Spectrum* 26:4 (January 1998): 59-60. In this article Desmond Ford, a retired General Conference Official and notes that the Church's traditional teaching of the investigative judgment can no longer be taught by the Church's scholars and magazine editors. He notes that even "some well-known administrators also confess our theological embarrassment in this area," and that a chief architect of the doctrine admitted to the problem of this doctrine. He said all this to explain that in the spirit of Ellen White, it is quite appropriate for a Church to adjust its teachings based on greater illumination. .

It is interesting to note that the concerns on either side for the well-being of the denomination appear in the testimonies of its prophet. We have noted in this chapter that in spite of the overwhelming amount of statements to the contrary, she asserts verbal inspiration when the source criticism of the historical-critical method threatened the very foundations of Adventism.

### What Method? The Politics of Disassociation

Thus far we have seen that the denomination maintains an official statement on methodology. However as the debate over hermeneutics continues, each side of the right/left continuum seem to be willing to use and disassociate with methods as it suits their political purposes. A very significant question that surfaces in the debate is whether Seventh-day Adventist scholars actually use the historical-critical method. In his 1995 contribution to *The Welcome Table*, Cottrell refers to the historical-critical method as a method which Liberal Bible scholars use and which works with the presupposition that the Bible is strictly a human product. Here Cottrell is signaling a disassociation from liberalism while making a case for ordination of women – a significant political position when one considers that the fundamentalist clique has the upper hand. In light of this he

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<sup>160</sup>Ford quotes these statements by Ellen White: “Increasing light is to shine upon us; “we have many lessons to learn and unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible”; “We must not think, ‘Well, we have all the truth, we understand the main pillars of our faith, and we may rest on this knowledge.’ The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light”; “The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God’s people, should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what. (See Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers, 76, and Councils to Writers and Editors, 33, 39*)

contravenes allegations within Seventh-day Adventism that some of its scholars follow this method. According to him “no real Adventist scholar follows this method.”<sup>161</sup> He asserts that what most Adventist scholars use is the *historical method*. This is the method that uses all the necessary tools of exegesis yet emphasizes the salvation history perspective of the Bible. This is to say that it regards scripture as first and foremost a proclamation, rather than as a library of scientific and historical fact. Fundamentalist scholars however, associate this with higher criticism. Roy Gane, an associate professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary also demonstrates this politics of disassociation. He notes that those scholars who reject any form of the historical-critical method associate its tools with its ideology, while those who accept a limited application of the method define it as tools alone.<sup>162</sup> In light of this, McIver suggests that Adventist biblical scholars drop the name “historical-critical method” from the debate because the “term is so loaded and so often misunderstood that it has come to be an inadequate description of what is under consideration.”<sup>163</sup>

Johnston argues that the use of the tools of historical-criticism is inescapable in any sensible approach to scripture. He points to the application of source criticism by the Church to the writings of Ellen White.<sup>164</sup> He argues:

The technology of exegesis welcomes any method that shows promise of being helpful. This includes historical-critical disciplines, which we do not

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<sup>161</sup> Cottrell, “A Guide to Reliable Interpretation,” 80.

<sup>162</sup> Roy Gane, “An Approach to the Historical Critical Method,” *Ministry*, March 1999.

<sup>163</sup> McIver, 16.

<sup>164</sup> By this method the church defended the charges of plagiarism against Ellen White.

hesitate to apply to the writings of Ellen White and which we ought not to hesitate to apply in a reverent and respectful way to the Bible.<sup>165</sup>

Also, Thompson observes that even Koranteng-Pipim in his book *Receiving the Word* finds it difficult to completely disassociate himself from the method. He cites pages 48 and 49 of the book where the author admits that even Bible writers used sources in their research.<sup>166</sup> In light of what seems inescapable, Johnson suggests:

The imperfection and inadequacy of human understanding must be acknowledged, but it must not be despised, for it is all we have. We must apply it to the Bible with vigor and then apply the Bible to ourselves with vigor. By applying to the Bible writers what we know about Ellen White, we resolve many problems. We are left with a truly Adventist Hermeneutic that is a *via media* between...fundamentalism and ...the radical skepticism of modernism.<sup>167</sup>

Thus far, the Church has made no adjustments to “Methods in Bible Study” and the greater section of Adventist biblical scholarship continues to use a method, the precise label for which is yet to be coined. The conversation remains, and the widespread publication of these conversations suggests that the community is actively engaged in the process of “scripturalizing.”

### **Women’s Ordination: The Scapegoat in the Defense of Seventh-day Adventist Theology**

The question of the ordination of women not only exacerbated what is already a fomenting issue of Adventist hermeneutics, but masks the deeper ecclesiological issue as

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<sup>165</sup> Johnston, 12.

<sup>166</sup> Thompson, “En Route to a Plain Reading of Scripture,” 51.

<sup>167</sup> Johnston, 12.

it regards Church tradition and identity. Chaves argues that as inerrancy becomes more and more a symbol of the antimodern stance, it became more and more difficult to harmonize women's ordination and biblical inerrancy.<sup>168</sup> In essence the opposing side of women's ordination manages by its politics of association, to use the Bible to speak so loudly against women's ordination that the voice from scripture speaking for it becomes drowned out. This may also be why many found higher criticism itself the most plausible means of defending it. This is not merely a twentieth century phenomenon, but finds 19<sup>th</sup> century example in Cady Stanton's *Women's Bible* which rather than wrestling with the ambiguity regarding gender equality in scripture rejects biblical authority altogether. It appears that many who wanted to defend gender equality were backed into a corner by the loud voice of antimodernism, while the entrenched status quo of male dominance threatened to silence them. Thus by the beginning of the 1980s the tables turned. Feminist interpretation came to the fore utilizing the tools both with and without the presuppositions of historical-criticism to argue for the equal participation of women in all spheres of society. Leading Christian feminists of the 1980s such as Phyllis Trible<sup>169</sup> and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza<sup>170</sup> challenged the biblical culture of patriarchy that marginalizes women in the biblical text and continues to carry this influence. Susan T.

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<sup>168</sup> Chaves, 101.

<sup>169</sup> See Trible's most widely circulated book, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Reading of Biblical Narratives*. Trible describes her feminist approach as prophetic in that it criticizes culture and faith in light of misogyny, "examines the status quo, pronounces judgment, and calls forth repentance" (Ibid., 3). Worthy of note is that in this book Trible allows the Bible to criticize itself so far as she "discerns within the Bible critiques of patriarchy" (Ibid.)

<sup>170</sup> See Schussler Fiorenza's *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). See also Schussler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or reject: Continuing our Critical Work," in *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*."

Foh a major anti-feminist evangelical theologian criticizes this kind of feminism as an attempt to purge the scriptures of cultural elements to “recover God’s truth.”<sup>171</sup> This seemed to have marked the onset of the hermeneutical war over gender equality which is symbolic of the resistance and counter resistance to a modernity that threatens to overturn the traditional patriarchal family structure which gave males a secure space in an economic culture of gender equality.

Historical-criticism had by now appeared as an enemy to Adventism and consequently any issue associated with it. With the question of the ordination of women heating up at the turn of the 1980s along with general feminist issues in the wider society, some began to associate the issue on ordination of women in Adventism with the general climate of Christian feminism whose foremost proponents were now applying critical tools of interpretation to scripture. The entrance of the feminist critique introduced a new enemy in this regard, the proponents of women’s ordination. Thus whereas up until the mid 1970s no heated debate on hermeneutics accompanied the debate on the ordination of women, by the time the feminist critique became the symbolic foe of Seventh-day Adventist theology the issues of hermeneutics and women’s ordination became twin issues. In the conversations against women’s ordination the issues become muddled. Following are significant arguments that demonstrate the underlying hermeneutical fear that accompany the issue of women’s ordination in the mind of those who oppose it.

Weiland Henry III writing for *Advetists Affirm* clearly expresses that the fundamentalist concern with Seventh-day Adventist theology lies deeper than the concern over a methodology. Thus as he contemplates the question of women’s ordination, he is

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<sup>171</sup> Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 7.

not sure how he can let the Bible speak for the denomination's theology while speaking for women's ordination. He states:

More important than the outcome of the ordination question or any other disputed point in the church is the question of how we decide what is right, *how* we distinguish truth from error. The Bible must provide the answers for us, but *how* shall we interpret it? Our methods of interpretation must work well on *all* of our doctrines and practices. We dare not bring in new approaches for one point that would compromise our teachings on other points.<sup>172</sup>

We have however noted that from a practical standpoint, we cannot identify any consistent approach in the hermeneutical fray. This very statement of Henry suggests that there is a search for a convenient approach, and not necessarily a "right" one. What we are sure of is that the denomination and its most strident scholars maintain a firm inerrantist stance. Yet inerrancy, as we have noted comes to a variety of services in the hermeneutical politics, and may utilize any of the two contended approaches to do so.

In a 1980 *Spectrum* article Brian Ball then president of Avondale College in Australia criticizes prominent biblical feminists<sup>173</sup> who argue for the full participation of women in the ordinances of the church mainly on the basis of their interpretive methods.<sup>174</sup> He titles his article as "a plea for caution." According to Ball, "the influence of liberal theology in its many forms is clearly evident in the writings of many who

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<sup>172</sup> Weiland Henry III, "Two or Three Witnesses," *Adventists Affirm*, Spring 1996, 37. (Italics his)

<sup>173</sup> Ball criticizes Sara Maitland's *A Map of the New Century – Women and Christianity* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), and Georgia Harkness's, *Women in Church and Society: A Historical and Theological Inquiry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1972). These authors apply higher criticism to scripture, assuming, for example, that the Genesis story is mythical.

<sup>174</sup> See Brian Ball, "The Ordination of Women: A Plea for Caution," *Spectrum* 17:2 (December, 1980): 38-54.

advocate women's ordination."<sup>175</sup> Thus he argues, "it is this pervasive influence of liberalism that should deter Seventh-day Adventists from moving precipitately in the direction of female ordination."<sup>176</sup> It is essentially for Ball "the question of biblical authority that is one of the main targets for those anxious to support the movement for women's ordination."<sup>177</sup>

Further, two of the major works in Adventism that oppose women's ordination, *The Tip of the Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry*, by Raymond Holmes, and Samuel Koranteng-Pipim's *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle*, preface the discussion on women's ordination with a critique of higher criticism and feminist theology which they associate with an erosion of the authority of scripture, a threat to Adventist foundational beliefs and practice, and a corrupting influence on society. The association of religious feminism with higher criticism seems to have triggered the association of methodology with the question of the ordination of women, and in turn associated women's ordination with serious threats to the doctrines of the Church, its unity and its survival. Thus Holmes states that the "feminist agenda" of ordination, biblical and historical reinterpretation and reconstruction is a "one-way ticket to social anarchy."<sup>178</sup> Koranteng-Pipim on his part alerts his readers to "the most powerful

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Holmes, 87-88.



ideology driving the campaign for women's ordination, namely feminism.<sup>179</sup> He argues that feminism's "cardinal dogma of full equality poses a direct challenge to our "biblical faith."<sup>180</sup>

The stated purpose of Ball in his article clearly reveals the nature of the concern regarding women's ordination as mainly one of a safe hermeneutic that does not threaten Adventism. He states: "Since it (ordination) is theological, it must be grounded in a theology acceptable to the Seventh-day Adventist church as a whole and must be worked out according to acceptable hermeneutical principles."

We have noted at the onset that prior to the 1980s as the Camp Mohaven document *The Role of Women in the Church* reveals, some of Adventism's most respected theologians worked out the question of the ordination of women within the inerrantist boundaries of the denomination, and without any of the tools of higher criticism. We also noted at the onset the most striking example in the case of Gerhard Hasel, one of Adventism's most respected theologians, who became a dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Hasel's work "Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3" interpreted Genesis 1-3 to heartily support the ordination of women, using the grammatical-historical methodology.<sup>181</sup> Yet by 1988 at the second Commission on the Role of Women Hasel's contributing paper "Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, and the Role of Women," revealed that he had turned coat prefacing his argument with a section on biblical authority and new hermeneutical approaches by Christian and biblical

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<sup>179</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Must We Be Silent?* 137.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Indeed Hasel has been the most articulate defender of traditional Protestant methodology since the onset of the 1970s before the issue of women's ordination became associated with interpretive methodology.

feminists. In this latter instance, Hasel does not base his argument on an interpretation of Genesis 1-3, but on an interpretation of the New Testament interpretation of it (I Timothy 2: 8-15). Here Hasel attempts to uphold Paul's interpretation of the order of creation as valid, and thus make a case for the full authority of scripture and against the inroads of historical criticism. Hasel's 1989 article in *Adventist Affirm* leaves little doubt in the readers mind his grave concern for the traditional beliefs and practices of Adventism as they relate to women's ordination. In the article he states:

“A totally egalitarian stance on women, eliminating male and female role differences, demands limiting the authority of the Bible. Current feminist literature justifies limiting the Bible's authority on this matter by comparing the women's issue to the Sabbath (culturally limited, they say, to the Jews), the adornment of women (culturally limited to Ephesus), and the footwashing ceremony (culturally limited to Jesus' disciples). In short, we cannot separate the issue of the role of women in the church from other items that depend on the authority of scripture, such as the Sabbath, footwashing, and adornment. We could add others: dietary regulations, adult baptism by immersion, and the historical validity of Genesis 1-11.”<sup>182</sup>

Why did Hasel shift from a view of mutuality in gender role to one that opposes it. His paper that advocated it (as we will see in the following chapter) used no questionable methodology. Gordon Hyde Director of the Biblical Research Institute in the 1970s who activated the Camp Mohaven studies provides an explanation.<sup>183</sup> Hyde who conducted the studies on the assumption that the Bible is neutral on the ordination of women question<sup>184</sup> explained at least one of the Mohaven theologians (referring to Hasel who was the most influential theologian present at the conference) modified his views because of the discomfort with the claim that Paul would not have urged the restrictions and

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<sup>182</sup> Gerhard Hasel, “Biblical Authority and Feminist Interpretation,” 13

<sup>183</sup> Gordon Hyde, “The Mohaven Council – Where it Began,” *Adventists Affirm*, Fall 1989, 41-43.

<sup>184</sup> See Hyde's introduction and overview of *The Role of Women in the Church*, 8.

limitations that he did had it not been for the expectations and demands of the surrounding culture. This, according to Hyde becomes problematic “because it is the seed or root which has produced the higher-critical...method of approach to the scriptures. By such, the entire scriptures are considered fair game for reinterpretation on the assumption that they are culturally conditioned.”<sup>185</sup> For this chief reason among others, Hyde declares he no longer advocates the ordination of women.<sup>186</sup> Hasel’s 1988 paper implies that his real issue is not with the ordination of women, but with the feminist critique which in his view subordinates scripture to human reason.<sup>187</sup> Hasel’s issue is with the historical-critical methodology which he thoroughly criticizes in his 1985 book, *Biblical Interpretation Today*.

We see then that the confrontation of feminist criticism exacerbates what was already a fomenting issue in Adventism, namely the challenge of historical criticism. The ordination of women becomes the logical scapegoat. In this vein biblical authority comes to represent the authority of the cultural background of the Bible, namely patriarchy, and in turn to represent male authority. Thus as we may deduce from the conversation so far, the principle in the grammatical-historical methodology that calls for an investigation of the historical context<sup>188</sup> becomes lost in the shuffle to present the Bible as a perfect blending of the human and the divine without errors, cultural particularity or diversity of ideas. Here, inerrancy functions as a symbol of resistance to

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> See *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>188</sup> We may recall that Ford did just that, thus earning his passage out of the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

liberal religion which any semblance of higher criticism seems to represent, and the rationale for resisting women's ordination.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The question about hermeneutics arises in Seventh-day Adventism with the question of the inspiration and authority of scripture, and the question of the veracity of the Church's foundational doctrines. These questions issue from the challenges of historical-criticism to biblical studies in general and to Seventh-day Adventism in particular. While historical-criticism classically rejects the supernatural presuppositions of the historical-grammatical method, the issue in Seventh-day Adventism involves the use of the method without its antisupernaturalist presuppositions. The literature suggests that those who oppose the use of these tools in Adventism are wary of the ideology that attends the method, and of the presuppositions regarding biblical inspiration and authority which accompany merely an application of its tools.

In spite of the protest of the fundamentalist scholars in the denomination, no one in the conversation over methodology rejects biblical authority and inspiration. Moreover they seem to adhere to a more rigid concept of inerrancy than the denomination's prophet. Also, the denomination's official statement on interpretive methodology seems to allow more room for contextualization than those who protest against it give it credit for. Further, it does not allow for the kind of inerrancy that the fundamentalist scholars would like to associate it with. Their association with higher

criticism of any methodology (regardless of its adherence to biblical authority) that may alter the traditional theology of the denomination has engendered a methodological politics on all sides of the conflict by which Seventh-day Adventism becomes the major object of defense. In this regard the concern is less with methodology than it is with the fundamental doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism.

Leading Christian feminists apply critical tools to scripture in the argument against the patriarchal heritage in scripture that continues to justify the marginalization of women. This has the effect of projecting the threat of historical-criticism onto the question of the ordination of women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In this case, the ordination of women stands in the place of the original enemy of Seventh-day Adventist identity, historical criticism. The resistance to women's ordination, therefore, is symbolic of the resistance to the use of any interpretive methodology that threatens the fundamental doctrine of the denomination. Women's ordination therefore became the scapegoat in the denomination's struggle to protect its identity. The arguments against women's ordination consequently moved beyond methodology to become an all out struggle to maintain a Church's identity against those who push for the Church's growth by challenging traditional practices.

# Methods of Bible Study

## Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods

### 1. Preamble

This statement is addressed to all members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the purpose of providing guidelines on how to study the Bible, both the trained biblical scholar and others.

Seventh-day Adventists recognize and appreciate the contributions of those biblical scholars throughout history who have developed useful and reliable methods of Bible study consistent with the claims and teachings of Scripture. Adventists are committed to the acceptance of biblical truth and are willing to follow it, using all methods of interpretation consistent with what Scripture says of itself. These are outlined in the presuppositions detailed below.

In recent decades the most prominent method in biblical studies has been known as the historical-critical method. Scholars who use this method, as classically formulated, operate on the basis of presuppositions which, prior to studying the biblical text, reject the reliability of accounts of miracles and other supernatural events narrated in the Bible. Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.

The historical-critical method minimizes the need for faith in God and obedience to His commandments. In addition, because such a method de-emphasizes the divine element in the Bible as an inspired book (including its resultant unity) and depreciates or misunderstands apocalyptic prophecy and the eschatological portions of the Bible, we urge Adventist Bible students to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method.

In contrast with the historical-critical method and presuppositions, we believe it to be helpful to set forth the principles of Bible study that are consistent with the teachings

of the Scriptures themselves, that preserve their unity, and are based upon the premise that the Bible is the Word of God. Such an approach will lead us into a satisfying and rewarding experience with God.

### 2. Presuppositions Arising From the Claims of Scripture

#### a. Origin

(1) The Bible is the Word of God and is the primary and authoritative means by which He reveals Himself to human beings.

(2) The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers with thoughts, ideas, and objective information; in turn they expressed these in their own words. Therefore the Scriptures are an indivisible union of human and divine elements, neither of which should be emphasized to the neglect of the other (2 Peter 1:21; cf. *The Great Controversy*, v, vi).

(3) All Scripture is inspired by God and came through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, it did not come in a continuous chain of unbroken revelations. As the Holy Spirit communicated truth to the Bible writer, each wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the aspect of the truth which he was led to stress. For this reason the student of the Bible will gain a rounded comprehension on any subject by recognizing that the Bible is its own best interpreter and when studied as a whole it depicts a consistent, harmonious truth (2Tim.3:16; Heb. 1:1, 2; cf. *Selected Messages*, Book 1, 19, 20; *The Great Controversy*, v, vi).

(4) Although it was given to those who lived in an ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean context, the Bible transcends its cultural backgrounds to serve as God's Word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages.

#### b. Authority

(1) The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are the clear, infallible

revelation of

God's will and His salvation. The Bible is the Word of God, and it alone is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested (2 Tim. 3:15, 17; Ps. 119: 105; Prov. 30:5,6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Thess. 3:14; Heb. 4:12).

(2) Scripture is an authentic, reliable record of history and God's acts in history. It provides the normative theological interpretation of those acts. The supernatural acts revealed in Scripture are historically true. For example, chapters 1-11 of Genesis are a factual account of historical events.

(3) The Bible is not like other books. It is an indivisible blend of the divine and the human. Its record of many details of secular history is integral to its overall purpose to convey salvation history. While at times there may be parallel procedures employed by Bible students to determine historical data, the usual techniques of historical research, based as they are on human presuppositions and focused on the human element, are inadequate for interpreting the Scriptures, which are a blend of the divine and human. Only a method that fully recognizes the indivisible nature of the Scriptures can avoid a distortion of its message.

(4) Human reason is subject to the Bible, not equal to or above it. Presuppositions regarding the Scriptures must be in harmony with the claims of the Scriptures and subject to correction by them (1 Cor. 2:1-6). God intends that human reason be used to its fullest extent, but within the context and under the authority of His Word rather than independent of it.

(5) The revelation of God in all nature, when properly understood, is in harmony with the written Word, and is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture.

### **3. Principles for Approaching the Interpretation of Scripture**

a. The Spirit enables the believer to accept, understand, and apply the Bible to one's own life as he seeks divine power to render obedience to all scriptural requirements and to appropriate personally all Bible promises. Only those following the

light already received can hope to receive further illumination of the Spirit (John 16:13, 14; 1 Cor.2:10-14).

b. Scripture cannot be correctly interpreted without the aid of the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit who enables the believer to understand and apply Scripture. Therefore, any study of the Word should commence with a request for the Spirit's guidance and illumination.

c. Those who come to the study of the Word must do so with faith, in the humble spirit of a learner who seeks to hear what the Bible is saying. They must be willing to submit all presuppositions, opinions, and the conclusions of reason to the judgment and correction of the Word itself. With this attitude the Bible student may come directly to the Word, and with careful study may come to an understanding of the essentials of salvation apart from any human explanations, however helpful. The biblical message becomes meaningful to such a person.

d. The investigation of Scripture must be characterized by a sincere desire to discover and obey God's will and word rather than to seek support or evidence for preconceived ideas.

### **4. Methods of Bible Study**

a. Select a Bible version for study that is faithful to the meaning contained in languages in which the Bible originally was written, giving preference to translations done by a broad group of scholars and published by a general publisher above translations sponsored by a particular denomination or narrowly focused group.

Exercise care not to build major doctrinal points on one Bible translation or version. Trained biblical scholars will use the Greek and Hebrew texts, enabling them to examine variant readings of ancient Bible manuscripts as well.

b. Choose a definite plan of study, avoiding haphazard and aimless approaches. Study plans such as the following are suggested:

(1) Book-by-book analysis of the message

(2) Verse-by-verse method

(3) Study that seeks a biblical solution to a specific life problem, biblical satisfaction for a specific need, or a biblical answer to a specific question

(4) Topical study (faith, love, second coming, and others)

(5) Word study

(6) Biographical study

c. Seek to grasp the simple, most obvious meaning of the biblical passage being studied.

d. Seek to discover the underlying major themes of Scripture as found in individual texts, passages, and books. Two basic, related themes run throughout Scripture: (1) The person and work of Jesus Christ; and (2) the great controversy perspective involving the authority of God's Word, the fall of man, the first and second advents of Christ, the exoneration of God and His law, and the restoration of the divine plan for the universe. These themes are to be drawn from the totality of Scripture and not imposed on it.

e. Recognize that the Bible is its own interpreter and that the meaning of words, texts, and passages is best determined by diligently comparing scripture with scripture.

f. Study the context of the passage under consideration by relating it to the sentences and paragraphs immediately preceding and following it. Try to relate the ideas of the passage to the line of thought of the entire Bible book.

g. As far as possible ascertain the historical circumstances in which the passage was written by the biblical writers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

h. Determine the literary type the author is using. Some biblical material is composed of parables, proverbs, allegories, psalms, and apocalyptic prophecies. Since many biblical writers presented much of their material as poetry, it is helpful to use a version of the Bible that presents this material in poetic style, for passages employing imagery are not to be interpreted in the same manner as prose.

1. Recognize that a given biblical text may not conform in every detail to present-day literary categories. Be cautious not to force these categories in interpreting the

meaning of the biblical text. It is a human tendency to find what one is looking for, even when the author did not intend such.

j. Take note of grammar and sentence construction in order to discover the author's meaning. Study the key words of the passage by comparing their use in other parts of the Bible by means of a concordance and with the help of biblical lexicons and dictionaries.

k. In connection with the study of the biblical text, explore the historical and cultural factors. Archaeology, anthropology, and history may contribute to understanding the meaning of the text.

1. Seventh-day Adventists believe that God inspired Ellen G. White. Therefore, her expositions on any given Bible passage offer an inspired

guide to the meaning of texts without exhausting their meaning or preempting the task of exegesis (for example, see *Evangelism*, 256; *The Great Controversy*, 193, 595; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 665, 682, 707-708; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 33-35).

m. After studying as outlined above, turn to various commentaries and secondary helps such as scholarly works to see how others have dealt with the passage. Then carefully evaluate the different viewpoints expressed from the standpoint of Scripture as a whole.

n. In interpreting prophecy keep in mind that:

(1) The Bible claims God's power to predict the future (Isa 46:10).

(2) Prophecy has a moral purpose. It was not written merely to satisfy curiosity about the future. Some of the purposes of prophecy are to strengthen faith (John 14:29) and to promote holy living and readiness for the Advent (Matt 24:44; Rev 22:7, 10, 11).

(3) The focus of much prophecy is on Christ (both His first and second advents), the church, and the end-time.

(4) The norms for interpreting prophecy are found within the Bible itself: The Bible notes time prophecies and their historical fulfillments; the New Testament cites specific fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah; and the Old



Testament itself presents individuals and events as types of the Messiah.

(5) In the New Testament application of Old Testament prophecies, some literal names become spiritual: for example, Israel represents the church, Babylon apostate religion, etc.

(6) There are two general types of prophetic writings: nonapocalyptic prophecy as found in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and apocalyptic prophecy as found in Daniel and the Revelation. These differing types have different characteristics:

(a) Nonapocalyptic prophecy addresses God's people; apocalyptic is more universal in scope.

(b) Nonapocalyptic prophecy often is conditional in nature, setting forth to God's people the alternatives of blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience; apocalyptic emphasizes the sovereignty of God and His control over history.

(c) Nonapocalyptic prophecy often leaps from the local crisis to the end-time day of the Lord; apocalyptic prophecy presents the course of history from the time of the prophet to the end of the world.

(d) Time prophecies in nonapocalyptic prophecy generally are long, for example, 400 years of Israel's servitude (Gen. 15:13) and 70 years of Babylonian captivity (Jer. 25:12). Time prophecies in apocalyptic prophecy generally are phrased in short terms, for example, 10 days (Rev. 2:10) or 42 months (Rev. 13:5). Apocalyptic time periods stand symbolically for longer periods of actual time.

(7) Apocalyptic prophecy is highly symbolic and should be interpreted accordingly. In interpreting symbols, the following methods may be used:

(a) Look for interpretations (explicit or implicit) within the passage itself (for example, Dan. 8:20, 21; Rev. 1:20).

(b) Look for interpretations elsewhere in the book or in other writings by the same author.

(c) Using a concordance, study the use of symbols in other parts of Scripture.

(d) A study of ancient Near Eastern documents may throw light on the meaning of symbols, although scriptural use may alter those meanings.

(8) The literary structure of a book often is an aid to interpreting it. The parallel nature of Daniel's prophecies is an example.

o. Parallel accounts in Scripture sometimes present differences in detail and emphasis (for example, cf. Matt 21:33, 34; Mark 12:1-11; and Luke 20:9-18; or 2 Kings 18-20 with 2 Chron. 32). When studying such passages, first examine them carefully to be sure that the parallels actually are referring to the same historical event. For example, many of Jesus' parables may have been given on different occasions to different audiences and with different wording.

In cases where there appear to be differences in parallel accounts, one should recognize that the total message of the Bible is the synthesis of all of its parts. Each book or writer communicates that which the Spirit has led him to write. Each makes his own special contribution to the richness, diversity, and variety of Scripture (*The Great Controversy* v, vi). The reader must allow each Bible writer to emerge and be heard while at the same time recognizing the basic unity of the divine self-disclosure.

When parallel passages seem to indicate discrepancy or contradiction, look for the underlying harmony. Keep in mind that dissimilarities may be due to minor errors of copyists (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 16), or may be the result of differing emphases and choice of materials of various authors who wrote under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit for different audiences under different circumstances (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 21, 22; *The Great Controversy* vi).

It may prove impossible to reconcile minor dissimilarities in detail which may be irrelevant to the main and clear message of the passage. In some cases judgment may have to be suspended until more information and better evidence are available to resolve a seeming discrepancy.

p. The Scriptures were written for the practical purpose of revealing the will of God to the human family. However, in order not to misconstrue certain kinds of statements, it is important to recognize that they were addressed to peoples of Eastern cultures and expressed in their thought

patterns.

Expressions such as “the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Ex. 9:12) or “an evil spirit from God . . .” (1 Sam 16:15), the imprecatory psalms, or the “three days and three nights” of Jonah as compared with Christ’s death (Matt. 12:40), commonly are misunderstood because they are interpreted today from a different viewpoint.

A background knowledge of Near Eastern culture is indispensable for understanding such expressions. For example, Hebrew culture attributed responsibility to an individual for acts he did not commit but that he allowed to happen. Therefore the inspired writers of the Scriptures commonly credit God with doing actively that which in Western thought we would say He permits or does not prevent from happening, for example, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.

Another aspect of Scripture that troubles the modern mind is the divine command to Israel to engage in war and execute entire nations. Israel originally was organized as a theocracy, a civil government through which God ruled directly (Gen. 18:25). Such a theocratic state was unique. It no longer exists and cannot be regarded as a direct model for Christian practice.

The Scriptures record that God accepted persons whose experiences and statements were not in harmony with the spiritual principles of the Bible as a whole. For example, we may cite incidents relating to the use of alcohol, polygamy, divorce, and slavery. Although condemnation of such deeply ingrained social customs is not explicit, God did not necessarily endorse or approve all that He permitted and bore with in the lives of the patriarchs and in Israel. Jesus made this clear in His statement with regard to divorce (Matt 19:4-6, 8).

The spirit of the Scriptures is one of restoration. God works patiently to elevate fallen humanity from the depths of sin to the divine ideal. Consequently, we must not accept as models the actions of sinful men as recorded in the Bible.

The Scriptures represent the unfolding of God’s revelation to man. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, for example, enlarges and expands certain Old Testament concepts.

Christ Himself is the ultimate revelation of God’s character to humanity (Heb. 1:1-3).

While there is an overarching unity in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and while all Scripture is equally inspired, God chose to reveal Himself to and through human individuals and to meet them where they were in terms of spiritual and intellectual endowments. God Himself does not change, but He progressively unfolded His revelation to men as they were able to grasp it (John 16:12; *The SDA Bible Commentary* vol .7, p. 945; *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 21). Every experience or statement of Scripture is a divinely inspired record, but not every statement or experience is necessarily normative for Christian behavior today. Both the spirit and the letter of Scripture must be understood (1 Cor. 10:6-13; *The Desire of Ages*, 150; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 10-12).

q. As the final goal, make application of the text. Ask such questions as, “What is the message and purpose God intends to convey through Scripture?” “What meaning does this text have for me?” “How does it apply to my situation and circumstances today?” In doing so, recognize that although many biblical passages had local significance, nonetheless they contain timeless principles applicable to every age and culture.

## 5. Conclusion

In the “Introduction” to *The Great Controversy* Ellen G. White wrote:

The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” John 1:14. (p. vi)

As it is impossible for those who do not accept Christ’s divinity to understand the purpose of His incarnation, it is also impossible for those who see the Bible merely as a human book to understand its message, however careful and rigorous their methods.

Even Christian scholars who accept the divine-human nature of Scripture, but whose methodological approaches cause them to dwell largely on its human aspects, risk emptying the biblical message of its power by relegating it to the background while concentrating on the medium. They forget that medium and message are inseparable and that the medium without the message is as an empty shell that cannot address the

vital spiritual needs of humankind.

A committed Christian will use only those methods that are able to do full justice to the dual, inseparable nature of Scripture, enhance his ability to understand and apply its message, and strengthen faith.

October 12, 1986

General Conference Committee  
Annual Council

## CHAPTER III

### **The Debate: Deriving Meaning from the Bible or Imposing an Agenda Upon it?**

Because resistance to women's ordination functions as a symbol of denominational loyalty, those who defend women's ordination have been compelled to also make a case for denominational loyalty. This case seems to be made by the fact that for the most significant part, the arguments for women's ordination have remained within the conservative inerrantist boundaries of the denomination. By this, they effectively make the statement that women's ordination is not an enemy of the denomination. Yet, already it is a symbolic threat – a symbol of liberalism. Therefore, the arguments for and against women's ordination have comprised largely of an ideological struggle centered on the status quo of male headship in which the Bible is more an accessory than it is instructive. Interpretive methodology is the servant of an already framed social outlook.<sup>1</sup>

Chaves argues that an acceptance of the conclusion of higher criticism will allow one to accept the inconsistency in scripture on the matter of female clergy. He refers specifically to the idea that “different texts in the Bible were written by various people in various contexts for various purposes. Higher criticism, however, is not necessary to arriving at such conclusion. The denomination's statement on biblical interpretation, “Methods of Bible Study” clearly recognizes this, but does not define it as “inconsistency.”<sup>2</sup> Rather it assumes that there is an “underlying harmony.”<sup>3</sup> In spite of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Meike Bal, *Lethal Love* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> “Methods of Bible Study,” 4. (8).

denomination's relatively open approach to scripture, the fundamentalist biblical scholars of the denomination have been able to convince the world field that the denomination's survival is at stake in the question of women's ordination. This is because they carried to the Bible a political agenda that *really* had nothing to do with women's ordination, but appealed to the majority because it advocated against liberal religion and upheld the status quo of male authority.

The difference in interpretive outcomes does not depend on the interpretive methodology but upon the agenda that each side takes to the Bible. This becomes evident in the text with which they start. We have seen an apt example of this in the case of Hasel who was able to come away with opposing conclusions regarding women's ordination not because of a different methodology, but because of the text he begins with in each instance. When he defended women's ordination, he began with Genesis 1 that asserts a general principle of gender equality. When he opposed it, he discarded such principle in favor of a literalist approach to I Timothy 2: 11-15 that forbids women to have authority over men. In the latter instance, he is concerned with upholding the status quo of male headship as a means of resisting modernity - a resistance which mask the deeper ecclesiological issue of Seventh-day Adventist identity. This indicates that the concern is not with interpretive methodology, but with interpretive outcome.

The argument for male authority makes the argument against female clergy salient. It is the most consistent biblical argument available, not because the Bible is consistent about it, but because it represents the social status quo of scripture and remains

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

entrenched in Western culture. Upholding this vital social status quo is a key to resisting liberal religion. Thus, while other arguments have been presented for and against women's ordination, the arguments for male authority and gender mutuality have been the decisive arguments in the debate. This defines the debate as socially ideological.

This chapter closely observes how Adventist biblical scholars engage the Bible to defend the ideas of male headship and gender mutuality as the primary points of consideration in the question of the ordination of women. The chapter proceeds by first looking at the historical progress of the debate to acquaint the reader with the major literary sources of the Biblical arguments in the debate. It then presents a survey of the methodology used in the major arguments to determine the extent to which interpretive methodology is the issue in the debate. The arguments that appear are representative of the way the arguments from the Bible develop. Because the arguments at the Utrecht debate appear as an ideal case for the argument that the social agenda that one takes to the text determines the outcome, the study will look at these arguments prior to entering into the general conversation.

### **History of the Debate**

Seventh-day Adventism grew out of a 19<sup>th</sup> century religious revivalism that saw women taking to the pulpits, and several of them leading out in denominations. Seventh-day Adventism stands out in this regard, because its founding prophet is a woman. At a time when the focus of the denomination was on evangelistic preaching many women took on the role of evangelists and obtained ministerial licenses. Because of the inerrantist stance of the denomination, this phenomenon of women's active public role in the denomination

has stirred up controversy. As more and more women became active as evangelists and preachers not only in the Adventist Church, but in other churches, many wanted to know how this could be justified in light of I Corinthians 14: 34-35 (“...women should remain silent in all the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says....”), and I Timothy 2: 11-14 (“.....I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent....”). Thus, as early as the 1870s James White opened the pages of the *Review and Herald*<sup>4</sup> to those who wanted to express their views on the question of women’s role in the Church. Though the question of ordination did not surface in these articles, the 1881 resolution to ordain women suggests that the question existed. Also, in 1895, Ellen White made statements regarding the laying on of hand on women to do special charitable and voluntary work.<sup>5</sup> This described the office of deacon as the Church understands it. Many of those statements, as we shall see in Chapter IV seem to have been working around a fomenting issue regarding ordination. By the death of Ellen White in 1915, the issue had died. While the administrative positions held by women in the Church continued to fall thereafter, women continued to work as ministers and receive ministerial licenses in North America, Europe and the Far East.

The issue of Ordination came to the fore when in 1968 and 1972 requests from Finland and the Far Eastern Division came to the General Conference for counsel regarding the ordination of women. Along with this, the issue was already fomenting in

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<sup>4</sup> See my reference to the relevant articles in the discussion below.

<sup>5</sup> According to Mrs. White, “women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to do this work by prayer and the laying on of hands.... (“The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *Review and Herald*, 9 July, 1895).

North America. This led to the establishment of an *ad hoc* committee on the role of women in the Church directed by the Biblical Research Institute. This committee met at Camp Mohaven in Ohio in September 1973 to discuss 29 papers on the role of women in the Church. The result was the publication of *The Role of Women in the Church*. It was a pro-ordination of women publication. Though other papers were presented to the committee that opposed the issue, these views were not represented.<sup>6</sup>

In 1983, the North American Division established a Commission on the Role of Women in the Church. Between 1983 and 1988 this commission generated papers mainly by the denomination's biblical scholars both for and against ordination of women. As the debate continued to heat up, major books were published opposing and supporting ordination of women. While these books represent other arguments both biblical and non-biblical, the major biblical arguments surround male headship. The first major publication in this direction was Samuelle Bacchiocchi's: *Women in the Church*. His was the foremost argument against ordination of women based on male headship, and was published in 1987. Most of the other arguments came in both official and independent Adventist periodicals and magazines until the mid 1990s when the decisive vote was to be made in Utrecht. Three major books appeared in anticipation of Utrecht. In 1994, Raymond Holmes published *The Tip of An Iceberg* dealing with the question of biblical authority, biblical interpretation and the ordination of women. Along with Koranteng-Pipims's *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity*, published in 1995, these books followed the line of argument of Bacchiocchi regarding male authority, but inserting a strong indictment of the feminist agenda backed by an

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<sup>6</sup> This is based on the admission of Gordon Hyde, the convener of the conference. See Hyde, "The Mohaven Council – Where it all Began," 6.



interpretive method that threatens Adventist fundamental beliefs. Opposing those views was the book *The Welcome Table* which opposed the concept of male authority using a methodology that relies on the broad theme of *heilsgeschichtie* as the element of consistency in scripture, rather than on biblical literalism, without questing any of the fundamental beliefs of Adventism. This was also published in 1995 in anticipation of the Utrecht debate. These four books were independently published

The debate continued after the vote at Utrecht with a publication by the majority of Seminary Professors, *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, published in 1998. This book was published by Andrews University Press. The minority “fundamentalist” section of the Seminary, along with associated lay persons responded with *Prove All Things* in 2000. The major spokesperson for this group, Koranteng-Pipim continued to publish in 1996 and 2001 respectively *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Affect our Faith*, and *Must We Be Silent: Issues Affecting our Church*. These two books consolidate the fundamentalist views in Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholarship. All these books were independently published.

Thus far, we have been arguing that the argument over methodology is more political than it is functional. In the general literature on the debate, the question of hermeneutics prefaces the arguments. It is important to look at these prefatory arguments regarding hermeneutics to see how they expose the politics of “scripturalizing that characterizes the debate.

### **A Survey of Methodology**

Close investigation of the literature produced by the debate, reveals a politics of methodology by which both opponents and proponents of women’s ordination attempt to

distance themselves from any methodology that questions the divine inspiration of scripture or diverts from the principle of *sola scriptura*. However, it appears that for the opponents, methodology is equated with the side of the debate on which one stands. Close observation reveals that while the same methodology prevails throughout, interpreters seem to use it differently based on the position they take in the debate.

Both proponents and opponents construe the idea of scripture interpreting itself (a core historical grammatical principle) in different ways. For example, Samuele Bacchiocchi's *Women in the Church* relies on the basic principle of scripture interpreting scripture, yet it generally appears as a sophisticated use of proof text – matching texts with texts to prove his point. As we shall see, Bacchiocchi is willing to reference the culture of the time to justify his defense of male headship, but he rejects the idea that many of the practices reflected in scripture may be culturally specific. On the other hand, the pro-ordination of women book, *Women in Ministry*, while it declares that scripture must be allowed to interpret itself, it states: “on matters on which scripture is silent, one must search for biblical *principles* (italics mine) that relate to the situation.”<sup>7</sup> It bases this on the assumption that the Bible is silent on the question of women's ordination. The essential difference here lies in this assumption. Opponents of women's ordination assume that the Bible is explicit on the question of Women's ordination. Other singly authored books<sup>8</sup> published around the time of the 1995 Utrecht convention which opposed the ordination of women adopt a *modus operandi* similar to that of Bacchiocchi.

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<sup>7</sup> *Women in Ministry*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Holmes, *The Tip of An Iceberg*; Koranteng-Pippim, *Searching the Scriptures*, and *Receiving the Word*.

The pro-ordination of women book *The Welcome Table*<sup>9</sup> registers recognition of the weakness of the historical-grammatical method (and also the antisupernaturalist presupposition of the historical-critical method), and rejected the idea of male authority at any level. It approaches the Bible from the “perspective of salvation history”<sup>10</sup> - a method it calls the *historical method*, and by this it attempts to present biblical rationale for opposing male headship. Cottrell argues that this is the method used by the majority of Seventh-day Adventist biblical scholars.<sup>11</sup> The designation “historical method” seems to be an attempt to purge the term “critical” from a methodology which opponents of women’s ordination designate as “historical-critical” and which they indict as the enemy of Adventist theology. According to Cottrell, “it accepts the divine message in its entirety and at the same time recognizes the historical circumstances of the people to whom the message was originally addressed.”<sup>12</sup> Cottrell lists the historical-critical method and the historical-grammatical method among the methods he terms “defective.”<sup>13</sup> The defect in higher criticism for him is not the critical tools of interpretation, but the anti-supernatural presupposition with which it approaches the text,<sup>14</sup> while the defect of historical-grammatical method is the fact that it tends to do scholarly investigation “under the control of fundamentalist proof-text principles and

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<sup>9</sup> *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women*, eds., Patricia Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart (Langley Park, MD: TEAMPress), 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Cottrell, “A Reliable Guide to Interpretation,” 80.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

presuppositions.”<sup>15</sup> Careful observation of the method which Cottrell presents as acceptable will reveal that it makes no significant diversion from “Methods of Bible Study.” However two significant points in Cottrell’s methodology may prove to cut the edge. First Cottrell notes under the heading, “aspects of Bible that must be considered” that the Bible is “replete with evidence of accommodation to cultural influences.”<sup>16</sup> Yet, the examples which he presents in this regard, such as literary forms, social customs and anthropomorphisms keep him on the same path as “Methods of Bible Study.” Secondly, the point labeled “presuppositions” notes that the interpreter must be aware of his or her presuppositions that “guide and control how one evaluates and forms conclusions,” and as such “must be open to revision if one finds convincing evidence.”<sup>17</sup> What is the essential difference then between the method outlined by Cottrell in *The Welcome Table* and that by “Methods of Bible Study? There are two. One is that it does not express the hostility towards historical-criticism as “Methods of Bible Study” does; and very significantly, it is willing to recognize presuppositions and to declare that they may need revision.

The book *Women in Ministry* expresses no diversion from “Methods of Bible Study,” and as the approach stipulates, it focuses on the broad principles of scripture, utilizing historical research in arriving at conclusions.<sup>18</sup> The consistency of scripture lies in these broad principles, not in the specific accounts and practices. Yet, to a significant

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>18</sup> See for example, Dederen, “The Priesthood of all Believers,” in *Women in Ministry*, 9-27. Dederen gives historical reasons for the absence of women priests in Israel, rather than a priori doctrinal reasons.

extent, it capitulates to the symbolism of male headship. It presents the concept of gender mutuality as a spiritual ideal but maintains male headship in the family for the sake of domestic harmony.<sup>19</sup> Where it argues for male authority it does so as social expediency rather than as a universal ideal. This seems to be a subtle statement against liberalism without embracing fundamentalism.

The opposing response to *Women in Ministry, Prove all Things*, declares that it uses the historical-grammatical, that which Koranteng-Pipim calls “the time honored approach.”<sup>20</sup> Its opening chapters on methodology<sup>21</sup> comprise mainly of criticizing the books *Women in Ministry* and *The Welcome Table* as using a “wrong methodology,” while presenting its methodology as the “right methodology.” Yet, close reading reveal that the methodology has as its starting point an expressed advocacy for the “long-standing Seventh-day Adventist belief and practice of ministry.”<sup>22</sup> Thus despite the protest of *Prove all Things* against the methodology of these two pro-ordination books, its basic problem with their methodology seems to be with their essential conclusion (or presupposition) - one which affirms women’s ordination. Careful observation of the contributions in *Prove all Things* reveals that they often lapse into proof text methodology to *prove* major points of contention. This seems to be unavoidable given

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<sup>19</sup> This argument is the contribution of Richard M. Davidson who argues that male headship is a result of the fall, and was not a pre-fall ideal. He argues that it is only applicable in the husband-wife relationship to maintain harmony in the home, but does not extend to the covenant community. See Richard Davidson, “Headship Submission and Equality in Scripture,” in *Ibid*, 259-294.

<sup>20</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, “Theology or Ideology? Background, Methodology, and Content of Women in Ministry,” in *Prove all Things*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Ibid.*, 17-44; and Damsteegt, “A Look at the Methods of Interpretation in *Women in Ministry*,” in *Ibid.*, 45-59.

<sup>22</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, “Theology or Ideology?,” 27.

fundamentalist inerrancy that is driven by a need to maintain the social status quo of male headship. The authors in *Prove all Things* tend to sacrifice the broad principles of scripture for the specific cultural details, while the pro-ordination authors tend to see historical details as the only deterrent to women's ordination. Thus the book is able, in the manner of Bacchiocchi, to interpret male authority in scripture as a general and universal rule – the basic order of creation.

Finally, while all the major contenders in the debate maintain a policy of interpretation that may not hold up in court as being non-Seventh-day Adventist as far as their stated recognition of the inspiration, authority, unity, and relevance of scripture, opponents and proponents seem to part basically on how they use a particular methodology. This as we as we have been arguing so far, and are about to observe, is based on the particular agenda of the interpreter.

### **The Utrecht Debate:<sup>23</sup> A Platform for Male Headship**

At the Utrecht debate Raoul Dederen presented the argument in favor of women's ordination while Gerard Damsteegt a member of the fundamentalist clique in the theological academe, presented the opposing argument. Interestingly, both men approached the arguments with a common presupposition – namely, male authority. The pro-ordination advocate maintained the conservative inerrantist stance of the denomination and conceded to the politics of male headship. It came down to a question of who used the texts more convincingly. Dederen seemed to have taken on a more

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<sup>23</sup> Thirteenth Business Meeting, General conference Bulletin 1995 – No. 07, *Adventist Review*, 7 July 1995: 23-31.

challenging task than Damsteegt by attempting to prove from scripture that male authority in the New Testament refers only to the husband-wife relationship and thus confined only to the home. Damsteegt appealed to the people gathered at the convention with a power point presentation on a gigantic screen going all out for the authority of scripture to prescribe male headship and female submission in every sphere of life. His argument appealed to the majority, mainly those from developing nations who are overwhelmingly fundamentalist.

Gerard Damsteegt found that a reference to historical background was useful for his purpose. This is because what he is essentially opposing is women's liberation movements. He uses I Timothy 2:12, ff. as his starting point ("I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first....") along with the early Seventh-day Adventist opposition to the women's movement of the nineteenth century,<sup>24</sup> and then launches off into a "background" study of the text. This latter, he juxtaposes to the early Christian interpretation of the gospel by women "as a freedom to exercise the spiritual leadership role in the church."<sup>25</sup> According to him, "I do not permit a woman to have authority over a man" was Paul's "swift" response to a rising women's movement. By this he argues that Paul opposes women's movements that challenge male authority.

Damsteegt attempts to foil all arguments for equality by arguing that male headship appears both before and after sin. He does this by establishing three biblical arguments for the plan for spiritual leadership which he terms as orders of Christ: (1)

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<sup>24</sup> This will be elaborated in Chapter IV.

<sup>25</sup> Thirteenth Business Meeting, General conference Bulletin, 26.

Christ's order of creation before the fall (Adam was created first), (2) Christ's order after the fall (Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor), and (3) Christ's order after the cross (The headship argument of I Corinthians 11: 3). By this he argues that creation, fall and atonement are universal Christian ideals that enforce the universal nature of the I Timothy 2 text.

Damsteegt then looks at the injunction in the text of I Timothy 2 regarding elders. That the text describes a male (having one wife), and that it requires him to have firm leadership over his household, proves for Damsteegt that the text refers to headship both in home and church. The two spheres of authority then are not mutually exclusive. He makes no consideration that the text may be addressing male elders rather than describing the gender of elders. Because the text forbids women to exercise headship or authority over men, it disqualifies them from ordination to the pastoral ministry.

Raoul Dederen who presented the argument for the proposition, presents as his starting point Galations 3:28 ("There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus), as "the overall principle of scripture" regarding women's status. His argument seems to break down in face of the opposition however, as he attempts to concede to the concept of male authority. According to him, the difference between the terms used in Galations 3:28 regarding male, and female and those used in I Corinthians suggests that the headship role of the male is to be exercised only in his capacity as the husband. Dederen argues that in I Corinthians 11 Paul uses the terms *ανδρως* (man or husband) and *γυνη*(woman or wife). In Galations 3: 28 he uses the terms *αρσην* (male) and *θηλυς* (female). By this he concludes that in the arguments for headship/authority, Paul is referring to husbands over his wife. Dederen quotes verses 8



and 9 of I Corinthians 11 (“For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for the woman; but the woman for man.”) as an example of the use of the Greek terms for husband and wife. Yet he stops short of verse 11-12 (which seems to oppose verses 8 and 9): “Nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God.” Here the same terms for husband and wife are used. Dederen makes no commentary on this verse that appears to overturn all that Paul is saying so far on male headship.

### Evaluation

Both speakers have been “appropriately” chosen since they represent the more conservative approach to scripture and affirm the status quo of patriarchy. In essence they both represent the general antiliberal stance of the denomination, a stance necessary to affirm its separatism. Their efforts to uphold male authority steered them away from an obvious contradiction of it in I Corinthians 11: 11-12, even though they interpreted the passage which these verses conclude. The two theologians were appropriate at the world convention of a denomination which was by then convinced that the foe against which they were fighting was liberalism, which disregards the authority of scripture - an authority which had, by then, taken on the symbol of male authority.

By indicting those who want to ordain women of disregard for biblical authority, Damsteegt keeps in the full view of those who are aware of it, the underlying issue which this study has been uncovering, namely the denomination’s theology. This seems to have been the politics at Utrecht to the extent that it involved church scholars and administrators. It involved a struggle to put women in their places – outside of which the

denomination's own future is at stake. It was a struggle with feminism whose hermeneutics challenges the very basis on which Adventism formed its doctrines and established its identity and to upset the "time proven" social status quo of scripture. The argument for women's ordination appears to cover all the political loopholes by remaining on the path of biblical authority and male authority. Thus, it at once opposes the feminist threat, and speaks for the ordination of women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This brings us back to the question why the argument *for* ordination of women at Utrecht stops short of I Corinthians 11: 11-12. The text seems to help the case. However it would not help the argument for male headship. This appears as an apt demonstration of the politics of interpretation.

### **The Argument for Male Authority**

The argument for male authority by the opponents of women's ordination carries with it the maleness of the Godhead, the Old Testament priesthood, and the appointed New Testament apostles. It thus supports the argument of unequal roles, while yielding to the argument of equal humanity. To what extent this twin idea advances an oblique argument for gender equality is yet to be seen. All these arguments obscure the Genesis one account of creation<sup>26</sup> that states that God made both male and female in God's image, and gave them both dominion over the earth by reading it in the light of the order of creation in Genesis 2 as does the author of I Timothy 2:11-15. In these arguments, the focus is on Genesis 2 which outlines the process of the creation of man and woman, and on Genesis 3 regarding the fall and its consequences.

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<sup>26</sup> This text remains a key reference for the argument of gender mutuality.

The argument for male authority as a deterrent to the ordination of women has been advanced systematically in Adventist academic circles primarily by the now deceased Gerhard Hasel, and Samuele Bacchiocchi. Later, Hasel's protégé, Samuel Koranteng-Pipim took up where he left off and has been the most strident opponent of women's ordination and chief representative of the fundamentalist mindset of the developing world of Adventism.<sup>27</sup> All these arguments work with a position on biblical authority and interpretation that explicitly reacts to feminist approaches to scripture, its use of higher criticism, and its critique of the patriarchal heritage.

The major passages in the discussion are I Timothy 2:11-14; I Corinthians 11: 2-10 I Corinthians 14:34-34; Ephesians 5:22-33. As meta-texts of Genesis 2-3, these are accepted by the proponents of male headship as permanent and binding interpretations of the J account of creation. Along with these texts, proponents of male authority have also found it necessary to apply the councils regarding church leaders in I Timothy 3: 1-6, and Titus 1:6 which specifically address male leadership (though they do not prescribe exclusive male leadership). Let us therefore take a closer look at the way these passages figure in the conversation.

The pivotal text from which the argument concerning male authority proceeds is I Timothy 2:11-14. The passage reads:

“11. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. 12. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. 13. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15. Yet she will be saved through childbearing provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.”

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<sup>27</sup> Though Koranteng-Pipim has lived, studied and worked in the United States since 1986, as a native of Ghana, he has been a delegate of the African Indian Ocean Division since 1985. This seems to be due to his continued involvement in the Church in that division.

Samuele Bacchiocchi admits that the view taken by an author on this passage usually reflects his or her view on the role of women in the church.<sup>28</sup> Here he admits to the social mindset that precedes the text. Bacchiocchi attempts to convince his readers that these instructions given by Paul were not merely a congregational issue, but a universal ecclesiastical issue. Bacchiocchi argues that the entire passage though set against a pagan background, makes general statements of male authority indicated and affirmed by female conduct. He bases this on I Timothy 2:9: “I also want a woman to dress modestly, with decency and propriety....” He argues that this is a sign in that culture of a woman’s submission to her husband and recognition of her place among men in general. The entire intent of the text, according to Bacchiocchi, is for women to recognize their rightful place relative to men. He notes that authority and teaching in verse 12 is parallel to submission and quietness in verse 11. Thus he concludes that the kind of teaching referred to in verse 12 is the authoritative kind of teaching, or “governing” function “restricted to the pastor or elder/overseer of the congregation. Bacchiocchi proves this conclusion with I Corinthians 14: 34-35 (“...women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands as home for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”). By doing this, he answers the question that arises regarding I Corinthians 11:5 (“...every woman who prays of prophecies with

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<sup>28</sup> Samuele Bachiocchi, “Divine Order of Headship and Church Order: A Study of the Implications of Male Headship for the Ordination of Women as Elders and/or Pastors,” Commission on the Role of Women, 1987, Office of the President, Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Columbia, Maryland.

her head uncovered dishonors her head....).<sup>29</sup> Why then does the text permit woman to prophecy? He explains that praying and prophesying in I Corinthians 11 are not authoritative teaching ministries.”<sup>30</sup>

Hasel pursues a similar argument regarding male authority and the gift of prophecy. According to him, prophecy was the function of those who had the prophetic gift by the presence of revelation. This, he distinguishes from the authoritative teaching function.<sup>31</sup> The text of I Corinthians 14:34 is a conclusive point in a discussion on spiritual gifts. In light of this, Bacchiocchi refutes the argument that the gift of authoritative leadership can be given to women in the Church. I Timothy 2:11-15 proves his point, and I Corinthians 14:36 reinforces the proof (“What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?”). This, according to him, suggests that the Corinthian church had adopted a norm of allowing women to speak and teach authoritatively that was contrary to the established will of God and the general practice the Churches (I Corinthians 14:33).

Bacchiocchi opposes the claim that the injunction of male authority and female subordination was a response to a local problem and thus locally confined by Paul’s “order of creation” argument.<sup>32</sup> He notes that Paul grounded his argument in the pre-fall and not the post-fall. He further proves this with I Timothy 2:14 (“Adam was not

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<sup>29</sup> Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study of the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987) 170.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Hasel, “Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, and the Role of Women,” Commission on the Role of Women, 1988, Office of the President, Columbia Union Conference, Columbia, Maryland, 37.

<sup>32</sup> Bacchiocchi, “Divine Order of Headship and Church Order,” 24-25.

deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor”). According to him it represents a typological argument of what happens when the order of creation is reversed.<sup>33</sup> Hasel arrives at the same conclusion regarding this text. According to him, Paul could not be denying that Adam was also a transgressor. Rather, he concludes that Paul means to say that if roles are exchanged, disaster is the result as was in the beginning. Thus he effectively locates male headship in the pre-fall state.<sup>34</sup>

Koranteng-Pipim also argues that male headship was instituted at creation, and “reiterated after the fall.”<sup>35</sup> He places the weight of his conclusion on the pre-fall condition using the same argumentation as Hasel and Bacchiocchi.<sup>36</sup> Bacchiocchi’s conclusion is representative. According to him, Paul “did not appeal to local or cultural factors such as the disorderly conduct of some women, their relative lack of education or....” Rather, “the nature of Paul’s argument,” i.e., the appeal to the order of creation, “leaves no room to make his instructions of only local and time-bound application.”<sup>37</sup> The text of Ephesians Ephesians 5:22, ff. drives home Bacchiocchi’s proof. (“Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For as the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church....”) The text forms the basis of his argument that as

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<sup>33</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Women in the Church*, 160.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*, 50.

<sup>36</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Must We Be Silent: Issue Dividing Our Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Berrien Books, 2001), 221-223.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

Christ is the male representative of a male God, so only the male qualifies to take on any headship role.<sup>38</sup>

It is interesting to note that the above proponents seem to begin with the prohibition in I Timothy 2:9-11 and then work towards I Corinthians 11: 3-10. They take along with this prohibition the injunction regarding the office of the elder (I Timothy 3:2, ff.: "...the husband of one wife ....manage his family well..."), noting that all references denote a male person. Thus they begin with what they perceive to be the established order, making it the light for I Corinthians 11: 2-12. It may help to explain why they stop short of I Corinthians 11: 11-12. Even though Bacchiocchi makes an elaborate case for the headship of the man based on the order of creation<sup>39</sup> he totally avoids this text. It appears to pose a challenge to the assumptions of harmony of biblical ideas and of the universal ideal of male headship by which he approaches the texts.

I Timothy 2:11-14, Headship, Anti-ordination: An argument for Seventh-day Adventist Traditional beliefs

Closer observation of the arguments of the above opponents of women's ordination reveals that the obsession is less with what the scripture says on women clergy, than with any interpretation of scripture that may necessitate a revision of Seventh-day Adventist theology. This leads to arguments that are less than consistent.

Bacchiocchi notes that the injunction in I Timothy 2:9 regarding modest attire ("...not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes..."), was in that culture, a sign of her submission to her husband. Thus for him, the principle is universal, though

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<sup>38</sup> Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church*, 206-208.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 65-86.

the examples given in the text - “braided hair, or gold or pearls or costly attire” may be culturally relative.<sup>40</sup> Seventh-day Adventists have used this text as the reason for the doctrinal prohibition against the wearing jewelry. But Bacchiocchi, a vigilante of the denomination’s traditions, is not arguing against the practice of not wearing jewelry and so on. Here, he is simply off his guard in the rush to uphold male authority. Hasel on the other hand is not off guard. He upholds this practice adding that the Church has recognized this text on jewelry to be transcultural in nature.<sup>41</sup> He wants to be consistent in arguing that the rest of the text regarding authority and submission is not culturally relative. He charges with inconsistency, those Adventist scholars who maintain that the rest of the text regarding authority and submission is transcultural.<sup>42</sup> Here appears a conundrum of presuppositions. First, Bacchiocchi concedes that the specific injunction on dress is culturally relative, because he must be consistent with his discussion on I Corinthians 11 that a woman’s head covering is a *symbol* of submission.<sup>43</sup> Here he is approaching the text from the Adventist perspective, namely, that Seventh-day Adventists do not have a general rule on head covering for women. In trying to be consistent with this one rule, since it directly relates to male authority, he appears ambiguous regarding the Church’s stand on Jewelry. The general trend of his argument suggests that this is not his intention. Hasel on his part begins with the Adventist practice concerning jewelry, and uses it as an argument to support the cultural transcendence of the rest of the Timothy

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<sup>40</sup> Bacchiocchi, “Divine Order of Headship and Church Order,” 23.

<sup>41</sup> Hasel, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Bacchiocchi, “Divine Order of Headship and Church Order,” 17, ff. (Italics mine)



2 text. Thus he assumes the Adventist interpretation to be correct from an apologetic standpoint, and projects that on any Adventist conversation regarding the cultural relativity of I Timothy 2: 11-14.

Damsteegt makes the case for the literal application of I Timothy 2:11-14 by appealing to the most foundational doctrine in Adventism – the doctrine of the sanctuary.<sup>44</sup> His argument seems to be a rhetorical device aimed at obscuring the line between church loyalty, and the adherence to biblical tradition. Because a major Adventist tradition surfaces in the context text of I Timothy 2:11-15, namely that of not wearing jewelry,<sup>45</sup> Damsteegt sees it necessary to defend the practice based on the Old Testament day of atonement when Israel was required to “afflict” themselves. As we have seen in Chapter I, the basic idea of the sanctuary doctrine is that October 22, 1844 when the Adventist Church arose ushered in the antitypical day of atonement when Jesus the ultimate high priest entered into the holy of holies in heaven to make final atonement for human sin. Damsteegt arbitrarily suggests that not wearing jewelry is a sign of humility, and because we are in the antitypical Day of Atonement, putting aside jewelry remains a requirement. He justifies his arbitration by saying: “the well-established practice of viewing all teachings in the light of the whole Bible reveals that it is indeed proper to appeal to the antitypical Day of Atonement as one argument against the wearing of jewelry.”<sup>46</sup> It is interesting to note however that the dress code in I Timothy 2:9

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<sup>44</sup> Gerard Damsteegt, “Scripture Faces Current Issues,” *Ministry*, April 1999: 23-27.

<sup>45</sup> “Jewelry” as it is tabooed in Adventism refers really to earrings, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and rings other than a wedding or engagement ring. One can wear an extremely expensive watch or broach and still be regarded as a “good Adventist.”

<sup>46</sup> Damsteegt, 25.

referred only to women. He has not enlightened his readers on why the counsel was given only to women, and why the text is now used to ban jewelry for both men and women.<sup>47</sup> Yet all this appears to be a circumnavigation by Damsteegt to justify a literal application of the text of I Timothy 2: 11-14. He reinforces this literalist approach with the injunction that the elder or minister must be the husband of one wife, and with the Adventist tradition of not allowing women to function as elders or ministers of congregations.<sup>48</sup>

No one can charge Damsteegt for using an “errant” methodology. He has matched texts with text in arriving at his arguments. He says in affirmation of his own approach: “...what we need as Seventh-day Adventists...is submission to the Word of God, not reinterpretation.” So far, Damsteegt has called for a submission to traditional Adventist practices. “Reinterpretation” appears to refer to any change in what he regards as historically Adventist.

#### Male Authority and Pro-ordination of Women

We have noted that both presenters for and against the ordination of women argued for male authority at the 1995 General Conference in Utrecht when the debate came to a climax. The difference however, is that the opposition argued for male authority in all spheres of life both in the home and the church while the proposition argued for male authority only in the home. This signals the politicizing of the texts that

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<sup>47</sup> He intimates at a reason by referring to the incident of the golden calf (Exodus 32: 19-33:6). According to him, the removal of jewelry as Moses commanded the Israelites symbolizes a change of heart. He notes that “nowhere in the Old Testament did God grant Israel permission to put their jewelry back on.” (Ibid.) Has Damsteegt omitted to observe that the issue was not that of wearing jewelry, and therefore the Old Testament would not likely take it up as a subject? He seem even to disregard the basic literary context in the attempt to prove his point.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 26-27.

an antiliberal agenda demands. The result of the arguments that defend women's ordination along with a male headship is that they fall into logical loopholes. The following demonstrates this.

Frank B. Holbrook, in his contribution to the Camp Mohaven study supports female ordination while not altogether uprooting the concept of male headship.<sup>49</sup> He believes that the headship refers to the relationship of husband to wife established at creation and "confirmed" after the fall.<sup>50</sup> He recognizes some of the social ills that attended women in the world of the Bible, but interprets the language of Genesis 2 as the proof of God's will that men and women have equal status. He also cites instances in the Old and New Testaments where women had positions of authority, as evidence that there is a struggle between God's ideal and the sinful state of humankind. Thus he concludes that though sin has resulted in the degradation of woman through the centuries, this was not necessarily the result of God's established order of male headship. He however goes on to say that while

Mosaic instructions preserve to a large degree God's ideal for womanhood, it may be inferred from the records that the divine instruction was adapted to the cultural situation of the times and the hardness of men's hearts. Progressive revelation would bring enlightenment regarding God's ideal.<sup>51</sup>

Holbrook's exegesis results in the equality of man and woman because: (1) She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, (2) she was created from his side not his foot or head, and 3) her name implies equality. However Holbrook sees a certain relationship

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<sup>49</sup> Frank B. Holbrook, "A Brief Analysis and Interpretation of the Biblical Data Regarding the Role of Women," in *The Role of Women in the Church*, 107-137.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

implied in creation that suggests male headship. These include the priority of Adam's creation (citing I Timothy 2:14) and the fact that woman was created for man (citing Genesis 2:18, but seeming to work from the text of I Timothy). Thus he concludes: "Even in the sinless state...there seems to have been a certain headship conferred on the man."<sup>52</sup> The judgment due to sin, he argues, confirms this headship. This is his attempts to confirm the reasons that I Timothy 2:11-14 gives for prohibiting women from having authority over men. Holbrook however argues that Paul's instructions regarding women in I Timothy 2:11-14 and I Corinthians 14:34-35 "was advisable because of the cultural situation of the time."<sup>53</sup> He explains that Galations 3:28 ("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.") is a "manifest declaration of equality insofar as divine redemption is concerned."<sup>54</sup> However, he argues that "such a perspective could not always be realized in that age because of certain deep-seated social institutions and view points held by the society at the time."<sup>55</sup> According to him, New Testament texts such as I Timothy 2:11-14 and I Corinthians 14:34-35 reflect this difficulty to affirm gender equality.<sup>56</sup>

We may observe then, that Holbrook makes the instructions to woman in I Timothy 2:14 accommodative, but the reasons, namely the order of creation and the sin of the woman normative. Holbrook is able to maintain the patriarchal ideal of male

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

headship, or as he terms it male responsibility, which he distinguishes from male domination.<sup>57</sup> Male domination for him is the result of sin. It is that which leads to the exclusion of women from positions of leadership.

Holbrook stretches the historical grammatical method further than the opponents of women's ordination are willing to, by allowing the principle of equality in the sphere of salvation to inform what he sees as difficult passages and then applying the historical context in determining the application of the texts.

Richard Davidson argues for headship but only as a result of the fall.<sup>58</sup> For him, in the perfect creation man and woman had a mutual relationship. This mutuality is demonstrated in the covenant community both in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>59</sup> Davidson argues that Genesis 3: 16 (“...your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you”) is not descriptive but prescriptive. This is because he reads the passage in a judgment/punishment context. Therefore, for him “Gods pronouncement is not...a culturally-conditioned description, but a divine sentence.”<sup>60</sup> Davidson mitigates this conclusion in the context of the covenant community and the scheme of salvation. He says:

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>58</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture,” in *Women in Ministry*, 259-295.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 272, ff.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 267. He draws this conclusion to be consistent with the snake walking on its belly, the need to cultivate the land, the fact of labor in childbirth and the very reality of death. Thus “just as none of those judgments were removed at the cross, but stay in force until the consummation of salvation history, so this judgment remains in force until the removal of sinful world conditions at the end of time.” (Ibid.)

The divine judgment/blessing<sup>61</sup> in Genesis 3:16 is to facilitate the achievement of the original divine design within the context of a sinful world, and it is thus appropriate for marriage partners to seek to return as much as possible to total egalitarianism in the marriage relationship.<sup>62</sup>

The headship relationship is applicable only between husband and wife and not between man and woman in general. In his arguments, this is consistent with the fact that women did have authoritative roles over men in the both Old and New Testaments. How does Davidson account for the injunctions in I Timothy 2: 11-14, and I Corinthians 14:34-35? He argues that the prohibitions do not relate to ecclesiastical authority but to maintenance of the husband/wife relationship of headship/submission even in the worship services. His extensive word study<sup>63</sup> leads him to the conclusion that Paul is addressing husbands and wives, not men and women in general.<sup>64</sup> In I Timothy 2:12 Paul is not prohibiting her from teaching, but from bossing her husband.<sup>65</sup>

Davidson also makes reference to the historical setting of the I Timothy 2 text by pointing to the social conflict in Ephesus which gave rise to the text of I Timothy 2:13. He notes: “Paul is not arguing for a creation headship of man over woman, but was correcting a false syncretistic theology which claimed that *woman* was created first and

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<sup>61</sup> Davidson proposes that the judgment upon the relationship between man and wife in Genesis 3:16 accrue as blessings. He bases this on a word study of *mashal* (rule), which though it indicates submission, subjection and dominion, it is used in the sense of servant leadership, comfort, protect, care for, love. (Here he reads Genesis 3: 16 in light of Ephesians 5: 22-29). Thus the judgment is meant to help human beings return to the ideal pre-fall state. He has, however not explained how the other judgments accrue to blessings.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>63</sup> His conclusive evidence is that the word used for submission in of wives in I Timothy 2:11 is consistent with all other uses of the word dealing with man-woman relations.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

*man* fell first, and therefore women were superior to men.” This, he says, led to the situation of women domineering their husbands.<sup>66</sup>

Davidson’s works with the principle of Galations 3: 28, yet his arguments and conclusions differ from that of Dederen who uses this as his key text in the Utrecht debate. Davidson however must overturn the counter argument to Dederen’s argument namely that Galations 3:28 deals with matters of salvation and not of social roles. He does this by reading it in light of an original sinless creation in Genesis 1:27, in which there is no perversion of human relationships. Thus he concludes that by the text Paul calls us back to the divine ideal which has no place for the general submission of females to males.<sup>67</sup>

Thus far, Davidson has exceeded those who argue for male headship in the husband wife relationship by noting that this was not part of the original creative order. For him therefore, mutuality is an ideal which may even be entered into now. How can this headship/submission be a judgment, a prescription, and yet may be overcome in this sinful world? Davidson answers this question by not interpreting it as part of the order of creation, and by referring to other ways in which the judgment of the curse has been mitigated (such as scientific development in agriculture, and medicine).<sup>68</sup> Of course, Davidson while favoring the ordination of women is not necessarily constrained by his hermeneutics. He is apparently confining himself to the historical-grammatical method.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 267.

His argument does not radically upset the patriarchal mind set, nor does it advocate its establishment. For him, it is not an ideal.

Davidson made no reference to I Corinthians 11:11-12 though it stands in the context of male authority, which he argues, refers to husband and wife relationship. However, he notes the tension in regarding equality and submission from the standpoint of Genesis 3:16 and Genesis 1:27. He argues from what he sees as evidence that God does not prevent women from leadership roles in the covenant community,<sup>69</sup> thus he finds it necessary to explain Paul's argument regarding the teaching authority of women in the church in I Timothy 11:2, ff. In doing so he turns to its source in Genesis 3:16b and then reads it in light of what Paul says about the husband's treatment of his wife in Ephesians 5:22-33, concluding that the injunction regards husbands and wives. He goes into a word study not unlike that of Dederen to prove that the relationship of headship refers only to the husband/wife relationship. After all his explanations he notes that the social mindset at the time prevented Paul from acting "precipitously." Here the reader is not entirely sure whether the precipitous action is that of allowing women to lead in the church or allowing them equal roles in the marital relationship. If it is the former, then he overturns his argument because he has been arguing that headship refers only to the marital relationship. But to be consistent, he must be referring to the latter. This is the statement which he makes in this regard:

Within the social constraints of his day, Paul and the early church (like Jesus) did not act precipitously. ...yet the principles of the gospels were set forth to begin to lead back to the Edenic ideal....While women may not have immediately received full and equal partnership with men in the ministry of the church, the evidence of women in leadership roles in the early church is

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 282.



sufficient to demonstrate that they were not barred from positions of influence, leadership and even headship over men.<sup>70</sup>

In light of what he has been saying, this statement appears ambiguous. However the purpose of his argumentation is clear. He wants to defend the politics of headship, and at the same time defend the ordination of women. His approach in this regard is radical in that he advocates the disestablishment of patriarchy in light of the plan of salvation and the Edenic ideal. Very significantly, he is able to do this without the use of higher critical tools.

The argument of G. C. Tenney in 1892 represents a less exegetically sophisticated argument for male authority alongside women's leadership in the Church.<sup>71</sup> Yet it reveals the ambiguity of the arguments based on male authority. Tenney, the first president of the Australian Conference uses I Corinthians 11:11 to mitigate the argument of male authority as it relates to a woman's silence in the Church. His assumption of male authority is simply stated without any exegetical maneuver:

It is true he (Paul) insists upon God's order being preserved. He objects to that anomalous condition of things in which woman rules over a household, or where obstreperous women run the church. And who would not? Such things did exist then; they do now sad to say. But it is not God's plan.<sup>72</sup>

Tenney however, goes on to support the role of women in the church by arguing that the statements in I Timothy 2 and I Corinthians 14 regarding women's silence and submission to men related to particular circumstances of "impropriety" that caused

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> G. C. Tenney, "Woman's Relation to the Cause of Christ," *Review and Herald*, 24 May 1892.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

disorder. To make a conclusive statement for women's equal role in the church he refers to I Corinthians 11 as proof that they did speak in the church. To further prove that their speaking roles were similar to that of males he argues: "It is then stated that woman was ordained to be subject to man in point of authority, but 'neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord' (verse 11)."<sup>73</sup> What we see here is an assertion of male headship, in face of the threat of female domination and yet an unwillingness to allow this to curtail the function of women in the church. Thus he asserts the authority of both man and women in the church by the use of I Corinthians 11:11. This interpretation lacks the word study of Dederen and Davidson, yet it demonstrates that prior agendas can limit just a careful reading of the text without going into word study. Because he must prove that women may be ordained in spite of male headship, Dederen ignores I Corinthians 11:11. Tenney nails down the text, but repeats the ambivalence in the text regarding headship and mutuality.

#### Authoritative Teaching and Non-authoritative Teaching:

When James White opened the pages of the Review in the 1870s for people to express their views, it regarded women's speaking function in the church particularly in light of I Timothy 2 and I Corinthians 14:34-35. It is significant to the present conversation because those such as Bacchiocchi and Hasel who argue against ordination of women based on male authority make a distinction between the authoritative teaching of the elder/pastor, and the non-authoritative teaching such as that of the prophet. An observation of the conversations at that time showed that the key leaders in the Church made no such distinction. It is clear from the interpretation of G. C. Tenney above, that

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<sup>73</sup> This is the only reference to this verse in the conversation that I have so far observed in this study.

he made no such distinction. This may be because it is due to the teaching authority of a woman that Adventism remains a viable institution. These early leaders were not far removed from that reality. Yet this does not let the present advocates of the teaching authority of the male head off the hook. These very vigilantes of the denomination quote the writings of the prophet White more copiously than any other group in the denomination's academe. What is happening here? We shall answer that in Chapter IV, but for now, it is sufficient to say that the argument against the authoritative force of the prophetic gift is inconsistent with the practice of the denomination.

Damsteegt in substantiating his argument cites an editorial from the Review and Herald of June 14, 1881 that gives an interpretation of I Timothy 2 similar to his and the other opponents of female ordination.<sup>74</sup> While along with his wife Ellen White, James White made statements regarding the authority of the male, based on I Timothy 2, these were made in the context of the women's movement, and not of authoritative teaching ministry of the church, which was the light in which Ellen White's ministry and the ministry of other women at the time was seen. James White's May 1879 article in the Review and Herald indicates this. In the article he argues:

There are those women, doubtless, in the apostle's day as well as in ours, who could prate about "women's rights" as glibly, if not filthily, as the notorious Victoria Woodhull.<sup>75</sup> Hear the noble Paul on the subject in the

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<sup>74</sup> Damseegt, "The Church Faces Current Issues, 27. He seems to want to present it as an official position of the Church, by first listing James White as one of the editors at the time. It does not seem likely that James White contributed to the article since he died in August of that same year. Moreover, James White's position on the issue opposes that of Damsteegt.

<sup>75</sup> Victoria Woodhull was a leading activist for women's rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century though she enacted the concept as much as she "prated" about it. She is said to have been a century ahead of her times. She was a very controversial and public figure reputed to have been a communist (though she was the first female stockbroker, and a very successful one), an advocate for free love, a spiritualist (It is said that she was taught by her mother to communicate with the spirits), and an opponent of organized (Christian) religion. She was the first woman to run for president of the United States though women did not yet have suffrage.

same Epistle where the foregoing text is found: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (I Cor. 11:3). Paul continues in verse 4 and 5, and the reader will see that he places man and women side by side in the position and work of teaching and praying in the work of Christ....<sup>76</sup>

Unlike the modern opponents of female ordination based on male authority, James White seems to have had no concept of authoritative teaching *vis a vis* non-authoritative teaching role in the church as far as women and men were concerned. Thus he interprets the difficult verse of I Corinthians 14: 34-35 in light of other verses that affirm the authoritative function of women in the history of Christianity concluding with Acts 2:17: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy.” Clearly James White did not distinguish the role of prophecy, from that of an “authoritative teaching” role. Interestingly, he makes no reference to the I Timothy 2 text in this article. Rather he begins with I Corinthians 11: 3ff. as the basis of his presupposition, and ends with Acts 2:7 as an end all to the difficult texts regarding the equal teaching role of men and women in the church.

In January of that same year J. N. Andrews one of the editors of the *Review and Herald* wrote an article arguing that I Timothy 2:12 is a general rule with regard to women as public teachers.<sup>77</sup> However, he argues that there are exceptions to this rule, citing those women in the early church and the Old Testament who functioned in

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That she crashed the fundamental convention regarding women at that time, and advocated such religious and social ideas that were taboo in nineteenth century American society, and especially among conservative Christians such as Seventh-day Adventists, made her a most fitting and gargoyle caricature of women’s rights in the public eye.

<sup>76</sup> James White, “Women in the Church,” *Review and Herald*, 29 May 1879

<sup>77</sup> J. N. Andrews, “May Women Speak in Meeting?” *Review and Herald*, 29 May 1879.

authoritative teaching and leadership positions. He also made no distinction between prophecy and authoritative teaching ministry. Andrews then ends with the statement “Paul in Romans 10:10 says, ‘with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation’ and this must apply to women equally with men.” Since this statement comes under the final caption in his article “Exception to the Rule,” the reader may conclude that Andrews uses this text to support the fact that there are exceptions to the rule. His final comment on the text (“and this must apply to women equally with men”), however indicates something other than an exception.

These men all seem to have come to the text with the twin assumption of male headship, and the appropriateness of women function in the Church equally with men. Their interpretations serve the purpose of laying bare the phenomenon by which the Bible is used to support particular social convictions and political motivations.

### **The Argument for Gender Mutuality**

Sakae Kubo one of Seventh-day Adventism’s most respected biblical scholars, in his contribution to the Camp Mohaven study, presents an argument of mutuality by a straightforward application of I Corinthians 11:11-12.<sup>78</sup> He allows this text to throw light on the arguments of Paul regarding male headship. He argues that I Corinthians 11:11-12 refers to a context similar to that of I Timothy 2 and Ephesians 5:22-33 as regards relationships between husband and wife masters and slave. By relating the contexts, he is able to reveal a tension between the “in Christ” conviction of Paul and the tradition of

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<sup>78</sup> Sakae Kubo, “An Exegesis of I Timothy 2:11-15 and Its Implications,” in *The Role of Women in the Church*, 102, ff.

male headship. Thus he is able to strengthen the argument from Galatians 3:28, in light of this text, making redundant the extensive linguistic maneuvers regarding male/female (Galatians 3:28) husband/wife (I Corinthians 11:3-9; I Timothy 2:11-14) by those who support female ordination while supporting male authority. Kubo succors his argument by analysis of the social context of the texts, noting that Paul, in spite of his Christian convictions is constrained by the social circumstances. So, as Paul does not call for the abolition of slavery, but rather for humane treatment of slaves by masters, so he does not call for an uprooting of male headship, but for a loving treatment of wives by husbands.<sup>79</sup> This social argument though made by Davidson, did not occupy a central place because of his emphasis on word study to support male authority, albeit a limited authority. Kubo begins from what he observes in society - the situation in North America as it compares with the world of Paul. He wants to lead his readers away from a tradition that is not helpful for the denomination especially in the developed nations where women have more social power by noting that women in Paul's time did not have the status of women today.<sup>80</sup> Davidson attempts to do the same, but wants to affirm in some way the tradition of male headship.

Opponents of female ordination have made a case for the pre-fall institution of headship to counter the arguments that male headship is a result of sin. This latter argument is the major means by which proponents of women's ordination support their position. Essentially the argument is that to accept salvation through Christ is to reach for the ideal of equality in the pre-fall condition. The foremost proponent of this

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 105.

interpretation was Gerhard Hasel before he became a chief opponent of women's ordination. In 1973 when the *ad hoc* committee on the role of women was formed by the General Conference committee, Gerhard Hasel starred as the most eloquent proponent of the equality of male and female, disregarding the idea of male authority based on the order of creation. His was the opening article in the document prepared by the committee when they met at Camp Mohaven in September of 1973. He used no "unorthodox" method, but remained strictly with the text itself, using mainly the original language, and other biblical texts to explain the difficulty that those New Testament texts referring to male authority present.

In his 1973 article,<sup>81</sup> Hasel's starting point is Genesis 1. God made man male and female in His image, and gave them both "common power to 'subdue' the earth."<sup>82</sup> He uses that text to cancel arguments regarding any kind of relationship between male and female outside of complete mutuality. The following summary by Hasel reveals his "faithfulness" to the text, and an outcome contrary to his current approach :

The more extensive story of the creation of man and woman in Genesis 2 does not stand in tension or opposition to this picture, but corroborates the expressed statements of Genesis 1, complementing them with additional details. That woman is created to be man's 'helper' (*ezer*) expresses both a beneficial and harmonious relationship between man and woman. Only woman is a suitable partner alongside and corresponding to man and woman; she is his equal companion (2: 18, 20). As God is man's helper, and animals are God's inferior helpers, so woman is man's equal helper, one that fits him. Woman owes her creation as solely to God as does man who, although created first, is neither consulted nor participates in her creation. Her creation from Adam's rib indicates the inseparable unity and fellowship of life between male and female as well as her status as equal with man (2:21). The jubilant outcry, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'

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<sup>81</sup> Hasel, "Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3," in *The Role of Women in the Church*, 10-27.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

(2: 23a, RSV), expresses man's recognition that finally there is a fitting companion equal to him. THE FACT OF ADAM'S CREATION BEFORE EVE'S DOES NOT IMPLY ANY SUPERIORITY ON HIS PART.<sup>83</sup>

Hasel's argumentation is that all relationships of inequality that now exist are a result of human fall into sin. He argues that Genesis 3 illustrates "the usurpation of power and authority by man over woman contrary to the divine intention and God's will."<sup>84</sup> For him, therefore, any affirmation of faith in the sacrifice of Christ must look to a restoration of the pre-fall state of gender mutuality in all spheres.

Hasel's current conclusions contravene the foregoing because in the current he begins with the text of I Timothy 2: 11-14. That is, his general methodology remains the same but he begins with a different presupposition, that of male authority/headship. Therefore, though he uses the same hermeneutical method, namely the historical-grammatical, the outcome is different. The outcome is different because he has imposed the present social struggle between feminism and patriarchy upon the text. Because he has, for political purposes which we have already noted, taken the side of patriarchy, he refuses to contextualize the text in favor of women's ordination. Here it appears that the essential problem exceeds methodology and biblical authority, as far as the ordination of women.

#### Mutuality and Methodology

So far we have seen arguments for and against women's ordination. We have seen arguments for it that advocate male headship as an act of creation, and male headship as a consequence of sin. Now we turn to *The Welcome Table* which generally

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 27 (emphasis his).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 25.



rejects the above methodology and presents the most radical challenge to male headship. This work recognizes the “order of creation and male headship as the “two principal arguments used against the ordination of women.”<sup>85</sup> Cottrell argues that these arguments are based on the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. My argument here, however, is that it is not historical grammatical methodology per se that produces these conclusions, but a particular use of it, namely the fundamentalist/inerrantist approach. Indeed the most extensive argument in *The Welcome Table* against male headship represents a strict non-fundamentalist use of the historical grammatical method.<sup>86</sup>

In his chapter “A Guide to Reliable Interpretation,” Cottrell ends by making a general statement regarding male headship and order of creation in light of the principle of interpretation which he outlines. Basic to this principle is that the Bible is culturally conditioned. He argues that the “order of creation argument that Adam has priority over Eve because he was created first is a non sequitur.”<sup>87</sup> This is to say that it does not logically follow that man has priority over woman because he was created first. He explains this by saying that while the biblical account of creation is inspired, the assumed conclusion is an uninspired deduction.

Those who argue for male headship assume that the conclusion that Adam has priority over Eve is a conclusion drawn by Paul, and is thus inspired. However, based on *The Welcome Table's* hermeneutic (the historical method), and based on the historical-grammatical hermeneutic as used by Kubo, it is not a conclusion drawn by Paul. Rather

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<sup>85</sup> Cottrell , “A Guide to Reliable Interpretation: Determining the Meaning of Scripture,”84, ff.

<sup>86</sup> Sheryll Prinz-McMillan, “Who’s in Charge of the Family?” in *The Welcome Table*, 197-221.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

for them it is a conclusion drawn in a sinful world to support male superiority. The extent to which the two methods differ in their approach to the arguments under consideration is yet to be seen. Here, then, the study proceeds to look at four works in the book that advance the argument of gender mutuality. How have they applied methodology and how do their argument compare with the above as far as presuppositions and consistency? How well does *The Welcome* table live up to its claims to a superior method which assumes a more biblical outcome?

In her contribution “Genesis Revisited,” Donna Jeane Haerich calls attention to Genesis 1:26-28.<sup>88</sup> Here God makes male and female in God’s image and give them dominion over the earth. From this text she argues that the concept of male headship and female submission does not have its origin in Genesis 1-2. Haerich uses form criticism that establishes the etiological<sup>89</sup> nature of the Genesis story and then goes into the same literary and linguistic study regarding key words in Genesis as those who use the historical-grammatical to prove male headship. She notes that the story of Genesis 2 is “a story of beginnings” “to instruct and even to entertain,” and is not meant to give historical or scientific account, or even to do theology as we do theology today. According to her, it was “told to a certain audience in a certain time with a specific meaning and intent.”<sup>90</sup> That intent was to address “the patriarchal system as it was found in the ancient world and, without changing it outwardly, transform it inwardly.” She perceives a kind of subversion of Genesis 3: 16 b: (“...your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule

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<sup>88</sup> Donna Jeane Haerich, “Genesis Revisited,” in *The Welcome Table*, 93-111.

<sup>89</sup> Etiology studies the text as a story that explains the origin of things. It explains the how and why of how things are the way they are.

<sup>90</sup> Haerich, 100.

over you”) in Genesis 2:24 (“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh”). Her interpretation of this is that it is not the woman who is taken from her home, but it is the man who leaves his mother and father and cleaves to his wife. Thus she argues that “it is the man who forsakes all others, even his closest ties, and moves towards the woman for the purpose of a close, permanent partnership.”<sup>91</sup> The reader may observe however, that Haerich does no investigation of the socio-historical significance of the text regarding the leaving of the man. Without this method of nailing down the meaning, it is difficult to dispute other possible meanings of this. For instance, the text could simply mean that it is the man who goes after a woman and not vice versa. This would be more consistent with her understanding of the patriarchal setting of the text coupled with her assumption that the text is etiological.

By her procedure of drawing meaning from words, and matching texts with insufficient socio-historical investigation Haerich seems to put herself at the risk of lapsing into what she states at the onset to be a problem in interpreting Genesis 1-2, that of reading into it certain ideas of man and women that are simply not there.<sup>92</sup> To focus on a study of word and language and matching texts regarding the creation of women from man as a helper fitting for him, hardly steers Haerich away from reading meaning into the text. This is because while also using literary and lexical approach Bacchiocchi arrives at an opposite conclusion. That woman was created from man’s side may indeed be as sign of equality as Haerich argues. However, the statement that woman was created *from* man, may also be a sign of some inequality as Bacchiocchi argues. Neither of them

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 93.

has given the reader an objective lens by which to judge which interpretation is correct. Both are seeing in the texts what they look for in them.

Haerich seems to focus on the ideal gender relationship as she sees it in Genesis. The salvation history perspective of the method she works with assumes that the New Testament meta-texts such as I Timothy 2:11-14 are culturally conditioned. Yet in reading an ideal into Genesis 1-3 she wanders from the particular social context that the story may explain (assuming that the story is etiological as she notes) and in effect wanders away from her assumed methodology. That she comes away from it with a conclusion different from those who oppose ordination of women may therefore be due not to a strict principle of interpretation but to the fact that she assumes a stance critical of patriarchy, while her opponents do not.

Fritz Guy<sup>93</sup> also attempts to apply higher critical tools in his recognition of the two creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 1 and 2 he sees a perfect creation, while Genesis 3, for him explains the why and how things are the way they are in spite of that original perfection. He registers all his observations in Genesis 2 and 3 to woman's credit rather than her discredit. He reverses the order of creation argument to woman's credit. Thus he says:

As the Sabbath is the goal of the creation of the world in the first creation story, so the companionship of man and woman is the goal of the creation of humanity in the second story. And as the world would not have been complete without the creation of the human, so humanity would not have been complete without the creation of the woman.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Fritz Guy, "The Disappearance of Paradise," in *The welcome Table*, 137-153.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

Regarding the deception of the woman by the serpent, Guy agrees with Carol Meyers<sup>95</sup> that the woman's dialogue with the serpent was a "comment on her intellect," rather than a "blot on her character."<sup>96</sup> He makes this point to say that she was not merely a useful assistant, but a full partner. Guy therefore does not read the Genesis accounts of the creation and the fall in light of I Timothy 2: 11-14, but in light of the original perfect creation. This serves his purpose. Guy presupposes a divine ideal which, in the scheme of salvation history is ever to be sought after. That ideal is gender mutuality, which for him, fosters healthy relationships in church and society.<sup>97</sup> Those who argue for male headship however are concerned about social chaos, about the dismantling of tradition.<sup>98</sup> Much then depends upon the presupposition with which one comes to the text, a presupposition defined by the side of the social struggle that one takes.

David R. Larson<sup>99</sup> also focuses on the ideal of the original creation as it is recounted in Genesis one. He reads the story from Genesis 1-3, presenting the argument of mutuality within the scheme of creation, sin and salvation. Like all those who argue for mutuality, he recognizes male headship as an aberration of the divine intent. Notably Larson has placed particular attention upon I Corinthians 11: 11-12 as it relates to I

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<sup>95</sup> Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford Press, 1988), 92.

<sup>96</sup> Guy, 141.

<sup>97</sup> Guy, 151-152.

<sup>98</sup> This seems to have been the concern in Paul's day, in spite of what seems to be an understanding that things do not have to remain the way they are.

<sup>99</sup> David R. Larson, "Man and Woman as Equal Partners: The Biblical Mandate for Inclusive Ordination," in *The welcome Table*, 113-135.

Corinthians 11:3, ff.<sup>100</sup> He notes that “the problem here is not with Paul, but with explanations of the passage, which focus on Paul’s initial comments but say little or nothing about Paul’s subsequent redirection of his own line of thought....”<sup>101</sup> Larson sees this as consistent with Galations 3:28. Thus he says “Keeping in mind that he left us letters instead of treatises, we must let Paul be Paul and base our interpretation on the whole of what he says.”<sup>102</sup> Here Larson renders redundant the lexical rigmarole in arguments that attempt to prove headship whether as limited to husband/wife relationship or of man over woman. Rather Larsen presents what appears to be a “plain” reading of the I Corinthians 11:3, ff text. He does not overlook the obvious contradiction to male headship in I Corinthians 11:11-12, because he does not go to the text with a headship agenda.

Sheryll Prinz-McMillan gives a comprehensive analysis of all the major New Testament interpretations of Genesis 1-3. Her contribution epitomizes the politics of scripturalizing in the debate. In analyzing I Corinthians 11 on male headship, she seems to have blurred the line between what Paul actually said in 11:3 (the man is the head of the woman), and what he seems to believe to be an ideal in 11: 11-12 (In the Lord they are not independent of each other since they both have a common source, God). Thus she argues that there is no such thing as biblical “headship.” This is the most aggressive argument for mutuality that has been observed in this study. Her analysis takes into consideration the context out of which the texts arose, the entire message of both Paul

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

and the New Testament, and word meanings. Her extensive word study is yet another exegetical rigmarole around an obvious reality in scripture, namely male headship. She contextualizes where it suits her purpose, and does word study without historical context where contextualizing does not suit her purpose. Word study is not sufficient in and of itself, because language developed out of real living experiences.

Prinze-McMillan begins with a word study of κεφαλη in I Corinthians 11:3. She attempts to disassociate the word as Paul uses it, from the idea of “headship.” She argues that the word, though having the literal meaning of *head*, is used consistently to mean source as in life source. She uses I Corinthians 11:11-12 to prove her point. (“Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, but all things come from God.”) Here Prinz-McMillan is attempting to overturn renderings of the word by those such as Bacchiocchi who see the word as implying “one who stands over another in the sense of being the ground of his being.”<sup>103</sup> Because she has blurred the between what Paul actually said in 11:3, and what he seems to believe to be an ideal in 11: 11-12 she denies he at all declares man to be the head. She does a thorough socio-cultural background study of the other texts she interprets such as I Timothy 2:11-14, that clearly forbids women to have authority over men. Yet she does no socio cultural study of any significance to the meaning of the argument regarding κεφαλη. What did it mean in that culture for the woman to cover her head? Did it simply mean recognition of the man as her life source, or does is pervading ideology of man being the source of the woman (based on the Genesis 2 account of creation) the reason given for her submission

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<sup>103</sup> Heinrich Schlier, “Kephale,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI, 1974), 679, quoted in Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church*, 115.

to the male. Was it a sign of honor to him as her source? Is this not what Paul argues in I Corinthians 11:1-9 before he declares in 11:11-12, that the argument is inappropriate in the new community of faith (“in the Lord”)? Further, is Christ the source of the man’s being in the same way that man is the source of woman? Is there some nuance here as far as the way the word is used in the passage, a nuance to which she is not paying attention? Could Bacchiocchi be right in not making any distinction between source and authority? What are the further implications of the “nevertheless” in I Corinthians 11:11 regarding Paul’s statement that in the Lord neither the man nor the woman is independent of each other? Would “nevertheless” be necessary if 11:3 did not imply some hierarchy in the first place? Is Prinze-McMillan seeing only what she wants to see in the text, namely mutuality, in the same way that Bacchiocchi is seeing only what he wants to see in the text, namely headship? Bacchiocchi’s investigation into the cultural meaning of a woman shaving her head or appearing in public without a covering on her head serves his purpose very well, namely that κεφαλη means authority.<sup>104</sup> Has Prinze-McMillan omitted this investigation because it upsets her conversation that rules out any concept of headship?

In interpreting I Corinthians 14:24-25<sup>105</sup> Prinz-McMillan does a thorough socio-cultural background study, to clarify the word λαλεω (speak). According to her, the word referred to the chaotic speech of “frenzied shouting and ecstatic raving that most

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<sup>104</sup> In his paper “Divine Order of Headship and Church Order,” 17, Bacchiocchi explains that the absence of head covering was in Roman society a sign that the woman repudiated her husband’s authority.

<sup>105</sup> Prinz-McMillan, 206, ff.



upper-class Roman men found offensive.”<sup>106</sup> Thus, there was the risk of outsiders confusing Christianity with the pagan cults. Because many sects were outlawed under Roman law, the law to which Paul referred (“They are not allowed to speak...as the law says”) was Roman law, not Jewish law. The activity of these women could have been interpreted as illegal. Thus she concludes that the subordination which Paul asked for was not subordination to the husband, but to the Roman law. This was not required only of women, but of everyone. Paul directs the counsel to them here, because they were on the offensive in this instance.

In interpreting Ephesians 5:22-33,<sup>107</sup> Prinz-McMillan does not recognize a hierarchy of headship and submission. She begins with verse 22 (“be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”) and reads everything else in light of it. This mutual submission she sees as a radical departure from the Roman household code<sup>108</sup> upon which Paul draws to give his instructions.

Regarding I Timothy 2, Prinz-McMillan also makes a thorough investigation of the socio-cultural context.<sup>109</sup> She notes the social factors and the gender struggles that may have been the root of the text. The following are two major factors noted by Prinz-McMillan that bear upon a full understanding of the text:<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 209, ff.

<sup>108</sup> This refers to the rhetorical and philosophical practice in ancient Rome which stipulated publica duties according to a person’s responsibility to different groups in society. Everette Ferguson notes that “quite frequent was the grouping of duties in three pairs: husbands-wives, parents-children, masters-slaves.” He compares this with Ephesians 5:21-6:9 among other similar New Testament texts. See Everette Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 212, ff.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 214-215.

- 1) The concern in I Timothy 2:9-15 is linked to issues of marriage, celibacy and sexuality connected to particular lifestyles and philosophies contrary to the teachings of the gospel that impacted the church in Ephesus. This kind of situation made the worship service argumentative and abusive.
- 2) The Gnostic lore that pictured Eve as instructor of Adam and mediator of the knowledge brought by the serpent seemed to have been a theology that appealed to women who had little power or position in their own society.

Based on these factors, verse 15 (“yet she will be saved through childbearing....”) seems to address this issue of celibacy, which certain women were advocating as part of their freedom. Further, she notes that Paul’s reference to the order of creation was probably intended to fight the Gnostic heresy “rather than establish any pattern of relationship between men and women.”<sup>111</sup>

It is interesting to note that Damsteegt also acknowledges this background of the I Timothy 2 text. Yet because he approaches it with a different pre-supposition, he sees Paul as correcting a Gnostic heresy regarding male female relationships. He perceives Paul’s reference to creation as re-establishing the norm of male headship that stands the threat of being overturned.

In spite of the stated hermeneutic of *The Welcome Table*, Prinz-McMillan has not utilized any method alien to the historical-grammatical. Her heavy leaning upon socio-cultural background does not presuppose that the texts are culturally conditioned. Rather she has used those references to clarify the meaning of the text as “Methods of Bible Study” stipulates. She declares each text to be understood “according to context, history,

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 215.

and consistency with other biblical truths.”<sup>112</sup> Yet she manages to read an opposite meaning in all the major text used by those who argue for male headship. Her fellow authors in *The Welcome Table* come to the texts recognizing a male headship argument in them, but dismissing it as culturally conditioned, or as the result of sin. Prinz-McMillan however, comes to the text denying that “headship” is there and relies upon the “orthodox” method to find a meaning of mutuality in all the texts that have been used to support male headship. Thus she concludes:

In reviewing these Pauline passages, it becomes clear that there is no such thing as biblical ‘headship.’ All the passages used to support this idea are not talking about relationships between women and men, but rather how to deal with worship, outsiders, problem people, and heresy. Both I Corinthians 11 and 14 support a model of interconnectedness, with women clearly involved in decision-making and worship. Ephesians 5 introduces ways of living in mutual submission, through love and the centrality of Christ. Similarly, I Timothy as written to remind the congregation to avoid heresy that undermined the value of family and worship, and that Christian freedom does not require celibacy. Most importantly, these passages show that Christian submission requires giving up of power over others and submitting to the power of God. These texts taken with cultural sensitivity and in conjunction with other Bible passages set forth a model of relationship that is radically different from the hierarchy of “headship theology.”<sup>113</sup>

Notably, she uses lexical study and downplays cultural background where it is helpful to do so, and relies heavily on cultural background where it is most helpful.<sup>114</sup> This appears to be the mode of those who oppose women’s ordination by the argument for male headship.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> This places in a different perspective the statement of Robert Johnston that “the technology of exegesis welcomes any method that shows promise of being helpful.” (Johnston, “The Case for a Balanced Hermeneutic, 12) Here “helpful” appears to mean the method that suits one’s purpose, more than it means the method that best gives the intended meaning of the text.

So far we have not observed in these arguments for mutuality any evidence that each author went to the text to find out what it says about the issue. Rather each seems to have an opinion for which he or she goes to the Bible to work out the extent to which the Bible may support their claims. That is why even though they use the same kind of argumentation on the order of creation and fall of humanity for example, two authors (Haerich and Bacchiocchi) can come away with opposing views. Regardless of the methodology, authors may determine what aspects of the methodology best suit their purpose.

### **Male Headship and Gender Equality**

We have noted that those who argue for male headship also argue for gender equality. However, for those who argue for gender mutuality, male headship/female submission and gender equality do not belong on the same plane. The claim for a role of authority based on an order of creation appears as a claim for male supremacy dissimulated by arguments for ontological equality. How do the arguments that claim ontological equality and male authority hold up? Here we may observe that male authority is more symbolic than it is real. As we noted at the onset, the argument for male authority among conservative evangelicals is a way that religious establishments secure a safe space for males in a socio-economic climate of gender equality. Those who make an argument from the Bible for male authority and ontological equality do not adequately account for fact that arguments for headship in scripture (I Corinthians 11:1-9, and I Timothy 2:11-14) are justified by ontological hierarchy that places the male above the female because

he was created first, and because the woman was created *from* him, and *for* him. The distinction between ontological equality and male headship is not a reality in scripture or in ancient Roman or Jewish ideology. This argument is contrived in order that opponents of women's ordination may remain politically correct both in face of the current socio-economic reality of gender equality, and in face of the anti-modernist stance that male headship symbolizes. Unfortunately the fundamentalist/inerrantist stance does not allow for an observation of the fact that while Paul make this argument for male supremacy in I Corinthians 11, he is willing to recognize that there is something inappropriate about the argument ( I Corinthians 11:11-12).

In *Prove all Things*, Bacchiocchi makes a representative argument for ontological equality and male headship. What seems unclear in the arguments of Bacchiocchi and Koranteng-Pipim for example is the level of inequality that exists in gender relationships. This is to say, we *are* clear, as far as they state, on the nature of equality that they see in scripture. It is ontological. We are however *not* clear on their definition of inequality. If it is not ontological, what is it?

The central question in the arguments is the question of gender-role equality. Koranteng-Pipim argues that the equal privilege from the salvation-historical perspective which he sees Galations 3:28 pointing to, "does not suggest that men and women have equal (interchangeable) roles in the home or in the church."<sup>115</sup> Here Koranteng-Pipim is suggesting that gender roles are not equal, thus belying an argument for social inequality. This is the general trend of the arguments for ontological equality along with male

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<sup>115</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Must We Be Silent? Issues Affecting Our Church* (Ann Arbor, MI: Berean Books, 2001), 154.

headship and female submission. Yet, as I have noted such argumentation cannot hold up to the biblical reality.

The argument in I Corinthians 11: 3, ff seems to refer to an ontological hierarchy because it is based on the very ordering of human and divine beings. Bacchiocchi's arguments admit to this. It is based on this idea of priority in the creation – namely that woman came *after, from, and for* the man - that the social role functions seem to follow in I Timothy 2. Bacchiocchi's explanations of the concept express this.<sup>116</sup> Thus he argues that that male and female are equal before God, but not before each other. In making this statement he makes the male into a minor god, and thus cannot hold his argument for ontological equality. He notes that Paul's use of the term "image" and "glory" of man to describe the woman in I Corinthians 11: 3, ff is based on the fact that he interprets Genesis 1:26-27 in light of Genesis 2 to explain that woman was created from and for man and not vice versa.<sup>117</sup> He further argues that though Genesis 1:26-27 affirms male-female equality, "it alludes to male headship by twice calling the human race man."<sup>118</sup> He continues to make his point by underlining Paul's statement that the man is the image and glory of God, while the woman is the image and glory of man.<sup>119</sup> This argument appears to say that man and woman stand before God on some unequal footing. Bacchiocchi calls this is "functional distinction." The ontological basis for this "functional distinction" emerges from his interpretation of the "consistent male

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<sup>116</sup> Bacchiocchi, "Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture," in *Prove All Things*, 65-110.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*.

imagery”<sup>120</sup> in scripture. He notes that the males imagery of God as universal father in Ephesians 3:14, 15 indicates that “males in the human household are called fathers because they reflect the image of the heavenly father.”<sup>121</sup> This is to say that women do not reflect this image by virtue of her gender. Thus for him, “any change in the imagery of the Trinity to open up ordination of women must be viewed...as heresy.”<sup>122</sup> Bacchiocchi further argues that it is Adam who names the woman both before and after the fall. The naming of Eve by Adam before the fall, Bacchiocchi refers to as “defining” her identity in relation to himself. This he interprets as a “sovereign act” which arose out of Adam’s sense of headship.<sup>123</sup> Bacchiocchi’s explanations suggest therefore that woman bears the image of God by virtue of her creation out of the man.

Bacchiocchi’s argument seems to reveal that social status is so intertwined with ontological status that attempts to separate the two may prove futile. Recognizing the difficulty of his arguments, he calls the relationship at creation a “paradox,” “equal and yet different.”<sup>124</sup> The reader may view this rather as a contradiction on Bacchiocchi’s part - the result of an effort to assert the modern concept of equality of being which is taken for granted, into an ancient context where this equality was not taken for granted.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Bacchiocchi, “Women: Ministry Without Ordination,” *Ministry*, October 1986, 6.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>125</sup> Chapter IV elaborates this.

Koranteng-Pipim defines the social nature of the headship/submission relationship. According to him it “calls upon the woman to lovingly support/assist the man in his leadership function.” At the same time he argues that it is not about “male supremacy, control or domination” but is about functional difference.<sup>126</sup> This is a typical mode of mitigating the arguments for qualified gender equality. The arguments of opponents against male supremacy seem to be statements of apology for arguments of male headship that do not really make sense in the opposition to women clergy. In light of what we have noted so far, it is a political strategy that seems to have been dissimulated behind layers of symbolism, fundamentalist inerrancy, male headship and opposition to women’s ordination. These symbolisms have themselves become the reality to the extent that not many seem to be unsure of what the real object of defense is.

Arguments for Hegemony:

Close scrutiny of Bacchiocchi’s argument reveals that he seems to be making a case for male hegemony. His discussion in *Prove all Things* appears as a response to Davidson’s “Headship, Submission, and Equality in scripture,” in *Women in Ministry*. Davidson attempts to prove equality in Genesis 2 by analyzing the literary structure of the text.<sup>127</sup> He notes that the narrative moves from completeness to incompleteness and therefore he concludes that the order of creation more likely gives woman the hedge, if indeed the order is to suggest anything. Davidson’s interpretation differs from whatever tradition Paul drew upon in I Corinthians 11 and I Timothy 2. Bacchiocchi sets about to prove the undeniable male hegemony in these New Testament texts by his reading of

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<sup>126</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*, 31-32.

<sup>127</sup> Davidson, 261.



Genesis 1:26-27 in the light of Genesis 2. To Davidson's analysis of the order of creation narrative, he retorts that the completeness that the creation of woman satisfied was the man's not hers. This is because for Bacchiocchi, man is the subject of creation, sovereign of the creation which includes the woman, since God allows him to identify and name her as he names the animals.<sup>128</sup> To this effect he quotes von Rad as saying that Adam's naming of the other creatures is "an act of ordering, by which man intellectually objectifies the creatures for himself."<sup>129</sup> Woman, according to Bacchiocchi was also named by man and thus is the object of man. This reflects the classic Western worldview that associates woman with the visible creation, and associates man with God, and above the earth. Effectively, Bacchiocchi's arguments have sunk to the level of being outright male supremacist as he seeks to hold an argument against female clergy, an argument which is merely symbolic of a deeper struggle. Indeed Paul does make an argument for male hegemony, but Bacchiocchi, because of his fundamentalist/inerrantist agenda, unlike Paul, is unable to amend it.

### **Hermeneutics and Meaning**

Thus far, we have observed that using the same interpretive methodology, namely the historical-grammatical methodology, scholars have arrived at different and opposing conclusions. This demonstrates that the outcome of an interpretation depends largely upon the starting point of the interpreter. That an interpreter begins with a particular text regarding gender status, as opposed to another, may indicate that there is a particular

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<sup>128</sup> Bacchiocchi, "Headship, Submission and Equality in Scripture," 79-80

<sup>129</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. J. H. Marks (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1961), 80, quoted by Bacchiocchi, in "Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture," 79.

presupposition with which she/he approaches the text. We have also observed that a text that seems to indicate equality such as I Corinthians 11:11-12 does not figure in the interpretation of those who want to focus on some form of male headship, while others find it useful in making the particular point they want to make. Most significantly, we have observed that one interpreter, namely Gerhard Hasel who has changed his views uses the same methodology in each instance. What we observe is that he begins with a different presupposition. The text with which he begins in each case reveals this. In the first instance he begins with Genesis 1:27-28 which affirms gender mutuality. In the second instance he begins with I Timothy 2:11-14 which supports male headship.

Haerich's interpretation demonstrates that using any of the tools of higher criticism does not guarantee that one will work consistently with the text. Neither has she utilized the tools consistently or comprehensively. The overwhelming desire to prove an already formed idea may lead one to read something into the text in spite of the claim to a supposedly superior method.

It is very significant to underline that major arguments for gender mutuality in favor of female ordination does not use the tools of historical criticism so vigorously opposed by the antagonists of feminism and feminist hermeneutics. Thus, contrary to the argument presented by Holmes and Koranteng-Pipim in *The tip of an Iceberg*, and *Searching the Scriptures*, interpretive method does not necessarily determine meaning. Rather, meaning is already determined, and method is used to justify it. This is to say that interpreters use whatever aspect of a particular methodology in whatever way and for whatever text that best serves their interests.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

All of those involved in the formal debate over women's ordination take an inerrantist approach to scripture. This includes those who use the tools of higher criticism, since they work with the assumption of biblical authority and inspiration, and an assumption that there is a consistent principle in scripture that justifies women's ordination. The conservative and fundamentalist approaches differ only in the way they make the orthodox methodology work for them. All the contenders come to the issue with an agenda with reference to women's ordination, and they have all made the Bible speak for them. The opponents of women's ordination, for the most part, seem so obsessed with making an argument for Seventh-day Adventist traditional beliefs and practices that they seem to be unmindful of the inconsistency of their arguments. Further, some of those such as Dederen and Davidson who defend women's ordination seem to be themselves caught up in the politics of male headship. This reflects an attempt to defend women's ordination while upholding the symbol of antiliberalism, namely male headship. This prevents them from making a coherent argument. Opponents of women's ordination who argue for male headship and ontological equality are also caught up in the symbolism, but in a different way. While the former group limits itself to male headship, the latter goes as far as opposing women's ordination. At this point one may not be sure what the contenders are advocating, whether, biblical faithfulness, antimodernity, Seventh-day Adventism, or all of these. The real agenda has been dissimulated by so many layers of symbolism that the symbols themselves seem to have become the real agenda.

Those however, who have taken the non-conservative inerrantist stance use no method that they perceive to be a threat to Adventism, and have not proven that they have

not approached the text without already formed opinions regarding the issue of women's ordination. They, like others who support women's ordination by the traditional methodology seem to reference the text in the same way that opponents do. They find reasons for their already framed positions not so much because of their methodologies, but because the biblical texts summarily present conflicting ideals. In essence, inerrancy can do anything for the argument of women's ordination that the contender wishes it to do. Yet very few are willing to rise to the level of the apostle Paul and evaluate a social ideology for what it is worth in the Christian community. This is because too many have involved themselves in the social and ecclesiological politics that accompany the debate.

Seventh-day Adventism has been pulled into a conflict that has taken on a larger ideological significance than the issue of women's ordination itself. It is about the status quo of male headship and the threat of liberalism. The Bible has been used as an accessory in this social struggle in which women's ordination functions as a symbol. This politics of "scripturalizing" has been dissimulated by affirmations of biblical authority and denominational identity. Here the Bible does not function as having authority in and of itself, but has having authority as a community in conflict lends it authority.

## Chapter IV

### **Resistance to Women's Ordination: Hermeneutical Crisis or Cultural Dilemma?**

The official inerrantist stance of Seventh-day Adventism does not place it in opposition to women's ordination. In its infancy it was a leader in granting women a voice in the public sphere. The denomination has been pulled into the Fundamentalist cult of resistance to modernity because of its "true church" stance. The present conflict mirrors the nineteenth-century conflict over women's ordination because in both periods the separatist stance of the denomination necessitated the resistance to a definite move to grant women full clergy rights. In both periods the denomination associated the issue of full gender equality with elements in the women's movement that were incongruent to its separatist stance. In a real sense, therefore, the problem of women's ordination in Seventh-day Adventism is not about what the Bible says or about what the prophet counsels, but about how Seventh-day Adventism positioned itself against the cultural foment, brought on by the two waves of the women's movement.

Chaves argues that the fundamentalist movement within Protestantism constructed an "inerrantist institutional world" which defines itself in opposition to the world of liberal religions. He further notes that because gender equality is such a defining core of the modern liberal agenda, resisting women's ordination became a way to symbolize antiliberalism within the religious world. Seventh-day Adventism was pulled into this "inerrantist institutional world" by the beginning of the 1980s by its fundamentalist scholars. This minority within the denomination's theological academe

had so much power, precisely because it aligned itself with the larger antiliberal inerrantist world. This separatist stance of Seventh-day Adventism made it very tempting for it to be pulled into the “inerrantist institutional world” because liberal modernity tends to down- play biblical authority and exclusive claims to truth. What results from this identity with the general culture of resistance is that Seventh-day Adventism, which is essentially a separatist denomination, discards with its separatism in order to defend its separatism. Its separatism allowed it in the first instance to transcend the 19<sup>th</sup> century American culture that gave women no public voice,<sup>1</sup> but at the same time, this separatism demanded that it capitulate to the culture through the mainstream religious medium of resistance to liberal modernity. Consequently, what the denomination’s scholars articulated as a hermeneutical crisis was actually a cultural dilemma that is rooted in the denomination’s history and identity. We must therefore now focus on the resistance to women’s ordination because it essentially defines the conflict.

While the heart of the problem of women’s ordination is not simply hermeneutics, the Bible serves as the means of empowerment and therefore hermeneutics cannot be left out of the equation. The use of the Bible is justified, because it has texts that speak for female clergy, and texts that do not speak for female clergy. The texts of male headship represent a status quo that is entrenched in Western culture. Yet there seem to be also texts in scripture that assess the ideology of male headship to be inappropriate to a

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber identifies this as the “ultimate ethic of world refection” which characterizes nascent religions, especially those that display charismatic gifts of the spirit. See Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1922), 262, ff. The other worldly stance and the expectation of the soon return of Christ gave the early Seventh-day Adventist a sense of mission that included the gifts of men and women. The sect affirmed the particular charismatic gift of Ellen White and the preaching gifts of other women because of this other-worldly stance.

concept of equality (Galations 3: 28; I Corinthians 11:11-12). In this respect, we may understand the “hermeneutical cultural”<sup>2</sup> spin that Wimbush associates with biblical interpretation within communities in conflict. The conflict in scripture, which reflects a conflict in first century Rome, is reflected in the present culture of gender conflict. This conflict in turn references this very conflict in scripture. Thus each side of the debate seems to have a case in scripture. Yet the opposition to women’s ordination has not made a case for consistency, when the same powers who lead the resistance against it used the same Bible and the same method to defend it. In this manner, Chaves’ conclusion that resistance to women’s ordination begs for a sociological explanation<sup>3</sup> rings true. Chaves argues his case well as he identifies fundamentalist inerrancy and women’s ordination as symbols of resistance to liberal modernity. The argument of Gallagher and Smith supplies an adequate supplement to Chaves’ argument. They state:

Symbolic male headship provides an ideological tool with which individual evangelicals may maintain a sense of distinctiveness from the broader culture of which they are a part.” At the same time, symbolic headship blunts some of the harsher effects of living in a materially rich, but time poor, culture, by diffusing an area of potential conflict, creating a safe space within which men can negotiate, and strengthening men’s material and emotional ties to their families.<sup>4</sup>

This is the drama in which Seventh-day Adventism at large has been pulled during the two waves of the women’s movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as the movement shakes the Western cultural consciousness. Yet in the case of Seventh-day Adventism, it had more at stake than just male headship, it had its entire survival at stake. Were it not

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<sup>2</sup> Wimbush, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Chaves, 92.

<sup>4</sup> Gallagher and Smith, 211.

for the latter, it may not have been so much part of the Evangelical culture of anxiety. That the majority of its members belong to third world cultures that are essentially fundamentalist complicates the problem and lends power to the fundamentalist politics within the denomination's academe.

This chapter attempts to assess the issue of women's ordination in Seventh-day Adventism as a cultural dilemma that arises from its stance as the true church of Bible prophecy. In doing so, it attempts to lift the scriptural mask from the issue, and show how the cultural foment of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been a determinant factor in the resistance of women's ordination. In demonstrating this, I will first look at the social implications of ordination by observing the way it is perceived by those engaged in the debate over women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This helps to explain why Seventh-day Adventist women clergy are not granted the full clergy rights that come with ordination. I will then highlight the way major arguments against women's ordination reflect the antiliberal stance, concern for the unity of the denomination and then highlight the conflict between North American and Third World cultures that complicates the issue. I will then look at the gender conflict in 19<sup>th</sup> century Seventh-day Adventism in which the prophet of the denomination was herself embroiled. The official assumption within the denomination is that in the absence of any definite biblical mandate against it, a recommendation from the prophet White to ordain women would have sufficed. The argument here however, is that if in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the denomination was in a similar dilemma as the present one, not even the prophet was at liberty to discard this symbol of resistance to modernity, namely, women's ordination. To discard with it is to compromise the denomination's true church stance, and



consequently compromise her integrity as its prophet. This will demonstrate the cultural dilemma in which Seventh-day Adventism found itself, and in which it remains, because of its perceived need to enter into the Protestant “inerrantist institutional world” to maintain its separatist stance.

### **Ordination: The Ultimate Symbol of Social Elevation**

Karen Torjesen has noted that the theological argument used until 1976 to exclude women from the priesthood was based on the argument that women are inferior by nature. She notes that this argument articulated by Aristotle arose out of the very Greco-Roman culture in which the New Testament is historically situated.<sup>5</sup> Thus, she says, “the issue of women’s religious leadership is embedded in a larger context – that of cultural beliefs about gender, those of contemporary American society and those of ancient Greco-Roman cultures.”<sup>6</sup> Ordination thus serves as an adequate symbol in the conflict because it functions in the religious subculture as the ultimate symbol of superiority. This is because ordination to full clergy rights indicates that a person is invested with the right to represent God. Because God is perceived in exclusively male terms, it becomes difficult to justify ordination of women. In this section we will observe the way this social entrenchment is at work in the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the issue of ordination.

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<sup>5</sup> Karen Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women’s Leadership in the early Church & the Scandal of their Subordination* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

The denomination passed the motion to let divisions decide to allow women to *function* as ordained ministers at the Annual Council level. Yet it is significant that the General Conference in session as a world body must decide on whether divisions should decide. This is a statement about the high status which the denomination places on ordination. By its very policies it makes the statement that ordination is something more than function.

“A Theology of Ordination,”<sup>7</sup> was a major paper presented at the Camp Mohaven Council in September 1973. It signals the awareness in Adventism that the issue does involve a question of power and privilege. It attempts to present a Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of ordination. The arguments define ordination by laying on of hands as the denomination’s recognition of the call of the individual by God to some specialized service in the church. Yet, according to the paper, as the call to membership in Christ’s body is not based in any way on merit, so is the call to serve or minister. Thus it is an undeserved gift of God’s grace.<sup>8</sup> What this “theology of ordination” attempts to do is to eliminate from the concept of ordination the social status symbol. Terms used in the paper such as “special call” “confer” and “undeserved gift” may however make ordination a privilege and thus make it a status symbol.

Also, Ellen White in addressing what appears to have been a problem in the approach to ministry in nineteenth-century Seventh-day Adventism explains that while the first century apostles such as Paul and Barnabas understood ordination to be a call to

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<sup>7</sup> Dederen, “A Theology of Ordination,” in *The Role of Women in the Church*, 183-195

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

serve, it later took on the shape of social status. She notes:

At a later date, the rite of ordination by the laying on of hands was greatly abused; unwarrantable importance was attached to the act, as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work. But in the setting apart of these two apostles, there is no record indicating that any virtue was imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands. There is only the simple record of their ordination, and of the bearing that it had on their future work.<sup>9</sup>

Roger L. Dudley, former Director of the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University in a 1985 issue of *Ministry* the Adventist magazine for clergy, argues that while the right course regarding the ordination of women must eventually be determined by right theology, the issue may better be understood from a sociological perspective.<sup>10</sup> He argues that religion may be used to legitimize a gender caste system.<sup>11</sup> In making his argument he quotes Meredith B. McGuire saying that religion has been used “to explain why certain inequalities exist. These explanations justify both the privileges of the upper classes or castes and the relative nonprivileges of the lower ones.”<sup>12</sup>

In I Timothy 2, there appears to be a social status attached to being male – a reflection not only of the Graeco-Roman world but of the Jewish culture<sup>13</sup> - so much so

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<sup>9</sup> Ellen White, “Separated Unto the Gospel,” *Review and Herald*, 11 May 1911, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Roger L. Dudley, “Ordination of Women: A Question of Status or Function?” *Ministry*, October 1985, 19-29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1981), 91, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that there were no opposing ideals to this basic social understanding in the first century. The very writings of Paul as we shall have seen in the previous chapter suggest that there were conflicting

that a female should not teach a man or have authority over him. Thus the function as Elder in I Timothy 2 carries with it a social status symbol, and because this social status obtains ecclesiological sanction, it merges into the religious as a universal norm instituted by God. Yet the modern mind which is not conditioned by the primitive hierarchical anthropology of the first century attempts to reconcile this to modern social egalitarian ideals.<sup>14</sup> This may account for the attempt to reconcile those texts by Paul that present opposing positions regarding gender equality. In the ancient world, ontological egalitarianism was not taken for granted. This is something which Bacchiocchi and Koranteng-Pipim have not factored in their arguments, thus their logical dilemma as they attempt to harmonize gender equality and male headship.<sup>15</sup>

While the opponents of women's ordination argue that ordination is not about status, they advocate ordination for males only on the basis of the headship argument. Why is the term "headship" used, and why is it exclusively male? What is implied in the term "servant headship role" and "submissive helper role"?<sup>16</sup> Koranteng-Pipim attempts to answer this by inserting ontological equality as a compensation for social inequality

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ideals of gender relations.

<sup>14</sup> The work of Gallagher and Smith explains this as a way that evangelical Christianity tends to "reconcile the contours of modern economic life with their ideals for personal family life. According to her, "Ideals of hegemonic masculinity" based on an ideology of male headship appears as a way of creating a secure space for males in a changing economic structure that relies on the economic viability of both men and women. Thus she labels this phenomenon "symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism." See Gallagher and Smith, 211-214.

<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, some of the arguments that use the text to justify resistance to the status quo also tend to ignore the social climate of hierarchy that the texts of headship reflect and thus seek to reconcile all the conflicting texts to make them speak for gender mutuality. In both instances no attention is given to the two opposing ideals regarding gender in the Bible.

<sup>16</sup> Samuelle Bacchiocchi, "Headship Submission and Equality in Scripture," in *Prove all Things*, 67.

and by describing the role of male and female as complimentary.<sup>17</sup> It however does not appear that the idea of compliment eliminate the social status of either. By complementary is meant that one cannot function effectively without the other. The fact that 6 needs 4 to make 10 does not make 6 and 4 equal in value. Six is greater in value relative to the equation. They are equal only by identity – namely that they are both numbers. What complicates the matter is this insertion of a modern ideal of gender into the biblical arguments of male headship. This is a major dilemma in the debate. To assert that the Bible does affirm equality of being in the face of a mandate for male headship is to suggest that there is a hierarchy on the social plane that is not on the ontological plane. The assumption in this study is that this distinction does not occur in the texts involved. Where the arguments for male headship appear in the sacred texts, the social and ontological planes do not appear as mutually exclusive. The argument in I Timothy 2: 11, ff. is that woman must not have authority over a man because of the nature of her creation relative to that of man. Bacchiocchi's interpretations highlight this point. Social status is therefore hidden behind the arguments about social role. The fact that these ancient ideas of female inferiority are embedded in the Western psyche further complicates this situation.

It is the divine sanction – the fact that it is a call exclusively from God - that makes ordination to the ministry a role function of the highest order and therefore not available to the female who was created from and for the male who was made in God's

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<sup>17</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*, 26, ff.

image.<sup>18</sup> This status now extends to all spheres of life precisely because the social and religious have never existed independent of each other in the social process. Koranteng-Pipim argues that ordination is not about status,<sup>19</sup> yet contradicts himself based on his concept of role inequality. It is precisely because they see this role as a supremely high status that virtually all those including Koranteng\_Pipim<sup>20</sup> who argue against the ordination of women based on the argument of male headship quotes the following statement by Ellen White even though it was not made in the context of women's role in the church:

Eve was perfectly happy by her husband's side in her Eden home; but like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her...In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity, and nobility of character, and left undone the very work that heaven has appointed them.<sup>21</sup>

This role function of the highest order, places man on a plane on which he represents God. It is a biblically based claim, and thus those who isolate the scripture from its social setting perceive the exclusively male ordained ministry a purely theological issue. In order to liberate this theological mandate from the social reality of the modern social world, Ball argues that "the ordination of women cannot be evaluated by the same criteria which determine whether or not a woman is suitable for professional

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<sup>18</sup> K. Ware ("Man Woman and the Priesthood of Christ," in *Man, Woman and Priesthood*, ed., P. Moore [London: SPCK, 1978], 79), argues that "the ministry is not to be envisaged in professional terms as a job which woman can carry out as completely as man, and which she has an equal right to perform," but "is a call to service, and this call comes from God."

<sup>19</sup> Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>21</sup> Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 59. This statement will be repeated in its entirety later in this chapter and analyzed in light of its context.

roles.”<sup>22</sup> This argument has not included the fact that in the world of scripture women were not generally regarded as suitable for professional roles.

We have noted that the World Church has granted women clergy right, albeit with some limitations. The denomination has benefited from the ministry of women as much as it has from men.<sup>23</sup> Thus women do function as authoritative teachers in the church. What has been withheld is ordination, the full recognition of the denomination that the woman has been called by God.<sup>24</sup> A clearly questionable case is that traditionally the church has ordained deacons and not “deaconesses” (*διακονιον* being a neuter term referring to both male and female in the New Testament). It suggests that ordination is more than about function. Further, there is no precedent for such a practice in the New Testament. This practice in Adventism effectively demonstrates the importance of status relative to function as far as it concerns ordination.

#### Gender equality and ordination: The cultural associations

The ideology of male dominance seems to be more deeply entrenched in third world cultures. This seems to be a major impeding factor to granting women full clergy rights. Though Seventh-day Adventism in general allows for the ordination of women as deacons and elders, it is not a generally accepted practice especially in nations such as

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<sup>22</sup> Bryan Ball, “The Ordination of Women: A Plea for Caution,” *Ministry*, December, 1980, 40.

<sup>23</sup> Among others are women such as Zhoo Hu-Ying and Wu Lan Ying of China who raised up churches of more than 1000 members. Are these churches not to be accepted by the church if the teaching ministry of women is not the authoritative ministry of which Bacchiocchi speaks? What of the ministry of Ellen White that is the single most powerful reason for the present existence of the Church and its many institutions?

<sup>24</sup> Regarding this, the Present of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists appealed to the delegates at the Utrecht General Conference to grant the same acknowledgement of their call to “our sisters who stand with us in ministry” as that which the church confers on their male colleagues.” See “Thirteenth Business Meeting, Fifty sixth General Conference session,” *Adventist Review*, 7 July, 1995.

those in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. In Chapter I we have noted that the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a world body does not grant women full clergy rights because the majority of the delegates with the vote come from the less developed nations of the world. It may be necessary here to consider that in these regions, issues of justice and human rights are not as rigorously attended to and legislated as in developed nations such as North America and Europe. These latter regions are ready to ordain women who are qualified and actively engaged in ministry, but are impeded mainly by those regions which are not yet ready. In a letter to W.J. Ridley, Gordon Hyde, the Director of the Biblical Research Institute and the chief organizational protagonist for the ordination of women in the 1970s writes:

I wish to tell you that the Annual Council of 1974 turned away from the ordination of women to the ministry at this time on the basis that a world church must consider how a situation or recommendation would be received in the many different parts and cultures of the world field, and although several of the world divisions indicated a willingness to follow a General Conference lead, even to the point of ordaining women to the ministry, there were some divisions that asked the General Conference to hold on the matter under the present circumstances.”<sup>25</sup>

Hyde then goes on to assure Ridley of the continued effort of the church to provide theological basis for any action on the matter. The question that follows is whether some regions of the world have a theological problem with the issue, or a cultural problem, or both.

In spite of the biblical expositions that preceded the vote at Utrecht, there was the clear sense, according to the editor of the *Adventist Review*, that “very few people

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon M. Hyde to W.J. Ridley, January 9, 1976, 2.



changed their minds” as “most delegates had already decided how they would vote.”<sup>26</sup> Here we may observe the hermeneutical-cultural spin. Raymond Cottrell notes regarding the Utrecht vote that as a North American Church, Adventism evangelized the world with the use of the proof text method with which delegates of developing nations defended their votes.<sup>27</sup> This however seems to be only part of the problem. Male headship is already embedded in the social fabric of developing nations through colonialist expansion.<sup>28</sup> A proof text methodology only reinforces it. That these regions lag behind developed nations on issues of human rights and justice makes it more difficult than in developed nations to derive from scripture a vision of women that places them on this high pedestal of ordained ministry. It appears easier in regions where gender role definitions are freely challenged in both ideology and practice. This phenomenon tends to present a challenge to Ball’s argument that the issue is purely theological. It is theological, but so far as one reads the Bible in light of a certain social awareness. This is not to say that a certain social consciousness is exclusive to certain parts of the world. (Certainly the bulk of the formal conversations both for and against the ordination of women emerge from the developed world, particularly North America, and it is the fundamentalist movement in North America that gives the resistance to women’s

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<sup>26</sup> William G. Johnsson, *Adventist Review*, 7 July 1995.

<sup>27</sup> Cottrell, “The Old Order Changeth,” 2.

<sup>28</sup> Peggy Reeves Sanday (*Female power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981]), in her extensive anthropological research highlights the effects of Western colonialism on traditional female power and authority, and notes the research on the impact of modernization on traditional female power. This however is not only as a result of the spread of Christianity which came with European expansion, but also a result of the spread of Islam in Africa. All these forces have become part of the cultural formation of people of developing nations, and particularly in Africa where social control is traditionally maintained by elaborate taboos.

ordination power.) Rather it is to point to this phenomenon as evidence that people do not argue purely from the text, but also come to the text with something.

A survey conducted among religion teachers by Roger L. Dudley,<sup>29</sup> while it revealed that a majority of religion teachers around the world favored the ordination of women, it also revealed that a significantly greater percentage of North American respondents favor the conferral of this high status upon women. That there was significantly less respondents outside North America, according to the study, suggests that the issue is more of concern in North America than in areas where certain gender norms are less challenged. The overwhelming amount of Religion teacher from North America supporting it seems to be an indication of the very social nature of the issue. North America remains the site of the most rigorous challenges to social stereotyping.

Further, as we have seen in Chapter I, the globalization of Adventism has also affected the debate. The use of proof texts in the mass evangelization of people of the third world contributes largely to their unwillingness to challenge what seems to be a biblical ban on ordination of women.<sup>30</sup> Yet, while it may be argued that third world people are resistant to female leadership, it has not been proven that among the masses, this is more a social mindset than it is in North America and other developed countries. As we have noted, the difference is the rigorous attention to matters of justice and human

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<sup>29</sup> Roger L. Dudley, "Religion Teacher's Opinions on the Role of Women," *Ministry*, August 1987.

<sup>30</sup> Evidence of this comes from a report on the 1990 General Conference which deliberated on the issue of the ordination of women. He reports that an opponent, a church administrator in Africa said that the Bible nowhere commands the ordination of women. The administrator said, "if it is in the Bible we want it. If it is not in the Bible, this church must reject it." See Scriven, "The Debate about Women: What Happened? Why?" *Spectrum* 20:5 (August 1990):25.

rights in North America, not necessarily the social mindset.<sup>31</sup> Christian denominations that do ordain women also exist in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. In these regions too, there are the indigenous religions in which, for the most part, women are the leaders.<sup>32</sup> It is this section of the world that carried the vote against the ordination of women. Is it because of their cultural heritage, or is it because they have not been exposed to tools of biblical interpretation to which many in the developed nations have been exposed? Is it that they do not feel empowered to challenge the status quo? Do they associate the ordination of women with a falling away from true Adventism? All these factors seem to bear upon the issue.

Certainly, in many areas of Africa for example, patriarchy is a Christian heritage. Yet in those areas where women have been traditionally exploited, the colonial heritage of male dominance has served to reify this and to give it divine sanction through interpretation of the Bible. It appears that many in the developing nations have fully accepted the biblical tradition of male authority, through the primary method of interpretation available to them – proof text.<sup>33</sup> Jim Walters an editorial advisor for the independent Adventist magazine *Adventist Today* analyzes the situation thus:

The vote refusing the NAD permission to ordain its women is the real "tip of the iceberg," the iceberg being the clash between scriptural literalism, a view held largely in the developing world—Africa and much of South American

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<sup>31</sup> Women are very active in both church and society in all these developed nations where delegates (almost exclusively male), resist ordination of women. Even more than women do in developed nations, women preach, teach and raise up churches in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Yet there are fewer women in leadership positions in these nations than in Developed nations.

<sup>32</sup> In Jamaica for example women are the primary leaders in the indigenous religions Kumina and Revivalism which are a blend of African religions and Christianity.

<sup>33</sup> We have noted in chapter two that of the two major viewpoints in the debate on hermeneutics, that which tends towards biblical inerrancy influences mostly the laity.

and Inter-America, and a principle-based approach to scripture followed in areas where the church has matured for a century and a half. The headship theology, derived from a literalist reading of passages that clearly reflect the patriarchal nature of ancient society (including the biblical period), still greatly appeals to traditional cultures.<sup>34</sup>

This may be further exacerbated by the phenomenon of an overwhelming amount of relatively new converts in these regions who have not yet processed the Bible to the level at which they may perceive any principle in it that questions the status quo of male headship. Many of the delegates from regions such as Africa are themselves relatively new converts, and in the words of Walters, “not far removed from polygamous exploitation of women” and thus “naturally drawn to an interpretation of scripture that affirms a millennia-old sentiment towards women.”<sup>35</sup>

What appears among third world nations, therefore, is a hermeneutical culture of proof text inerrancy reinforced by a cultural rejection of gender equality. This stands as an impediment to the North America constituency of the denomination who wish to grant women full clergy rights. What we may conclude however, is that given a constituency today of those who constituted the denomination before it began to spread outside of the developed world, the motion would have passed for the ordination of women.

#### Gender Role Definition: Securing a Safe Space for Males

Grave concern for the traditional headship role of the male emerges from some of the arguments that object to women’s ordination. The following argument, for example, indicates a fear that to take away the gender exclusivity from the ordained ministry is to

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<sup>34</sup> Jim Walters, “General Conference Delegates Say NO on Women’s Ordination,” *Adventist Today*, September/October 1996.

emasculate the role as it represents male headship, and in effect to emasculate the male partner. Rosalie Haffner Lee wife of a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and who has served as an assistant pastor and Bible instructor, refers to this as “a danger of weakening the father’s role.”<sup>36</sup> In the case of a male married to a female pastor, she is concerned as to whose job takes priority in the event that the pastor must change location.<sup>37</sup> Her question to this effect is rhetorical, suggesting that the man’s job, regardless of what it is, must take priority<sup>38</sup> even though the pastor’s role is prior. By this argument she attempts to suggest that such a role of pastor is not the place of a woman. For her it is not possible for a woman to fulfill ordination vows and marriage vows at the same time. For her, the woman’s marriage vows require her to give priority to her husband and her family.<sup>39</sup> According to her, ordination vows require that the pastor gives priority to the church family, but neither can the single woman functioning as a pastor represent the model family which the pastor is to represent.<sup>40</sup> What we may observe here is a fixed idea of what woman’s place ought to be that makes it difficult even for a trained pastor to see herself in any other role but a secondary one.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Rosalee Heffner Lee, “Is Ordination Needed to Women’s Ministry?” in Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church*, 246.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>38</sup> This is part of the headship ideology that, in spite of the modern economic changes, designates the man as the one ultimately responsible for the economic wellbeing of the family. To have a woman working as the sole breadwinner in the family would be to essentially emasculate the male spouse. Here male power and economic reality seems at crossfire with male power winning out at the end of the day in the interest of maintaining a particular social structure.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Laura Damsteegt, also trained in pastoral ministry and wife of Gerard Damsteegt, the presenter against the ordination of women at Utrecht, in an article which attempts to describe the historical struggle of the church with feminism, names herself on the title page as Laura Damsteegt M. Div., M.P.H., *Mother*.<sup>41</sup> In another issue of the same periodical in which Mrs. Damsteegt published her article, *Adventist Affirm*, Melissa Wallace in her article "The Future of the Adventist Home,"<sup>42</sup> names herself in the title page as "Melissa Wallace Mother, Homemaker, Teacher." This reflects not only the phenomenon of turf protection, but the way self identity depends upon it. Notably, Mrs. Damsteegt's husband does not attach *Father* to his name on the title page of any of the many articles he has written whether in that same magazine or any other. What appears here is the social phenomenon of the glorification of motherhood.<sup>43</sup> But in these arguments this role seems to be glorified so far as it allows the man to maintain his position of hegemony in the public sphere without challenge or interruption.<sup>44</sup> She is his helper in that in submissiveness she secures the home circle in his extended absence. Mrs. Damsteegt describes it as "a cross" "for dying on, for the end of me, the end of

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<sup>41</sup> Laura Damsteegt, "Feminism vs. Adventism: Why the Conflict" *Adventists Affirm*, Fall 1989, 33. (Italics mine) Indeed this is how she names herself on the title page of all the articles she writes regarding the issue of women's role in the church.

<sup>42</sup> Melissa Wallace, "The Future of the Adventist Home," *Adventists Affirm*, Spring 1991, 41-43.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Pearson notes this social phenomenon as a key factor that prevents any radical reform as far as women's role in the church. See Pearson, 155.

<sup>44</sup> Glick and Fiske refer to this phenomenon as benevolent sexism, in that it reflects men's dependence upon women which makes women a 'valuable resource' for men. See Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske, "Sexism and Other 'Isms': Interdependence, Status, and the Ambivalent Content of Stereotypes," in *Sexism and Stereotypes in Modern Society*, eds., William B. Swan, Jr., Judith H. Langlois, and Lucia Albino Gilbert (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1999), 211.

‘Number One’.”<sup>45</sup> She goes on then to say that “this kind of submission unifies because it yields.”<sup>46</sup> The argument suggests that the only way for social order, is for the woman, to submit to her role as supporter of the male. Female turf protection appears in all these arguments as protection of what they perceive as true manhood, the threat to which means a threat to the stability of the family, and society.

Some responses to the 1970s feeler regarding the role of women in the church sent out to the world field by the leadership of the World Church graphically displays the phenomenon of turf protection on the part of the male. Two of those responses one from the Afro-Mideast Division, and the other from the Inter-American Division are worthy of careful note. Alfredo Aeschlimann ministerial secretary of the Inter-American Division attempts to base his response on the Bible and the writings of Ellen White. However, he prefaces his response thus:

In the study of both secular and religious history, the fact stands out that man has been chief and head of all facets of human society. His role has always been to lead, preside, protect and support in all spheres of life. Woman has always been considered the weaker vessel of the human family. It was he privilege to be protected, supported, loved and admired by man. Her activities were considered to be very different from man’s. It never entered her mind to compete with man, to displace him in his work or to dispute his role of leadership in the family, society, business or in the field of politics....Woman wants to free herself from the traditional role as queen of the home and launch out in all directions even though this means replacing, supplanting and dominating man in the areas that have always been considered his sphere.<sup>47</sup>

In this argument there seems to be a perception that any shift in traditional gender roles as

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Alfredo Aeschlimann B. to Members of the Study Committee on the Role of Women in the Church, 26 February, 1975.

competition on the part of the woman, and a fear of displacement. Expressing a similar sentiment is Em. W. Pederson president of the Afro-Mideast division. He writes:

Having read the related material sent us, I seem to detect that some are generally inclined towards giving our fair ladies free rein to charge into the man's world, ready and ever anxious to let them share in everything he held as taboo for himself, except his still specific gift of fatherhood....It seems to me that there is more to the difference between man and woman than mere biology....<sup>48</sup>

These arguments express the perception of gender role as a matter of "privilege" - the privilege of power over, and the privilege of being "protected, supported, loved and admired by men."<sup>49</sup> For the male it is the privilege of social power, for the female, it is the privilege of social glorification as the protector of the male status, and as the protected by the male power.<sup>50</sup> In these arguments any kind of role changeability means displacement, and chaos. Raymond Holmes articulates it thus:

The feminist movement is robbing women of their God-given role in home and church, and proponents of women's ordination have unwittingly fallen into the trap. If women are hindered from being women, they will want to be men, or at least to do what men do. Feminism is working overtime to abolish the traditional role of woman as homemaker by brainwashing the unsuspecting into believing that denying them absolute freedom is unjust.<sup>51</sup>

The above discussion regarding ordination presents a challenge to the claim that

<sup>48</sup> Em. W. Pederson to W. Duncan Eva, July 23, 1974.

<sup>49</sup> Aeschlimann, 2.

<sup>50</sup> While the traditional role functions deem the woman dependent, Glick and Fiske have noted that it masks a dependence of the male on the female to maintain his position of dominance. This dependence fosters the benevolent sexism from which emerge feelings of protectiveness, the notion of woman as man's "better half" without whom man is incomplete. According to them, "these paternalistic justifications...come about when the dominant group is dependent on the subordinate group." See Glick and Fiske, 211.

<sup>51</sup> Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, 99.



ordination is not about status or dominance but rather about humble service. The argument that it not about status seems to be an attempt to mitigate the overtones of hegemony regarding male headship and church leadership, an attempt that has no root in social reality. Ordination appears to be a privilege of males, the most explicit sign of his dominance because he represents God.<sup>52</sup> What is also at work is an insistence to maintain a particular social order that perpetuates male dominance in all spheres of life. To threaten that at the place where it is most profoundly demonstrated, at the place where he represents God, is to threaten the very essence of manhood and to breach the boundaries of womanhood. This perception was vividly displayed at the Utrecht convention where every morning of the convention one had to pass at the entrance to the convention grounds a large banner of a woman doing a Hitler-like salute in a circle with a line drawn through it declaring **“No new Gods, No new leaders, Vote no on women’s ordination.”**<sup>53</sup> The seemingly hostile anti-woman rhetoric by some delegates at the 1995 Utrecht convention, reports Stella Ramirez, a delegate from Andrews University, ranged from “women belong to the kitchen and at home, to “women seeking ordination are similar to the third of the angels who fell with Lucifer.”<sup>54</sup> These constitute a caricature of the general sentiments against ordination of women, and support the argument that ordination may be, in practice, more about social status than it is about self-sacrificing

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<sup>52</sup> Holmes, Bacchiocchi and Ball among others counter the feminist challenge to the maleness of God and use the argument of God’s maleness and fatherhood to justify the exclusive maleness of the headship role of the male. See Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, 95, ff.; Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church*, 200-208; and Ball, 45, ff.

<sup>53</sup> Stella Ramirez Greig, “Conference Within a Conference,” *Spectrum* 25:1 (September, 1995): 20

<sup>54</sup> Greig, 21.

service.

To be fair in the conversation however, it must be underlined here that some of the opponents to female ordination became opponents only because the issue of hermeneutics arose. Thus they have no fundamental problems with women sharing this status with men. What is occurring here is that they are attempting to maintain a biblical argument for a reason that hides under the issue of ordination of women. In the process the real issue seems to become forgotten as the anti-feminist rhetoric proceeds.

### **Gender Roles, Social Order and Resistance**

The conversation continues to reflect the social anxiety that undergirds resistance to women's ordination. It reaches the point where the denomination does not seem to be clear on what it is really resisting, whether it is higher criticism, feminism, or women's ordination. It seems to have placed all these issues under one heading called liberal modernity. Yet it begs the question why women's ordination may lead to social chaos, and indicates that the issue presents more of a cultural dilemma than it does a hermeneutical challenge. Aeschlimann argues that "woman's present spirit of non-conformity has caused the bankruptcy of home, the tragedy of divorce, insecurity and disorientation of children and youth."<sup>55</sup> Holmes argues that the blurring of gender distinctions will cause confusion in church and society. According to him, the exercise of the roles of headship and submission are not for suppression but for the greater good.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Aeschlimann, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Holmes, *The Tip of the Iceberg*, 98.

This greater good is to prevent the destruction of marriage, family, fetus, roles, and monogamous relationships – things that stand “in the way of female self-fulfillment.”<sup>57</sup> These for him are the result of radical feminism which challenges traditional gender roles and perceptions of God. These arguments express the general fear among evangelical Christians that contemporary culture, particularly as it is driven by feminist ideology, may undermine traditional moral values and the stability of the family. Holmes sees this as a threat to civilization.<sup>58</sup> What we are observing in the arguments for male headship is an evangelical outreach to place a check on contemporary culture. In the arguments of Gallagher and Smith male headship is a symbol that “blunts” the harsh effects of liberal modernity which threatens to remove the hegemonic negotiating space for males.<sup>59</sup> The arguments against the ordination of women has been a railing against what Holmes perceived as a degenerate contemporary culture, and a call for the church, as he articulates it, to not “capitulate” to culture, but surrender “to God’s will regarding the roles he has assigned to men and women.”<sup>60</sup>

The basic concern among evangelicals seems to be the concern for the family as it affects the larger society. Gallagher and Smith argue that “because family values reflect concern about social change, these values provide a lens through which to examine some of the core tensions and transitions under way in American society.”<sup>61</sup> This tends to

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>59</sup> Gallagher and Smith, 211

<sup>60</sup> Holmes, 100.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

explain at least in part, the fixation on male headship in both the major arguments for and against women's ordination at Utrecht. The argument that Dederen presents seems to more fully represent the tension between the ideology of headship and contemporary socio-economic realities. His arguments challenge the Church to adjust to the demands of the North American cultural milieu and at the same time affirm male headship in the family. *Women in Ministry*, the follow up pro-ordination book after Utrecht, presents no argument for male headship as a divine institution.<sup>62</sup> The arguments in the book challenge the argument of headship since it profoundly affects an understanding of gender in general social terms – an understanding that makes it difficult to reconcile male headship with a concept of female ordination. The fight against the ordination of women appears as a struggle to dissociate with the contemporary cultural climate and at the same time transform it by taking a stand among those church institutions that remain, as Steve Daley puts it, “society's last bastions”<sup>63</sup> of male hegemony. In the arguments against ordination, the church is an extension of the family (where man is the head), and a leaven in the world, thus the church must transform the world, and not the world the church. The church cannot afford therefore to capitulate.

What we may observe is that the social order in question is one that maintains a particular gender role distinction. The concept of male headship and female subordination specifically spells out this distinction. This, according to the arguments for

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<sup>62</sup> Even Dederen who also contributed to *Women in Ministry*, steered away from the argument of headship, remaining rather with the argument of “the priesthood of all believers.” See Raoul Dederen, “The Priesthood of all Believers,” in *Women in Ministry*.

<sup>63</sup> Daily, “The Irony of Adventism,” 278.

maintaining traditional roles, is necessary to keep impending social chaos in check. The chaos refers to an interchangeable gender role structure that dilutes perceptions of manhood, by removing the boundaries that separate men from women. The fear of role interchangeability not only creates the perception of a gender identity crisis but also distills an embedded homophobia inherent in a patriarchal culture.<sup>64</sup> It is a question of ontology. Maleness as opposed to femaleness is central to that ontology. Though the wider society has by law removed many of those boundaries, there are those in religious circles who must hold this ultimate symbol of male power, the ordination to the ministry, which makes man a representative of God. This serves to hold in check the winds of change that threatens this God-appointed order of male headship, the threat to which is perceived as the threat to civilization as we know it.

This perceived threat to civilization is essentially a threat to the status quo. What we have in contemporary society therefore is a culture of resistance – resistance to the status quo and counter-resistance to that resistance. Jean Lipman-Blumen aptly describes the state of affairs thus:

Men's and women's roles are currently caught in the vortex of a darkening social storm, which threatens to spark changes in their relationships as individuals and as groups. Occasional lightning flashes allow us only the briefest glimpse of the different shapes toward which these roles are evolving and the underlying power struggle they symbolize.<sup>65</sup>

This is the social conflict that engages Adventism as it debates the question of the ordination of women. At this point of the conflict the denomination is caught in a

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<sup>64</sup> Holmes challenges the feminist presupposition that “humanness supersedes maleness and femaleness.” (*The Tip of an Iceberg*, 101). See also Bacchiocchi, “Recovering Harmonious Gender Distinctions,” *Adventists Affirm*, Spring 1995, 61-66.

<sup>65</sup> Jean Lipman-Blumen, *Gender Roles and Power* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984), 1.

cultural dilemma, a dilemma which arises from the denomination's resistance of women's ordination as symbolic display of its separatism.

### **Church, Unity and Identity**

The cultural dilemma in which the denomination finds itself grows to greater proportions as it considers the need to adjust to a changing world in order to make its mission more effective. The arguments for contextualizing the ministry of the church vary depending on one takes. Gordon Bietz's a proponent of women's ordination argues that the church in the new millennium "must be a mature church that is not threatened by diversity and is open to multiple ways of representing our Lord in this world."<sup>66</sup> Bietz further notes that as many Adventists travel, they "discover new interpretations of the Adventist faith," sometimes disturbing.<sup>67</sup> The ordination of women in North America by local congregations and even local conferences represents in a major way, such a paradigm shift. It indicates the demands on the denomination to revise its policies on women clergy. Yet it has been drawn into the antiliberal cult that challenges it to display its separatism. Mario Veloso an associate secretary of the General conference represents a resistance to any consideration of contextualization as a way out of this dilemma. For him it is a threat to the unity and identity of the denomination. He writes in 1995 shortly before the Utrecht convention concerning the request to allow divisions to decide whether to ordain women:

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<sup>66</sup> Gordon Bietz, "The Changing Face of the Church: How Can We be Proactive as We Confront the Inevitable?" *Adventist Review*, 30 December, 1999, 10-13.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

As truly one, the church can be neither multiplied nor divided. Multiplicity would destroy its identity, because, being many it would be nothing in particular. Dividing it into independent sections would eliminate its global corporate unity, and therefore the whole would cease to exist.<sup>68</sup>

His basic concern is one of organizational unity by which all decisions affecting the Church must be made from one general source. He interprets the unity Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4: 4-5 (“The is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all) as “complete unity-ecclesiastical, moral, spiritual, doctrinal, missiological, and theological.”<sup>69</sup> Koranteng-Pipim’s underlying concern in his book *Must We Be Silent? Issues Affecting our Church* is that of Theological pluralism.<sup>70</sup> He also concludes, that the early church insisted on a uniformity of doctrine and practice.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, Walter Douglas, a proponent of women’s ordination and a professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary argues:

...our danger lies not in the decision for or against such issues as women’s ordination, but in a structural fundamentalism in which unity is derived through polity, as though polity is almost to be equated with absolute truth. My plea is that we do not allow structure to distract us or to sabotage our

<sup>68</sup> Mario Veloso, “Unity: The nonnegotiable sign of the church,” *Adventist Review*, 25 May 1995, 16 [16-18].

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. Statements such as this do not take into consideration that Paul addressed particular congregations, and not a general body of Christian believers. Neither do they consider that no such system of organization existed in the early church as it does in the Adventist Church. Here again we see the imposition of a social reality, namely Adventist organizational structure, upon the reality of the text.

<sup>70</sup> See 556, ff.

<sup>71</sup> Not only is this historically inaccurate, but there is enough evidence in the New Testament itself that there was marked difference in practice in Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity (See Galatians 2:11, ff.)

essential oneness in Christ and his mission.<sup>72</sup>

Douglas sees in Ephesian 4:4-5 quoted by Veloso as a unity in fundamental doctrinal beliefs, as set forth in the “core beliefs of Adventism,” and not unity through polity.<sup>73</sup>

Bacchiocchi sees the male only ordination as an absolute truth from scripture, and thus a core belief. In this context he comments regarding the issue: “truth is not established by majority vote, because by its very nature truth is not popular.”<sup>74</sup> For him therefore, the church must decide on such a matter as a body, and not as individual divisions.

The arguments that resist contextualizing the ministry of the church based on cultural inclinations reveal that anything short of an approach that makes *select*<sup>75</sup> practices in the Bible normative for today creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability. In the debate over women’s ordination, this is a major consideration in the theological controversy that surrounds the issue. Thus, in the heat of this debate, Dederen expresses the concern that in spite of the doctrinal oneness that has contributed to Adventist global unity, “the inner tensions produced by theological controversy could ...reach a critical point and break that unity.”<sup>76</sup> Gordon Hyde has come to believe that allowing ordination of women in the church would create a split in the Seventh-day

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<sup>72</sup> Walter Douglas, “Unity in Diversity in Christ,” *Ministry*, August 1997, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Bath, pastor of Sligo Church speaking as a delegate at the Utrecht convention presents a similar position as Douglas regarding unity. He argues that to defeat the motion is to argue for a kind of uniformity that is not the essential nature of the body of Christ. To defeat it, he argues is to divide the very body of Christ. See “Speaking in Turn: Excerpts From Delegates’ Speeches On the Ordination of Women,” *Spectrum*, 30:5 (August 1990): 33

<sup>74</sup> Bacchiocchi, “The Future of Adventism: Problems and Possibilities,” *Adventists Affirm*, Spring 1991, 10. [5-13].

<sup>75</sup> Such as male headship.

<sup>76</sup> Dederen, “The Church: Authority and Unity,” *Ministry*, Supplement, May 1995, 12.



Adventist Church as it has in other protestant denominations that have ordained women.<sup>77</sup> Based on his argument, this would mean the very disappearance of Adventism, its unique nature, and its unique mission. Thus this very threat is fundamental to what it means to be Seventh-day Adventist.

Along with the question of unity and certainty of doctrine and practice goes the question of identity. The traditional beliefs and practices of the church have been that which set Adventism apart. Bacchiocchi argues that the “conflicting views on what it means to be an Adventist in terms of lifestyle has lead to...*a crisis of identity*.”<sup>78</sup> Though these practices and beliefs are not directly related to the issue of women’s ordination, he among others such as Hasel and Koranteng-Pipim connects them with the issue as far as the question of normative biblical teachings, and of the unity and certainty of doctrine and practice. Thus Bacchiocchi blames the slow growth of the church in North America and the other developed nations on their attitude of openness which creates an atmosphere of uncertainty.<sup>79</sup> According to him, the dramatic fall in the North American membership is the result of the “erosion of biblical authority,” and “cultural conformity” which includes the “rejection of role distinction between men and women.”<sup>80</sup>

In spite of all the expressions of concern for the unity of the church A. C. McLurie president of the North American Division in concluding his statement at the

<sup>77</sup> Gordon M. Hyde, “The Mohaven Council – Where it all Began,” *Adventists Affirm*, Fall 1989, 43 [4-43]. See also Holmes, 157, ff.

<sup>78</sup> Bacchiocchi, “The Future of Adventism,” 7. See also Koranteng-Pipim, “Crisis over the Word,” 15, ff.

<sup>79</sup> Bacchiocchi, “The Future of Adventism: Problems and Possibilities,” 6, 7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

Utrecht convention regarding the request for women's ordination says: "There are those who fear that if this permission is granted, it will divide the church. I do not believe the church is that fragile."<sup>81</sup>

This ecclesiological question makes the general cultural dilemma more complicated. The church is anxious over its identity, its unity and its survival, and thus it has been convinced by its fundamentalist scholars that it must remain in the inerrantist institutional world to maintain this stance. Yet there is the recognized need to grant women full clergy right where it is needed and accepted. The resistance to women's ordination therefore presents a cultural dilemma.

So far we have observed first hand the obvious social concerns regarding women's ordination in Seventh-day Adventism. These concerns are current, yet they may give us a picture of the very concerns that existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While we cannot produce similar arguments from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we can look at the conflict as it existed in Seventh-day Adventism over the issue of women's ordination to explain the way the present conflict mirrors the 19<sup>th</sup> century conflict, and how its sectarian stance has placed it in a cultural dilemma. Here it seems appropriate to focus upon the denomination's prophet, because opponents of women's ordination reference her writings. Referencing her writings does less to solve the problem of why the church must resist women's ordination, than it does to perpetuate the problem that lies behind the resistance. To

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<sup>81</sup> "Thirteenth Business Meeting, Fifty-sixth General Conference Session," *Adventist Review*, 7 July 1995, 25.

assess them as indicative of the cultural dilemma in which the denomination finds itself, is to properly assess the resistance to women's ordination as symbolic of the denomination's alliance with the fundamentalist movement in order to publicly display its separatist stance.

**The Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Seventh-day Adventism: Ellen White and the Denomination's Rules on Women Clergy.**

Aside from the question of interpretive methodology,<sup>82</sup> the gender conflict in early Adventist ministry appears to mirror the present conflict. The conflict regarding women's role in the life of the church was part of the conflict regarding gender roles in American society in general. In the midst of that conflict was the church's prophet herself, seeking to maintain unity in a growing church while maintaining her own authority as the founding prophet of the church. Her writings provide the major medium through which the denomination references the 19th century in debating the issue of women's ordination. However, these references to her writings to oppose women's ordination have not taken into consideration the extent to which the prophet was embroiled in the cultural conflict that resisted women's ordination. Ellen White stood the risk of being identified with Spiritualism, a nineteenth-century religious movement which, like radical feminism, opposed biblical authority and religious separatism. This was so to the extent that her authority to advise the denomination on the issue was significantly curtailed.

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<sup>82</sup> The debate over interpretive methodology in the present conflict over women's ordination reflects the intellectual advancement of the denomination. Chapter III demonstrates that the nineteenth-century use of

While the 1881 resolution to ordain women reveals that the conflict over women's ordination existed within Seventh-day Adventism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we have no record of either the proceedings or any comment that the church's prophet might have made concerning it. That the conflict existed then is not surprising, since the women's movement was very active in the first part of the 19th century, and was pushing for equal clergy rights for women as one of its major agendas. That the denomination responded positively to the two waves of the women's movement by seeking to ordain women, suggests that it is not generically opposed to the demands for gender equality which the movement makes on society. What we may observe in the writings of the denomination's prophet is a certain ambivalence regarding gender roles, enough to provide a frame of reference for both sides of the debate. The ambiguity emerges from her need to distance herself from Spiritualism, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the sectarian charismatic outlook that recognized the gifts of both genders in the public mission of the Church. This latter outlook became enmeshed in the women's movement, because the impulses towards gender equality actually began as a religious impulse, rather than as a secular one.

#### The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Resolution to Ordain Women: What Happened?

What was the result of the 1881 resolution by the general conference session to ordain women? Was it passed, or was it not passed? We are not sure. Besides the questions surrounding this 1881 resolution, the case of two women who were listed in the 1908 Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook as ordained ministers, namely, Ellen White and Lulu Whitman indicates that the ordination of women presented a dilemma that was other

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Bible within the denomination was less sophisticated than the current use of Bible.

than biblical. Let us take a closer look at these issues.

There is no uncontested report from the 1881 convention stating that it was passed or not passed. The reports in the two major periodicals published by the denominations have conflicting reports. Bert Haloviak, director of the Office of archives and Statistics at the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters, points to a discrepancy between the report in the *Signs of the Times* and the *Review and Herald* regarding the 1881 resolution.<sup>83</sup> The *Signs of the Times* reports that the resolution passed while the *Review and Herald* reports that it was discussed by J.O. Corliss, A. C. Bourdeau, E.R. Jones, D.H. Lamson, W.H. Littlehorn, A.S. Hutchins, D. M. Canwright and J. N. Longborough and referred to the General Conference committee. What we may be sure of is that there were pockets of resistance within the denomination that were powerful enough to block any vote or resolution to ordain women. We shall see this as the conversation develops.

The record of the 1881 general conference session not only shows that delegates may have debated the issue quite rigorously, but it also provides evidence that there was an antiliberal resistance movement within the denomination. Willie White the son of Ellen White, who was a delegate at the session, reported that delegates at the session had separated in competing “progressive” and “conservative” camps, and that there was “likely to be lively times” before the session was over.<sup>84</sup> There is nothing in the available

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<sup>83</sup> Both magazines being official Adventist publications, nevertheless represented at the time somewhat competing camps. The *Review and Herald* being the official organ of the Church would record the more conservative report. See Haloviak, “A Place at the Table: Women and the Early Years,” in *The Welcome Table*, 28, ff.

<sup>84</sup> W.C. White to Mary White, 2 December, 1881.

record referring to what exactly was said and how the discussions at that conference proceeded. Also, there is no available record regarding Ellen White's response. We know that James White had died earlier that year, and that Ellen White had left for California. Why was the resolution made in her absence, and why did it die, if indeed it died?

The records show that the Church began granting ministerial licenses<sup>85</sup> to women ten years prior to 1881. Yet, of particular significance is the case of Lulu Whitman a Seventh-day Adventist minister from 1897 to 1910 in New York. Haloviak informs us that Lulu Whitman was recommended for ordination by R.A. Underwood, the president of the New York Union, at the New York state conference meeting in New York in 1901.<sup>86</sup> This was ten years after the motion to ordain women first came before the General Conference in session and was referred to the General conference committee for discussion where it died. Why would a Union president move to ordain a woman in such a climate of social foment regarding gender roles in the 19th century? Could it be that the resolution may have passed, but was never acted upon? According to Haloviak, the General conference president A. G. Daniells who "just happened to be at that conference meeting (neither by design nor by invitation), did not believe that a woman could 'properly be ordained, just now at least'.<sup>87</sup> Could the "just now" be a reference to the general social climate of gender conflict? The conference voted to give Mrs.

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<sup>85</sup> Ministerial licenses granted women limited clergy rights in the 19th century.

<sup>86</sup> Haloviak, "A Place at the Table: Women and the Early Years," in *The Welcome Table*, 28, ff.

<sup>87</sup> John Wightman to S.H. Lane, 2 September, 1904, letter held in the Seventh-day Adventist Archives, Silver Spring, MD, quoted in Haloviak, "A Place at the Table," 31.

Wightman the ordained minister's salary without the ordination.”<sup>88</sup>

It is interesting to note the conflict which ensued in the wake of the Lulu Wightman case. Two years after the conference vote regarding the ministerial status of Lulu Wightman, her husband also received a ministerial license. The conference then lowered her salary to that of a licensed minister in spite of the protest of her husband John Wightman. While the statistics show that Lulu Whitman was the most effective minister in New York, John Wightman was ordained in 1905 two years after he received his ministerial license. Before the receipt of his ministerial license he received a salary for assisting his wife. After his ordination, both continued to work together as ministers during which time, reports Haloviak, his wife “attained state and national acclaim in religious liberty lectures before a number of state legislatures.”<sup>89</sup>

Haloviak reports a sad ending to this story of the Wightmans. In 1910 Mrs. Wightman's brother who was the president of the Central Union Conference circulated a 16-page pamphlet against the Wightmans charging that they “opposed the church structure.”<sup>90</sup> This effectively ended their ministry since they were dropped from the service of the Church.

Haloviak believes that Daniells was absolutely wrong when he said that women could not properly be ordained in the Adventist Church. Haloviak's reason, based on his argument is that women were always a part of Adventist trained and licensed ministry in

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<sup>88</sup> Haloviak, *Place at the Table*,” 31.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>91</sup> This however, in Chaves' argument is a demonstration of "loose coupling" between a denomination's rules and its practice. The Seventh-day Adventist Church had to make rules against women clergy as a public display of its separatist stance, a display which it makes by joining the general Protestant inerrantist institutional world of resistance to modernity.

Further, some important implications surround the ministerial credential of Ellen White. They indicate the dilemma of the denomination regarding the role of one of its chief ministers, Ellen White, and its rules regarding women clergy. First, the fact that Ellen White was granted ministerial credentials from 1871, affirms that her role included not just that of prophet. She functioned as a minister, teaching, preaching and raising up churches, as was the nature of ministry in the church during its early stages. She was issued a certificate which said "Ordained Minister" similar to that given to all ordained ministers including her husband James White. Of the certificates issued to her since 1871, three are extant. The certificate of 1885 has "Ordained Minister" crossed out. However on the 1883 and 1887 certificates it is not crossed out. William Fagel an assistant secretary of the Ellen White Estate in the 1980s, and a strident opponent of women's ordination speculates that this crossing out did not represent a change in status, but "highlights the awkwardness of giving credentials to a prophet."<sup>92</sup> According to him, since no credential for the category of prophet exists the church gave her the highest

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<sup>91</sup> Haloviak documents instructions given by both Ellen White and James regarding the ministerial training of men and women from *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1870.

<sup>92</sup> William Fagel, "Ellen White and the Role of Women in the Church," unpublished Manuscript, Ellen White Estate, 11.



credential it had.<sup>93</sup> George R. Knight, one of the denominations most prominent historians simply states that although the denomination never formerly ordained Ellen White, “it *listed* her as an ordained minister,” so that she could receive a full ministerial salary.<sup>94</sup> We may recall however, that Lulu Whitman also received the full ministerial salary before her husband himself received a ministerial license, but she was not given an ordained minister’s credential

It should be noted that Ellen White was a minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church first and foremost.<sup>95</sup> That may also explain why she was given a ministerial credential. “Minister” and not “pastor” was the term used for religious leaders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What we call pastoral work is something which developed later, once churches became established and ministers became resident rather than itinerant. That the term “Ordained Minister” was struck out in 1885 and remained in 1887 suggests something more than “awkward.” Why was it struck out in 1885? Why did not Ellen White herself have it struck out on all the other certificates? By her own indication, we know that Ellen White was not actually ordained.<sup>96</sup> What stands out in the case of Ellen White’s credential is the fact that she received, albeit unofficially, an equal status with her husband James White. Both Ellen White and Lulu Wightman are included in the 1908

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> George Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1999), 105.

<sup>95</sup> Knight states that Ellen White was “probably the most influential ‘minister’ ever to serve the Adventist Church.” Knight places the term minister here in quotation marks because he seems unwilling to distinguish between Ellen White’s prophetic role and her ministerial role. See Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Arthur L. White, “Ellen G. White: The Person,” *Spectrum* 4:2 (Spring 1972):7

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*<sup>97</sup> among the ordained ministers.<sup>98</sup>

A popular line of argument which opponents of women's ordination use is a statement by Ellen White to the effect that God ordained her. The statement also appears in Appendix C of the Ellen G. White Estate Exhibits Relating to the Ordination of Women.<sup>99</sup> In these instances the statement does not seem to appear in its proper context. Indeed Ellen White made the statement at the close of her ministry four years before her death, stating that God *ordained* her in Portland as His messenger.<sup>100</sup> Such a statement appears as a testimony regarding her own ministry which began in Portland when she received her first vision. She referred to it in an effort to raise funds to build a church in that city. She did not make such statement as an affront to the ordination of women as the opponents of the issue use it. Such an issue was nowhere in the vicinity of the conversation. Rather she calls attention to the importance of erecting a church building in Portland, by affirming her own call by God in that city – a call which we are about to see, did not go unchallenged throughout the years.

#### The Authority of Ellen White and the Issue of Women's Ordination:

The extensive reference to the writings of Ellen White by those who oppose

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<sup>97</sup> Held in the Office of Statistics and Archives, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD.

<sup>98</sup> For more information on Seventh-day Adventist women in Ministry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Josephine Benton, *Called by God: Stories of Seventh-day Adventist Women Ministers* (Smithsburg, MD: Blackberry Hill Publishers, 1990).

<sup>99</sup> [Egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/](http://Egwdatabase.whiteestate.org/)

<sup>100</sup> See Ellen White, "An Appeal to Our Churches Throughout the United States," *Review and Herald*, 18 May 1911. The statement was part of a testimonial recapitulation of her own ministry. She states "In the city of Portland the Lord #ordained me as His messenger, and here my first labors were given to the cause of present truth."

ordination of women reveals an assumption that Ellen White's councils or opinions were consistently accepted by those in leadership without opposition or objection. I am contesting that assumption. The historical records show that Ellen White struggled in the 19th century to maintain her credibility and her authority as the prophet of the denomination. On a matter so important that she herself held an ordained minister's credential one would imagine that she had definite opinions. The effect of her voicing those opinions however remains a question. That the delegates at the 1881 General Conference hotly debated the matter suggests that Ellen White's position on the matter was not considered authoritative. Yet, if she had come out to oppose it, it may have settled the matter, since there seem to have been a strong enough current of opposition to the motion given its death after the 1881 resolution.

The historical records reveal that the Church was going through a major social upheaval with regards to leadership and organization between 1864 and 1900.<sup>101</sup> It was a time of much controversy in Adventism – controversy regarding the way the church should organize, and controversy regarding leadership, pantheism, and legalism.<sup>102</sup> After James White's death, Ellen White came to play an increasingly prominent role in the life of the Church. However at this time too, her authority came under attack. Richard Schwartz points out that Adventist ministers in the United States, Australia and Netherlands questioned the claims to her supernatural leading by God.<sup>103</sup> In particular, he notes that during the 1890s the “Chief Australian dissidents advanced a series of wild

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<sup>101</sup> See Knight, *Organizing to beat the Devil*, 67, ff.

<sup>102</sup> Richard W. Schwartz, “The Perils of Growth: 1886-1905,” in *Adventism in America*, 99-138.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

charges against Ellen White (who was then ministering in Australia) that ranged from flagrant dishonesty to enriching herself at Adventists' expense. A letter from Ellen White in 1890, the year before she left for Australia, to Uriah Smith, one of the leading Adventist theologians at the time describes the effect that these challenges had on her. She writes:

My brethren have trifled and caviled and commented and demerited, and picked and chosen a little and refused much until the testimonies mean nothing to them. ... I would, if I had dared, [have] given up this field of conflict long ago, but something has held me.<sup>104</sup>

The general tenor at the 1891 General Conference session was an attempt to reinforce the authority of the counsels of Ellen White on how the work of the gospel was to proceed.<sup>105</sup> Much of what she has written in regarding heeding the Testimonies she directed to those in leadership who wanted to make decisions without her advice and counsel.<sup>106</sup> The 1919 Bible conference in Takoma Park, Maryland brought to a head growing concerns regarding the inspiration of Ellen White, especially in view of the question of her literary integrity.<sup>107</sup> The president of the general conference at the time,

<sup>104</sup> Ellen White to Uriah Smith, 1890, quoted in Arthur L. White, *Ellen White, vol. 3: The Lonely Years 176-1891* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981), 471.

<sup>105</sup> Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White Vol. 4 The Australian Years 1891-1900* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981), 476-489.

<sup>106</sup> See for example, White, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, 718-721. Indeed while Ellen White still held the Adventist populace, many in the leadership of the General Conference doubted her credibility and increasingly disregarded her counsels. One example of this was Ellen White's struggle to maintain the emphasis on the seventh-day Sabbath, as noted above where some wanted to align the church more with the mainstream by easing up on the sabbatarian emphasis in *The American Sentinel* for example.

<sup>107</sup> The historic 1919 (four years after Ellen White's death) Bible conference seems to have been the climax of a long struggle to maintain the voice of Ellen White in the running of the Church. While Ellen White did not place her writings at the level of scripture, it was the tendency of many to do so to maintain the steady hand of the prophet in the development of the Church. It is interesting to note that the president of the General Conference at that time was A.G. Daniels by whose authority the ordination of Lulu

A.G. Daniells came under direct scrutiny regarding his attitude towards the writings of Ellen White.

On her part, Ellen White had serious conflicts with the General Conference leadership regarding the style of leadership, the organization of the institution, and the decision making process. On her return from California in 1883, Ellen White expressed her disapproval of the centralized management of the affairs of the Church, by a handful of men who give others “no chance” to develop their God-given skills.<sup>108</sup> Knight notes that hers was the main voice opposing the centralizing of the Battle Creek management of the Church.<sup>109</sup>

A statement by Ellen White in 1888 shortly after the 1888 General Conference Session<sup>110</sup> regarding the General Conference President reveals her own struggles with the leadership of the Church. She writes: “Elder Butler...has been in office three years too long and now all humility and lowliness of mind have departed from him. He thinks his position gives him such power that his voice is infallible.” We may recall that G.I. Butler was one of the three-man general conference committee that discussed the 1881 resolution to ordain women. In another statement regarding Butler’s leadership she

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Wightman was prevented. The conference consisted mainly of a defense by A.G. Daniells of his position regarding the Testimonies of Ellen White. He seems to have been generally perceived as having an insufficient respect for the authority of the Testimonies of Ellen White. Yet he affirmed his belief in the inspiration of the Testimonies albeit not a verbal inspiration or one on the same level as scripture. See Chapter II of this study regarding the charge of plagiarism against Ellen White.

<sup>108</sup> See Ellen G. White to W. C. White and Mary White, 23 August, 1883.

<sup>109</sup> Knight, 77.

<sup>110</sup> This was one of the most heated General Conference sessions in Adventist history. At this session the subject of Righteousness by faith vis a vis righteousness by works came under discussion. George I. Butler who was then president bent towards legalism, while Ellen White backed those who focused on the faith aspect of righteousness.

states: “I hope there will never be the slightest encouragement given to our people to put such wonderful confidence in finite erring man as has been placed upon Elder Butler in the past.”<sup>111</sup> The following statement in 1891 by the prophet regarding the leadership of the General Conference suggests that it was possible for a resolution (such as women's ordination) to be passed and not acted upon. She states:

...I was obliged to take the position that there was not the voice of God in the General Conference management and decisions. ...Many of the positions taken, going forth as the voice of the General Conference, have been the voice of one, two, or three men who were misleading the conference.... “One or more men gave assent to measures laid out before the board of councils, but all the time they decided they would have their own way and carry out the matter as they chose. ...there were unfaithful stewards in responsible positions who appeared to sanction the propositions but who had the least intention of carrying them out. They would do the opposite of that which came before them for their decisions. Therefore wrongs were practiced and evils were carried out in untruthful deceptive lines.”<sup>112</sup>

A very interesting development in the ongoing conflict between Ellen White and the leadership of the Church is worthy of mention here. At the end of the 1891 General Conference session, Ellen White had plans to settle down and spend some time to do some writing. She hoped that she would not be asked to travel to Australia. However, the call came for her to go to Australia,<sup>113</sup> and so she left for Australia in September 1891

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<sup>111</sup> Ellen G. White to Mary White, November 4, 1888, quoted in Knight, *Organizing to Beat the Devil*, 73.

<sup>112</sup> Ellen White, MS 33, 1891, 167. Ellen White points to three specific things in this regard. These included: 1) the unwillingness to break down the color line regarding work among Blacks, 2) the refusal to close down commercial work on Sundays particularly in areas where it was offensive to Sunday observers, and 3) the attempt to omit the sabbatarian emphasis in *The American Sentinel*.

<sup>113</sup> Shortly after the 1891 General Conference session Ellen White was involved in a near fatal carriage accident. Arthur L. White in his biography of Ellen White wrote: “George B. Starr and his wife, engaged in evangelism in that area, witnessed it at close range and felt it was an attempt on the part of the enemy to bring injury to Ellen White or to destroy her and those with her. He quotes Ellen White as saying concerning the accident: “...upon examining the wheel [we] found that the spokes were too small for the

where she spent nine years leading out in the building up of the work there. In view of the conflicts that lead up to 1891, the motive for this call has not gone unquestioned.<sup>114</sup> Yet, it was during this time in Australia that Ellen White in 1895 made her statement regarding the ordination of women to the deaconate.<sup>115</sup> She made this statement despite the fact that it was contrary to the past history of the Church.<sup>116</sup> A number of women were ordained for the first time during Ellen White's ministry in Australia in 1895.<sup>117</sup> This never caught on in America until 1972. During this same period, she continued to hurl invectives at the leadership of the Church in Battle Creek as "man ruling power," "dictatorial authority," "kingly power," "galling yoke," and "a species of slavery."<sup>118</sup>

As we have noted, Ellen White specifically wanted the General Conference leadership to have less direct control of the work in various fields. It was a result of her protest that the General Conference was reorganized in 1901 to give more autonomy to

holes in the hub, and wooden wedges had been driven in to make the spokes fit, then painted all over. It was a complete fraud. I am sorry that even all our brethren cannot be trusted to deal honorably, without pretense or fraud." (Arthur L. White, 490-491.

<sup>114</sup> Arthur White, 11.

<sup>115</sup> This statement reads: "Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work #by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with #God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church." (Ellen G. White, "The Duty of Ministers and the People," *Review and Herald*, 9 July, 1895).

<sup>116</sup> Haloviak, 33.

<sup>117</sup> Also on January 6, 1900 an ordination service for the Ashfield church in Sydney, Australia included deaconesses. This event is not widely publicized and was rediscovered through a publication by Arthur Patrick in the *Adventist Review*, 16 January, 1986.

<sup>118</sup> Ellen G. White, MS 43, 1895; letter to J.A. Burden, 2 November, 1906; letter to Brethren [A.G. Daniells, J.A. Irwin, W.W. Prescott], 1 October, 1907; MS 6, 1891, quoted by Charles W. Teel, Jr., "Remnant," in *Remnant and Republic*, 13 [1-35].

specific fields.<sup>119</sup> This autonomy in local fields seems to have enabled the ordination of women at least to the deaconate in Australia.<sup>120</sup> It appears too that this reorganization opened the possibility for an ordination such as that proposed for Lulu Wightman in 1901.<sup>121</sup>

With the death of the prophet, a significant voice and example for women in the leadership of the denomination died. By 1923 women's leadership in the Church began to decline. Kit Watts, special projects coordinator for the La Sierra University Women's Resource Center and an administrator at Southeastern California Conference, demonstrates this by showing the extent to which the number of women in key leadership positions and the number that received ministerial licenses fell after the death of Ellen White.<sup>122</sup> She observes that by 1915 the year the prophet died, "scores of Adventist women held decision-making posts," but by the end of World War II, "Adventist women lost all the ground they had gained in the previous 100 years" to the point where "they completely vanished from conference leadership."<sup>123</sup> Today says Watts, "it has become more and more difficult to recall women's former prominence and effectiveness."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> The reorganization included primarily "the creation of union conferences and missions that had supervision of local conferences and missions and thereby dispersed the administrative authority of the General conference officers." (Knight, 108)

<sup>120</sup> It seems naïve to ask why she did not allow for women to be ordained to the ministry in Australia. Any ordination at all was a big step at that time. Ellen White's own ministry came under assault as inappropriate.

<sup>121</sup> This conference at which the recommendation was made to ordain Lulu Wightman, was the first held by the New York Union under the newly organized general Conference.

<sup>122</sup> Kit Watts, "Moving Away From the Table: A Survey of Historical Factors Affecting Women Leaders," in *The Welcome Table*, 45-59.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*



Watts says regarding the effect of Ellen Whites death upon women in Adventist ministry: “When an advocate’s voice becomes silent, there is less incentive to maintain inclusive policies, especially if leaders have had doubts about them to begin with.”<sup>125</sup> Haloviak gives another explanation for the decline of women in ministry after 1915. He points out from the record of the October 1923 General Conference Council that church leaders enacted new policies at the General Conference Council which stipulated that for one to receive a departmental position one must have had successful experience in evangelical work, preferable ordained ministers.<sup>126</sup> This marks a radical diversion from the path of ministry down which Adventism had come particularly through the councils and leadership of Ellen White. The following statements by Ellen White reveal that the attempt to close out of the main stream those who were not ordained began long before 1923, but which she seem to have fought against:

“Men want the work to go in their lines, and they refuse to accept broader plans for others. ... It does not follow that because a man is not ordained as a preacher, he cannot work for God.”<sup>127</sup> 2) “The Savior’s commission to the disciples included all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depend alone on the ordained minister. ... All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellowmen.”<sup>128</sup>

The death of the prophet indeed marked a major blow to the progress of women in Adventist ministry. It halted any move that the Church might have made towards the full

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>126</sup> Haloviak, “Adventism’s Lost Generations: The Decline of Leadership Positions for SDA Women,” Unpublished Paper, May 12, 1990.

<sup>127</sup> Ellen White, *Life Sketches*, 385.

<sup>128</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages* (Oakland, California: Pacific Press Publishing Co., 1898), 822.

recognition of female ministers in the form of ordination. Yet the 1919 Bible conference marked a victory for the voice of the prophet – a voice that stood the risk of extinction. The conference revealed that though the Bible is the primary authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Testimonies of Ellen White are indispensable. In spite of his political clout as the president of the General Conference, A. G. Daniells had to affirm belief in the Testimonies of Ellen G. White to maintain his own position of authority in the Church.<sup>129</sup> Ellen White’s prophetic charisma held the Adventist populace. The effect is that Ellen White won the day as the authoritative voice (outside of the Bible) in the Adventist Church. Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Leifeld sum it up well when they say: “...even in the face of solid evidence that indicates she used other writings as a basis of her ‘testimonies’ that were said to have come directly from God, the Seventh-day Adventists were unwilling to abandon her.”<sup>130</sup> Would Seventh-day Adventism have survived with the abandonment of Ellen White? This is a question for another study. Yet here we must note that her victory has an ironic twist. How is this so?

The authority of Ellen White is now been used<sup>131</sup> by some as a tool of social control with reference to male headship. Yet this irony underscores the cultural dilemma that the denomination stands as regards the ordination of women. Those such as Bacchiocchi and

<sup>129</sup> This may have been a political strategy. Because Ellen White held the Adventist populace, those who wanted to maintain leadership positions had to at least appear to respect her authority. Minutes from the 1919 conference reveals that Daniells slighted much of the supernatural aura that attended the general perception of Ellen White’s ministry, but he was able to present in the typical style of a defense lawyer enough argument to prove that he did believe in the Spirit of Prophecy.

<sup>130</sup> Ruth Tucker, and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 276.

<sup>131</sup> Schwartz points out that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the prophet’s “prominent role and influence lead some church members with special causes to seek her support.” He notes that “many times they misused her

Hasel who oppose ordination of women attempt to relegate the gift of prophecy to a position subordinate to the teaching authority of the pastor. At the same time, to make their case, these very opponents of the issue have argued that Ellen White was not ordained by man but by God. Is this an attempt to obscure an obvious contradiction between the prevailing high view regarding Ellen White and the position they take against ordaining women – namely that prophecy is not an authoritative teaching function? If indeed God himself ordained a woman, then this must give her an authority above that which is being claimed for men. The reference to her *divine ordination*<sup>132</sup> also exposes the very social nature of ordination as it is practiced in the Church. The use of such statement (albeit out of context) serves to exclude her from the hierarchy of the Church and at the same time elevate her. Outside of the human sphere of ordination she does not appear to pose a threat. This statement appears as an attempt to explain the apparent contradiction between an appeal to the authority of a woman and the denial that this woman whose primary function was that of a minister<sup>133</sup> should be ordained to the ministry.

#### Ellen White, Feminism and the Adventist Church

While Ellen White may have been circumscribed by her denomination's entrance into the inerrantist institutional world, she was not necessarily opposed to granting full clergy rights to women. She was an advocate for women for the highest possible

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published statements to further their own interests and ends.” See Schwartz, 105.

<sup>132</sup> Referring to the statement she made in 1911 to the effect that God *ordained* her in Portland as His messenger.

<sup>133</sup> As noted earlier in this chapter, Ellen White functioned primarily as a minister as was the nature of nineteenth-century ministry. For the greater part her writings like the writings of the apostle Paul resulted from genuine issues in ministry. No one calls Paul a prophet.

involvement of women in the gospel ministry. The many statements in the writings of Ellen White, encouraging and advocating for the participation of women in ministry do not seem to be tokenistic statements telling women what they can do so that they may not breach the boundaries set by the ordination. This appears to be the manner in which those who argue against ordination of women use those statements.<sup>134</sup> What appears here is the use of Ellen White's authority – an authority she fought to maintain in light of the prevailing view on gender roles- to support the very idea she sought to subvert. We are also about to see that those statements from the Testimonies have been extracted from the context of the women's movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and do not give full explanation of Ellen White's view on the role of women in the church.

The phenomenon of the active participation of women in Christian ministry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was first and foremost the result of a religious awakening, derived from a reading of scripture.<sup>135</sup> According to J. Gordon Melton, religion provided in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "a context in which women could organize and from which feminist impulses could be generated."<sup>136</sup> Thus he argues: "before there were women's clubs, women's

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<sup>134</sup> See Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*, 70-80. Koranteng-Pipim speaks positively of "Godly women who exercised leadership within the framework of biblical guidelines." (78) Indeed, in his argument they may take on any position in the church as long as they do not aspire for ordination. See also: Fagel, "Ellen White and the Role of Women in the Church," in Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church*; and Bacchiocchi, "Women: Ministry Without Ordination," *Ministry*, October 1986, 4-7.

<sup>135</sup> The work of Tucker and Liefeld shows that women in religious leadership is a long heritage and struggle stretching back to early Christianity that precedes the feminist movement. It is the result of religious conviction and desires to serve God. If anything secular feminism receives its basic information from women in religion.

<sup>136</sup> J. Gordon Melton, "Emma Curtis Hopkins: A Feminist of the 1880s and Mother of New Thought," in *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions*, 89

schools and women's rights groups, women's mobilization began in the churches."<sup>137</sup> It heralded a resistance to a culture that rendered women legally dependent as children and slaves, and which closed out their voices from the public sphere. The rise of women in teaching, preaching and leadership positions in the Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a result of this awakening. Seventh-day Adventism was rooted in this trend. J. Gordon Melton notes that Revivalism among Methodists was among the prominent forces that worked "for the general elevation of women in the social structures of nineteenth-century America."<sup>138</sup> He further notes that it pioneered the ordination of women.<sup>139</sup> There were many in Adventism who opposed this trend, and Ellen White and other leaders had to defend the teaching and preaching ministry of women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>140</sup> According to Ellen White, her own brother urged her to cease to "go out as a preacher" because she was bringing disgrace upon the family."<sup>141</sup> Part of her reply was that she would "not keep silent for when God imparts his light to me, he means that I shall diffuse it to others, according to my ability."<sup>142</sup>

What was occurring in Nineteenth-century Seventh-day Adventism was a

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>140</sup> Ellen White hardly spoke in her own defense, but usually allowed her male colleagues to respond to the queries regarding her ministry. For example, at a meeting in Arbutle, California in 1880 Ellen White reported in a letter to her husband James White that a piece of paper was handed to S. N. Haskell "quoting certain texts prohibiting women speaking in public." According to her, Haskell "took the matter in a brief manner and very clearly expressed the meaning of the apostle's words." (Ellen G. White to James White, 1 April 1880)

<sup>141</sup> Ellen White, "Looking for that Blessed Hope," *Signs of the Times*, 24 June 1889.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

resistance to the status quo that confined women to the private sphere, and a counter-resistance to at least curtail the extent to which they may function in that sphere. This was a reflection of what was happening in the society at large. Yet the Church by its very self identity as the remnant called out of Babylon, sought to disassociate with society. This had the effect of creating a level of ambivalence in the prophetic utterances regarding the struggle. That is, while the prophet advocated for the active participation of women in the life of the church – a cultural deviance, she also attempted to dissociate from the struggle in the wider society. In particular, she attempted to disassociate from the feminist movement. The feminist movement not only fully represented this cultural deviance in American society, but its philosophy was in many respects incongruent to Seventh-day Adventism.

We may identify two major elements within feminism that were incongruent with Seventh-day Adventism. First, feminism rejected biblical authority because of what it perceives to be the use of the Bible to justify the oppression of women. According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton: "The only points in which I differ from all ecclesiastical teaching is that I do not believe that any man ever saw or talked with God, I do not believe that God inspired the Mosaic code, or told the historians what they say he did about women...."<sup>143</sup> Secondly Spiritualism, developed in the 1850s as a new religious movement and became associated with the women's movement. It provided proof for the immortality of the soul by establishing communication with the dead. Ann Braude's study, *Radical Spirits* indicates that it was not a part of the women's movement, but

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<sup>143</sup> Stanton, 12.

overlapped with it. Firstly, it did not depend on scripture as a vehicle of truth, but on contact with the spirit world.<sup>144</sup> Secondly, women were prominent in Spiritualism because religious authority came through individual spiritual contact rather than from an official hierarchy or from training. Thus, mediumship in spiritualism became closely identified with femininity.<sup>145</sup> Because of this dependence on the unhindered autonomy of female mediums, the movement became an ardent advocate of women's rights.<sup>146</sup> Finally, Spiritualism embraced a liberal theology that replaces faith in a savior with a vision of the divine in the natural world and in human nature which it perceives to be inherently good.<sup>147</sup>

Seventh-day Adventism bases its true-church stance on the authority of scripture. This places it in confrontation with any movement that opposes this approach to scripture. Secondly, the associations of Spiritualism presented a major challenge to Seventh-day Adventism. Spiritualism which stresses women rights embraces a liberal theology that is universalist in nature. This stands in opposition to the separatist stance of Seventh-day Adventism. Very significantly, however, it appears that in the 19th century, some people associated the visionary experience of Ellen White with the mesmerism and clairvoyance of Spiritualism.<sup>148</sup> This observation has been made by Ann Taves in her

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<sup>144</sup> Braude, 36.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>148</sup> Seventh-day Adventism emerged out of the Great Disappointment through the visionary experience of Ellen White.

major study on eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century religious experience, titled *Fits, Trances and Visions*. Indeed, as Taves observes, some of Ellen White's experiences in vision could easily have been explained as the mesmeric sleep of Spiritualism in which the human medium comes in contact with the spirit world.<sup>149</sup> White was approached in 1845 by a physician who was a celebrated mesmerizer, because he believed her experience was mesmeric, and saw her as an easy medium.<sup>150</sup> According to Taves, the visions were "so troubling to many" that in 1851 James White decided to suspend printing his wife's visions "to avoid arousing further controversy."<sup>151</sup> The significant point here is that James White and Ellen White found it necessary to distance themselves from what they, along with mainstream Protestantism, believed to be satanic Spiritualism, and to explain Ellen White's experiences as visions from God.<sup>152</sup> We can fully understand then why Ellen White would be as reticent as was possible on the question of women's rights.

We have argued that biblical inerrancy does not necessarily lead to resistance of women's ordination. Yet, as Chaves notes, biblical inerrancy took on the symbolic weight of defining an antiliberal Protestant subculture and thus it became increasingly difficult to combine biblical inerrancy with support for women's ordination.<sup>153</sup> Thus in those marginal religions of the 19th century which granted women leadership positions

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<sup>149</sup> Taves, 155.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-163.

<sup>153</sup> Chaves, 102.



and equal status with men, the overriding factor was the fact that they were not biblically inerrant religions. In this regard, Shakerism, Spiritualism and Christian Science possessed the following four characteristics<sup>154</sup> that made them dissenters:

1. a perception of the divine that de-emphasized the masculine either by means of bisexual divinity or an impersonal, non-anthropomorphic divine principle;
2. a tempering or denial of the doctrine of the fall;
3. a denial of the need for a traditional ordained clergy
4. a view of marriage that did not stress the married state and motherhood as the proper sphere for women and her only means of fulfillment.

Though its founder was a woman, the separatist stance of Seventh-day Adventism which was based on its inerrantist stance could not allow it to join such dissenters in the 19th century. Rather, its separatist stance allowed it to join the antiliberal Protestant religious subculture. Yet we may observe in the writings of Ellen White some amount of solidarity with the dissenting stance that enabled the granting of equal status to women in marginal religions.

Ellen White: A Dissenting Voice on Gender Ideology:

First, Ellen White did not advocate domesticity as the only sphere proper to women. That much she held in common with the dissenters. Indeed statements by the prophet that opponents use against ordination of women arose from the prophet's own effort to subvert the gender ideologies that relegate women to the private sphere. Many

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<sup>154</sup> Mary Farell Bednarowski identifies these as factors which can be found in religions where women take on important leadership roles. See Mary Farell Bednarowski, "Outside the Mainstream: Women's Religion and Women Religious leaders in nineteenth -Century America," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48 (June 1980): 207-231.

of the arguments in the debate on women's ordination which utilize the writings of Ellen White have not factored the social context of nineteenth-century America into the conversation. Michael Beroni in his contribution to *Women in Ministry*, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Adventist Ministry" seeks to correct this error of overlooking the historical context of many of the statement of Ellen White used in the debate on women's ordination.<sup>155</sup> Beroni pursues the argument that "the idea that woman's God-ordained place was in the home permeated every level of society in Ellen White's day."<sup>156</sup> His conclusion is that Ellen White "continually broadened the nature, functions and roles of women in ministry at a time when women were discouraged from placing themselves in the public eye."<sup>157</sup>

Ellen White's own perusal of a public life and her vision for the expansion of the work of the gospel using all the available human resources in the midst of a climate that idealized female domesticity has created a level of ambivalence in her writings as far as gender roles. Yet careful evaluation of her writings against the prevailing social climate may indicate a prophetic charisma that attempted to hold together a growing movement while pressing against the social currents that, from her standpoint may hinder that growth. Almost all those who adamantly oppose women's ordination quote the following text from Ellen White:

Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband's side in her Eden home; but,

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<sup>155</sup> Michael Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Adventist Ministry against the Backdrop of their Times," in *Women in Ministry*, 211-233.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it. A similar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God's plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them.<sup>158</sup>

Along with this, most opponents also quote the following:

Those who feel called out to join the movement in favor of woman's rights and the so-called dress reform might as well sever all connection with the third angel's message. The spirit which attends the one cannot be in harmony with the other. The scriptures are plain upon the relations and rights of men and women.<sup>159</sup>

Laura Damsteegt<sup>160</sup> and Gerard Damsteegt<sup>161</sup> have quoted this statement, but have ignored the second part of the statement which in and of itself would lead the critical mind to wonder if it was attacking the women's movement per se, rather than that with which the movement was associated. The second part of the statement reads

Spiritualists have, to quite an extent, adopted this singular mode of dress. Seventh-day Adventists, who believe in the restoration of the gifts, are often branded as spiritualists. Let them adopt this costume, and their influence is dead. The people would place them on a level with spiritualists and would refuse to listen to them.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 59.

<sup>159</sup> Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 421. Alicia A. Worley has researched this statement showing its original form written in 1864 in a small volume entitled *Testimony No. 10* before its current publication. In the original form the first sentence reads: "Those who feel called out to join the *Women's Rights Movement*," rather than "Those who feel called out to join *the movement in favor of women's rights*" (italics supplied). Also the original reading, "the relations and rights of *women* and men," has been revised to read "the relations and rights of *men* and women" (italics supplied). See Alicia A. Worley, "Ellen White and Women's Rights," in *Women in Ministry*, 376.

<sup>160</sup> Laura Damsteegt, 33.

<sup>161</sup> Gerard Damsteegt, "Scripture Faces Current Issues," 25.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid

We first observe in the current use of this statement a preoccupation with the idea that men and women do not have equal rights. This is how Gerard Damsteegt, for example uses this statement.<sup>163</sup> Was Ellen White against equal rights for men and women? The rights for which women fought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century included the right to just pay for their labor. This was also an issue in Adventist ministry. Ellen White advocated for just pay for women who labored as much as men in the ministry.<sup>164</sup> Notably also, Ellen White supported the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)<sup>165</sup> which supported equal rights for women, advocated the involvement of men in family life, the mutuality of relationship between men and women, the training and education of women, and their participation in public life.<sup>166</sup> Notably, a national evangelist for the WCTU, Mrs. S.M.I. Henry became a Seventh-day Adventist and Ellen White encouraged her to continue her public ministry saying to her "...each person has his own lamp to keep burning."<sup>167</sup> The above statement by Ellen White regarding the Bible's stand on gender rights may therefore not necessarily have been a stand against advocating for rights of women, rather it seems to have been an attempt to disassociate especially with the Spiritualism with which she was often associated because of her visionary experiences.<sup>168</sup> What the prophet

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<sup>163</sup> Gerard Damsteegt, "Scripture Faces Current Issues," 25, 27. Damsteegt quotes only the sentence, "the scripture are clear upon the relations and rights of men and women."

<sup>164</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Labourer is Worthy of his Hire," MS 43a, 22 March, 1898.

<sup>165</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Welfare Ministry*, 164.

<sup>166</sup> Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Press, 1981), 147.

<sup>167</sup> Ellen G. White to S.M.I. Henry, 24 March 1899, quoted by S.M.I. Henry, "The Excellency of the Soul," *Review and Herald*, 9 May 1899.

<sup>168</sup> Bernoi points out that the WCTU also distanced itself from feminism, "mostly because of its strong

was saying in essence is that the Church did not need the women's movement to enlighten it on the rights of women and men because the scripture has already done that. Hers was not a statement regarding what the scripture says on the rights of women and men, but a statement that it is clear on those rights. It was an affirmation that biblical inerrancy does not lead to resistance to gender equality.

Ellen White's commentary on the creation and the fall in *Patriarchs and Prophets* quoted above reflects the very tension that seems to have existed in American society at the time. While her commentary explains the submission of woman as a result of the fall, her general statements regarding gender relationships argue for mutuality. Elsewhere she states that "woman, if she wisely improves her time and her faculties, relying upon God for wisdom and strength may stand on an equal level with her husband as adviser, counselor, companion, and co-worker, and yet lose none of her womanly grace and modesty."<sup>169</sup> It does not appear that Ellen White related her interpretation of the Genesis account of creation and the fall to the place of women in ministry. Rather, she appears to have been commenting on the creation/fall drama in the style typical of her times and in keeping with the antiliberal Protestant religious subculture into which her denomination was drawn. It therefore may have applied to the current feminist movement which mainstream society perceived as politically and socially outlandish.<sup>170</sup>

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political and controversial stances." Bernoi, 218. The WCTU was associated with the holiness movement a development of American revivalism, which first gave voice to equal rights for women. See Melton, 89.

<sup>169</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 467.

<sup>170</sup> Graybill points out that Ellen White like Mary Baker Eddie avoided both the extremes of feminism which rejected scripture as encouraging the oppression of women and the extreme right which denied women any place in the public sphere. See Graybill, 164.

Her constant struggle seems to have been for women inclined towards ministry to use their talents to the fullest, and for the Church to recognize them on a level equal to their male counterparts. This stood in tension with the contemporary ideal of womanhood which she also affirmed in her writings.<sup>171</sup> That ordination of women did not take place then, was not a reflection of her position on the matter, but a reflection of the Protestant resistance to liberalism which Seventh-day Adventism joined in order to maintain its separatist stance. It does not seem likely that she was reticent on the issue given her circumstance, the relatively high percentage of women who were both ministers and General Conference administrators in Adventism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the social tensions of the time regarding woman's proper place.

Following is a sampling of typical statements made by Ellen White in the struggle for women in the ministry of the Adventist Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They suggest that hers was a dissenting voice on the gender ideology that relegated women.

*"You have a disposition to dictate and control matters and if you cannot do this you are almost sure to be sullen and uncongenial. ... The feelings you cherish in reference to the faithful sisters of the church are more satanic than they are divine. You have united with some others in cherishing feelings that were all wrong. If you only had as much piety, perseverance, earnestness and steadfast energy as has been manifested by these humble devoted women who have the benefit of your sneers, you would have been in far better condition spiritually. ...It is not always men who are best adapted to the successful management of a church. If faithful women have more deep piety and true devotion than men, they could indeed by their prayers and their labors do more than men who are unconsecrated in heart and life. ...It is just such material as you, who help compose our churches that make these churches weak and full of disease. ...Oh, my soul is in anguish day and night, as I see the weakness of our churches in consequence of men who want to rule by their own spirit. (Ellen G. White to Brother Johnson, letter 33, 1879 MS Releases, 19:55-56).*

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<sup>171</sup> What the prophet taught regarding the ideal woman, while it was an obsession in nineteenth-century American culture as a resistance to the women's movement, it did not reflect the practice of the prophet herself. In her own life, she neither fit the ideal of motherhood, nor of the ideal submissive wife. Mrs. White's first son Henry who died at sixteen was raised by friends for the first six years of his life while James and Ellen traveled to spread the gospel. Later she expressed her guilt for leaving him. (See "Early Trials and Labours," MS - 5, 1863, Ellen G. White Estate. Also James and Ellen White were both charismatic figures who often clashed. Ellen's letter to him revealed that she was willing to take directions only from God, and was willing to work apart from him if it meant that their work could be more effective (See Graybill, 25-53, en passim.)

Seventh-day Adventists are not in any way to belittle woman's work. If a woman puts her housework in the hands of a faithful, prudent helper, and leaves her children in good care, while she engages in the work, the conference should have wisdom to understand the justice of her receiving wages. {MSS Release, vol 5, 1898, 324)

There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God. Husband and wife may unite in this work, and when it is possible, they should. The way is open for consecrated women. But the enemy would be pleased to have the women whom God could use to help hundreds, binding up their time and strength on one helpless little mortal, that requires constant care and attention. (Ibid, 325)

While I was in America, I was given light upon this subject. I was instructed that there are matters that need to be considered. Injustice has been done to women who labor just as devotedly as their husbands, and who are recognized by God as being as necessary to the work of ministry as their husbands. The method of paying men laborers and not their wives is a plan not after the Lord's order. Injustice is thus done. A mistake is made. The Lord does not favor this plan. This arrangement, if carried out in our conferences, is liable to discourage our sisters from qualifying themselves for the work they should engage in. (Ibid., 323)

This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that they are essential to carry the truth into families. Their work is just the work that must be done. In many respects a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot. The cause would suffer great loss without this kind of labor. Again and again the Lord has shown me that women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which He has appointed them as are men. They should not be compelled by the sentiments and rules of others to depend upon donations for their payment, any more than should the ministers. (Ibid, 325)

Ellen White made all (except for the first) of the above statements while she was in Australia. However the first, and seemingly most profound, she wrote in 1879 two years before the 1881 resolution to ordain women to the ministry. Her statements were not patronizing meant to mollify disgruntled women, as the opponents of women's ordination have used them. Rather, they represent her resistance to the attempts to close women out and to relegate them to domesticity, attempts which did not exclude the prophet herself.

That the prophet seems to have backed away from the ordination issue may be a

reflection of her charisma<sup>172</sup> which prevented her from advocating to its limit what had become for the antiliberal Protestant sub-culture a symbol of cultural deviance. But did she really back away from the issue? Tucker and Liefeld note that ordination for women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century “was frequently a hard-fought battle, though many women refused to become involved in the fray themselves.”<sup>173</sup> Ellen White was the prophet of Seventh-day Adventism, already fighting both to maintain her own credibility among the leadership of the Church and to distance herself from Spiritualism which orthodox religion viewed as satanic. Her alleged silence regarding the matter was therefore hardly an indication of her disapproval of the ordination of women. Already she had pushed the issue to even the ordination of deaconesses.

Ellen White, James White and others who lead the church and were inclined towards allowing the full use of the gifts of women were circumscribed not so much by scripture, as they were by the general social climate of resistance to liberal modernity into which the denomination entered in order to maintain its separatist stance. Based on his statement “not...just now at least,” we may observe that A.G. Daniells did not object to the ordination of Lulu Wightman on Scriptural grounds. The active participation of women in the church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was an attempt to transcend the social climate as regards gender. History shows that it was not completely successful. As Laura Vance

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<sup>172</sup> This is based on Max Weber’s idea of the prophet. For him the prophetic charisma not only challenges the status quo through the authority inherent in the manifested gift, but it seeks for integration and unity of the group. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1922), 46-59.

<sup>173</sup> Tucker and Liefeld, 279.



has argued, Seventh-day Adventism eventually capitulated to the status quo.<sup>174</sup> Thus, in spite of the brave struggles of the prophet, and others who pushed the resolution to grant women full clergy rights in the 19th century, the denomination in order to protect its separatist identity, entered into the fundamentalist inerrantist institutional world of resistance to liberal modernity. This indicated a cultural dilemma within Seventh-day Adventism that effected the abortion of a developing process whereby women in ministry may have eventually been given as a rule<sup>175</sup> equal recognition as that of their male counterparts. The issue of women's ordination in 19th century became, as it did in the 20th century, a scapegoat in the denomination's effort to protect its true-church identity.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The current arguments against women's ordination reflect the cultural ideals of the antiliberal Protestant subculture that inform the way opponents of women's ordination use the Bible to argue against women's ordination. Ordination is a social status symbol that places the recipient of ordination on a level where he or she represents God. Because the Bible depicts God in male imagery, this makes resistance to women's ordination an appropriate symbol of the fundamentalist resistance to liberal modernity.

The official inerrantist stance of Seventh-day Adventism does not place it in opposition to women's ordination. Moreover, Seventh-day Adventism identified with the American revivalism, a nineteenth-century religious subculture that valued the gifts of

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<sup>174</sup> Vance, 215, 222.

<sup>175</sup> As noted above, Ellen White and Lulu Whitman were given equal recognition to the extent that they were listed and paid as ordained ministers.

women in a way that the reigning culture did not. This resulted in the denomination's positive response to the two waves of the women's movement that pushed for full gender equality. Yet its efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries to grant women full clergy rights were halted because of the challenge to its separatist identity which the liberal feminist rejection of biblical authority presented. The denomination was not fighting modernity or even feminism per se. Rather, it was fighting against a perceived threat to its identity as the true church. In the 20th century this threat took the form of higher criticism. In the 19th century, this took the form of Spiritualism (which also rejected biblical authority). In both periods resistance to women's ordination became among fundamentalist, a symbol of resistance to liberal modernity. This general antiliberal Protestant religious subculture was the vehicle through which Seventh-day Adventism established its separatist stance in the 19th century, and the means by which major opponents of women ordination made their case in the 20th century, and won.

The denomination's prophet, while she sought to disassociate herself from Spiritualism with which many identified her, did not seem to back down from pushing as far as possible for the equal recognition of those women involved in the work of the Church. While this was subversive of the prevailing gender ideology that confined women to the private sphere, she could not steer the denomination from the path of resistance to women's ordination on which it chose to enter to protect its identity. Women's ordination was already a symbol of this resistance to liberal modernity. The prophet's need to distance herself from Spiritualism to protect her denomination's identity along with the challenges to her authority as a true prophet, seem to have rendered her powerless in making any authoritative statement regarding women's

ordination. Her “silence” therefore, may not be the result of scriptural conviction, but of social expediency.

Seventh-day Adventism’s rules on female clergy displays it as a fundamentalist inerrantist institution opposed to liberal modernity, when in essence it is a conservative (“Bible believing”) institution open to contextualizing its mission by granting full clergy rights to women. The dilemma of Seventh-day Adventism regarding women’s ordination is therefore not hermeneutical, but cultural.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Seventh-day Adventism is a biblically inerrant denomination that has struggled over the question of women's ordination in both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. How can two opposing sides, using for the most part the same basic approach to the Bible, find in it justification for their arguments? It is precisely because they go there to find justification for their arguments. Why does a denomination whose major source of authority outside of the Bible is a woman, its founding prophet, continue to resist women's ordination based on the biblical argument of male authority? There must be something about the way the Bible figures in the conflict that is worthy of close scrutiny. We have discovered that in this conflict, the Bible is more an accessory than it is a source of instruction. We must therefore be wary of the claim that the end point in interpretation in a culture defined by conflicting socio-religious ideas is the text. As Wimbush argues, such a claim is a "ruse."<sup>1</sup> I have demonstrated that this is indeed the case in the debate over women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I have made my conclusion in view of the argument that the inerrantist stance of Seventh-day Adventism is not the reason for its resistance to women's ordination, but its separatist stance. As a result of this stance, the present rules on women clergy in Seventh-day Adventism is not so much the result of what the Bible says on the issue as it is the result of the theological crisis in the denomination that resulted from its confrontation with higher criticism. Because higher criticism is inimical to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 6.

denomination fundamental doctrines, and because it epitomizes liberal religion, the vigilante scholars of the denomination called upon the general antiliberal religious subculture to defend the denomination's separatist stance. Thus they were able to pull the denomination into the inerrantist institutional world constructed by the fundamentalist movement, where resistance to gender equality is a symbol of resistance to liberal modernity. As a result, women's ordination shifted from being a genuine issue in Seventh-day Adventism to becoming a symbol of alliance with liberalism. Because of this association of women's ordination with the enemy of the denomination, resistance to women's ordination ultimately became a symbolic display of denominational loyalty. As a result, those who defend women's ordination have had to call upon a similar politics of interpretation as that of their opponents. This is to say, they have had to defend their arguments without going outside of the inerrantist boundaries of the denomination. Major arguments for women's ordination have not used even the tools of higher criticism. Where the tools have been used, it has not disavowed the true church stance of the denomination. Thus both sides of the conversation were less concerned about what the Bible says than they were about making it say what they wanted it to say. Interpretive methodology was merely a servant to the sociological agendas of each side of the conflict. This has also demonstrated that higher criticism is a phantom enemy. Yet, because women's ordination had already taken on symbolic weight as the enemy of the denomination, a defense of it became equated with the use of a wrong (higher critical) interpretive methodology.

The sociological explanation of Chaves, namely that the resistance to women's ordination serves as a symbol of resistance to modernity is illuminating. It points to the

fact that the alliance with fundamentalism by some biblically inerrant denominations does not necessarily point to a new way of perceiving the Bible, but to a different way of using it to make a sociological statement. It helps to demonstrate that the symbols that any group in conflict constructs or embraces in order to establish its “truth” become the truth itself. Where the Bible is the source of authority, this “truth” is imposed upon it.

In studying the specific case of Seventh-day Adventism, the sociological nature of the hermeneutical conflict over women’s ordination becomes even more evident. This study, unlike Chaves’ study, has focused not only on the resistance, but upon the conflict in general, to assess the extent to which a particular community in conflict may politicize the sacred text in order to create their own meaning. It demonstrates that opposing groups will use whatever resources that may be available to them, regardless of whether those resources are biblical, or consistent with their confessions, so long as these resources help them to obtain biblical affirmation.

Seventh-day Adventism made two major moves during its history to grant women full clergy rights through ordination. These two moves came in response to pressure from the two waves of the women’s movement. It seems to have responded positively in these two periods because of its roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century religious revivalism that gave voice to women in a culture that generally gave them no public voice. Yet, in both periods the women’s movement seemed to have carried with it particular approaches to the Bible and to Christianity in general that undermined the separatist stance of Seventh-day Adventism. Such associations as Spiritualism and higher criticism (or a non-inerrantist approach to scripture) became enemies of Seventh-day Adventism because the denomination’s true-church stance breaks down in light of these. It therefore became

easy for Seventh-day Adventism to join the religious subculture of resistance to modernity in order to defend its separatist stance. Thus, where the resistance to women's ordination serves as a symbol of resistance to modernity in the general religious subculture, for Seventh-day Adventism it serves as the symbol of resistance to any threat to its separatist stance. In spite of its separatism, it was willing to join the general religious subculture to resist what became a symbolic enemy. Women's ordination became a scapegoat in the denomination's struggle to maintain its identity. The Bible served as the sacrificial knife. At the same time, it provided a source of authority to the extent that it protects each group from the scandal of alliance with the real enemy of the denomination, higher criticism – the hallmark of liberal religion. In a real sense, however, it has authority to speak for each group only to the extent that each side of the conflict makes it speak for them.

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