

Should women be ordained to the gospel ministry?

YES

By MARY GORDON

Georgina was pregnant with her third child when her husband left home to marry another woman. Georgina is rebuilding her life—learning to be breadwinner, homemaker and single parent. Looking back, she says, “The rejection I felt from my husband’s divorce is indescribable. Male ministers went out of their way to help me, but they couldn’t understand exactly what I was going through. I wish I’d had a woman pastor.”

Alicia feels called to reach women who are in the United States military forces. “That’s a mission field! And it’s open to Adventists. But in order to be considered, we *must* be ordained by our own church. Here’s a case where ‘the world’ wants women’s ministry, but the church is holding back. I hope prayerful consideration will be given to ordaining qualified women so this need won’t go unanswered.”

Rose is an Adventist teacher who attends a small church in a large city. “It’s true that women who are divorced, abused, chemically dependent, or in hospitals or the Army really need the ministry of other women,” she comments. “But the need is far greater. Women and men just look at life and religion differently. To have the gospel preached only by men leaves part of the message out. I want to hear women preaching, identifying with my spiritual needs.”

Sylvia is one of a handful of Adventist women in North America who has chosen pastoral ministry as her lifework. “It is incredible to feel the Lord is calling. I had other plans. Besides, my family thought I would face too much prejudice. They urged me to become a CPA or lawyer or something else. But I couldn’t shake off the Holy Spirit. Now that I’ve actually been a pastor I feel confirmed that the Lord is in this. There are some ways I can serve in which a man can’t; we need to work together. For example, when a woman is suddenly widowed I have the freedom to stay in her home for a few days ministering to her. Because the male pastor and I are a team we meet a wider spectrum of needs.”

Nellie has been a pastor-evangelist in the Philippines for many years. She says simply, “I want to serve God and win many souls before He comes.” Her evangelistic series typically last from 15 to 21 days and may attract crowds of 200. She is married and has adopted two children, but says her family responsibilities are compatible with her ministry. Do her churches accept her? “I have observed that some of the brethren like a lady pastor and some do not,” Nellie answers. “But if they know I can build churches they do not like it when I am transferred to another place.” Her postscript says, “Every year I have as my project to build one church in my district.”

Mary Gordon is a pseudonym.

NO

By LOUISE RIVERS

What would you do if the church offered to ordain you to the ministry?” The question came from my pastor husband who had just listened to my views on women’s ordination. “You know, it’s one thing to oppose it in principle, but another to refuse it if it’s handed to you.” His wry comment caused me to think through the issue again.

So what would I do if the church offered to ordain me to the gospel ministry? Well (if I may boast with my friend Paul), I suppose I could “qualify” as well as any woman in the Adventist Church today. Dedicated to the Lord before birth by my parents, I felt the call of God at an early age. Later I studied and received a degree in religion with all male classmates. Upon graduation I accepted a call to the ministry as a Bible instructor.

In my early ministry in the church I struggled, like many young women today, with understanding my female role in relation to the male role in ministry, until I found the answer to the conflict in the blueprint that God has given to this church.

I have been a part of the gospel ministry now for many years, though the hands of ordination have never been laid upon me. The Lord has blessed my ministry. I’ve been privileged to lead people to Christ, prepare them for baptism, nurture them to maturity, counsel them in distress, visit them in sickness, and minister to them in countless ways. I’ve given Bible studies, conducted seminars and classes of various kinds, instructed people in becoming soul winners. I’ve conducted prayer meetings and preached at Sabbath worship services when circumstances necessitated.

So why shouldn’t I seek ordination or accept an offer of it? Basically there are three considerations that I must weigh in answering these questions: First, what guidelines do I find in the Word of God? Second, what counsel did Ellen White give to this church that would help me make a wise choice? And finally, what practical implications would ordination impose upon me as a woman and a wife? What effect would my ordination have on the church as a whole?

Women in Scripture

From the earliest history of Israel through to New Testament times, women filled important roles in God’s economy. Take Miriam, for example: God used her leadership abilities in leading Israel out of Egypt. He could have set her aside by ordination, as a member of the Levitical family, along with her brother Aaron (Ex. 15:20). This would have been in harmony with the culture in which Israel lived, since most pagan religions featured female priestesses

Louise Rivers is a pseudonym.

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Such accounts reveal that some Adventists sincerely want women's ministry fully authorized in the church. Others' personal testimonies claim that the Lord has called them to this very work, and the fruits of their work uphold this. As we reflect on this we, in fairness, should consider the possibility that the One leading us toward an acceptance of ordination for these women may be our Lord Jesus, who chose such unlikely candidates for this role in His day as untaught fishermen, tax collectors, and others.

Surprise and initiative

God sometimes leads by surprising us. At other times He seems to work out His will through human initiative under the Spirit's quiet influence. As we consider the case for ordaining women to the gospel ministry let us review two stories of God's leading, in the book of Acts.

Acts 10 and 11 tells of God's leading by surprise. Peter is surprised by a dream in which God commands him to eat both clean and unclean animals without regard to the Levitical laws. With Gentiles knocking at his door, Peter soon realizes that the dream means he must freely preach Jesus to them. Later, the church council in Jerusalem heatedly debates the issue of accepting these Gentile converts without requiring them to become Jews first. In the end the council accepts Peter's personal testimony: "If God gave them the *same gift* as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think I could oppose God!" (Acts 11:17, N.I.V.).

Peter was surprised to see the Holy Spirit fall upon Gentiles. We may feel surprised to find the Spirit's gifts for ministry in women. But if God is the giver of these gifts, our duty is to consider what the appropriate response of the church should be to this leading.

A second story is found in Acts 6. Here is God's openness to the initiative of responsible church leaders. By some oversight, discrimination was occurring against the widows

Adventist scholars, in 1975, found no theological obstacles to ordaining women to gospel ministry.

among the Greek-speaking Jews; they were not being fed and cared for as well as other widows. *The SDA Bible Commentary* suggests this was "not merely a petty complaining, but a protest sufficiently vocal to warrant serious concern."¹ To meet the growing crisis, the apostles exercised their leadership; they proposed appointing seven deacons.

The text does not indicate that God gave the apostles a dream or laid out a blueprint for the ideal church organization. These were the first deacons. There was no precedent! But this initiative was blessed. They found people who had "wisdom" and were "full of the Spirit" (chap. 6:3, N.I.V.). But they did not put them to work right way. The church took the additional step of publicly confirming them.

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in their worship. But God did not ordain Miriam or any other women to this sacred office. He did, in fact, rebuke Miriam when she sought equality of authority with her brother Moses, the ordained leader of His people (Num. 12:2-10).

Women like Deborah and Huldah exercised the prophetic gift and ministered to God's people in times of crisis. Women served at the Temple in both Old and New Testament times (Ex. 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22, N.I.V.). Anna the prophetess dedicated a long life to the Temple and had the privilege of endorsing the Messiah at His birth (Luke 2:36-38).

These women served in supportive roles. Their work was important to the carrying on of God's plans, but they fulfilled their calling in harmony with the Biblical mode of the complementary balance between male and female roles.

Paul commended this model for husbands and wives as a symbol of Christ and the church. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it. . . . So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself" (Eph. 5:22-28).^{*} While the apostle Paul appreciated the women who assisted him in his ministry, he made it clear that he did not allow women to occupy positions enabling them to usurp authority over men (1 Tim. 2:11, 12).

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces the question Shall we ordain women because of the demands of our society, even though no scriptural principle or precedent supports it, and set our feet in the perilous path of acting upon that in which God's Word is silent? "The very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church. Rome began by enjoining what God had not forbidden, and she ended by forbidding what He had explicitly enjoined."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 289, 290.

Following God's plans and purposes produces harmony of action and unity of spirit in the church. Departing from His will, seeking to be like the other nations (1 Sam. 8:5), results in confusion.

The breakdown of the family structure as God ordained it has produced a sick society, ridden with emotional problems, weakened wills and characters, and sexual perversions. Confusion over roles and the absence of a strong male image in many homes has contributed to, if not caused, many of these ills. The prophet Isaiah described a similar condition in ancient Israel. Comparing their sins to the sin of Sodom, he wrote: "Children are their oppressors, and *women rule over them*" (Isa. 3:8-12). The church, like the family, needs the balancing strength of the male leadership role.

The delicate balance of male and female roles as demonstrated and taught in the Scriptures is not some old-fashioned tradition to be shed, but a wall of protection to the well-being of the family, the church, society, and the

^{*} All Bible quotations in this article, unless otherwise noted, are from the New King James Version.

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The apostles "prayed and laid their hands on them" (verse 6, N.I.V.).

This was the church's first ordination service. Apparently the ordination act was an appropriate extension of Biblical principles, for Ellen White notes, "That this step was in the order of God, is revealed in the immediate results for good that were seen."²

Keeping these insights in mind, let us address two sets of questions about the propriety of ordaining women to ministry.

Circumstances

The first set of questions has to do with our situation, what we see around us. Are there legitimate needs in the church that women have the ability and the qualifications to meet? Do some women testify that God calls them to the ministry? When they minister, is the result positive? Are people blessed?

These questions can be answered with facts and evidence. From the brief personal stories earlier in this article we begin to recognize that Adventist women's ministry has been helpful and effective. Women are as likely to make mistakes as men, but not more likely. Human beings who accept God's call are still frail. But there are needs that women seem particularly well suited to meet. To this first set of questions we can answer, "Yes, able women are called to the ministry; we need them."

Some argue that these needs are not worth the intense debate going on. But we might ask What proportion of the early church was made up of Greek-speaking widows? Were they 10 percent or even 2 percent of the church? Since these women were both widows and Greek-speaking it's hard to imagine that they comprised a large part of the membership. Yet the apostles recognized the needs and the injustice and took action.

Scripture and history

The second set of questions focuses on understanding the Bible and our historical sources. Does the Bible forbid women from serving God in leadership roles? Is ordination reserved for males? Did Adventist pioneers hold women silent in church and keep them from preaching and evangelizing?

In answer to these questions books and papers have been written by scholars both within and without the Adventist Church.³ Interested readers would profit by studying the papers Adventist scholars prepared in 1975.⁴ The conclusion is that there are *no theological obstacles* to ordaining women to gospel ministry.

In answer to this second set of questions we can say, "No, ordination and leadership are not restricted to men." But to support this statement, let us look more deeply into the sources.

Biblical principles

1. In view of the fact that God's image is reflected in the human race by the combination of male and female (Gen. 1:27) we find the equality of the sexes is established from the beginning. Ellen White concurs.⁵

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ultimate happiness of all of God's children—both male and female. The question is not superiority or inferiority, but, in the words of Elisabeth Elliot, "the orderly arrangement of all creatures for the fulfillment and happiness of all." Paul illustrates this truth in his depiction of the church as a body. Not all can be an eye, an ear, or a hand. Each part functions differently, but each contributes to the good of the whole and does so harmoniously (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

While in God's plan the husband is to be the "houseband," who would argue that the most influential person in a child's life is the queen of the household, the mother? The church, no less than the home, needs the nurturing role of the feminine personality, especially in its mission of taking the gospel to people, one at a time!

In all the counsel regarding women's part in the ministry there appears not one hint that women should function in the same role as men or that they should be ordained.

Very early in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Ellen White declared emphatically that women "should labor in the gospel ministry."—*Evangelism*, p. 472. (Italics supplied.) "The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. . . . They can do in families a work that men cannot do. . . . Their labor is needed."—*Ibid.*, pp. 464, 465. She urged, "There certainly should be a larger number of women engaged in the work of ministering to suffering humanity."—*Ibid.*, p. 465. Furthermore, "Those women who give themselves to the service of the Lord, who labor for the salvation of others by doing house-to-house work, which is as taxing as, and more taxing than, standing before a congregation, should receive payment for their labor."—*Ibid.*, pp. 493, 494. "The tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women."—*Ibid.*, p. 492.

She deplored the injustices sometimes practiced against women: "The method of paying men laborers, and not paying their wives who share their labors with them, is a plan not according to the Lord's order."—*Ibid.*, p. 492. Often husband-and-wife teams labored side by side in evangelism in the early days of our work. "When it is possible, let the minister and his wife go forth together. The wife can often labor by the side of her husband, accomplishing a noble work. She can visit the homes of the people and help the women in these families in a way that her husband cannot."—*Ibid.*, p. 491. "If a woman is appointed by the Lord to do a certain work, her work is to be estimated according to its value."—*Ibid.*

Imagine how revolutionary her counsel must have sounded to the conservative ears of her day: "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

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2. Though sin marred the relationship between God and human beings and between man and woman (chapter 3), Jesus' work of redemption is to *restore* us to God's likeness. Sin has brought pain, separation, and oppression, but these conditions are evil, and we work to overcome them (Luke 4:18-19).⁶

3. In the Old Testament God used some women in ways that were not customary in Israel. Miriam, Huldah, and Deborah were prophets. Deborah held a joint appointment, since she also served as a judge and exercised military authority. Ruth and Esther each took daring initiatives normally belonging to men, but their courage was rewarded by God. Joel predicted that the Spirit would cause "your sons and daughters" to prophesy. Though women's roles were restricted in the Old Testament, there was room for exceptions.

4. The New Testament expands women's roles. Priscilla was a noted teacher of the gospel; Phebe was a deacon of the Cenchræa congregation (Rom. 16:1); Euodias and Syntyche were coworkers with Paul (Phil. 4:3). And Junia was an *apostle* (Rom. 16:7).⁷

Jesus broke many religious and social conventions that had limited or suppressed women, suggesting new options should open for them. In spite of Martha's protests, Jesus commended Mary for sitting at His feet to learn spiritual truth. He twice shocked religious leaders by *healing* on the Sabbath and by making the object of His compassion a *woman* (Luke 13:10-17). Jesus revealed Himself most openly as Messiah to a Samaritan divorcee. After His resurrection He appeared first to Mary, instructing her to announce this cataclysmic event to the men.

The fact that baptism rather than circumcision marked a believer's entry into the church promoted equality; the rite applies to men and women both.

5. Paul taught equality in the church because all are saved by Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28, N.I.V.). By extension, this principle teaches that racism, classism, and sexism are inappropriate within the church family. We may differ from each other in social class, race, or gender, but these distinctions are not to establish favoritism or discrimination. God is no respecter of persons.

The meaning of ordination

As we learned in Acts 6 the ceremony of ordination is the capstone of a four-step process—a need was recognized, qualifications were set up, persons sought who had the gifts, and finally, the persons were ordained.

Raoul Dederen, scholar and author of the paper "A Theology of Ordination," rightly states that ordination confers on an individual *no new* gifts.⁸ When Ellen White describes how the believers in Antioch ordained Paul and Barnabas, she notes "there is no record indicating that any virtue was imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands." She adds that they "by that action, asked God to bestow His blessing upon the chosen apostles in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed."⁹

Ordination for Adventists is a recognition of gifts that God *already has given*. This is in distinct contrast to the Roman

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engages in the work, the conference should have wisdom to understand the justice of her receiving wages."—*Ibid.*, pp. 492, 493.

She outlined clearly the work that women are uniquely qualified to do, the nurturing ministry of working with families, visiting and instructing them. "The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth."—*Ibid.*, p. 472. She had the courage to suggest that this personal ministry in the home might "do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God" (*Ibid.*). "Should not such labor be looked upon as being as rich in results as the work of the ordained minister?"—*Ibid.*, p. 493.

Yet in all the counsel regarding women's part in the ministry there appears not one hint or suggestion that women should function in the same role as men or that they should be ordained. The General Conference session in 1881 passed a resolution to ordain women to the gospel ministry, but apparently it was never implemented. Why did not Ellen White endorse this action or encourage the church to carry it out if it was according to the Lord's order and plan? She certainly did not mince words on the issue of the church's responsibility to hire women as a part of the gospel ministry: "This question [women's receiving wages for their labors] 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 carrying the truth into families. Their work is just the work that must be done, and should be encouraged. 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 by women. *Again*

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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."—*Ibid.* (Italics supplied.)

Clearly, then, Ellen White called for *reformation, not ordination*, in the church's attitudes and practices toward women in the gospel ministry. Significantly, she never accepted ordination for herself. Perhaps she felt that she could carry on her unique and important role more efficiently and with more freedom without the traditional responsibilities imposed by ordination. But more important, I believe, she respected that delicate balance between male and female roles. "Woman, if she wisely improves her time and her faculties, relying upon God for wisdom and strength, may stand on an equality with her husband as adviser, counselor, companion, and coworker, and yet lose none of her womanly grace or modesty."—*Ibid.*, p. 467. She disapproved the spirit of the woman's rights movement in her day, saying, "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."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 421.

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Catholic view that ordination *bestows* the gift of the Holy Spirit, conveying a sacrament. (Those who accept this latter view believe the clergy gain certain mystical powers. But Adventists share with most Protestants the belief that the gift of the Spirit comes not at ordination, but at baptism.) At baptism we become "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9, N.I.V.). This is the priesthood of all believers.

As priests in this sense we each have direct access to God.

Ordination is the way we fully authorize an individual to act on behalf of the church.

Yet we possess different gifts and callings. Ordination is the church's way of recognizing this.

Ordination is also the way we *fully authorize* an individual to act on behalf of the church. According to *The SDA Encyclopedia*, Adventist ministers have five privileges—preaching the gospel, baptizing converts, organizing churches, performing weddings, and conducting communion services.¹⁰ Of these privileges only two are unique to gospel ministers—organizing churches and performing weddings. Local elders may preach, conduct communion services, and with permission, baptize.¹¹

Several Adventist women now work in various parts of the world as pastors, evangelists, and ministers. They bear all the responsibilities that male ministers bear, but are denied the privileges we regularly give men.

When we withhold ordination from women, saying it is not necessary for their work, we argue not against women but against ordination. We are really asking the question Is ordination necessary for anyone? Men and women could both work without it. But ordination is the sign the church gives when it approves of one's work, gifts, and calling. This is the way the church rejoices in what God has given to build up the members. When we ordain someone, it is an act of recognition and acceptance of those gifts, instead of merely taking them for granted. The very act of our affirmation encourages the individual to continue developing in God's service.

Early Adventist history

Among the Adventist pioneers women engaged in teaching, medical and temperance work, administration, and preaching. John G. Beach's *Notable Women of Spirit* documents many of these stories.¹²

The *Review and Herald* of August 24, 1876, reports on Elbert and Ellen Lane, a husband-and-wife evangelistic team who held tent meetings for several years in Ohio, Indiana, Virginia, and Tennessee. One Sabbath morning Elbert addressed a group of 35; the next day Mrs. Lane attracted a crowd of 650! "This we regard a large congregation for a country place; our tent is pitched on a farm," Elbert wrote.

"The refining, softening influence of Christian women is

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Throughout the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church women have made significant contributions. Loretta Farnsworth Robinson, the first official woman Bible worker (in 1941 the name was officially changed to Bible instructor) labored by the side of her evangelist husband, Asa T. Robinson. Stephen and Hettie Hurd Haskell (an established Bible worker before their marriage) together pioneered city mission work (schools of evangelism for the training of Bible workers and canvassers.) Jennie Owen McClelland gave many years of service in America and Europe. Maud Sisley, the first Adventist single woman to go to a foreign land as a missionary, later married Elder Charles L. Boyd, and together they served for many years, she as a Bible worker. Her sister, Nellie, also a Bible worker, became Mrs. George Starr, and together they worked in city missions and as overseas missionaries.

The list could go on, for the line of succession of these noble women ministers still lives in the Adventist Church today. And though perhaps not recognized as they deserve, they continue to make a vital and productive contribution to the church.

I have had ordination-seeking young women tell me that they did not want to become Bible instructors because they prefer the "prestige" of the male ministry. Whether you call it "prestige" or responsibility, it is true that according to New Testament guidelines, ordination sets a man apart as an elder (Greek *presbuteros*—which emphasizes the authority of leadership, or "ruling" [1 Tim. 5:17]), or bishop (Greek *episkopos*—"overseer"), or pastor (Greek *poimēn*—"Shepherd"). All of these titles suggest a role of authority bestowed upon a man qualified to lead or oversee either on a local or universal level.

According to Bible principles already discussed above and the counsel of Ellen White, women are called to minister, but not in the same role as men. As we have already noticed, the function of the woman in personal ministry is just as important as that of the male role, if not more so. The question is not one of status or prestige, but of differing roles, the varying functions of each contributing to the well-being of the body as a whole. Though we are all one in Christ, each bears his or her gifts in a different vessel, but all to the glory of God.

And a loving and understanding Creator has designed those roles beautifully according to the unique abilities of

Will the ordination of women strengthen or weaken the church's mission of soul winning?

each. I can personally testify to this. My ministry has been rich and varied. The Lord has blessed in ways too numerous to recount (in spite of the occasional injustices). My feminine role has been flexible, allowing—among other things—for marriage without threatening my role in the ministry. I have served as a pastoral assistant, working closely with pastors,

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needed in the great work of preaching the truth," according to Ellen White. She adds, "Zealous and continued diligence in our sisters toiling for the spread of the truth would be wholly successful, and would astonish us with its results."¹¹

Perhaps the work of women evangelists like Mrs. Lane and statements by Mrs. White as just noted led to the adoption of this resolution at the 1881 General Conference: "Resolved, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry."¹⁴

The resolution was referred to the General Conference Committee for implementation. The record of what happened to it is silent. While some speculate that the matter was dropped because Ellen White didn't encourage it, this seems inconsistent with her statements above or with her own recommendation to ordain women in welfare ministry.¹⁵

Mrs. White herself was not ordained as a minister, never held an official church position, and did not claim the title of prophet. She explained: "My work has covered so many lines that I cannot call myself other than a messenger, sent to bear a message from the Lord to His people, and to take up work in any line that He points out."¹⁶ However, after her husband's death, the church chose to credential her. Her name appears, for example, among the licensed ministers such as Uriah Smith, J. N. Loughborough, George I. Butler, and 77 others in the *General Conference Bulletin* for 1895.¹⁷

Why are there questions about women in the church? The Bible is not one piece of cloth, but a quiltwork of

We must not pretend there are no difficult passages to study.

contributions by many authors. Our dilemma about whether or not to ordain women as pastors stems in part from puzzling passages, and in part from Jewish tradition, Christian history, and interpretations of Scripture offered by early Church Fathers and Protestant Reformers.

Jewish rabbis in the first century, for example, taught, "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman. . . . Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity."¹⁸

Josephus wrote, "The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man."¹⁹

Blaming women for bringing sin and death into the world, Tertullian said in scathing tones: "You are the devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die."²⁰

John Calvin argued in his *Commentary on the Corinthians* that "woman is a distinguished ornament of the man" and that "as the woman derives her origin from the man, she is therefore inferior in rank."²¹ Calvin taught that "God's eternal law . . . has made the female sex subject to the authority of man." He exhorted woman to "be satisfied with

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and now for many years in a team ministry with my pastor husband. I can say with conviction and emphasis that though I might be capable of functioning in the male role, I prefer the one that God has outlined for women. To be involved in soul winning and personal ministry without having to carry the heavy responsibilities of administration inherent in pastoring has been most fulfilling and rewarding for me. (More than one pastor has admitted to a bit of envy.)

As I listen to women who have reached the top in the business and secular world, I detect a very real frustration, though not admitted, that the very liberation they so desperately sought in being equal with men has turned sour. A woman who seeks equality must often choose between the freedom to be feminine and the complex and competitive

The real issue the church should be considering is its hiring practices!

world of males. And while the gospel ministry operates on a different level from the business world, the fact remains that there are pressures and expectations demanded of men that most of us as women would choose not to have imposed on us. This conclusion has grown out of years of experience, both as a single woman and now as a married woman still actively engaged in ministry and loving it! And I think I can safely say that my views represent the vast majority of Bible instructors engaged in the soul-winning ministry of the church.

A woman came to Jesus one day, not seeking ordination for herself, but "that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." Jesus answered her with a penetrating question: "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" (Matt. 20:21, 22). The question for every woman seeking ordination is "Are you able to drink the cup of loneliness if you opt for single life? (This is not because celibacy is required, but can you juggle marriage and ministry at the same time?) Or can you drink the cup of frustration and conflict if you opt for marriage and your role interferes with that of your husband, or his with yours? Are you able physically and emotionally to drink the cup of commitment?"

The impact of ordination of women on the church

One of the crucial questions the church must ask in considering the ordination of women is Will it strengthen or weaken its mission of soul winning? Consider the options:

The vote to ordain women would open the door to a comparative few, but it would not necessarily change the attitudes and practices of discrimination against hiring women, thus perpetuating the current shortage of women ministers, if not eliminating them altogether as a part of the ministry. (The real issue that the church should be considering is not ordination but the willingness of leadership to change its hiring practices!) The need for women in personal ministry is urgent and vital to the

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her state of subjection, and not take it amiss that she is made inferior to the more distinguished sex." Believing that teaching was a "superiority" in the church and "inconsistent with subjection," Calvin excluded women from it.

These sentiments have influenced Christian thought and practice, but lack theological soundness. Many of these ideas have been carefully examined and put to rest by Adventist scholars in the Biblical Research Institute papers mentioned earlier.

We must not pretend there are no difficult passages to study. Some texts present negative ideas of women, but others boldly offer positive views. How shall we balance them?²²

This task is not new. Jesus and religious leaders of His day often debated the true meaning of Scripture. Deuteronomy 24:1 clearly provides for divorce, the Pharisees pointed out.

There is a field of need awaiting women in pastoral and evangelistic roles today.

Yes, said Jesus, but the text should be interpreted in the light of God's *intent*, not just His provisions. "From the beginning it was not so," Jesus said (Matt. 19:8). And so our task now is not only to read texts but to search out the underlying principles of the whole Bible. It may be that Genesis 3, for example, is not a *prescription* of male and female roles, but a *description* of how sin affects them. "But from the beginning it was not so."

J. N. Andrews, our first missionary and scholar, adopted a positive view of women. Writing more than 100 years ago for the *Review and Herald*, he looked at 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:12, texts that are often cited to prove that women should not speak or lead in religious meetings.

Andrews argues that the texts should not be applied universally. He says that the Corinthian church was "in a state of great disorder."²³ When Paul instructed women there to remain silent it should "not be taken as directions to all Christian women in other times, when and where such disorders do not exist." As for 1 Timothy 2, Andrews does not see that the text prevents women from teaching, for Priscilla and other women were encouraged and praised for teaching by Paul himself. Andrews ends his article on this note: "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."²⁴

A church that accepts the gospel commission as a serious challenge and has a vision of a worldwide field of labor can no longer afford to limit its recognition of particular gifts and ordination to ministry to only half of its membership. In recalling the spirit of the notable women of Scripture, the confirmation of women's calling to equal discipleship by Jesus and Paul, and the contribution of Adventist pioneer women, we are encouraged to accept fully and to authorize

women in pastoral and evangelistic roles today. There is a field of need waiting for them. We can best affirm them for this work by using the time-honored Christian act of ordination. □

REFERENCES

- ¹ *The SDA Bible Commentary*, on Acts 6:1, p. 188.
- ² *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 89.
- ³ For landmark studies by contemporary Christian authors, see Latha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1974), and Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).
- ⁴ These papers are available by writing to Dr. George Reid, Director, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20012.
- ⁵ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.
- ⁶ Commenting on the Fall, Ellen White notes in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59: "In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it. . . . 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." Some interpret that Eve was attempting to rise from woman's place to man's place. Actually, she was equal with man (Gen. 1:27) and attempting to rise from the place of *human beings* to becoming like God as the serpent suggests in Genesis 3:5.
- ⁷ Bible translators have puzzled over this name and usually have opted for the masculine form, Junias, since the person bore the title of *apostle*, which was assumed to have been held only by men. The linguistic evidence favors the feminine form, and this is how the King James Version renders it. See E. Margaret Howe, *Women and Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), pp. 34, 35.
- ⁸ This paper is included among those commissioned by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in 1975.
- ⁹ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 162.
- ¹⁰ Page 925.
- ¹¹ At this time Adventist women are not permitted to baptize their own candidates or perform weddings for their parishioners because they lack ordination.
- ¹² Published in 1976 by the Southern Publishing Association, this book is now out of print.
- ¹³ *Review and Herald*, Jan. 2, 1879.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Dec. 20, 1881.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, July 9, 1895.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, July 26, 1906.
- ¹⁷ Page 427.
- ¹⁸ Mishnah Sotah 3, 4.
- ¹⁹ *Against Apion* II. 201.
- ²⁰ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 1. 1, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 40, pp. 117ff.
- ²¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1948), Vol. 1, pp. 355-361, 468.
- ²² An evenhanded study of how Scripture is interpreted by those holding opposing views of those passages dealing with women has been published in Willard Swartley (a Mennonite scholar), *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1983), pp. 152-191.
- ²³ *Review and Herald*, Jan. 2, 1879.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*

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soul-winning work of the church. To neglect or ignore this need is to weaken the total program of the church. "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."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59. (Italics supplied.)

The other option? The church should restudy the blueprint that has been given us regarding women's place in ministry. New hiring policies implemented would open the door for dedicated, qualified women, called of God to minister, to be placed on the payrolls of our conferences. The soul-winning program of the church would be strengthened, the 'tithe income from new members would more than compensate for the salaries added. "This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it."

The choice is ours; the consequences will be ours also! In the words of King Jehoshaphat of old: "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20). □

