Reflections on
WOMEN’S
ORDINATION

BY STEPHEN BOHR
Foreword (continued from back cover)

The book in your hands is not strident, nor is it chauvinistic. Quite the contrary, it is the product of careful, painstaking research, combined with a fair and balanced delineation of the facts concerning the whole issue of women’s ordination to the Gospel ministry. Although the subject matter without doubt touches the emotions, the appeal of Pastor Stephen Bohr’s essay is quietly yet very well reasoned.

When it comes time to cast your ballot, may you have the courage to be remnant people—men and women who will not be bought or sold, who in their inmost souls are true and honest, who do not fear to call sin by its right name, who will stand for the right though the heavens fall. (See Ellen G. White, Education, p. 57.) Praise God for men and women like these: men and women just like you! Without qualification or reservation, I want to stand with Pastor Bohr and you on the side of sanctified courage.

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Introduction

The issue of women’s ordination, which seemed to have been on life support for the last several years, has surfaced once again—and with a
vengeance! In the last few months at least three union conference executive committees and one local conference committee in the North American Division have voted to authorize the ordination of women pastors and issue them ministerial credentials subject to a constituency action (Mid-America Union, Pacific Union, Columbia Union, and the Southeastern California Conference). Ignoring recent General Conference appeals to refrain from acting independently, the Columbia Union on July 29, 2012, voted overwhelmingly to authorize ordination “without regard to gender.” This was done in the very presence of Elder Ted N. C. Wilson, General Conference president, who appealed to the delegates to drop the motion, predicting that otherwise such a unilateral move “will lead to fragmentation and collegial disunity.” He also warned the constituents that there would be “many grave consequences” if they should “vote positively.”

Elsewhere, the Southern Union Conference, though sympathetic with the idea of ordaining women, has issued an official statement that it will do so only if and when the world church authorizes it at a General Conference quinquennial session. In this conference’s own words: “We will do so only in harmony with the Seventh-day Adventist World Church as expressed by actions taken during the General Conference in business session.” (Issued March 29, 2012)

After many years of study and discussion on this topic, there is obviously nothing new to be discovered. I have personally read a plethora of books and articles, some of which are pro and others con.
Meetings have been held, books have been written, votes have been taken; and I seriously question whether there is any new light to be discovered in the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy on this subject. The evidence has been examined and reexamined and hashed and rehashed. Ordination of women as pastors has been twice rejected by a wide majority of the constituency of the world church in General Conference session (at Indianapolis and Utrecht), and yet the subject refuses to die.

Yet while there are no new theological arguments, there are new methods that are being proposed by the “women’s ordination lobby” to approve the ordination of women in some denominational circles, in opposition to the compelling votes against it by the world church.

A Little History

A little history might be beneficial. As is well known, the North American Division (henceforth referred to as the NAD) took a request to ordain women to the Gospel ministry to two General Conference sessions (Indianapolis [1990] and Utrecht [1995]). Both times the motion was soundly defeated by a significant majority of the delegates (the vote was 1,173–377 at Indianapolis and 1481–673 at Utrecht).

These denials did not sit well with a number of the NAD delegates. I personally attended the Indianapolis General Conference session, and in the halls between meetings I heard someone suggest that North America ought to cut off financial subsidies to the world field in retaliation. I heard one delegate
say: “If they want our money, they should support our agenda.”

At Utrecht five years later, two top-notch theologians, Dr. P. Gerard Damsteegt (con) and Dr. Raoul Dederen (pro) presented the two sides of the issue, and the NAD request was once again soundly defeated. I believe that the NAD realized at that point that it would be fruitless to take the issue to a General Conference session once again because the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the developing countries was growing by leaps and bounds, and the NAD knew that the motion would most likely be voted down once more. The response of some conferences in the NAD was to ignore the vote of the world church and ordain women pastors anyway, albeit without issuing them ministerial credentials.

**The E 60 Change**

Then, in 2009, the Executive Committee of the NAD voted to make a subtle but significant change in the Working Policy book that governs the operations of the world church. Policy E 60 originally read:

“**E 60 Conference/Mission President**

“Inasmuch as the conference/mission president stands at the head of the ministry in the conference/mission and is the chief elder, or overseer of all the churches, a conference/mission president should be an ordained minister.”

The NAD executive committee changed only one word, but the change was very significant:
“E 60 Conference/Mission President

“Inasmuch as the conference/mission president stands at the head of the ministry in the conference/mission and is the chief elder, or overseer of all the churches, a conference/mission president should be an ordained/generated minister.”

The policy change would now make it possible for women to serve as conference presidents, a function which previously belonged only to ordained pastors with a ministerial credential. The NAD executive committee reaffirmed this change in 2010 and 2011.

But a problem surfaced. The General Conference’s legal counsel informed the NAD executive committee on January 3, 2012 that they had no legal authority to establish policies which are out of harmony with the General Conference Model Constitution or General Conference Working Policy, because individual divisions do not have their own constituencies. Each division is actually a part of the General Conference structure as a whole, and as such its constituency is composed of the delegates of the entire world field. In short, in order for the NAD to make the change, they would need the support of the world field!

As a result, the NAD was forced to retract the change. The NAD administration took full responsibility for failing to do sufficient research into the constitutional issues that had impacted their decision. In bringing this matter to the floor in 2010 and 2011, they were doing so under the assumption that the NAD had a constituency separate and distinct
from the General Conference. Unfortunately, they were wrong and apologized for the oversight. It bears noting, however, that the apology was not for the intention of electing a conference president of the female gender, but rather for the failure to follow the constitutional stipulation that forbade them to do so.

On January 31 (released on February 6), Elder Dan Jackson, president of the NAD, wrote a letter to his constituents explaining that the NAD did not have the authority to make the change that had been extant since 2009. Among other things, Elder Jackson made the following statement in the letter:

“With specific reference to some of the concerns expressed to us in recent discussions, we strongly assert that neither the NAD administration nor the NADCOM have ‘rebelled’ against any vote of the General Conference, nor has it been their intention to do so.”

This statement is open to question because by changing the wording in the first place, the NAD was surreptitiously attempting to circumvent the decisions that the world church had made at the two General Conference sessions.

In the second half of his letter Elder Jackson suggested that the NAD could learn many lessons from this experience. One does not have to read between the lines of these “many lessons” to understand that the NAD is determined to get its way in this matter. Among the future strategies suggested by Elder Jackson to the constituency of the NAD:
“We must also develop intentional methods of mentoring women who can take on executive leadership positions within our conferences.”

A New Strategy

It did not take long for those intentional methods to bear fruit. Now that the “women’s ordination lobby” knew that it could do nothing on the division level, they chose to work on the union and conference levels instead. The “women’s ordination lobby” knew that unions and conferences do have local constituencies, so they decided to work on those levels to approve the ordination of women pastors and issue them ministerial credentials. With a ministerial credential, women could then become conference presidents and pastors in every sense of the word.

This new intentional method of circumventing the vote of the world church is exemplified by decisions made recently by the Pacific Union Conference. The union has called a special constituency session for August 19, 2012, to deal with the issue of women’s ordination. It appears that there will be little theological discussion because the meeting is scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. and end at 5 p.m.

On May 22, 2012, my conference secretary forwarded me a document from the Pacific Union in which the intent of the constituency was explained (the complete document was later published in the Pacific Union Recorder, June 2012, pp. 4, 5). The title of the document is “Union Committee calls special constituency session to authorize ordinations
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without regard to gender.” It is composed of three parts: The preamble approved by the Union Committee, a main motion, and the process to be followed.

It bears noting that the Union has not called this session to decide whether to ordain women. The document reveals in several ways that the desired outcome of the session has already been decided. It will be noticed that the title of the document does not say that the constituency will decide whether to ordain women. It clearly states that it wishes to approve the ordination of women.

Further, the preamble repeats the same worn-out arguments that have been used in the past in favor of women’s ordination—arguments such as:

- Men and women both preach God’s message.
- We must act justly and lovingly toward women.
- In Christ there is neither male nor female.
- Differences between men and women must not divide us.
- The cofounder of the church was a woman, and there are Spirit-filled women in the church.

As we shall see in this article, all of these statements are true, but they have nothing to do with the issue of women’s ordination.

Although it appears that there will be no new theological arguments presented at the Pacific Union Constituency Session (because there are none), there is a new intentional method (to use Elder Dan Jackson’s language) that the Pacific Union will use. The document sent by the union underlines
the fact that the NAD Working Policy assigns to the unions the final decision making authority and responsibility with respect to ordinations:

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church assigns Unions the **final decision-making authority** and responsibility with respect to ordination” (NAD Working Policy L45 05 3, Spring Council 2012 116-12G Report).

True enough. But the key question is: Must that “final decision-making authority” of the union be in harmony with the votes of the world church? Who trumps whom? In exercising its authority and responsibility, must the local union comply with the decisions of the world church, or must the world church adapt to the independent decisions of the local union?

In the document, the Pacific Union Conference openly admits that according to General Conference policy, each union must operate within the guidelines that have been voted by the world church:

“It is to be understood that the **exercise of authority and responsibility** is done within the context of the belief, values, and policies **of the entire church**. No entity is authorized to exercise its authority and responsibility in a manner that is **contrary to the interests of the whole church** and its activities in fulfilling its mission.”

The union document recognizes and admits that there is a **tension** between the decision of the world church on the issue of ordination and their
own “final authority and responsibility” that they intend to exercise in contradiction to the vote of the world church.

The question is: How does the Pacific Union plan to solve this tension (really, contradiction) between the votes of the world church and their intention to approve the ordination of women? The answer is that they quote a document that was prepared earlier this year by the General Conference and distributed at the General Conference Spring Meeting. In part, the document, which was never voted upon by the world church, affirms:

“To expect that every entity in the world church will look and function exactly like every other entity of its type may in itself become an impediment to mission.”

But the document also states that local adaptation of policies and procedures must not divide the church:

“There must be room to recognize the need for a legitimacy of local adaptation of policies and procedures that facilitate mission while not diminishing the worldwide identity, harmony and unity of the church.”

No matter how you look at it, this decision of the Pacific Union is still at variance with the votes of the world church at two General Conference sessions. Consequently, the intentional method of the Pacific Union makes it unnecessary to change the wording in Policy E 60 from “ordained” to “ordained/commissioned” because women will no longer be
commissioned but rather ordained. By ordaining women and giving them a ministerial credential, they are in harmony with E 60 but out of harmony with the will of the world church. Simply put, it is still a sly method of rebellion against the decisions of the world church.

In the July issue of the *Pacific Union Recorder* (pp. 3–19), several articles and items appeared in support of ordaining women as pastors. The articles made it clear that the union was determined to influence the delegates to vote in favor of a change in the union bylaws that would allow for the ordination of women. Not one article or even one jot or tittle was included in the issue in favor of the opposing view. Further, in an obvious attempt to influence the large Hispanic vote in the union, the articles were translated into Spanish. In my seventeen years in the Pacific Union, I have never seen any major articles in Spanish in the *Recorder*!

A similar but stronger bias in favor of women’s ordination was reflected in the July issue of the *Columbia Union Visitor*. The cover’s banner headline was: “Weighing the Issues: Why We’re Advocating for Women’s Ordination.” No hidden agenda here! It is clear that the Columbia Union was determined to approve the ordination of women as pastors at their special constituency session on July 29, and they had done everything possible in advance to slant the vote in their direction. As with the *Pacific Union Recorder*, the July issue of the *Visitor* did not provide a forum for any opposing view. This was patently unfair. The unions, through their monthly papers,
have access to every single member in each union. Those who are opposed to women’s ordination are therefore working at a great disadvantage to get out their view of the matter. Unions must remember that members who are opposed to women’s ordination also return the tithe. Is it really fair that their view is not represented when they faithfully support the union financially? Further, since when are constituencies expected to rubber-stamp the union leaders’ agenda? Is this really the democratic process that God envisioned for His church?

This lopsided support of women’s ordination by the Pacific and Columbia Unions is reminiscent of the publication of the book *Women in Ministry* by the Theological Seminary at Andrews University in the immediate aftermath of the overwhelming vote against women’s ordination at Utrecht. This book, which was distributed to church leaders in all the world and panned off as the official view of the Seminary, did not include even one chapter against women’s ordination, although there were professors at the Seminary who were opposed to the practice (read the fully documented story of the publication of *Women in Ministry* in *Prove All Things*, pp. 17–44).

Why is there this renewed pressure in some circles of the church to ordain women to the Gospel ministry? Is it because of a Bible and Spirit of Prophecy mandate or does the reason lie elsewhere? The “women’s ordination lobby” has made it an issue of *ministry, equality, and ability/capacity*. But is it so? Are those who are opposed to the ordination of women as pastors simply closed-minded,
prejudiced, and divisive? Are they really against women in ministry? Do they really believe that women are inferior to men and that they have lesser abilities or capacities that would impede them from serving as ordained ministers?

Not About Women in Ministry

On the basis of my own personal research, let me share with you three things that the present conflict is NOT really about (although the “women’s ordination lobby” would like to make us believe that these are the central issues):

First of all, the “women’s ordination lobby” frequently suggests that one of the central issues in the conflict is whether women can be involved and participate in ministry. They suggest that if you do not believe in women’s ordination, then you do not believe in women in ministry.

But this is a fallacious argument. No matter how much the “women’s ordination lobby” wishes us to think so, the conflict is not about whether women can or should be involved in ministry.

Recently my conference president sent me a document researched and compiled several years ago by Bert Haloviak, and that proves unquestionably that women have been very active in ministry in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Who could dispute the massive evidence that the document provides? The evidence in this document reveals overwhelmingly that women have been involved in ministry in many different ways. Among other things, they have given Bible studies,
ministered to the poor, preached revivals, and served as evangelists, teachers, and literature evangelists. The document, however, falls short of proving that any woman (the lone exception being Ellen White, who received an honorary ministerial credential but was never ordained) was ever ordained as a pastor and received a ministerial credential.

It goes without saying that both men and women should minister to Christ and for Christ. So the fundamental issue is not about women in ministry. The “women’s ordination lobby” has created a masterful straw man. Their argument runs something like this: “If you don’t believe that women should be ordained as pastors and receive a ministerial credential, then you don’t believe that women should be involved in ministry.”

In January of this year, the senior pastor of one of our largest institutional churches, who is also an adjunct professor of homiletics and in my opinion one of the most eloquent and gifted orators in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, preached a sermon titled “Of Perfume, Tears and Grumpy Old Men.” This message exemplifies and spreads the misconception that if you don’t believe in women’s ordination, then you don’t believe in women in ministry. The preacher uses Mary, the sister of Lazarus, as his marquee exhibit.

In a rhetorically masterful way, he tells the story of how Mary anointed the feet of Jesus amidst the protests of a group of grumpy old men (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–47; John 12:1–7). In telling the story, the preacher repeatedly insinuates that the
men objected to Mary’s action because she was a woman. In other words, he repeatedly suggests that the grumpy old men objected to Mary ministering to Jesus because of her gender. In his inimitable style, the preacher eloquently described the scene:

“Here’s this woman. She has just quietly entered into a man’s world, has humbly brought to Christ her own expression of love and devotion, when suddenly noticed for her out-of-bounds expression, a certain man leaps upon that act and loudly declares that this is a misguided waste of effort and a misappropriation of devotion. And all it takes is for one man to protest, and soon other men, to prove their male credentials, jump on the bandwagon until all of them would drive this woman from their circle; until another Man interrupts: ‘Leave her alone. Leave her alone.’”

The preacher then continues by reminding us that the Mary who anointed the feet and head of Jesus is the same Mary whose sister, Martha, complained because she was not helping her in the kitchen. The preacher quotes Martha as saying to Jesus:

“Hey, Jesus, You’re just letting Mary sit here with all these men, while I have work to do in the kitchen. Would You command her to come back to the kitchen with me?”

The preacher then asks: “How did Jesus respond to Martha?” He sarcastically quotes Jesus as saying to Mary:
“Mary, Martha’s right. You need to remember your place in this world. It’s not here with all the men and Me; it’s in the kitchen where you belong. Go, go, go …”

When I heard the pastor use the narrative of the anointing in his sermon, I decided to read the parallel Gospel accounts as well as the chapter in *The Desire of Ages* (pp. 557, 568) to see if I had missed something, because I did not remember this being a male versus female issue. As I read line by line, I failed to find even a hint that the issue was over gender. The Gospel accounts make it clear that Simon was grumpy because, in his estimation, Mary was a sinner. And Judas and the disciples objected, because in their estimation, she had wasted valuable money that could have been better used.

And with regards to the Mary and Martha episode, only Luke recorded the incident (Luke 10:39–42), and he does not even hint that Martha’s complaint had anything to do with Mary sitting with “all these men.” Neither does Ellen White even hint that this story had anything to do with gender. Martha simply complained that Mary was not helping her with the meal preparation. Once again, the preacher has fabricated a gender issue where there was none.

As a teacher of homiletics, the pastor should know better. Preachers are entitled to make a story come alive by the way they tell it, but they are not at liberty to add to the text what is not there! The preacher might argue that Jesus several times in the story of the anointing referred to Mary as ‘this woman’ and that in this way He was contrasting her with
the men who were present. But a careful study of the passage reveals that the contrast is rather between this **sinful** woman and other women of better reputation. Simon the Pharisee himself made this fact crystal clear, when he said:

“This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and **what manner** of woman this is who is touching Him, for **she is a sinner**.”

Further, name-calling is never helpful but rather hurts, alienates, and makes bad situations worse. This preacher insinuates that anyone who objects to women in ministry (really, to the ordination of women as pastors) is a grumpy old man. I personally know many men who are opposed to women’s ordination, and they are definitely not grumpy old men but kind and loving Christians!

Our pastor continues his sermon by showing from the Gospels that Jesus ministered to and was inclusive of women. He reminds us that there were three women at the foot of the cross who are mentioned by name, and that there were many other women there as well. And we are told that these women **ministered** to Him. In the preacher’s own words, “Jesus personally and publicly received the ministry of all these women.” Time and again in the sermon, the preacher emphatically repeats the words of Jesus: “Leave her alone. Leave her alone,” thus hinting that women should be left alone, not merely to minister, but to be ordained and receive a ministerial credential.
And what is the pastor’s ultimate conclusion? It goes something like the following syllogism:

- Mary was a woman.
- Mary ministered to Jesus.
- Therefore women have the same role in ministry as men, and should be ordained and given a ministerial credential.

Is there a gargantuan leap of logic in the pastor’s argument, or did I miss something? Clearly, the conclusion does not logically follow the major or minor premises. The only logical conclusion that can be reached from the preacher’s major and minor premises is that “women should minister to Jesus.”

The story of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus has absolutely nothing to do with ordination or the role of women in ministry. It simply teaches that women should be involved in ministry. Every woman should minister to and for Jesus, but this does not mean that women should be ordained as Gospel ministers. The conclusion requires a leap of logic as broad as the Grand Canyon! Clearly this is a case of special pleading for a cause the preacher passionately believes in!

The preacher ends the story of the anointing with a significant question: “It makes you wonder: Where would Jesus stand today in a church that has opened its doors of ministry to all except women?”

So, for this pastor the issue in the story of the anointing is not really one ministry but rather of ordination to the Gospel ministry. He has simply used the story of Mary’s ministry to Jesus as a
springboard to plead for women’s ordination to the Gospel ministry. In his estimation, the Seventh-day Adventist Church bars women from serving in ministry because it bars them from ordination. The question that begs to be asked is this: If Jesus, as the pastor suggests, went against the conventions of His day and wished to include women in the role of pastoral leadership, then why did He appoint or ordain twelve men as apostles to be the founders of the Gospel church? Why not choose at least one of the women who ministered to Him? Why not choose Mary? After all, she ministered to Him while all His male disciples behaved like grumpy old men!

And things don’t get any better in the latter part of the sermon. The preacher uses the story of Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11 to “bolster” his argument in favor of women’s ordination. To abbreviate the story, when the brethren in Jerusalem heard that Cornelius and his two Gentile companions had been baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit just as had the Jews, they were perplexed; so Peter had to explain:

“‘If therefore God gave them [the Gentiles] the same gift as He gave us [the Jews] when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?’ When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’”

From this, the preacher then makes another gigantic leap of logic that goes something like this:
The Jews were prejudiced against the Gentiles and believed that they could not be saved and receive the Holy Spirit.

God removed the barrier between Jews and Gentiles by giving the Gentiles salvation and the same gift of the Holy Spirit that He had given to the Jews.

Therefore God has removed role distinctions between men and women in the church because God gave men and women the same gift.

Once again I ask: Does the conclusion logically follow the premises? Clearly not! Is the issue in Acts 10 and 11 a matter of role distinctions in the church? Is it a matter of gender? Does it really have anything to do with the ordination of pastors? The context clearly indicates that the issue is not a matter of role distinctions in the church or of gender. The issue is whether Jews and Gentiles have equal access to salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is seen clearly when we are told that the leaders in Jerusalem were amazed that “God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”

The “women’s ordination lobby” mishandles Galatians 3:28 in a similar way. Ignoring the immediate and broader context, and misusing the priesthood of all believers, they see the text teaching that there are no longer any role distinctions when it comes to gender. And yet the context clearly reveals that the subject is equal access to salvation in Christ, not to the abolition of gender distinctions for those who hold church office.
The preacher attempts to clinch his argument on Acts 10 and 11 with a capstone quotation from *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 142:

“Thus, without controversy, prejudice was broken down, *the exclusiveness established by the custom of ages was abandoned* [the preacher’s emphasis], and the way was opened for the Gospel to be proclaimed to the Gentiles.”

I personally decided to read the entire chapter where this quotation appears. Remarkably, the chapter begins by describing the resurrection of that saintly woman, Dorcas. Would anyone dare say that Dorcas did not serve *in ministry* in and to the church? Yet there is no record of her ever being ordained or serving as the pastor or leader of any local church. She did not aspire to what some consider a higher position of authority; she simply *ministered* to the saints without demanding any special status!

Time and again in this chapter Ellen White underlines that the issue in Acts 10 and 11 was equal access to salvation and to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Not once does she “extend the principle” to teach that because both men and women receive the gift of the Holy Spirit they should both have the same roles in the church. Once again the fallacy of the preacher’s argument can be discerned. Basically he is saying that if men and women receive the same Spirit, then their roles in the church should be same. He is half right in his assessment. It is true that the gifts of salvation and the Holy Spirit are given to all (both men and women, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free) who
are truly converted to Jesus; but it does not follow that because all have the same gift, all have the same calling and role in the church.

The preacher then suggests that the latter rain will not fall until women are ordained to the Gospel ministry. In a catchy phrase he states: “The wall has to come down before the Spirit can come down.” This ignores the fact that Peter and the apostles received the fullness of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost several years before the story of Acts 10 and 11. Did God have to wait for the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles to come down before the Spirit could come down in “rich currents” upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost? Actually, the fullness of the Spirit fell upon the apostles several years before the wall between Jews and Gentiles fell down.

One final point: The pastor understands the phrase “the exclusiveness established by the custom of ages was abandoned” as applying not only to the ethnic distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, but also to the role distinctions in the church between men and women. In his estimation, the role distinctions between men and women in the church today are simply a remnant of “the exclusiveness established by the custom of the ages” rather than an arrangement that was established by God Himself. Another scholar has even suggested that the reason why Jesus did not choose a female apostle is because He “did not want to upset the fabric of Jewish culture.” The scholar then speculates that Jesus “pointed the way forward to women’s ordination by the revolutionary way in which He treated women.”
But is this so? Is the role distinction between men and women in the church simply a relic passed along as a custom from a prejudiced patriarchal past? Did Jesus really point the way forward to women’s ordination by the revolutionary way in which He treated women contrary to the conventions of His day? Did Jesus simply wish to avoid upsetting the Jewish culture of His day and thus ordained twelve male apostles?

The simple fact is that Jesus went against the conventions of His day in the way that He treated all the marginalized of society—children, Samaritans, Gentiles, publicans, sinners, harlots, prodigals, lepers, etc. Did Jesus’ revolutionary treatment of these people mean that He was pointing the way forward to their ordination? To answer yes to this question would border on absurdity! The fact is that Jesus was revolutionary in the way that He treated people, period. Ordination was the furthest thing from His mind when He treated women with the dignity and respect that they deserved!

Once again I return to the question: Is the role distinction between men and women in the church a relic passed along as a custom from a prejudiced past? What does the Bible say about this matter?

Who chose twelve men to be the founders of the Old Testament church, when there was at least one woman who could have been chosen (Dinah)? Who specified, before the priesthood of the house of Aaron was established, that the firstborn male should be the priest of the household? (See The Desire of Ages, p. 51.) Who established a system of male priests in Israel (in a culture where female priestesses in the
surrounding nations was common)? Who established a system of male Levites in Israel to serve alongside the priests? Who intentionally ordained 12 male apostles when there were able women in ministry that could have been chosen as well?

Who chose to place the names of 12 males on the gates of the New Jerusalem and 12 males on the foundations of the city? Who inspired the apostle Paul (who began his ministry immediately after the inclusion of Gentiles in Acts 10 and 11) to teach that bishops and elders should be of the male gender? Were these choices established by the “custom of the ages,” or did God establish them? The apostle Paul is crystal clear that they were established by God:

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the Devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the Devil.” I Timothy 3:2–7

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking,
and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” Titus 1:5–9

As I read these passages in the writings of Paul, I have to ask myself: Hadn’t the apostle Paul gotten the message from Peter that “the exclusiveness established by the custom of ages” had been abandoned, and that now both young men and young women should be ordained to the Gospel ministry without regard to gender?

Is it really helpful to the discussion on this issue when some notable scholars in the church twist the Scriptures and make Paul say that the expression “husband of one wife” really means that bishops and elders “should be faithful to their spouse,” thus eliminating the gender distinction? No translation or paraphrase that I consulted ever translates I Timothy 3:2 in this manner. The versions I consulted either translate “husband of one wife” or “faithful to his wife,” thus keeping the gender distinction. This attempt to neuter the male gender of bishops
and elders is one of those “private interpretations” that the apostle Paul condemned in his writings.

Some argue that gender distinctions in the choice of church leaders was prescribed in the Old Testament, but that in the New Testament this distinction has been superseded by the priesthood of all believers. But is this so?

“The same principles of piety and justice that were to guide the rulers among God’s people in the time of Moses and of David were also to be followed by those given the oversight of the newly organized church of God in the Gospel dispensation. In the work of setting things in order in all the churches, and ordaining suitable men to act as officers, the apostles held to the high standards of leadership outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures. They maintained that he who is called to stand in a position of leading responsibility in the church ‘must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.’ Titus 1:7–9.” The Acts of the Apostles, p. 95

Regarding these passages in the epistles to Timothy and Titus, the eloquent preacher explains that if, based on these passages, we insist that the bishop or
elder must be a man, then it logically follows that we must also insist that the bishop or elder never get divorced and remarried because Paul says that he must be the “husband of one wife.” And we must also insist that he have children, since Paul says that he should have his children “in subjection.” But is this *reductio ad absurdum* argument valid? As most scholars understand it, the apostle Paul was simply saying that a man must be *monogamous*. Incidentally, in Latin America single pastors are not generally ordained to the Gospel ministry and given a ministerial credential until they get married, because Paul specifies that each must be the husband of one wife.

With regard to the requirement of having children, it’s not a bad idea! That’s the way it used to be when I was growing up in Latin America. And there are still some churches that to this day will not ordain childless elders because in their opinion (based on Paul’s passages), when a man is a good head of his own household he gives evidence that he is qualified to be a good head of God’s household, the church.

**Not a Matter of Equality**

Secondly—no matter how much the “women’s ordination lobby” wants us to think that it is so—the conflict is not about whether men and women are equal. The fact that women are not ordained to the Gospel ministry does not mean that they are inferior to men. Those of us who are opposed to women’s ordination would never deny that men and women are equal in the sight of God by creation and by redemption. But **ontological equality** is not the same
thing as **role identity**. That is to say, equality does not presuppose that men and women are to fulfill identical roles in the church.

To illustrate: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are **ontologically equal** (as Beings) but each of Them has a particular **function or role** in the plan of salvation. Is the Son inferior to the Father because His ministerial role was to die on the cross? Is the Holy Spirit inferior to the Son because His ministry is to make effectual the work of Christ? Of course not! They are equal as Beings, but They fulfill different ministerial functions or roles.

Some have sought to make the struggle for women’s ordination a matter comparable to the civil rights struggle for racial equality in the decade of the 60s. They argue that the subjection of women to male headship in the church is a deprivation of their equal rights with men and thus is tantamount to discrimination. But upon careful scrutiny this comparison falls on its face.

Ordination to the Gospel ministry is **not a right** but rather a **calling** that God does **not give** to all His creatures. It is true that racial and gender equality are inalienable rights that the Creator has granted to all His creatures. But as we have noted, pastoral ordination is not one of those inalienable “rights” that the Creator has granted to women. To the contrary, God has consistently reserved pastoral ordination in the Bible for men. Basic human rights are different from role distinctions in the church because rights belong to all human beings, but roles in the church are according to God’s calling and do
not inhere to all. An analogy might be useful here: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by Their nature, own equal rights, but this does not mean that Their roles are identical in the administration of the universe!

**Not a Matter of Ability**

Thirdly—the conflict does not revolve around the ability or capacity to do the job. I believe that there are some women who could do just as good a job (and in some cases even better) as men who have been ordained as pastors.

I have heard some women preach powerful sermons. I have women in my congregation who comfort the sick, provide outstanding counseling, are successful literature evangelists, and are experts at giving Bible studies. There are some who are excellent Sabbath School teachers. For many years my finance committee chair at Fresno Central was a woman, and she was the most efficient person in this function that I have ever worked with. Since its inception and until recently, the president of Secrets Unsealed was a very able woman. The marketing director of Secrets Unsealed is more capable than most men that I have known.

Yet none of these women has complained or feels neglected or discriminated against because she has not been ordained as elder of the church. At Fresno Central we have 18 elders, and all are men. Do the women complain and feel discriminated against because of this? I have not heard even one complaint in 16 years! We treat women with dignity and respect,
and provide ample opportunities for them to minister, and they are perfectly satisfied and happy serving the Lord in the capacity to which He has called them. Notably, Ellen White even went so far as to say that although men and women are equal, women can do a work with families that men cannot do, and they can come close to hearts that men cannot reach:

“The Lord God has work for women as well as men to do. They can do a work in families that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Therefore their labor is needed. We must have it. We who love God in truth are all working for a heavenly kingdom. There is no time to waste upon a class of work that has no Christ in it, or upon that work that woman, who is man’s equal, can do if her heart is imbued with the love of Christ our Savior.” Manuscript Releases, vol. 21, pp. 30, 31

So what is the central issue here? The real issue is whether God has called women to occupy the position of ordained pastors. In other words, at its core the real issue in the present debate has nothing to do with ministry or equality or ability, but rather with the role or function to which God has called man and woman.

Is It Prejudice and Bigotry?

Unfortunately, those such as myself who are against women’s ordination to the pastoral ministry
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are often earmarked as being antiwoman, obscurantist, and divisive. Even more, some consider us the enemy!

But this is simply a caricature. It is an undeniable fact that man and woman were created equal from the very beginning, and yet the roles for which God created them were different. Man was to be father and woman was to be mother. The roles were clearly defined and complementary. Neither man nor woman could occupy the role or position of the other without marring God’s plan. Put another way, although man and woman were created ontologically equal, coram Deo (in the sight of God), yet they were created to complement one another. That is to say, what was lacking in man was to be supplied by the woman, and what was lacking in the woman was to be supplied by the man. If they both had the same function or role, then why was Eve created to be man’s complement? Perhaps this is the reason why Ellen White consistently underlined that a pastor and his wife should be a team in ministry—not because they had the same role or both should be ordained, but because they complemented one another’s God-given gifts. The man was to be the head and the woman would fulfill the supporting role.

The Case of China

A friend who is in favor of ordaining women and issuing them ministerial credentials once said to me: “What do you do about countries in the world like China, where women are required by the circumstances to assume leadership because there are no
men available to fill the role?” My answer was short and to the point: “We are not in China.”

The fact that there are extenuating circumstances in China does not prove that we must ordain women and give them ministerial credentials in the United States and other countries where the same problem does not exist. Is it wrong for women to take the leadership role when and where there are no men available? Of course not! God is a practical God and takes circumstances into account. But the problem in North America is that the “women’s ordination lobby” has attempted to make the exception the rule.

Further, the problem of China is far more complex than just a shortage of men to fill ministerial positions. The situation in China is unique and exceptional. A recent unanimous communiqué from the 13 division presidents and the General Conference administrators (a group of 40 leaders) explains the unusual case of China:

“Information that a number of women serve as ordained ministers in China has been cited as justification, [sic] for unions elsewhere to proceed in a similar manner. It has been alleged that the Northern Asia-Pacific Division recognizes these ordinations and has therefore established a precedent for granting ministerial ordination to women. However, these ordinations were not authorized or conducted according to the policies of the church. Nor are these ordinations approved or recognized/endorsed by the Northern Asia-Pacific Division. The Seventh-day Adventist
Church does not have an officially organized structure in China that is comparable to other areas of the world. Government regulations do not permit outside involvement in church affairs within China. The practice, in China, of ministerial ordination for women is acknowledged as a reality that has arisen in China and is beyond the influence of the world-wide structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

To use the situation in China as the model for ordination in North America is absurd. It denotes a desperate attempt by the “women’s ordination lobby” to find, at all costs, some type of evidence for women’s ordination. Exceptional cases should be considered just that—exceptional cases. The Pacific and Columbia Unions are not “beyond the influence of the world-wide structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” such as is China. To compare ordination in China, where there are extenuating circumstances, to ordination in the United States, where such circumstances do not exist, is like comparing proverbial apples and oranges!

There are examples in the Bible where God allowed, in extenuating circumstances, what He had otherwise forbidden. Jesus assured the thief on the cross that he would be in the kingdom, although the Bible clearly states that ‘he who believes and is baptized will be saved’ (Mark 16:16). Does this mean that baptism is no longer necessary everywhere because the thief was saved though he did not get baptized? David ate the showbread when God had
explicitly stated that only the priests could eat it. Did this mean that everyone in Israel was now entitled to feast on the showbread?

A Striking Story

I believe that there is a Biblical story that illustrates what is happening presently in our church with regards to women’s ordination, and the story is not pretty. It is the story of Korah’s rebellion.

Korah was a member of the tribe of Levi but he was not a member of the household of Aaron. The Levites had been called by God to perform some very important ministries and services in the sanctuary on behalf of the congregation, and they were ordained (notice that there was ordination to different functions, which would explain Ellen White’s lone statement about ordaining women) for their role by the laying on of hands:

“So you shall bring the Levites before the LORD, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites.” Numbers 8:10

The Levites had some very important roles in the church of the day. They provided the music for the sanctuary service—both instrumental and choral. They gathered the tithes of Israel, they bore the Ark of the Covenant, they pitched and tore down the tabernacle and were its custodians, they flayed the animals, and they taught the law to the people—no menial and unimportant tasks, to be sure!

Yet although they were ordained to serve as Levites, they had not been called to minister as
priests before the Lord because He had not set them apart for such a function. Was this simply a “custom of the ages” established by men, or was it established by God?

Korah was not satisfied with simply being a Kohathite Levite. He wanted to be a priest! He aspired to what, in his view, was a higher position of authority. Put simply, he aspired to a position in ministry to which God had not called him. He had an all-absorbing passion and a relentless drive to be a priest, and he was determined to get his way no matter what or who should stand in the way!

Ellen White explains that Korah came to be “dissatisfied with his position and aspired to the dignity of the priesthood. The bestowal upon Aaron and his house of the priestly office, which had formerly devolved upon the firstborn son of every family, had given rise to jealousy and dissatisfaction.” Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 395

Korah whispered his discontent to others, and soon 250 influential leaders of the congregation sided with Korah against Moses and Aaron, the leaders that God had chosen to shepherd Israel. These 250 princes were no menial persons. According to Keil and Delitzsh “These men were … heads of the tribes, or of large divisions of the tribes, … members of the council of the nation which administered the affairs of the congregation.” In other words, they had administrative positions of authority in Israel, and yet they turned against the leader that God had chosen. Is something similar happening today to the man who was elected at the last General Conference session to lead God’s people?
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Numbers 16:2, 3 describes the attitude of these leaders and their arguments:

“They rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. … ‘You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy [or “set apart”], every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?’”

This was their argument in favor of what they perceived to be the priesthood of all believers. Perhaps the rebels even used Exodus 19:6 to bolster their argument that the entire nation had the right to serve in the office of priest. After all, they argued, had not God Himself told Israel when He made the covenant with them at Mt. Sinai that the entire nation was to be a “kingdom of priests” to reach out to the world with the Good News of a coming Savior?

Yet I ask: Did the existence of an ordained priesthood especially chosen by God from the house of Aaron annul the fact that the entire nation was also to serve in a priestly role and minister the Gospel to the world? Did the fact that Israel was a priestly nation give every Israelite the right to be ordained as priests and to serve as spiritual leaders to the nation? Of course not! The idea of the priesthood of all believers does not first surface in the New Testament. Exodus 19:6 makes it clear that it was already deeply embedded in God’s call to the entire nation.
of Israel to minister the Gospel to the world. The Gospel prophet Isaiah made this mission abundantly clear when he stated under inspiration:

“‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (Isaiah 49:6, in both Messianic and general aspects)

In the view of Korah and his coconspirators, the arrangement that allowed only those of the house of Aaron to serve as priests was unfair, unjust, unmerciful, and discriminatory. And they demanded equality and justice! “All the congregation is holy,” they said, “and we are all on an equal footing, so why should Moses rule over us, and why should Aaron and his family be the only ones who are allowed to minister as priests?”

Ellen White explains that “a deep-laid conspiracy was formed, the result of a determined purpose to overthrow the authority of the leaders appointed by God Himself.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 395

Having recruited so many influential leaders, “they felt confident of making a radical change in the government and greatly improving upon the administration of Moses and Aaron.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 397

The next step was to spread the discontent among the people, and, sadly, most of Israel sided with the rebels. If a constituency session had been
held, most of the congregation would have come out on Korah’s side! We are told that “a large part of the congregation openly sided with Korah.” Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 400

Now there was division in the camp, and those who wished to change God’s arrangement for roles in ministry caused this division! Korah and his sympathizers argued that the division was caused by those who insisted on discriminating against them.

Ultimately Moses had to confront the leaders who aspired to a position for which God had not called them. He said to them:

“Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD. And what is Aaron that you murmur against him?” Numbers 16:9–11

Several questions come to mind at this point:

• Had God called (and even ordained) Korah and his coconspirators to serve in ministry to God’s people? The answer is yes. But their role was to serve as Levites, not as priests!

• Did God consider Korah and his coconspirators as equal partners with the priests in
ministry to the congregation? Yes, again. The Levites were not inferior to the priests; they were simply called to fulfill a different function in ministry.

- Could Korah and his coconspirators have done as good a job as the priests? In other words, did they have the ability/capacity to be priests? I believe that they could have learned to do as good a job as those who were priests at the time. What disqualified them was not their lack of ability but rather that they had not been called to that particular office.

Was the issue in Korah’s day one of ministry, equality, or ability/capacity? No. In the sight of God, both the Levites and the priests were called to ministry, both groups were equal in His sight, and both groups had abilities; but God had called one group to be priests and the other to be Levites. The issue was thus one of calling, not one of ministry, equality, or ability.

How did God feel about those who wanted to be priests when He had not called them to fill that position? Did God just let it slip by? You know the answer to that question. When these Levites came with their censers in hand and with every intention of serving as priests before the Lord, the Lord opened up the earth and it swallowed them up!! Amazingly, after this the congregation still sided with the rebels, and when they complained against Moses and Aaron, a plague slew 14,700 of them and the plague was only stopped by the intercession of Aaron.
This is a view of God that is not very popular today. The religious world much prefers what I call “a sanitized view of God.” We kind of ignore the passages where God is particular and where He expects things to be done in the way that He has specified—stories such as Achan, Uzzah, King Saul, Jeroboam, and Ananias and Sapphira—and emphasize only those where God is accepting, inclusive, and perceived as “open minded.” This allows us to do as we please and then claim the blessing of God anyway!

An Act of Rebellion

With all due respect, I would like to say that I believe that the decision that has been made by the Mid-America Union, the Pacific Union, the Columbia Union, and the Southeastern California Conference (among others) is an act of rebellion against the decisions of the world church. The world church has clearly denied the request to ordain women pastors and issue them ministerial credentials in two General Conference sessions. Ellen White has clearly admonished us that when the delegates of the world church come together to vote on a matter, the decision must be respected by everyone:

“When, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision
of the general body. … God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority.”

_Testimonies for the Church_, vol. 9, pp. 260, 261

In an attempt to diminish the authority of the decisions of the General Conference (and the reliability of Ellen White by claiming that she contradicted herself), some have taken the following 1898 quotation out of context:

“It has been _some years_ since I have considered the General Conference as the _voice of God._” _Manuscript Releases_, vol. 17, p. 216

Ellen White had already written in 1896:

“The voice from Battle Creek, which has been regarded as authority in counseling how the work should be done, is _no longer the voice of God._” _Manuscript Releases_, vol. 17, p. 185

The historical context indicates that these statements were made when a handful of men in Battle Creek micromanaged the work in the field and exercised dictatorial control over the church’s every decision. Ellen White referred to this centralized power structure as “kingly power.” Regarding this she states:

“God has not set any _kingly power_ in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to _control_ the whole body, or to control any branch of the work. He has not provided that the burden of leadership shall rest upon a _few men_. Responsibilities are distributed among a _large_
number of competent men.” Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 236

In her opening address to the General Conference session on April 2, 1901, Ellen White made a solemn appeal for the decision-making power of the church to be distributed on a much broader scale:

“How now I want to say, God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. ... There must be a renovation, a reorganization; a power and strength must be brought into the committees that are necessary.” General Conference Bulletin, April 3, 1901, pp. 25, 26

Many decisions were made at the 1901 General Conference session that corrected the problem of “kingly power.” Ellen White was pleased by these decisions and said that a victory had been gained. The 1903 General Conference session made further corrections to broaden the decision-making power of the church and make it more representative. These positive developments in 1901 and 1903 led Ellen White to write in 1909:

“I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans should be followed [as
happened before 1901 and 1903]. But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body. … God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority.” Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, pp. 260, 261

**North German Union**

After the North German Union voted on April 23, 2012 to ordain women (by a vote of 160–47), president Klaus van Treeck made the following puzzling statement:

“We didn’t want to open the way or to encourage others to oppose the guidelines of the world church or to join us in civil disobedience. We discussed the matter in the context of our culture and ask the World Church to understand our situation and decision. We are respectful towards our brothers and sisters in any area of our World Church. We feel deeply associated with them in the love of Jesus and in the unity and mission of the church.” Euro-Africa Division newsletter, May 9, 2012
How can a decision that contradicts the will of the world church be considered respectful? Is not the decision of the North German Union a clear contradiction of Ellen White’s counsel that the decisions of the world church in General Conference session must be respected? It is most telling that the president openly admitted that the decision of his union opposed the guidelines of the world church and that it constituted “civil disobedience.” The Newsletter article fully admitted that all the delegates to the constituency session “knew [that] a positive vote would lead to a clash with the General Conference’s Working Policy.” At least the North German Union Conference was honest when it saw a clash between the Working Policy of the world church and its decision to approve the ordination of women. The NAD, on the other hand, in good postmodern fashion attempted to reconcile two opposites by stating that there is merely a tension between the two.

The president also stated that the “delegates wanted to express to the worldwide Adventist Church leadership that the issue of the equality of female and male pastors is no more an option, and invite them not to consider this vote as an act of disloyalty towards the World Church.”

I am perplexed. How could a vote to ordain women contrary to the will of the world church not be considered an act of disloyalty to the world church? Must the world church submissively give in to the will of unions that act independently of the body?

You can take it to the bank that if the world church had voted to ordain women pastors in a
General Conference session, those who are in favor would now be saying that the voice of the General Conference in session should be respected! But when the vote is against their wishes, then they must find a way to circumvent the decisions of the multitude of counselors!

**General Conference Dispenses Authoritative Counsel**

After the North German Union had already voted in constituency session to approve the ordination of women and the Pacific and Columbia Unions had announced their intention to do so in the immediate future, the 13 world division presidents (who are also vice-presidents of the General Conference) and the top administrators of the General Conference (officers from the Presidential, Secretariat, and Treasury departments) by unanimous consensus sent out a communiqué (issued from General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, on June 29, 2012) strongly discouraging unions from acting independently of the world body on the matter of women’s ordination (see the full communiqué at the end of this article). The plea was made for the unions to wait until the General Conference Executive Committee decides in 2014 whether to put the item on the agenda of the General Conference session in San Antonio in 2015.

The Columbia Union has decided to go ahead with its plans to ordain women. If the Pacific Union decides to follow suit, they will both be in rebellion against the will of the world church voted at two
General Conference sessions, and they will also be at odds with the counsel of its 40 top leaders! Sadly, the communiqué from the General Conference leaders was given after the genie was out of the bottle—perhaps too little, too late!

**A Can of Worms**

Let me ask you: What would happen if, in the future, the executive committee of a conference or union should vote to change the fundamental belief that the world was created in six literal contiguous, 24-hour days (not an unrealistic possibility, considering what has been happening recently in certain denominational institutions)? I am sure that there would be an outcry from the world field something like this: “This decision is not only against Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, but it is also at odds with the fundamental beliefs as voted by the world church at the General Conference session.” The answer from the conference committee might well be:

“We disagree with the world church on this matter just as we did with the women’s ordination issue. We believe that this fundamental belief is an obstacle to reaching the secular mind and therefore it is an obstacle to fulfilling our mission. Why should we respect the vote of the world church on the matter of origins?”

Decisions made by local conferences and unions against the will of the world church open wide the door to congregationalism and endanger the unity
of the world church. This is just as Satan would have it!

But let’s take it a step further. What would happen if a union or a conference decided to ordain gay pastors to the Gospel ministry? You might think that such a possibility is far-fetched. But is it? Past history reveals that the very next step that has been taken by denominations that have ordained women pastors in the name of justice and equality (such as the Presbyterians and Episcopalians) has been to ordain gay pastors.

The question is, on the basis of the precedent that has been set, what would prevent the conference or union from voting to ordain gay pastors? By rebelling against the votes of the world church on the matter of women’s ordination, these denominational organizations have opened up the proverbial can of worms that will splinter and divide the church.

You might be thinking, “Pastor Bohr, you are letting your imagination run wild. No denominational entity would ever vote to ordain a gay pastor who is in a same-sex marriage relationship.” To this I answer that there are already some individuals in the church who are pressing for just this.

In the recent past I received a petition by e-mail which was signed by 200 Seventh-day Adventists from all walks of life, requesting that the church recognize and give its stamp of approval to same-sex committed relationships. The request was signed by physicians, teachers, students, engineers, physical therapists, nurses, attorneys, real estate agents, computer technicians, film editors, writers,
psychologists, pastors, architects, marriage therapists, musicians, etc. The document began with the words: “A Solemn Appeal: To our fellow believers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” In part the appeal to the church included the following:

“Current scientific evidence supports our conviction that, just as with heterosexuals, a homosexual orientation is determined before birth and/or very soon after, by a complex mix of biological and environmental factors over which a person has no control. To describe people who find themselves attracted to the same sex as sinful, contradicts not only science but the scriptural principles of truth, justice, and compassion [the very words used by the ‘women’s ordination lobby’ to defend women’s ordination] taught and demonstrated by Jesus.”

“Along with our Seventh-day Adventist family, we do take seriously the guidance God has given us through the Bible. However, we have carefully studied those Biblical texts that are traditionally interpreted as forbidding same-sex activity, and join with those scholars who have found that they do not address homosexuality as we understand it today.”

“We believe the same Jesus who said, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,’ might say today in regard to this issue, ‘Marriage was made for humans, not humans for marriage.’ We believe God wants
homosexuals, as well as heterosexuals, to enjoy the many blessings of a monogamous, committed relationship—companionship, support of each other, a greater understanding of God’s love, and emotional and sexual intimacy—needs with which He created all of us.”

I am convinced (and I hope and pray that I am wrong) that in the not-too-distant-future the argument will be presented:

“We must give equal rights in pastoral ministry to those who are in a loving, same-sex relationship.”

You might argue: “But Pastor Bohr, this is openly contradictory to Scripture.” “Not so,” say those in the church who are in favor of same-sex committed relationships!! They argue that the Bible does not forbid loving, committed, same-sex marriages. They affirm that the Bible forbids only illicit gay relationships outside of a loving and committed same-sex marriage relationship!

**Practical Recommendations**

What can we do as church members in this time of crisis when Satan is doing his best to destroy the unity of the church? Here are some suggestions:

**Pray, Pray, Pray:**

This is a time to humble ourselves before God and ask Him what His will is in this matter. Society and culture may attempt to pressure us to do certain things, but the question for us to answer is: What does God say on this matter, and what is His
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will? We should fervently pray: “Thy will be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven”. We should also pray for the unity of God’s people, but always upon the platform of truth. And please pray for Elder Ted Wilson who I am sure is facing crushing pressures from every direction. Pray that the Lord will give him health, wisdom, and courage to face this issue with the unflinching determination to stand for the right though the heavens fall.

Study, Study, Study:

There are certain myths that have been passed along by the “women’s ordination lobby.” Among these myths are:

- Ellen White was ordained sometime between 1885 and 1887.
- In 1881 the General Conference approved women’s ordination.
- In 1895 Ellen White encouraged the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry.

For clear and persuasive answers to these and other myths see: Prove All Things, pp. 273–312.

It is our duty and responsibility to study out these and other matters for ourselves to see if they are so. We cannot leave this task to the theologians and administrators—it is far too important an issue. We must understand the issues if we are going to speak to them intelligently. Sound decisions are based on reliable information.

If you would like a somewhat complete picture of the main issues involved in the women’s ordination
debate, first read *Women in Ministry*, which was published by the Seminary at Andrews University and is in favor of women’s ordination. Carefully read the arguments and compare them with the Word of God. Next, read the response to the arguments in *Women in Ministry* in the book *Prove All Things*, which is available from Secrets Unsealed. This will give you a “fair and balanced” knowledge of the main arguments and counterarguments that are used for and against women’s ordination.

**Speak, Speak, Speak:**

But this is not only a time to pray and study. It is a time for action. I believe that there are three types of attitudes of members when it comes to the matter of women’s ordination. One group is militantly in favor of it. Another is strongly opposed. In the middle there is a group that keeps silent on the matter mainly for two reasons.

First, because they have not personally studied out the issues and therefore they do not perceive their importance. Second, although they might have reservations about ordaining women, they wish to keep the peace in the church, and in order to avoid strife they remain silent. But we must be careful not to cry out, “Peace, peace!” when there is no peace. We must wake up and kindly but firmly speak up on these matters on the local church level, the conference level, the union level, and yes, the NAD level. Speak to your pastors and to your administrators, and express your informed opinion on the matter, but do it kindly. Remember, in speaking against women’s ordination you are not rebelling against the
Reflections on Women’s Ordination

church but rather reaffirming the decisions of the entire world church!

God will hold us accountable if we keep silent in this time of crisis. We have been warned in no uncertain words by the Spirit of Prophecy:

“If God abhors one sin above another, of which His people are guilty, it is doing nothing in case of an emergency. Indifference and neutrality in a religious crisis is regarded by God as a grievous crime and equal to the very worst type of hostility against God.” Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 281

Two-Part General Conference Communiqué
An Appeal for Unity

On ordination questions, Adventist leadership appeals for orderly process

Report written by Mark Kellner/Adventist World

The world leadership of the Seventh-day Adventists has issued a highly unusual “appeal for unity” to regional administrative units of the church that have either taken or are considering independent action regarding the ordination of women to gospel ministry. The request comes in a statement

issued today in response to actions by several union conferences, including two in North America.

The union conferences, the key constituent elements of the church’s worldwide General Conference, have indicated either a willingness to ordain women, or to take independent actions that would permit such ordinations in their territories. At present, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not ordain women to ministry, following votes at General Conference sessions in 1990 and 1995 on the question where the issue was a major focus of the international delegation.

The appeal was prepared and unanimously accepted by consensus by the General Conference officers, a group of 40 senior leaders of the church, including the 13 division presidents who also serve as vice-presidents of the General Conference.

The appeal begins by noting the recent local actions and/or proposals, as well as reminding both the union conferences and the church’s wider membership that the entire subject of ordination is under study by the worldwide Adventist family, with results due in 2014. Once those results are received, the document states, the G.C.’s Executive Committee, the highest interim authority between quinquennial international sessions of the church, will decide whether to make further recommendations on the ordination issue to the 60th General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, in July 2015.

Until then, a move “to change or modify ordination practices is a global one and necessitates a decision from the world body,” the document stated.
“For any union to introduce a different ministerial ordination practice is seen, by the rest of the Church, as readiness to set aside a world Church decision and proceed in another direction,” Adventist leaders wrote. “Such actions, taken at the very time when the world Church is engaged in a study and discussion of the matter, pre-empt the process and any decision that might come from it.”

The leaders pointed to the collaborative approach to key decisions that has characterized Seventh-day Adventist polity since the church’s organization nearly 150 years ago in 1863: “The essence of unity in Seventh-day Adventist organizational functioning is the mutual commitment of all organizations to collective decision-making in matters affecting the whole family—and the acceptance of those decisions as the authority of the Church. The action of any union in pursuing a different course of action represents a rejection of this key value in denominational life.”

At the same time, the appeal noted, “General Conference officers welcome and invite unions to participate in the global study of ordination. This study will be the most widespread and thorough study the Church has undertaken on this topic. Earlier studies have been conducted by commissions. This is the first time that a study of ministerial ordination engages the whole Church through the 13 divisions.”

The leaders acknowledge that the question of women’s ordination has been a topic of deep concern to many within the movement: “… We realize
that sharply differing convictions with respect to ministerial ordination for women exist in our global family. We also realize that the passage of time without finding satisfaction for the tensions on this question can give rise to frustration and the erosion of confidence that a timely and mutually satisfactory resolution can be found.”

However, the Adventist world leaders said they “earnestly appeal” to the unions involved to:

1. **Operate in harmony** with the decisions of the worldwide church;

2. **Avoid any independent action** contrary to the decisions taken by the global body of the church in 1990 and 1995;

3. **Communicate to their constituents** the implications of independent action for the health of the wider denomination;

4. **Actively engage** in the established global discussion about the practice of ordination slated to report in 2014 and 2015.

As of December 31, 2010, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had 60 unions with conference status and 59 unions with mission status. Organized as a General Conference in 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has 17 million baptized members and is active in 209 countries and territories around the world. An estimated 30 million people attend Seventh-day Adventist worship services weekly.
Since the beginning of 2012 several union conferences have recorded actions expressing support for, or commitment to, the ministerial ordination of women. The world-wide Seventh-day Adventist Church is currently engaged in a study of the theology of ordination and its implications. This study is scheduled for completion by the 2014 Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee. At that time the Executive Committee will determine the report which will be given to the 2015 General Conference Session along with whether or not any new recommendation should be considered by delegates to the Session.

In the light of this current study and the actions of several unions, General Conference officers, including presidents of the 13 world divisions, have unanimously communicated an appeal for unity in respect to ministerial ordination practices. The appeal calls: 1) for unity in respecting a global church action (i.e. the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session decisions on ministerial ordination); 2) for each union executive committee to carefully review the far-reaching effects

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3 At December 31, 2010, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had 60 unions with conference status and 59 unions with mission status.

4 The group of 40 officers involved include officers from the Presidential, Secretariat and Treasury offices of the General Conference plus the presidents of divisions who, in additional [sic] to being presidents of their divisions are vice-presidents of the General Conference.
of pursuing a course of action that is contrary to the
decisions of the General Conference in session; and
3) for each union to participate in the current study
about the theology of ordination and its implication.

I. Respecting a global
decision of the Church

The world-wide Church recognizes the General
Conference in Session as the highest ecclesiastical
authority for Seventh-day Adventists. The 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session decisions
with respect to granting ministerial ordination to
women represent the current voice of the Church in
this matter. The actions of certain unions indicate
their desire to establish an alternative source of au-
thority for a matter that already carries the authority
of the world Church.

As currently understood in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, ordination to the gospel min-
istry is ordination to serve the global Church. No

5 The 1990 General Conference Session approved that women should be given wide participation in all church activities, including soul winning and pastoral duties, but that “in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church” the Session also approved the Annual Council recommendation that ordination of women to the gospel ministry not be authorized.

6 The 1995 General Conference Session action denied the request of the North American Division that the Session adopt provisions on ordination as outlined below: “The General Conference vests in each division the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender. In divisions where the division executive committee takes specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions.”
provision exists for a geographically localized ministerial ordination. Consequently the decision to change or modify ordination practices is a global one and necessitates a decision from the world body.

For any union to introduce a different ministerial ordination practice is seen, by the rest of the Church, as readiness to set aside a world Church decision and proceed in another direction. Such actions, taken at the very time when the world Church is engaged in a study and discussion of the matter, pre-empt the process and any decision that might come from it. This creates widespread confusion, misunderstanding as well as erosion of trust and also nurtures doubt about these unions acting in good faith as members of the world-wide family.

Some who would encourage unions to proceed with ministerial ordination for women draw attention to selected statements from a General Conference Executive Committee document. As used by

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7 Information that a number of women serve as ordained ministers in China has been cited as justification, [sic] for unions elsewhere to proceed in a similar manner. It has been alleged that the Northern Asia-Pacific Division recognizes these ordinations and has therefore established a precedent for granting ministerial ordination to women. However, these ordinations were not authorized or conducted according to the policies of the Church. Nor are these ordinations approved or recognized/endorsed by the Northern Asia-Pacific Division. The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have an officially organized structure in China that is comparable to other areas of the world. Government regulations do not permit outside involvement in church affairs within China. The practice, in China, of ministerial ordination for women is acknowledged as a reality that has arisen in China and is beyond the influence of the world-wide structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

these individuals, the statements would indicate that a union has final authority in matters relating to ministerial ordination. The intent of the document from which such statements have been taken is to emphasize the interconnectedness of Seventh-day Adventist denominational structure. The authority and responsibility entrusted to any entity of the Church is exercised within the context of beliefs, values, and policies of the entire Church. Being a part of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church obliges every organization to think and act for the good of the whole and to shun a spirit of autonomy and self-determination.

2. The effects of unilaterally pursuing a different course of action

The significance of any union proceeding in a manner contrary to a global Church decision is not limited to the specific action involved (ministerial ordination in the present instance); it touches the very heart of how this Church functions as a global family. The essence of unity in Seventh-day Adventist organizational functioning is the mutual commitment of all organizations to collective decision-making in matters affecting the whole family—and the acceptance of those decisions as the authority of the Church. The action of any union in pursuing a different course of action represents a rejection of this key value in denominational life. Unless this value (i.e. collective decision-making and the acceptance of those decisions as the authority of the Church) is maintained, all other values that contribute to unity are seriously weakened.
For one entity to express its reasoned dissent with a global decision of the Church might appear to some as a legitimate course of action. However, the implications of acting contrary to a world Church decision are not limited to the one entity. Any organization contemplating a course of action contrary to a global Church decision must ask itself, “Is this the pattern of participation in Church life that we wish to establish and recommend for other entities to follow?” “How will we deal with the situation if an organization in our territory should decide to discontinue its participation in one or more matters under which it disagrees with the larger family of organizations?” Mutually agreed upon policies benefit the entire Church and keep it from fragmenting into independent, locally-driven units. They are the reflection of the Spirit-directed will of the body and allow each entity to look beyond itself for the good of the whole body of Christ.

3. Participation in the current study of ordination and its implications

General Conference officers welcome and invite unions to participate in the global study of ordination. This study will be the most widespread and thorough study the Church has undertaken on this topic. Earlier studies have been conducted by commissions. This is the first time that a study of ministerial ordination engages the whole Church through the 13 divisions.

Biblical Research Committees in all divisions have been asked to conduct a study on the theology of ordination and its implications. In addition,
during 2012, the General Conference Administrative Committee will appoint a Theology of Ordination Study Committee, with representation from all divisions, to oversee and facilitate the global discussion process and to prepare reports for presentation to the General Conference Executive Committee. The Annual Council 2014 will determine what action, if any, should be recommended to the 2015 General Conference Session. Careful thought is being given to ensure that the study and education process is conducted with fairness and thoroughness in respect to examining the theology of ordination and its practical implications.

All unions are welcome to submit their conviction as part of the global dialog on this question. Their voices, along with others, in this matter need to be heard. Now is the time for unions to share their position on ministerial ordination, and the rationale behind it. Doing so will ensure that various perspectives will be clearly understood by the world Church.

The appeal sent by the General Conference officers to certain unions also reflects this Church leadership group’s message to other unions that may be considering similar steps with respect to ministerial ordination practices. The communication concludes: “We have shared with you our deep concerns about the course of action you have chosen. We realize that sharply differing convictions with respect to ministerial ordination for women exist in our global family. We also realize that the passage of time without finding satisfaction for the tensions on this question can give rise to frustration and the erosion of
confidence that a timely and mutually satisfactory resolution can be found.”

“We therefore earnestly appeal to you:

1. That your union continues to operate in harmony with the global decisions and global decision-making processes of the Church.

2. That until such time as the Church decides otherwise, your union refrains from taking any action to implement ministerial ordination practices that are contrary to the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session actions.

3. That the union membership be informed concerning the implications for the entire Church in the event that one entity, for whatever reason, chooses a course of action in deliberate opposition to a decision of the whole Church.

4. That the union actively participates in the global discussion about the Church’s understanding and practice of ordination. The contributions of a union in this discussion can be forwarded to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee through the respective Ordination Study Committee set up by each division.

“Thank you for your willingness to receive and reflect on these things. We join you in diligently and prayerfully seeking to know the will, the blessing and the guidance of God in this and all other matters affecting our life together as a Church and our collective endeavor to advance His kingdom.”