Minority Report on Ministry, Ordination, and Gender

The Seminary has prepared, but not yet released, a statement to endorse the view that the Adventist church should allow women to be ordained to the pastoral ministry. There are, however, a few professors who differ with the majority on biblical texts and concepts related to the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. This report by the minority identifies these passages and discusses their implications for the issue of gender and leadership within the church, and under what circumstances the ordination of women should be allowed. Before these texts are discussed, however, the minority believes it is vital to underscore their agreement with the main statement on a key point, the need for more women in ministry.

Area of Agreement: The Importance of Women in Ministry

We strongly believe that there are various ministries for which a church can lay hands on both men and women, including not only lay ministries to the sick, the young, and the poor, but also preaching and evangelism. Ellen White advocated for more women to be involved in a professional capacity in the ministry work of the church. “If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work,” she declared in 1879, “we should see many more converted to the truth. The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth.”

She advocated that women who devote their lives to ministry should be both paid from the tithe and trained, just as men are. This mandate to both pay women equally, and that woman should “qualify” themselves for the work, makes us believe that more women should be involved in the Adventist church in professional ministry. We also believe that more women should enter Adventist theological programs, including at the Seminary, to qualify themselves for this work.

Our report is not a defense of the status quo. Rather, it is a caution against moving from one extreme to another. We believe that the church should heed Ellen White’s call for increasing the numbers of women in ministry. We should structure our ministerial programs throughout the church to allow for greater female involvement, including more women professors in college religion departments and at the Seminary. We should work as a church to unleash the ministry potential of all our members.

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1 Acts of the Apostles, 94; Evangelism, 546; Daughters of God, 249-250.
2 Evangelism, 471-472; see also Desire of Ages, 568.
3 White warned that asking women to do ministerial work as a vocation, without pay, is not only unfair—“exaction,” “partiality,” “selfishness,” and “robbery”—but would “discourage our sisters from qualifying themselves for the work they should engage in” (Gospel Workers, 452-453; Evangelism, 492). She also asserted that women ministers should be paid from the tithe, which she elsewhere maintained is to be sacredly reserved for the support of the gospel ministry (Counsels on Stewardship, 81, 101-103; Testimonies for the Church, 9: 247-250). “The tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women,” she stated (Evangelism, 492).
Area of Departure: Questions of Gender and Church Authority

Ellen White endorsed a robust, professional women’s ministry, however, without promoting the concept that woman ministers be given “full ecclesiastical authority” within the church as ordained pastors. During her time, the Adventist church developed the practice of licensing women ministers, but not ordaining them.\(^4\) We believe that our pioneers based this distinction on certain scriptural teachings, which they viewed as setting out the ideal for primary authority in both the home and the church as that of male leadership. As we discuss below, while this ideal does not rise to the level of a universal moral imperative, it should not be lightly discarded without evidence of real need.

Our convictions in this regard are based on our understanding of the Bible. But we are also very conscious of the abuse that a misguided and unrestrained patriarchy can have in both the home and the church. Thus, we want to say a word at the outset about our social concerns. In our view, the loving, self-sacrificing, servant-based leadership role of the male found in the Bible does not give men authority to dominate and repress women or anyone else. Rather it is meant to connect men to both the home and the church with cords of special duty and responsibility. It is not so much about placing men “in charge,” as it is about keeping men involved, both at home and at church, where they are increasingly absent in a society that denies them any special role.

Order and Authority in Heaven

We believe that to fully understand this issue, one must go back before Eden to the larger context of the system of order and authority maintained in heaven itself. Ultimately, “there is no authority except from God” (Romans 13:1). Authority originates with God and thus comes to others only by delegation. But because God is a God of both love and order, the order of the whole universe is essentially a fabric of loving relationships, structured by authority and submission.

Authority Among Unfallen Beings and Angels

Principles of order and authority can be seen among the unfallen angels and heavenly beings. Angels, though created with a higher nature than humans (Psalm 8:5), nevertheless are organized in relationships of authority and submission. They are “ministering spirits sent forth [apostello] to minister [diakonia] for those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). They have authority for specific assignments on behalf of humans. “He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:11).

Further, angels are organized in ranks of authority. In Revelation 7:1-2, the “highest angel” had authority to command the other “four angels.” The angel that “had been sent” to Daniel to interpret his dreams was delayed by the prince of Persia for twenty-one days, until “Michael, one of the chief princes,” came to help him (Daniel 10:11, 13). Here we see angels sent on missions, overseen and even aided by their commanders, or princes. The “legions of

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angels” referred to in the Bible are more than just a figure of speech, but refer to groups of angels overseen by commanding angels (Matthew 26:53).

Scripture alludes to the existence of authority figures on other created worlds. Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus clear back to “Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38). At the climax of creation, “all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). Job also speaks of “a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them” (Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2). It is believed that Job recounts a heavenly council involving the leaders of created worlds, and that Satan presumed to attend because he had usurped the role of Adam, the original “son of God” representing the Earth.

Earthly Creation Order and the Fall

Given the order and roles in heaven among the unfallen beings, it is not surprising that there should be a framework of non-hierarchical role and function built into human society, even before the fall. If sinless angels need commanding angels to organize and strengthen them in their compliance with God’s will, then certainly humans would need leadership as well, even before sin. Such a need for order would be even greater after the confusion and disorder introduced by sin, and helps explain why a hierarchical framework of authority would be introduced in response to the entry of sin.

Earthly Creation Pre-Fall Order and Roles

We agree that Adam and Eve were created absolutely equal in value of nature and role, because both were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). There was no hierarchy of authority within the pre-fall relationship. Yet, we believe functional differences existed between the sexes. There is clear evidence that their roles in overseeing creation and interacting with God were not identical. Each gender supplied strengths and qualities that would otherwise be deficient in the other. But this diversity did not diminish equality.

From the beginning, Adam played a unique role in providing order to the larger earthly community and representing it. This role is revealed by the creation story of Genesis 2, where Adam is given an earlier perspective on creation: Adam was created first; he was given the command concerning the forbidden tree; he named all of the animals, all before Eve was on the

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5 Ellen White observes, “The very highest angels in the heavenly courts are appointed to work out the prayers which ascend to God for the advancement of the cause of God. Each angel has his particular post of duty, which he is not permitted to leave for any other place. If he should leave, the powers of darkness would gain an advantage” (SDA Bible Commentary, 4:1173). Many times she notes the roles of the “commanding angel(s).” For example, when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, the “angels in heaven . . . wished to surround the Son of God, but the commanding angels suffered them not, lest, as they should behold his betrayal, they would deliver him; for the plan was laid out, and it must be fulfilled” (Spiritual Gifts, 1:46; see also Early Writings, 167). When the mob arrested Jesus, “many companies of holy angels, each with a tall commanding angel at their head, were sent to witness the scene” (Early Writings, 168).

6 Ellen White saw that a parental type of authority is needed in the sinful world, even inside the church. “Those who have too little courage to reprove wrong, or who through indolence or lack of interest make no earnest effort to purify the family or the church of God, are held accountable for the evil that may result from their neglect of duty. We are just as responsible for evils that we might have checked in others by exercise of parental or pastoral authority as if the acts had been our own” (Patriarchs and Prophets, 578).
scene. Then, after God indicated that the man needed a “helper” (ezer), Eve was made from his side (Genesis 2:18, 22). While ezer can be used to describe superiors who provide assistance, including even God himself (see Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7), it is significant that Eve’s creation was especially for this purpose.

Adam also named her—not implying ownership, control, or superiority, but revealing again his special role of responsibility for the public realm and representation (Genesis 2:23). These functions would not have created a hierarchy of authority within the relationship of Adam and Eve, as Eve would have her own functions of equal importance, especially regarding the internal ordering of the family and child rearing, for which she had special biological, emotional, and intellectual gifts.\(^7\)

Eve may have been the “climax” of creation, but this did not displace Adam from his role as order-giver to creation and representative of his family to the outside worlds. “Headship” would be too strong a word for this pre-fall role. Perhaps “figurehead” or “spokesperson” would be more appropriate. One can represent a person or group to outsiders, and not be superior to those one is speaking for, as we see with spokespersons for presidents and heads of state.

This figurehead or spokesperson role can be seen when, despite the fact that Eve was first to sin, God initially called Adam to account for the eating of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:9-10). Only after he shifted responsibility to Eve did God address her. It seems that one of the first results of sin was male abdication of responsibility, a tendency that has only been enhanced with the passage of time and the strengthening of sin.

A further evidence of Adam’s pre-fall roles can be found in the contrasts between pre-fall blessings and post-fall curses in Eden. Each curse in Genesis 3:16-19 was a modification of a previous blessing.

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<tr>
<th>Post-Fall Curses</th>
<th>Pre-Fall Blessings</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. To Eve: Husband shall rule over you (3:16b).</td>
<td>2. To Adam: Representative of family; Adam created first and named the animals, as well as Eve, given the command regarding the tree, etc. (2:4-22).</td>
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<td>3. To Adam: Ground cursed; in toil and sweat shall you eat of it (3:17-19).</td>
<td>3. To Adam: Light enjoyable labor, to “tend and keep” the garden (2:15-16).</td>
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The first and third curses are obviously parallel to explicit blessings in Genesis 1 and 2. The second curse only makes sense if there was something about the pre-fall roles that gave Adam some position of representation or oversight on behalf of the earthly family.

Indeed, in two places in the New Testament, the apostle Paul makes explicit what is implicit in Genesis 2. In 1 Timothy 2:13 he writes: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” In 1 Corinthians 11:8 he writes, “For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.” In both instances, he uses this order of creation to support some kind of figurehead or leadership role for man in the context of worship and worship.

\(^7\) Significantly, upon the birth of the first human baby, Eve alone is quoted regarding the significance of the event—“With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man” (Genesis 4:1).
spiritual order. For Paul, Adam’s representative role had been passed on to all men, giving them special responsibilities for spiritual leadership.

It is this representative role of Adam that makes sense of the New Testament passages where the fall of humanity is identified with the sin of Adam, and not Eve. Eve fell first, of course, and yet repeatedly Paul emphasizes that death entered the world through the sin of Adam. “Therefore, as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin; . . . Nevertheless death reigned from Adam . . . who is a figure of him that was to come” (Romans 5:12, 14).

Christ is identified as the last Adam, the head of the race who redeems what the first Adam lost. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, . . . The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). All of this only makes sense if Adam played a special role as representative or figurehead of his family, even before sin.\(^8\)

**Post-Fall Roles and Authority**

The pre-fall equality of male and female in the image of God was marred, but not destroyed by the fall. Before the fall, free of sin and selfishness, the first couple could be, even with their different roles, absolutely equal in terms of value and authority without disunity. But after the fall, with darkened minds and selfish motives, unity could be maintained only by submission of one to the other. Therefore the pronouncement to the woman, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16), was an unavoidable consequence of the fall. While ontological equality continues, in order to preserve unity, some limits were placed on functional equality in terms of leadership authority.

Some suggest that the curses associated with the fall are meant to be descriptive rather than normative. We would certainly agree that reducing pain in childbirth and the invention of laborsaving devices are not prohibited by these passages. Indeed, other scriptural passages highlight the importance and need of helping the suffering and burdened (Isaiah 58:6-7; Luke 4:18-19). But nowhere does the Scripture say that the post-fall male headship of the family is to be abandoned where possible. On the contrary, it affirms that role in numerous places, both in the Old and New Testaments.

In referring to Abraham, Sarah called him “my Lord,” using the Hebrew word *adon* (Genesis 18:12). This word is typically translated “Lord” or “master.” It is used to address one who possesses power and authority and to whom respect is owed. God himself acknowledged Abraham’s familial authority when He revealed that “I have chosen him, so that he may command [swḥ; charge, command, order] his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness [mispat] and justice [sopot] . . .” (Genesis 18:19).

Another Old Testament family that illustrates God’s expectations of male leadership is found in the story of Moses and his Midianite wife Zipporah. After Moses is called by God to return to Egypt to free the Israelites, God unexpectedly meets him on the way and, the Bible

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\(^8\) Ellen White confirms this special representative role in a number of places. She wrote that “the Sabbath was committed to Adam, the father and representative of the whole human family” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 48). She states that “as representative of the fallen race, Christ passed over the same ground on which Adam stumbled and fell . . . Christ redeemed man from the penalty of Adam’s disgraceful fall” (Manuscript 126, 1901).
records, “was about to kill him.” To forestall this, Zipporah takes out a knife, and circumcises the boy (Genesis 4:24). Both parents clearly knew about the requirement of circumcision. Moses had a Jewish background, and Zipporah herself revealed her knowledge by immediately carrying out the act and saving Moses’ life. God, however, most directly holds Moses responsible for the failure of both parents to follow through on God’s requirements. Whether from his own oversight, or from opposition by Zipporah, he had failed to exercise his role as family and spiritual leader, and he is most directly held responsible.

Given the male role as primary spiritual leader of the family, it is unsurprising that when it comes time to institute the priesthood, God chooses only the sons of Aaron from the tribe of Levi to play that role. While God did desire to be a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6), this is evidently a reference to the role that Israel should play as a nation in mediating the truths of God to other nations. It was not meant to suggest that each Israelite should formally participate as priests or helpers in the sanctuary services.

In the Old Testament women held various roles of authority. But these were always distinct from the priestly function. Prophets had a charismatic authority that operated outside the formal sanctuary and priestly functions. Judges had a primarily civil oversight that was not usually connected with sanctuary functions. Certain individuals, such as Samuel, seemed to combine these various roles, offering sacrifices, prophesying, and judging. But there is simply no scriptural evidence that any women ever served a formal priestly function in ancient Israel. Indeed, the existence of certain women judges and prophets make all the more noteworthy the fact that when it came to institutional spiritual authority, God chose only men.

Throughout the history of the Old Testament era, the priests and their Levite helpers were all men (Numbers 1:51; 3:10, 38; 18:7). This male role was appropriate in terms of who the priests represented—they were figures of Christ, who came to earth as a man (Hebrews 8:1-6). It is Christ to whom they pointed, and it is Christ who, had he chosen, could have ended the patriarchy of the Old Testament by a simple act or declaration. There is simply no record that he did this. Indeed the explicit testimony of his apostles is to the contrary.

New Testament Passages

The Old Testament creates the framework of divine order in which the New Testament passages regarding gender roles of responsibility and authority, both in the home and the church, become comprehensible. While there is no continuation of the Aaronic priesthood in the New Testament per se, the leadership roles of the Old Testament serve in certain respects as an analogy and guide for leadership in the era of the church. As did their Old Testament counterparts, the New Testament writers see a close relationship between congregation and home; they treat the church as an extended family, the home as a small church.

Jesus Christ and the Disciples

Perhaps the most important passages on gender in the New Testament are those that do not exist. Had he desired, Christ could have overturned thousands of years of male headship

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9 Ellen White commonly draws on this imagery. “When Christ is in the heart, He is brought into the family. The father and mother feel the importance of living in obedience to the Holy Spirit so that the heavenly angels, who minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation, will minister to them as teachers in the home, educating and training them for the work of teaching their children. In the home it is possible to have a little church which will honor and glorify the Redeemer” (Adventist Home, 323).
simply by choosing six male, and six female apostles, or even four, or two, or one. But he chose
twelve men as apostles to play the most authoritative leadership roles in his new institution, the
church. Some argue that a rabbi in Palestine could not have traveled with female disciples
without provoking scandal. Yet the Bible records that there were “many women . . . which
followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him” (Matthew 27:55). Christ had women who
“followed” Him and the male disciples, yet he chose not to select any of them as apostles.

Priestesses were not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world, and indeed they held some
of the most prestigious religious leadership posts of their time. This included the role of the
priestess of Apollo at Cumea, the priestess at Delphi, known as the Oracle of Delphi, as well as
the Vestal Virgins of Rome. Neither is it true that these priestesses were typically associated
with immoral and licentious behavior. Indeed, the Vestal Virgins would face death if they
violated their vows of chastity.¹⁰

All this suggests that Christ could have altered the status quo on gender and leadership
had he desired—as he did on many things, such as ceremonial washings, and rituals, and
sacrifices—yet he chose not to. Instead, through his own acts and the teachings of his apostles,
he confirmed the ideal of male headship in both the home and the church, and re-asserted its
theological roots in the orders of creation and the fall.

The Apostles Uphold Old Testament Family Leadership Patterns

One of the clearest assertions of the Hebrew model of male headship is found in Peter’s
epistles. “Wives,” he wrote, “be in subjection to your own husbands . . . as Sarah obeyed
Abraham, calling him Lord: whose children ye now are, if ye do well, and are not put in fear by
any terror” (1 Peter 3:1, 6). Rather than moving to a new, different New Testament model, or
even merely ignoring the Hebrew model, Peter invokes male leadership by explicit reference to
the Old Testament example of Abraham and Sarah, and her deference to her husband as ‘Lord.’
This is one of many such references in the New Testament, where

¹⁰ Will Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York, NY: MJF Books, 1944), 63-64.
Paul also makes this connection plain in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, where he invokes the headship principle in the home, grounds it in the Trinity, and then applies it to church worship. “But I want you to know,” he writes, “that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (11:3). Having established the order in the home, and connecting it with the order in the Godhead, he then applies it to public worship. “But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head . . . for a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man” (11:5).

We need not be confused by the specific instruction here that women should cover their heads in prayer. We do not typically follow this guideline today, but this merely recognizes that cultural norms regarding respectful, modest submission have changed. This cultural change, however, does not affect the validity of the principle itself. A similar instruction today might be that women not pray in public wearing tight jeans, an immodest blouse, or other attire that does not show respect for male sensibilities and sensitivities.

Such submissive respect should go both ways, of course, but Paul argues that women have a special role in this regard. And why is this special role justified? Paul answers by reference to pre-fall creation: “For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (11:8-9). Here Paul touches the pre-fall, representational role of the man, discussed in the previous section. Something about the man’s public role in representing the family makes it important that when a woman plays a role in public, such as praying, that she do so in a way that indicates her full respect to the primary responsibility of the man. Her act should not send a message that the social, familial, spiritual order of gender relations in the family and spiritual community are being challenged or set aside.

It is the larger context of God’s ordered kingdom that makes sense of one of the more puzzling texts dealing with gender. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul climaxes his instructions about women showing respectful submission in church by reference to angels: “For this reason,” he writes, “the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” (11:10, emphasis added). This reference to angels is not so abrupt given that the passage ends where it began—discussing the order of heaven, where God is, for salvation purposes, the head of Christ (11:3).

Given our understanding about the order of authority and submission among the angels of heaven, it is apparent why they would be sensitive to breakdowns of order in God’s church on earth. It was Lucifer’s challenge to the divine system of order and authority in heaven led to the heavenly angels losing one-third of their colleagues—fellow angels whom they undoubtedly valued and loved. Paul alludes to the consternation of these angels if they see the order of God’s kingdom being challenged again in the precincts of His church on earth.

**The Relation of Spiritual Gifts to Church Offices**

All believers receive spiritual gifts, but not all believers are called to formal church leadership roles or office. Gifts are given by the Spirit and can be used by the believer whether or not the church recognizes these gifts by election to church office. Church offices, in contrast, are positions of trust for which having the appropriate gift is a necessary, but insufficient, condition.

Nobody has a right to hold a church office. The church community must both see the giftedness of the person, and also recognize them as having the requisite experience, character,
temperament, and other qualifications to represent the church and exercise authority on its behalf in a particular office. What those other qualifications are will differ depending on the office sought. Lists of the qualifications for certain church offices can be found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and the church must consider the listed qualifications when choosing persons to fill church offices.

It is our belief that these passages, when read in context, do raise issues of gender in relation to certain church offices, namely that of elder. The question of order and the role of authority in God’s church are dealt with in a number of passages, but the question of gender and leadership is most directly addressed by Paul in 1 Timothy. It is here that Paul directly addresses issues of church order in the specific context of certain church offices, namely elder and deacon.

Some argue that Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy relate primarily to the home. We believe that this argument overlooks the fact that 1 Timothy is explicitly concerned with the internal ordering and practices of the church itself. Paul says as much to Timothy, when he asserts that “these things I write to you . . . so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

This concern for the conduct and ordering of the church begins with a discussion of Timothy exercising his authority in the church to not allow “certain men to teach strange doctrines” (1 Timothy 1:4). After a discussion of the various teachings and practices that should not be allowed in the church, Paul moves in chapter 2 to a discussion of the kinds of prayers that should be made in church, and then the manner of praying. It is here that he deals with the question of the deportment and dress of men and women in public prayer and worship (2:8-10).

It would be strange if these instructions related only to husbands and wives, as though they had a peculiar responsibility to public holiness, modesty, and sobriety that single persons did not have. It is these instructions that lead directly to the immediate discussion about a woman quietly receiving instruction in submissiveness, and not exercising authority over a man. For ease of reference, we will list the key verses at this point:

But I do not allow [epitrepo] a woman [gune] to teach or exercise authority [authenteo] over a man [aner], but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:12-14).

Should Paul have wanted to indicate a shift from the recipient of the immediately preceding advice, which refers to all men and women generally, he could have used a feminine possessive pronoun, or at least an article, before “andros” in verse 12. Had he done this, it would have been clear that a woman was not supposed to have authority over “her man,” or “the man,” more obviously referring to her husband. But Paul does not do this, and it seems to us that the more natural reading of the passage is that the earlier reference to men and women in general continues into and through verse 12. That this is the more probable reading is attested to by the general usage of a wide range of modern and traditional translations that render the translation “man” and “woman” rather than “husband” and “wife.” Indeed, restricting this passage to the roles of husband and wife raises more questions than it solves.

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11 These include the New Kings James Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the English Standard Version, the King James Version, the American Standard Version, the New American Standard, the Net Bible, the Message, and others.
If Paul is really saying “I do not allow a wife to teach or exercise authority over her husband, but to remain quiet” in church, then he is actually allowing women to have authority over men who are not their husbands. The implication of this is that Paul would allow women generally, to “teach or exercise authority” over men at church, as long as they were not their own husbands. This is a deeply puzzling result. It would mean that Paul would deny a role to women in relation to the men closest to them, whose bodies they have an ownership interest in (1 Corinthians 7:4), while giving authority to them over men to whom they are not related and whom they have no special connection with. It would result in the anomalous situation where women elders could represent the church, and exercise authority over men in the church, except for their own husbands.

A further consequence of such a reading is even more troubling. If this passage is limited to husband and wife primarily in the home setting, as proposed, then the passage places severe limits on the wife’s role of questioning and even teaching at home. She must learn “in quiet submission,” even at home. But elsewhere, Paul indicates that it is appropriate for a wife to ask questions and engage in theological discussion at home (1 Corinthians 14:35). A consequence of trying to limit this text to spouses primarily in the home context actually creates a more burdensome gender limitation than we are comfortable with.

We think it is clear from the immediate words used, as well as the larger context, that Paul is here talking about church worship and order. His remarks most naturally relate, we believe, to women and men generally in the church. But this is referring not just to general teaching or preaching, but teaching relating to the exercise of spiritual authority and discipline.

The Authority of Elders

This command for quietness and limits on women teaching in church should be understood in the context of “exercising authority” of an ecclesiastical nature. Elsewhere in 1 Timothy, Paul references such functions which gives content to the meaning of such churchly authority. This includes instructing teachers not to teach “strange doctrines” (1:3), adjudicating charges brought against elders (5:19-20), and deciding what men were qualified to serve as elders (5:22). It appears to refer primarily to a theological gate keeping, disciplining, status-altering, decision-making role that would involve the direct exercise of administrative authority in spiritual matters over men. It does not limit a woman being able to publicly pray or prophesy, which is a form of exhorting or preaching. Paul elsewhere acknowledges the women’s appropriate public role in these expressive activities (1 Corinthians 11:5, 13).

Another evidence that Paul is primarily writing about the public space of the church is his use of the strong verb, epitrepo. By this, he indicates that he will not “allow” or “permit” the woman to “teach or exercise authority” over a man. In doing this, Paul is exercising authority himself, as epitrepo is a word of command or legal direction. It is the word used to describe what the lawgiver Moses did when he legally “permitted” divorce, or what Pilate did when he “granted permission” for Christ’s body to be taken away (Matthew 19:8; John 19:38.) It is a word generally used to describe the actions of a superior who has the authority direct a subordinate.

Paul certainly gave advice, counsel and even instruction regarding the family and the home, as we see in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. But as an apostle, his actual administrative authority lay in the province of the church (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10). It is Christ that is head of
the husband, and of the home, and not Paul. For him to issue a command in relation to what
must take place at home would be to step out of his role.

It is only in the church context that he could effectively “permit,” or “prohibit” certain
kinds of conduct and practice. Underscoring this point is the fact that the only other time Paul
uses epitrepo in relation to other people is when he tells the Corinthians “let your women keep
silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak” (1 Corinthians 14:34). This usage
clearly involves the public realm of the church where Paul does possess directive administrative
authority in his capacity as apostle.

Again, the command in 1 Corinthians for women to keep silent in church should not
confuse us. It is merely a particular application in Corinth of the broader principle of female
modesty and submissiveness, which was being violated because of circumstances in Corinth.
Elsewhere, as we have discussed, Paul is for female praying, prophesying, and teaching,
under circumstances where modesty and propriety is not violated (1 Corinthians 11:5, women
praying and prophesying in public; Acts 18:26, Priscilla teaching Apollos). Paul here gives local
advice about women remaining silent that we rightly read, because of context and practice he
allows elsewhere, as bound by time, place, and circumstance. This fact, however, should not
cause us to lose sight of the larger, universal principles of female modesty and submissiveness
that lies behind these applications.

The reasoning Paul draws on to justify the limit on female authority in 1 Timothy is
extremely significant in light of our earlier discussion of both the pre-fall and post-fall roles of
Adam and Eve. Paul cites both the pre-fall order of creation, and the order of the fall (1 Timothy
2:13-14). These reflect the two kinds of ordering we discussed in the Old Testament section,
external representation and internal hierarchy. This reflects the two-fold role that elders and
ordained ministers play in the church. In a special and formal way, these leaders speak for the
church to the outside world. They issue the formal pronouncements and statements of the church
in their names. An example of this is found in Acts 16, where the decree from the Jerusalem
council is described as being sent out “by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4).

Elders and apostles, of course, also have authority within the church to carry out and
safeguard the responsibilities that have been committed to them. This internal hierarchy
corresponds to the role Adam played in his family after the fall. It is the role that Paul reminds
Timothy of throughout his letter: Timothy is told to “instruct certain men not to teach strange
doctrines” (1 Timothy 1:3); to “prescribe and teach” the church the doctrines that Paul
commends to him (4:11); to oversee and adjudicate accusations against elders, and rebuke openly
those continuing in sin (5:20-21).

Some have suggested that the word for authority in Timothy, authenteo, does not refer to
official duties, but rather conveys the sense of “dominate, to get one’s way.” But the fact is that
this word is used only once in the New Testament, and it would appear that extra-Biblical usages
of the word generally support the common translation that it is merely the ordinary exercise of
authority that is being referred to here.\footnote{This is likely why Strong’s Greek Lexicon defines it simply as “to govern, to exercise authority.” In a study of the extrabiblical uses of authentein, Dr. George W. Knight III (not the Adventist historian) concluded that the common meaning is “to have authority over” (The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 141–42).} Even if the word could mean the abuse of authority in
some contexts, Paul would not appear to be using it in that manner here. It would be appropriate for no gender to exercise abusive authority, whether in marriage or not. If speaking against abusive authority generally, then Paul should simply have said “I permit no one to dominate” anyone else. His connection of it to a specific gender suggests that the opposite gender may appropriately engage in the activity, i.e., teach and exercise authority.

But the best explanation of the authority referred to by authenteo is the immediate context—and what immediately follows it in 1 Timothy is a description of the office of elder. The connection between 1 Timothy 2 and 3 would be even more clear if we did not have chapter divisions. Without that division, it would be impossible to ignore that in one breath Paul indicates a gender limitation on authority in the church, and then in the next he sets out the appropriate qualifications for the office of those holding church authority.

Many pro-ordination arguments are based on minimizing or even ignoring the proximity and logical flow of the second and third chapters of Timothy. Once the connection is seen, it becomes difficult to argue that chapter 2 is primarily about the home. Likewise, the connection between the two chapters makes it very difficult to dismiss the chapter 3 references to gender—“husband of one wife,” “manages his own household,” etc.—as merely incidental.

Some argue that Paul’s instructions can only be understood in terms of the beliefs of the cult of Artemis, which allegedly claimed that women were superior because they were created first, and men sinned first. This view argues that Paul was simply opposing female authority, and not promoting male authority. This insight is both interesting and enriching, but not ultimately persuasive, in our view, in terms of ordaining women as elders. First of all, it seems problematic that the correct understanding of a verse of Scripture can only be reached by reference to rather arcane extra-biblical information either not known by or not accessible to most people in most places in the history of the church. This would seem to raise issues regarding the principles that hold that the Bible should interpret itself.

Second, even if the Artemis cult in Ephesus did involve claims of female superiority, Paul’s response is not merely to deny female priority, but to assert male priority, at least in matters of spiritual authority within the church. There would be many ways of asserting gender equality, such as referencing Eve being made from Adam’s rib, or to note that both were made in the image of God. Paul references, however, none of the equality aspects of the creation story. Rather, he points to those elements that indicate the uniqueness of the male role and function, the order of creation and the fall.

His reference to the fall, especially in the context of the discussion of authority, brings to mind the post-fall headship role of the male. This allusion to male headship then serves as the immediate transition into a discussion of the role of elder in the church, one who should be the “husband of one wife,” and one who “manages his own household well” (1 Timothy 3:2, 4).

Rather than asserting gender equality or neutrality in response to the cult of Artemis, Paul asserts the traditional Hebrew understanding of the male role in the home and the congregation.

The Trajectory of the New Testament

Some read Peter and Paul as though much of what these apostles wrote about gender in the home and the church is somehow a temporary and somewhat unwilling continuation of the old covenant hierarchy—which was soon to pass away as the light of the gospel became more fully understood. After Christ, seems to be the argument, the growing ideal becomes to return to the pre-fall equality of Eden. The “Magna Carta” of the argument about the loss of role distinctiveness in matters of gender authority or office is Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew
nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

But the same Paul who wrote Galatians 3:28 also wrote 1 Timothy 2 and 3, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, Titus 2. When Bible verses appear to contradict, it is because we are overlooking something important. We also rejoice in Paul’s message of equality in Galatians. But we believe that it references the absolute spiritual, ontological equality of all people in Christ and their access to God and salvation. But just as the members of the Godhead are equal in worth, value, and substance, but still function, during the period of the fall, in different roles, the same is true, we believe, in the church and the family.

To read the “equality” principle of Galatians 3 as being the overriding guiding principle for all church actions and decision would lead to various problematic outcomes. These range from mundane notions that we should not have separate ministries or facilities for men and women at church, that coed dormitories in our schools should not be permitted, to more extreme ideas that because gender differences are now elided, same-sex marriage is acceptable. The spiritual equality of all believers does not negate the existence or importance of the varying roles we play at home, in society, and the church based on age, experience and gender.

Very simply, Peter and Paul both understand the truth of spiritual equality in Christ (Peter’s epistle is the basis of the “priesthood of all believer” ideal, 1 Peter 2:5). But neither Peter nor Paul says that spiritual equality is meant to nullify gender roles, either in the home, or as regards offices in the church. Indeed, they repeatedly assert the opposite. Why were they not more obviously concerned with returning to a pre-fall, non-hierarchical ideal?

It would be easier to accept that the New Testament implies a return to a non-hierarchical, pre-fall Edenic condition, if it did not explicitly say the opposite in a number of places. Even two thousand years later, our own prophet repeated the instructions of Peter and Paul regarding male headship in family relations. In a letter to a woman friend, Ellen White wrote “we women must remember that God has placed us subject to the husband. He is the head and our judgment and views and reasonings must agree with his if possible. If not, the preference in God’s Word is given to the husband where it is not a matter of conscience. We must yield to the head.”

There are many other balancing statements from Mrs. White we could quote to show that this headship should be self-sacrificing, full of love, desirous of service, and even deferential in many things. But the point is that, in the opinion of the most recent prophet to write on the topic, the principle of male leadership in the home continues.

Some suggest that the ordination of women is like the issue of slavery, which was not explicitly discarded in the New Testament, but which was undermined in principle. But nowhere

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13 This is not merely a theoretical or supposed concern, as some Adventist theologians are in print arguing that Galatians 3:28 and similar passages do in fact undermine “objections to same-sex relations.” John R. Jones, “‘In Christ There is Neither . . . ’: Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ”, Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives, eds. David Ferguson, Fritz Guy, David Larson (Roseville, CA: Adventist Forum, 2008), 4-28 to 4-29.

14 Letter 5, 1861, p. 2; to Mary Loughborough, June 6, 1861; in 6MR 126. In a similar vein, she wrote elsewhere that “the husband is head of the family, as Christ is the head of the church; and any course which the wife may pursue to lessen his influence and lead him to come down from that dignified, responsible position is displeasing to God. It is the duty of the wife to yield her wishes and will to her husband. Both should be yielding, but the word of God gives preference to the judgment of the husband.” 1 Test. 307.
in the Bible is slavery given an affirmative, normative, theological grounding in creation or the Godhead. Rather, it is dealt with as an existing societal institution, the reality of which the church is not in a position to undo. Paul acknowledges, however, that the wrong associated with the institution will receive its due “consequences,” and applies to it principles of “justice and fairness” that can only lead to its eventual dissolution (Colossians 3:25; 4:1).

Gender relations, in the church and the family, however, did not receive the same treatment. To the contrary, these relations are explicitly affirmed and—even more importantly—justified by reference to core theological ideas and historical events from the scriptures, including the order of relations in the Godhead, the nature and order of creation, as well as the facts of the fall. This broad theological grounding of gender roles make us unable to join our colleagues in asserting that the New Testament authors are implicitly asserting a pre-fall, role-neutral leadership, Edenic ideal.

The Exceptions – The Rule and Its Variations.

We recognize that our views on these important topics are far from infallible. We take seriously the ideas of authority and submission that we have been discussing. Paul says that all Christians should relate to one another by “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). We know that our position is only held by a small minority in the Seminary, and probably only by a minority, though a larger one, in the North American church at large. Having stated our convictions regarding this matter, our theological analysis is incomplete, we believe, if we do not state how those convictions guide us in how to relate to those that view things differently than we do.

What form “submitting” to one another takes depends on the situation and issue. Some issues are so core and central to what it means to be an Adventist or a Christian, that compromise or submission would be wrong. Issues central to the gospel, such as the atonement of Christ, His ministry in the Sanctuary, righteousness by faith, a literal creation, the Sabbath, and basic biblical sexual morality, are, in our view, non-negotiable. On these questions, we must, like Martin Luther before the Diet of Worms, stand unmoved whatever the consequences may be.

But we do not believe that the question of gender and leadership rises to the same level as these other issues. We believe this for reasons found in the Bible itself. There are a number of instances where exceptions are made to the primacy of male familial and spiritual leadership, showing that it is not an ironclad rule, not an absolute universal moral imperative. Indeed, as far as family leadership is concerned, women were, and are, frequently required to shoulder the role of leader of the household, both temporal and spiritual. This would happen if the father was killed, went to war, or was unwilling or morally unable to fill these roles. A good example is the role that Abigail played in staving off the wrath of David after her ungrateful, intemperate, drunken husband had insulted him (1 Samuel 25:2-38). Ellen White comments favorably on Abigail’s initiative and actions, taken “without consulting her husband or telling him of her intention” (Patriarchs and Prophets, 665).

Examples also exist of female leadership in the realm of prophets and judges. We think that prophets are a special case, as they often do not hold positions of institutional spiritual authority. God has shown a pattern of speaking charismatically through various figures whom He would not allow to hold institutional spiritual leadership. For instance, Miriam prophesied, yet was not made a priest like Aaron, and was rebuked with leprosy when she sought a share of
Moses’ leadership authority (Numbers 12:1-15); King Saul prophesied, yet he was ineligible to hold priestly office, and indeed lost his kingship when he imprudently offered sacrifices (1 Samuel 10:10-13); Samuel prophesied as a young boy, when he would have been too young to hold priestly office (1 Samuel 3:11-14); God speaks through a donkey to Balaam, and then speaks through Balaam himself, though the prophet has apostatized at that point, and would also be ineligible to hold spiritual institutional office (Numbers 22-24; Joshua 13:22).

And yet, it must be conceded that the office of prophet is distinctly a role of spiritual leadership. The office of judge is even more challenging for our position, as judges actually possessed a civil authority to decide cases, and could also possess some level of spiritual authority. Deborah was a married “prophetess” who “judged” Israel during the time of the Judges (Judges 4). This dual role of civil and spiritual authority comes close to representing a kind of institutional spiritual authority, and yet it is not the same as the priesthood. Deborah herself seemed to recognize that there were natural and appropriate limits to her role as a woman leader. When Barak said that he would only go out to fight Sisera if Deborah came with him, she agreed. But she also prophesied that he would not get the honor of the victory, but that it would fall to a woman. The implied rebuke here of Barak’s failure to provide strong male leadership is quite obvious (Judges 4:8-9).

Still, these cases show a willingness to alter leadership ideals in the face of the needs of a time, or the failure of men to provide the leadership. Another example where leadership ideals were modified involves not gender, but the form of the government of Israel. God’s ideal for Israel was that the confederacy of tribes should be governed by an interlocking system of tribal elders and judges, which would be overseen by God himself. The people of Israel, however, desired to have a king like the surrounding tribes. Eventually, God acceded to their requests on this point, and then through the prophet Samuel, anointed Saul as king of Israel (1 Samuel 8).

Despite the kingship not being God’s first plan or ideal, He eventually allowed the duly constituted authority of the nation to anoint kings. Once this happened, the kings themselves became the Lord’s anointed and chosen vessels to rule the nation (2 Kings 9:3, 6, 12). This story shows that God allows, at times, flexibility in his scheme of leadership of his people, as long as the variation takes place through duly constituted leadership and means.

The New Testament also shows some variation in patterns of leadership. It is interesting to note that at the division of leaders in Jerusalem the Seven were appointed to wait on tables, so that the apostles could minister the word. And yet it was not long before the Seven were themselves preaching, teaching, and baptizing, as seen in the actions of both Phillip and Stephen (Acts 6:9-15; 8:26-38).

There are a number of examples of female leadership in the early church, including female prophets, a deacon, and possibly an apostle (though in our opinion the evidence regarding Junia(s) is quite ambiguous). We would not characterize the evidence of female institutional leadership in the early church as ample, but rather as more infrequent and exceptional. They are the kind of exceptions that, in our view, tend to prove the rule of male leadership. But they also prove that there are exceptions, and that God at times leads His people in unconventional ways.

Conclusion – Loving Unity With Spirit-Led Religious Liberty

Given the versatility that God displays at times in regard to leadership, we believe that it is possible that God would permit the Holy Spirit to allow portions of the church to move
towards a fuller role for women in the gospel ministry. Indeed, the decision to do so has already happened in some Unions of our church, so the point is no longer theoretical. In light of the above discussion, our concern in this situation is threefold:

First, that whatever variations in leadership and ministry are allowed, that this happen in an orderly fashion through duly constituted church structures and authorities. We believe that church leaders at all levels have the responsibility to cooperate to see that this happens. While we believe that the dissenting Unions involved were precipitous in the actions they took, yet the world church has been slow to respond to the expressed concerns from North America and Europe on issues related to women and ministry. There is fault on both sides, and any move forward needs to recognize this.

Secondly, we believe that if a variation is allowed from the leadership ideal as found in the Bible, that it be viewed as an accommodation from the general rule, and not as the new rule. Along with our commitment to upholding the Scriptural ideal, we do not want to contribute to the further weakening of male responsibility for leadership and spiritual guidance in the home, either in North America, or overseas. Men, we believe, need to feel a special duty and sense of obligation to provide oversight for their homes and families, as outlined in the Bible.

Thirdly, and related to the above point, we have serious hermeneutical concerns about the methods used by some who desire to relativize or read as simply cultural the New Testament passages related to gender and authority. A central concern is that of the Biblical passages on marriage and sexuality. Sexual practices are fundamentally different from gender and leadership as a moral concern, and this is recognized as such in the Bible. Variation is allowed in gender and leadership; whereas no exception is ever made for adulterous or homosexual practice. Yet, we believe that the two issues are hermeneutically related. If we treat Paul’s statements in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians about gender roles in church as being purely cultural—despite Paul’s rooting them in the creation order, the nature of humanity, and the nature of God, why should the gay community be required to take seriously Paul’s similar statements regarding creation, nature, God’s law, and homosexual practice in Romans 1, 1 Tim 1:10, and elsewhere?

An issue even closer to the heart of Adventism is the Sabbath. In the New Testament, there are more and clearer statements maintaining the post-fall role of male leadership than exist about the continuing obligation of the Seventh-day Sabbath. If we relativize passages about gender and leadership, rooted as they are in creation and Eden, it makes it more challenging to insist that the Sabbath, another ordinance from creation, is of continuing validity, in light of the relative absence of New Testament re-assertions of that principle.
In view of these hermeneutical concerns, we believe that the world church should uphold the ideal of male servant-leadership—carried out in the loving and self-sacrificing spirit of Christ—in the home and in the church. But we believe that it should do so with the recognition that certain cultural or social circumstances may allow for some modification of these leadership roles. The church already does this in regards to leadership in China. While the Adventist church does not oversee the church in China as it does in the rest of the world, the world church recognizes the pastoral leadership roles of the ordained women pastors in China, and we believe that this is appropriate.

Already in North America we have had women serving as pastors and elders for decades. They do all the things their male counterparts do, with the only difference being the pastoral status of “commissioned” rather than “ordained.” The women playing these roles are among some of our most effective and engaged ministers and elders. To reverse this process will threaten schism, as the reality is that this practice is so entrenched that attempts to reverse it will be widely misunderstood as the imposition of non-western cultural norms on North America and Europe. It could quite easily result in some kind of breakdown of fellowship, or even schism.

In North America and much of the West, it is considered that any different treatment of the genders is downright bigotry, and as immoral as racism. In her own day, Ellen White said that “perils” to the church in ordaining women were posed by a “gainsaying world” (Daughters of God, 255). But the situation is now reversed in North America and the West. The “perils” to the church posed by the world are now the opposite; western society thinks we are hopelessly backward and bigoted by not accepting female equality in church office. Indeed, we believe that there are many changes that we could and should make to create greater opportunity for female ministers short of full pastoral ordination. Our church has been too culturally conservative in matters of gender, much more so than were our pioneers.

As we said in the introduction, we believe that the church needs to implement a ministry track for women on a worldwide basis that would create more and diverse professional ministry opportunities for women in the church, consistent with the headship teachings outlined above. It should also be willing to recognize that certain parts of the church may hold an honest conviction that full gender equality in pastoral leadership is necessary in their field, and should provide a mechanism where the world church could allow this in an orderly manner.

We in the minority do not find these arguments sufficiently compelling to move away from the biblical ideal in North America. But we think that the segments of the church facing these issues should be given allowance by the world Church to implement this variance if it is seen as necessary. On some issues, religious liberty should be allowed for, even within the church. We believe that the concerns of the world church could be addressed by a formal statement by the church affirming the Bible’s teaching on headship and male responsibility for family and spiritual leadership. This statement of church ideals would be accompanied by a recognition of the freedom that God at times allows the church to apply those ideals in varied ways depending on time, place, and culture. It would also contain a recognition and protection of the rights of Divisions and Unions to accept or reject women’s ordination as their members and leaders feel convicted.

Often we think of religious freedom in terms of the relation of the church to the state, but Paul in the New Testament allows for a latitude of religious liberty for certain kinds of differences within the church, including certain dietary matters and ritual observation. He says, “who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls.” Rom. 14:4
Likewise, if another church chooses as a servant of the church a woman, and that is what that congregation desires, how does that affect your church, or conference, or division, which would not be impacted by that choice? Should we not let church answer to their Master, which is ultimately God? In light of the adjustments accepted by God in various leadership roles in the Bible, we think it would be wisest, most charitable, and also biblically consistent for the world church to allow local variation on this point. Insisting on uniformity will result in contentious and even ugly confrontation, and even then uniformity may well not be obtained.

Allowing diversity on this point would be consistent with the spirit, we believe, of Paul’s command that we represent God by “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). The unity of the body of Christ, meant to be reflective of the unity of the Godhead, is a central and basic doctrine of the gospel. We believe that it is more central than is the precise nature and manner of leadership within the church. If we stand rigidly on a particular ordination practice, and sacrifice church unity and fellowship for it, rather than being like Luther at Worms, we believe we would be like Luther at the Marburg Colloquy. At Marburg, Luther refused to extend the hand of fellowship to Ulrich Zwingli because of what was really a minor difference in understanding over the nature of the communion ordinance. This unfortunate rift aided in the general disintegration of early Protestantism into competing denominations, sadly retarding the spread of the gospel.

The irony of the Marburg Colloquy, of course, is that the ritual that was meant to symbolize the unity of Christ and His church actually ended being a central point of contention and disunity. Likewise, ordination is a ritual instituted to help bring order and unity of action to the church. Let us not cause this ritual of order and unity to be the cause of rending the garment of Christ, or the Body of Christ. Rather, let us seek to fulfill the words of Christ, that “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that you sent Me, and love them, even as you have loved me.” (John 17:23.) This is our plea and our prayer, and the spirit in which this report is written.