

# The Labyrinth of Women's Ordination: A Way Out

By Edwin de Kock

## I

**M**y original title was to have been “To Ordain or Not to Ordain: The Hezekiah Option,” and I began by saying it might suggest that I was writing an article about the hot topic of women’s ordination to the pastoral ministry. I also asked what Hezekiah had to do with it. In the meantime, because my article has grown into a book, I have had to change the title. And yet I cannot get that monarch off my mind, because of something which happened in his time.

Hezekiah was the thirteenth king of ancient Judah, living and ruling seven hundred years before Christ. According to the Old Testament, he led his people in their desperate struggle against the terrible Assyrians under Sennacherib. He was also a marvelous reformer who exerted himself to eradicate idolatry:

“He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.” (2 Kings 18: 3, 4) That is, he did his level best to reestablish the worship of the true God.

But what about the Nehushtan? As our Bible Dictionary explains, this word means “bronze serpent,”<sup>1</sup> for that is what it was. Moses had made it centuries earlier during the Exodus when the rebellious Israelites bellyached and murmured as they often did. Therefore, in punishment the Most High just withdrew his protection against the poisonous snakes that infested the wilderness through which they were traveling. Many of them were bitten and died, so the people repented. Moses then prayed for them, and the Lord said to him: “Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it,

shall live.” Those who did so were healed. (Num. 21:7-9)

It was also a marvelous symbol of the Redeemer. In his night interview with Nicodemus, Jesus would one day apply it to himself when he said: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14, 15).

The descendants of the ancient Israelites understandably venerated it, but then they went a step too far. By Hezekiah’s time they had made an idol of it, and so he destroyed it. Several prophets, among them Isaiah, added their voices to his call for national reform and must have heartily approved of his actions. We are, however, now concerned with their reaction to the Nehushtan episode. Undoubtedly some people were outraged. But did the Lord send one of his servants to rebuke the king? Imagine the prophet saying: “Hezekiah, you did a very wicked thing by destroying that holy object!”

If that had happened, it would surely have been written in the Bible—which always tells the truth without fear or favor. The Scriptures contain no such record. Burning incense to the Nehushtan transgressed the Second Commandment; therefore, regrettably, it had to be destroyed along with the other idols.

Nowadays, many Christian groups or denominations—such as the Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and others—also have their Nehushtan. It is the ordination of men to the gospel ministry, but excluding women from such a status. This raises the males up above females and also the clergy above the laity, putting them on a pedestal, which can become a species of idolatry.

Motivated, ultimately, not by theology but by masculine pride, it is a manifestation of the Luciferian sin. Just hours before he suffered for us, our Lord rebuked the ambition of some disciples to be elevated above the others, seeking a higher status than their fellows: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:25-28, NKJV) At the last supper, to emphasize this idea, he

also washed the apostles' feet and asked: "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:12-15, NKJV)

The three churches mentioned, Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, and Seventh-day Adventists, have all in recent times been shaken by dramatic reactions to the idea and particularly the practice of women's ordination.

Also, though in theory discussing it would seem to be simple by seeing what the Bible has to say about it, several factors make it a difficult subject. The researcher is constantly tempted to wander off into other matters, which may or may not be relevant, like the headship of men, etc. That is to follow a veritable will-o'-the-wisp, "a person or thing that is difficult or impossible to find, reach, or catch." A Latin equivalent of this metaphor is *ignis fatuus* ("foolish fire"), "something deceptive or deluding," originally a phosphorescent light seen hovering or floating at night on marshy ground." Or, to change the image once more, women's ordination is—as my title suggests—a labyrinth. Fortunately, though, there is an exit and, on the way out, even the slaying of a Minotaur as in ancient, mythical Crete.

Nevertheless, there are genuine complexities. One of them is a substratum of ideas and attitudes which, for instance, Protestants have unthinkingly inherited from non-Biblical antecedents or other religions. This varies in different parts of the world; but Catholic hierarchy, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and African animism all have one thing in common: the subordination of women. Whether it is Latin-American machismo or sub-Saharan patriarchy, it exerts a noticeable and unfortunate influence on their theology.

## II

On 24 June 2013, Greta Kreuz of ABC News reported how five Roman Catholic women were ordained at Falls, Virginia. For this ceremony, performed by Bishop Mary Meehan, they were guests in the First Christian Church. As a consequence,

they were automatically excommunicated, though they still regard themselves as members of the Roman Church. Catering to their interests is the small but growing Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests.<sup>2</sup>

In December of the previous year, a related incident drew considerable attention. Becky Bratu of NBC News reported that Bill Brennan, a 92-year-old Jesuit, had been suspended from his priestly functions by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee as well as the Society of Jesus. He had transgressed by performing a liturgy at Columbus, Georgia, where another participant was Janice Sevre-Duszynska, an ordained woman.<sup>3</sup>

Bratu pointed out that “the Catholic Church prohibits women’s ordination, saying it has no authority to ordain women because Jesus chose only men as his apostles.” Nevertheless, “about 59 percent of American Catholics are in favor of women’s ordination, according to a 2010 poll by *The New York Times* and *CBS*, but the Vatican sees the initiative as having the potential to cause a rift in the church.”<sup>4</sup>

Two powerful factors influence this situation. One is that Catholics in the United States are Americans, shaped by female emancipation. The other is the shortage of clerics. According to Vince Corso, a married Franciscan, “One out of every three Roman Catholic priests in the United States has transitioned from celibacy to the married priesthood. The total is over 20,000—that’s an average of over 400 married priests per state who are available to serve in their local parishes. There are over 110,000 married priests worldwide.”<sup>5</sup> Concerning this, we have seen other, less sensational statistics but do not doubt that this problem has become critical.

### III

Very instructive is what has been happening among Baptists, especially within the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States with almost 16 million members. It originated in 1845, at Atlanta, Georgia, just one year later than the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which began in 1844 and now has more than 17 million baptized members world wide. Most of these, however, are outside the United States, while the SBC is

largely an American church.

Apart from baptism by immersion, SDAs owe a great debt to the Baptists for their two most characteristic doctrines, the belief in a premillennial Second Coming and the obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. The former was derived from William Miller (1782-1849), a Baptist; the latter, from Rachel Oakes Preston (1809-1868), a Seventh Day Baptist. It is true that SBC has a *Faith and Message Statement* containing a clause which requires Sunday observance and therefore contradicts the Fourth Commandment. But SDAs also baptize by immersion, believe as they do about righteousness by faith, and have many doctrines similar to theirs.

Today as well, we can learn much from the Baptists, particularly Southern Baptists, as they likewise wrestle with the problem of women's ordination. The arguments that the different factions advance in their debate about it are practically all the same ones used by SDAs. The resultant woes in the SBC can even be perceived as an object lesson and cautionary tale, a dire warning of what awaits us if we are not careful.

Beginning in 1979, the SBC initiated a very controversial purge. While some Southern Baptists call it a Conservative Resurgence, others say it was a Fundamentalist Takeover. "Theologically moderate and liberal leaders were voted out of office. Though some senior employees were fired from their jobs, most were replaced through attrition. All moderate and liberal presidents, professors, department heads, etc., of Southern Baptist seminaries, mission groups and other convention-owned institutions were replaced with conservatives. The Takeover/Resurgence was the most serious controversy ever to occur within the Southern Baptist Convention . . . One of its chief architects later described it as a 'reformation . . . achieved at an incredibly high cost.'"<sup>6</sup>

Although it began in 1845, the denomination had written its first creed in 1925, *The Baptist Faith and Message Statement*. In 1998 and 2000 this was amended. An important addition of 1998, retained in 2000 under **XVIII. The Family**, was the following statement: "A wife is to submit herself with kindness to the servant leadership of her husband. A wife

submits just as the church willingly submits to the leadership of Christ. This makes the wife and husband equals. She has the God-given duty [to] respect her husband. She is to serve as his helper in running the household and supporting the next generation.”<sup>7</sup>

In 2000, the SBC leadership went further and took a stand against the ordination of women.

The 1925 creed had declared of the church: “Its Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.”<sup>8</sup> According to the New Testament, this twofold distinction is correct—although it also speaks of apostles, whose office included an intercongregational function. But in 1998 the wording was modified to read: “Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.”<sup>9</sup> This, however, is incorrect. In the New Testament church, there were no pastors, only elders. All the same, up to 1998 the SBC *Faith and Message* said nothing about limiting its ministry to males. But in 2000 it did. Under Article VI, **The Church**, it said: “The church’s scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. Both men and women are given gifts by the Holy Spirit for service in the church. The office of pastor is limited to men that meet the qualifications found in Scripture.”<sup>10</sup>

Also debated in circles that produced this addition, though the *Faith and Message* says nothing about it, was the idea that females should also be debarred from being deacons, Sunday School teachers, and so on. After all, the apostle Paul had said: “I do not permit a woman to teach. . .” (1 Tim. 2:12, NKJV)

The effects of these creedal revisions and discussions have been explosively disruptive and brought about startling membership losses. Most spectacularly, this included the defection of the best-known Southern Baptist, who decided “to sever his ties with the Southern Baptist Convention after being affiliated with it for six decades.”<sup>11</sup>

#### IV

His name is Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States and a well-known humanitarian.

He believed unreservedly in the equality of women both

theologically and for everything else. Specifically, he gave full credit to his wife Rosalyn for her part in his successful race for the presidency: “‘Rosalynn and I were the ones that discussed every facet of the prospective campaign. . . . She can do everything as well as I can.’ Her sensitivity to the feelings of people helped to form his positions, and he always claimed that she was a ‘full partner or better.’”<sup>12</sup>

She also supported his battle for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. It had first been introduced in 1923, just three years after the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave American women the right to vote. Throughout the rest of the 1920’s as well as the 1930’s and 1940’s, the ERA failed to make much headway. After World War II, under Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon, Congress voted to adopt it. But subsequently over the years various powerful interest groups opposed it, including the American Federation of Labor and other labor unions. Consequently the ERA failed to obtain the endorsement by three-quarters of the States as required by the Constitution. In 1978, President Carter tried again, although it garnered no further support. Since then, in every Congress, there were attempts to revive the ERA. The 113th Congress of 2013 “has a record number of women.” Senator Robert Menendez has reintroduced the ERA “as S.J. RES. 10.” But it is not yet the law of the land.<sup>13</sup>

Jimmy Carter found the SBC additions to its creed and its subsequent actions repugnant. He said that “discrimination and abuse wrongly backed by doctrine are damaging society.” Also, for him, it went well beyond reactionary Christian theology. He linked it to the issue of universal Human Rights. On 11 July 2009, *The Observer* headlined his decision with the words: “The words of God do not justify cruelty to women.”

He cited Article 2 in the Universal Declaration of *Human Rights*, which states that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms” set forth in it, “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, *religion*, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” To this he added a statement from the Bible: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

(Galatians 3:28)

Carter found it painful and difficult as “a deacon and Bible teacher for many years” to sever his ties with the SBC. “It was, however, an unavoidable decision when the convention’s leaders, quoting a few carefully selected Bible verses and claiming that Eve was created second to Adam and was responsible for original sin, ordained that women must be ‘subservient’ to their husbands and prohibited from serving as deacons, pastors or chaplains in the military service. This was in conflict with my belief—confirmed in the holy scriptures—that we are all equal in the eyes of God.”

He went on to point out that the belief in women’s inferiority was not restricted to one religion. “Nor, tragically, does its influence stop at the walls of the church, mosque, synagogue or temple. This discrimination, unjustifiably attributed to a Higher Authority, has provided a reason or excuse for the deprivation of women’s equal rights across the world for centuries. The male interpretations of religious texts and the way they interact with, and reinforce, traditional practices justify some of the most pervasive, persistent, flagrant and damaging examples of human rights abuses.

“At their most repugnant, the belief that women must be subjugated to the wishes of men excuses slavery, violence, forced prostitution, genital mutilation and national laws that omit rape as a crime. But it also costs many millions of girls and women control over their own bodies and lives, and continues to deny them fair access to education, health, employment and influence within their own communities.”

Also quoted in *The Observer* were these paragraphs:

“Although not having training in religion or theology, I understand that the carefully selected verses found in the holy scriptures to justify the superiority of men owe more to time and place—and the determination of male leaders to hold onto their influence—than eternal truths. Similar Biblical excerpts could be found to support the approval of slavery, and the timid acquiescence to oppressive rulers.

“At the same time, I am also familiar with vivid descriptions in the same scriptures in which women are revered as pre-eminent leaders. During the years of the early Christian church women served as deacons, priests, bishops,



apostles, teachers and prophets. It wasn't until the fourth century that dominant Christian leaders, all men, twisted and distorted holy scriptures to perpetuate their ascendant position within the religious hierarchy."<sup>14</sup>

Carter's remarks were shrewdly apt. It is so true that theologians are often timeservers. And by referring to the justification of slavery from the Bible he stabbed the Southern Baptists in a very sensitive spot. In fact, he was twisting his knife most painfully. It concerned the origin, even the original *raison d'être*, of their church.

"The word *Southern* in Southern Baptist Convention stems from its having been founded and rooted in the Southern United States. In 1845, members at a regional convention held in Augusta, Georgia, created the SBC, following a split from northern Baptists over the issue of forbidding Southern slave-owners from becoming ordained missionaries."<sup>15</sup>

Another problem was racism. A second split occurred when most black Baptists separated from the whites to set up their own congregations and other structures.<sup>16</sup>

To the honor of the SBC, it must be added that it has thoroughly and without reservation apologized for both its racism and complicity in slavery. It did so in June 1995 at Atlanta, Georgia. That is, in the same State where it had been created 150 years earlier. Among other things, its official Resolution on these issues included statements like the following: "Our relationship to African-Americans has been hindered from the beginning by the role that slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention . . . Many of our Southern Baptist forbears defended the right to own slaves, and either participated in, supported, or acquiesced in the particularly inhumane nature of American slavery; and . . . In later years Southern Baptists failed, in many cases, to support, and in some cases opposed, legitimate initiatives to secure the civil rights of African-Americans . . ."<sup>17</sup>

The SBC followed up on this gesture, when at its annual convention in 2012 it "elected as president Fred Luter, Jr., the first African American to hold the position." He was re-elected to that position at the 2013 meeting. One of the motives is that "especially since the late twentieth century, the SBC has sought new members among minority groups and become much more diverse."<sup>18</sup>

Jimmy Carter certainly knew all about the 1995 Resolution.

Nevertheless, in 2009 when he was leaving the SBC, he could not forbear about the slavery issue and how theology had been abused to condone it.

## VI

Let us then look more closely at this now by going back to the nineteenth century before the American Civil War, and earlier. Some of what we have discovered may shock the reader.

“Passages in the Bible on the use and regulation of slavery have been used throughout history as justification for the keeping of slaves, and for guidance in how it should be done. Therefore, when abolition was proposed, many Christians spoke vociferously against it, citing the Bible’s acceptance of slavery as ‘proof’ that it was part of the normal condition. George Whitefield, famed for his sparking of the so-called *Great Awakening* of American evangelicalism, campaigned, in the Province of Georgia, for the legalization of slavery; slavery had been outlawed in Georgia, but it was legalized in 1751 due in large part to Whitefield’s efforts.

“In both Europe and the United States many Christians went further, arguing that slavery was actually justified by the words and doctrines of the Bible.”<sup>19</sup>

Robert Dabney, a prominent nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterian pastor, argued: “Every hope of the existence of church and state, and of civilization itself, hangs upon our arduous effort to defeat the doctrine of Negro suffrage.” And so, “in 1837, southerners in the Presbyterian denomination joined forces with conservative northerners to drive the antislavery New School Presbyterians out of the denomination. In 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church split into northern and southern wings over the issue of slavery. In 1845, the Baptists in the South formed the Southern Baptist Convention due to disputes with Northern Baptists over slavery and missions.”

At that time, Richard Furman, who presided over the South Carolina Baptist Convention, stated: “The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example.”

Here, too, is the testimony of another important Bible-believing Christian, Jefferson Davis, President, Confederate States of America: “[Slavery] was established by decree of Almighty God . . . it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation . . . it has existed in all ages, has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts.”<sup>20</sup>

Here we also note that many of these utterances were at least subconsciously hypocritical, for these speakers failed to reveal their grubby economic motive. They were not really so interested in serving Christ the King as *King Cotton*.

This was a “phrase frequently used by Southern politicians and authors prior to the American Civil War, indicating the economic and political importance of cotton production. After the invention of the cotton gin (1793), cotton surpassed tobacco as the dominant cash crop in the agricultural economy of the South, soon comprising more than half the total U.S. exports.

“The concept of ‘King Cotton’ was first suggested in David Christy’s book *Cotton Is King* (1855). Convinced of the supremacy of its commodity at home and abroad, the South was confident of success if secession from the Union should lead to war. On the floor of the U.S. Senate, Senator James H. Hammond declaimed (March 4, 1858): ‘You dare not make war upon cotton! No power on earth dares make war upon it. Cotton is king.’”

Nevertheless, “the South was wrong. Skillful diplomacy by the North, coupled with English abolitionist allegiances and Confederate military failure at crucial stages of the war, kept Britain from intervening. Rather than enter the war on the side of the slave states, Britain developed alternate sources of cotton cultivation elsewhere in the empire.”<sup>21</sup>

## VII

But not everybody who defended slavery by quoting from the Good Book was necessarily a hypocrite. There actually are statements in the writings of the apostle Paul which seem to uphold slavery as an institution. And interestingly it is linked

to the subordination of women and what Jimmy Carter had to say.

In Eph. 5:22, 23, we read: “Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife.” This proclaims not the general headship of men over women but of husbands within their families. That is, my wife must accept my headship, in the Lord; for she is married to me. She does not, however, have to acknowledge the headship over her of any other man.

Excluded, for instance, is the fellow whom we sometimes hire to help her in the garden. He hardly speaks English and is more or less illiterate. He also drinks too much beer, which has affected his mental capacity. She, on the other hand, has two degrees plus several diplomas and taught at the local university for several years. Does she have to acknowledge his headship over her?

Common sense also suggests that a husband’s role has limits. If he is slipping into Alzheimer’s disease or through an accident has suffered brain damage or become mentally and physically decrepid, his wife must assume the headship. She likewise need not accept his decisions if they are of a criminal or an immoral nature, and if they undermine her spiritual ministry. Et cetera,

In the next chapter, Paul goes on to tell children that they must obey their parents (Eph. 6:1-3), as also stated by one of the Ten Commandments.

Further he said: “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ” (Eph. 6:5).

This is problematic. The bondservants of the ancient Roman Empire were δούλοι (douloi), “slaves.” Did the apostle endorse the institution of human bondage? On the surface of it, he did. In the matter of Onesimus, who ran away from Philemon, his owner, the apostle even disregarded an Old Testament instruction from the Lord not to return a runaway slave: “You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses, within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.” (Deut. 23:15, 16)

So why did Paul return Onesimus to Philemon, bearing a conciliatory letter? He had a very good reason for doing so.

Already by the first century before our era, the Roman Empire to a large extent based its economy on the labor of slaves. They made up about 20 percent of its population. From time to time, these unfortunate people rebelled. Between 140 and 70 B.C., this culminated in three great slave uprisings called “Servile Wars, since the Latin for ‘slave’ is *servus*.” The best known today was the one under Spartacus, a skillful gladiator. N. S. Gill, a Latinist and freelance writer cites Barry Strauss, according to whom Spartacus defeated nine Roman armies before the forces of Crassus defeated him.<sup>22</sup> As all the ancient writers would have it, he died fighting, although his body was never found.<sup>23</sup> And “mass crucifixions followed the Third Servile War in 73-71 . . . To frighten other slaves from revolting, Crassus crucified 6,000 of Spartacus’ men along the Appian Way from Capua to Rome.”<sup>24</sup>

Slavery in the Roman Empire was an extremely sensitive issue. For Christians, it was also potentially very dangerous. For Paul to have confronted it could have brought disaster on the infant church, which was already for other reasons prone to persecution.

And what about role of women? It is possible to clarify some things that Paul wrote about it with reference to the status of females in ancient Greek society. Married women were largely confined to their homes, with little education and limited rights, like Muslims and Hindus in some countries today.

There was, however, also a class of hetairai, a word which means *companions*. Intellectually they were cultivated women but also high-class prostitutes, somewhat like Japanese geishas. In both Corinth and Athens, the hetairai were “especially noted for their outstanding physical and cultural accomplishments.” In associating with men, they were witty and learned as well as physically alluring.<sup>25</sup> For a Christian woman to converse freely with a man who was not her husband or to discuss theology in church could therefore easily cause unfriendly critics to say that she was an immoral hetaira.

In any case, if present-day Christians no longer need to

uphold slavery—indeed, must not do so—should they still insist on the perpetual bondage of the woman? She has, after all, for many centuries been the man’s *antikva sklavino* (eternal slave), as Gaston Waringhien, a powerful and subtle French Esperanto writer once declared.

## VIII

Carter was not the only high-profile Southern Baptist who left his church or criticized the 1998 and 2000 transformations of *The Baptist Faith and Message Statement*. Another was Dr. Russell H. Dilday. There was also the interesting case of David Flick.

Dilday had been President of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which has its main campus at Fort Worth, Texas. Founded in 1908, “it grew out of the Baylor University theological department, which was established in 1901.” It is one of the largest seminaries in the world and has graduated more than 40,000 students from the United States and abroad.<sup>26</sup> Dilday’s tenure of sixteen years began in 1978. During his time, in 1990, “*Christianity Today* released a poll of its readers ranking the effectiveness of American seminaries. Southwestern Seminary was ranked number one among the top 33 graduate theological schools in the nation.”<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, in March 1994, Dilday, a Texan who had earned both his M.Div. and Ph.D. at Southwestern, was abruptly fired as president of his Alma Mater, despite a brilliant academic career. His dismissal formed part of the so-called Conservative Resurgence, which he and others have regarded as a Fundamentalist Takeover.

In his own way, Dilday was as high-profile a Southern Baptist as Jimmy Carter. He received honorary degrees from Baylor University (L.L.D.), Mercer University (D.D.), William Jewell College (L.H.D.), and Dallas Baptist University (D.Hum). He has, moreover, “been recognized by *Texas Monthly* magazine as one of the ‘Texas Twenty’—persons across the state who ‘have proved to be pivotal forces in their respective fields—and, by extension, in Texas.’” *The Baptist Standard* also named him “as one of the ‘ten most

influential Texas Baptists in the twentieth century.”

Within months of his dismissal, in August 1994, “Dilday was hired by Baylor University to serve as a distinguished professor of homiletics at the George W. Truett Theological Seminary and to be a special assistant to Baylor President Herbert Reynolds. He also served as Acting Dean of Truett Seminary. He served as interim President of Howard Payne University from 2002-2003.”<sup>28</sup>

Dilday was “the only president” of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary “ever to be removed.”<sup>29</sup> Despite his claim that he was not a liberal, his dismissal must have been due to his ideas, which we will be dealing with. First, however, let us in passing note that the process of purging the Seminary continued after his departure.

For instance, on 28 January 2007, Associated Press under the headline “Professor: Seminary ousted her over gender,” reported that Dr. Sheri Klouda, lost her work because an administrator, whom she would not name, “told her that [President] Patterson would not be recommending her for tenure because she is female.” Since her husband needed hospitalization due to a heart problem, she was “the primary financial resources for the family.” At first, “I was assured I could stay until I found another position.” She continued teaching for two more years, but “In January 2006, the same administrator told her she would no longer be able to teach but would be paid through the 2006-2007 academic year. [But] a couple weeks later, she was told she would be terminated at the end of 2006.”<sup>30</sup>

Why? Because “Southern Baptist leaders agree that the role of pastor is reserved for men, based on a verse in 1st Timothy in which the Apostle Paul says, ‘I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man.’ The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message prohibits women from serving as pastors. Critics within the denomination say the interpretation should not be applied to the seminary because it is not a church.”<sup>31</sup>

It is pleasant to record that this gifted woman found employment with Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. Founded in 1846, this is one of the oldest evangelical Christian colleges in America, an interdenominational institution.<sup>32</sup> She was hired full time, promoted, and granted



tenure in 2012.<sup>33</sup>

## IX

Now what about Dr. Dilday? He regarded himself as a moderate rather than a liberal. But he did commit the grievous sin of thinking for himself, unlike the radicals who ruthlessly purged out everybody who disagreed with them. The *Baptist Standard* of 30 April 2001 contained a study by him entitled “An Analysis of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.” In this, he looked closely at and compared its 1925, 1989, and 2000 versions. While in the last mentioned he commended some of the revisions, some of them troubled him. He said: “Negative concerns about BFM2000 seem to cluster around twelve issues,” as follows:

1. The deletion of the Christocentric criterion for interpretation of Scripture.
2. The diminishing of the doctrines of soul competency and the priesthood of the believer.
3. The trend toward creedalism.
4. The diminishing of the doctrine of autonomy and freedom of the local church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
5. The trend toward Calvinism and mistrust of personal Christian experience.
6. The trend shifting Baptist identity from its Anabaptist, free church tradition to a reformed evangelical identity.
7. The narrow interpretation of the role of women in marriage.
8. The narrow interpretation of the role of women in the church.
9. The “Pandora’s box” concern—a fear of repeated future revisions to include favorite opinions.
10. The trend toward including a catalogue of specific sins.
11. The false accusation of neo-orthodoxy.
12. Inconsistency.<sup>34</sup>

For SDAs, many of these issues are also important. Let us

therefore briefly consider some of Dilday’s remarks and their relevance to women’s ordination. Incidentally, “soul competency” is SBC speak for the view that individual Christians may go directly to God through Christ without any other mediator—an excellent Protestant principle.

Dilday, under point 3, detected a trend toward creedalism. Historically, Southern Baptists, like Seventh-day Adventists, have been averse to setting up a creed. Both denominations have been slow to produce documents to describe their doctrines. SDAs now have 28 Fundamental Beliefs, described in so much specific detail that they fill a big book. Is this not a very detailed creed? Supposedly they are *descriptors* not *prescriptors*. That is, “they describe the official position of the church but are not a [*sic*] criteria for membership.”<sup>35</sup> This conclusion is questionable. Unfortunately, SDAs are also drifting toward creedalism.

For Dilday, this leads on directly to point 4: “Diminishing the doctrine of autonomy and freedom of the local church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.” The SBC churches have a congregational structure. Though they all espouse the same doctrines, each one of them runs its own affairs and is in this sense autonomous. Why? Because “from the beginning, Baptists have resisted any kind of denominational hierarchy, any form of ‘top-down’ governance from a central denominational office. They have fiercely defended the right of every congregation to make its own decisions as they believe God leads them—even if others believe they are wrong.” According to Dilday, by “limiting who can be called to be the pastor of a local congregation” the 2000 revision of the Baptist Faith and Message “is seen as a direct intervention in the church’s freedom to choose its own leaders.”<sup>36</sup>

Does the local emphasis of the SBC justify theological anarchism? Not at all. “This does not mean that a local church can believe anything and still have the right to participate in associations or conventions. Baptist conventions and associations are also autonomous and can set limits and criteria for participation. But to some, the BFM2000 seems to signal a trend toward more authoritarian control—even if subtle and informal—over local congregations”<sup>37</sup>

What Dilday objected to and rejected for the SBC looks

very much like the structure of the SDA Church, which is explicitly opposed to congregationalism. Its greatest strength of the latter lies in how it allocates funds, both tithes and offerings, for wider distribution in a worldwide work. Its greatest weakness is an extremely limited democracy. In theory, SDA authority and power reach upward, all the way from the local congregation to the president of the General Conference. In practice, however, that is not how it works.

This topic is dealt with in greater detail below. Here it suffices to note that SDA pastoral ordination is not, as in the SBC, authorized, credentialed, or administered at the level of the local congregation. This all occurs from higher up and is therefore hierarchical. Ironically, though, the office of the pastor, as something different from that of the elder, is unbiblical. It is also different from and to some extent contrary to older SDA practice and thinking during the nineteenth century.

Referring to point 7, Dilday criticized *The Baptist Faith and Message Statement* in its 2000 version for “The narrow interpretation of the role of women in marriage.” He said:

The new statement is based on deficient Biblical interpretation, adding some words not in the Scriptures, and selectively omitting other Biblical teachings on the same subject. The amendment does not make clear that the primary passage used (Ephesians 5:21-33) begins with the statement “Submit yourselves to one another.” While it refers to the husband’s responsibility to love his wife, the amendment does not explain that the word for ‘love’ (agape) means an unselfish submission to another. Properly understood then, the passage also calls for equal, if not greater submission of husband to wife.

As it stands, some see the revision as a faulty expression of a one-sided male authoritarian role in marriage that is not Biblical. It seems rather to be another rendering of the hierarchical authoritarian pattern (God—man—woman—child) popularized in the seventies and eighties by groups such as “Basic Youth Conflict Seminars.”<sup>38</sup>

Dilday’s 8th point was titled “The narrow interpretation of

the role of women in the church.” He maintained that those who had in 2000 revised *The Baptist Faith and Message Statement* should not so cavalierly brush aside the views of conservative scholars in other denominations. About this, he declared:

For example, other conservative interpreters believe the passage in 1 Tim. 1:8-15 which is usually translated “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent,” is actually a prohibition not against all women, but against a wife exerting authority over her husband in the church. They believe the passage is intended to protect the marriage relationship, not to limit a woman’s leadership role in the church.

Similarly, in 1 Cor. 14:34, “The women should keep silence in the churches,” the word “silence” used here means “be silent in this one instance.” In verse 30, the same word is used for men who are to keep silent when another is speaking. Some conservatives believe the passage means wives are not to correct their husbands publicly in church. This is Paul’s way of preserving the marriage relationship.

In 1 Cor. 11:2-09 Paul acknowledges that women are to “pray and prophesy” in church, but he admonishes them to do so in proper apparel or with proper hair styles.<sup>39</sup>

Calling for tolerance, Dilday concluded: “Surely these alternate conservative interpretations of these passages should not be prohibited.” He also referred to an article in *Christianity Today* on 4 September 2000, p. 105, reminding the revisers of BFM “that denominations like The Church of the Nazarene, Church of God, Evangelical Friends, Free Methodists, The Salvation Army, and the Wesleyan Church all take their Bibles seriously, but they all share a long heritage of women pastors and preachers.”<sup>40</sup>

It is doubtful that the SBC mandarins who had fired Dilday as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary could be swayed by such arguments. Most likely for them his arguments simply proved that he was a dangerous thinker and in their opinion justified his dismissal.

Less restrained and more militant was “Why Not Ordain Women?” by David Flick. Born and bred a Southern Baptist, he received his degrees from SBC institutions. His BA was at William Carey College (later University) in 1970, his Master of Divinity at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1974, and his Doctor of Ministry at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1995.<sup>41</sup> He was also ordained as a minister of the SBC. Afterwards, however, due to conflict with the teachings of that denomination, he became an American Baptist and as an individual joined the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CFB) of Oklahoma.<sup>42</sup> Let us see what this entailed.

The American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) had 1,310,505 members in 2009 and 5,402 churches. Under several names, it developed out of the First Baptist Church which Roger Williams established in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1638. The convention adopted its present name in 1972 and is headquartered in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.<sup>43</sup> Of particular interest to this discussion is its Policy Statement on Ordained Ministry, comprising a little historical data and detailed guidelines, adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches in December 1989. Among other things, it says: “There were women preachers in the first generation of Baptists. Since these early times women exercised leadership in the churches. Baptist churches began ordaining women in the 1880s.”<sup>44</sup> It also makes additional points.

Ordination involves the laying on of hands, but first the Lord has to call the individual to ministry, whose experience and conduct needs to be scrutinized by the church. Further, the Policy Statement notes that “the earliest local churches had multiple leaders rather than single leaders in most cases (see Romans 16:1-2 for a possible exception). Churches with one pastoral leader emerged by the beginning of the second century A.D.” Also: “Not until the second century A.D. did the practice of laying on of hands become closely associated with ordination.”<sup>45</sup>

And what about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CFB),

with which Dr. David Flick also associated himself?

Created in 1990, it comprised “a group of moderate Southern Baptists and ex-Southern Baptists,” totaling 1900 Baptist churches in America. On the website of Fundamentalist Baptist Ministries, an archived article by Thomas Williamson asserts that they are both liberal and very ecumenical. CFB also tolerates homosexuality in churches affiliated to it, although in 2000 it passed a resolution which states “that no funds would be given to any organizations promoting homosexuality, nor would any practicing homosexuals be hired as staff persons or missionaries.”<sup>46</sup>

On its own website, CFB insists that it is neither a denomination nor a convention but a fellowship of churches. It consequently “values and respects the autonomy of each individual and local church to evaluate and make their own decision regarding social issues like homosexuality.” All the same, “as Baptist Christians, we believe that the foundation of a Christian sexual ethic is faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman and celibacy in singleness.”<sup>47</sup>

But what does this network of churches believe about gender and ordination?

Affirmation of women in ministry was one of the founding principles of the Fellowship. In the founding document of the Fellowship, the New Testament is acknowledged as providing two views of the role of women—a literal approach of submission to men or an inclusive approach. The document cites Galatians 3:27-28, “As many of you as are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (NRSV).”

The founding document continues to read:

We take Galatians as a clue to the way the Church should be ordered. We interpret the reference to women the same way we interpret the reference to slaves. If we have submissive roles for women, we must also have a place for slaves in the Church.

In Galatians Paul follows the spirit of Jesus who courageously challenged the conventional wisdom of his

day. It was a wisdom with rigid boundaries between men and women in religion and public life. Jesus deliberately broke those barriers. He called women to follow him; he treated women as equally capable of dealing with sacred issues. Our model for the role of women in matters of faith is the Lord Jesus.

In addition to a number of partner churches with women pastors, the Fellowship's emphasis on equality in leadership is seen by the intentional diversity of in its highest elected office—moderator. Nominations alternate between male and female, clergy and laity.<sup>48</sup>

These, then, are the organizations with which Dr. David Flick became associated. But how and why did he leave the ministry of SBC? It began with love for his daughter DaLeesa and respect for the role of two other women in ministry. This brought him into conflict with Kenneth Fritz, a deacon in the First Baptist Church of Dewey, Texas, where Flick was pastor. "Ken's view of women in prominent places of leadership in the church, especially in the offices of deacon and pastor, is ultra-fundamentalist. He was vehemently opposed for his wife, Dora Lee, to even teach men in Sunday School."<sup>49</sup> Fritz must have thought of the Apostle Paul's declaration: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man . . ." (1 Tim. 2:12, NKJV)

DaLeesa had moved to Denton, Texas, to study music at the University of North Texas, where she joined the Southmont church, which was near her apartment. But she did not realize that it was a moderate congregation affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.<sup>50</sup>

There are "about 80 local Texas Baptist associations and 5,700 local churches" that cooperate with it. Nine universities, including Baylor University are affiliated with it. BGCT "accepts the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message as its statement of faith." However, it "specifically does not accept the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message." It therefore has no creedal problem with female ministry. As a matter of fact, "in October 2007 the Convention elected its first women president, Joy Fenner of Garland, Texas."<sup>51</sup> In 2009, the BGCT "began to also go by the name Texas Baptists to better communicate

who they are.”<sup>52</sup>

After graduating, DaLeesa stayed on in Denton, for at the University of North Texas she had met and married a young Ph.D. student. He also joined Southmont. Having become very active in this church, she was nominated to be a deacon. She notified her father, David Flick, who was horrified, because his congregation at Dewey—and especially some deacons like Kenneth Fritz—believed “that women are to be submissive to their husbands and the male leadership in the church.”<sup>53</sup>

At this time, two other splendid women who served the Lord in their congregations also entered the picture, which led to further trouble and conflict with Fritz. The reader can read about them in Flick’s article on the Internet, and we need not here describe the details. But it was at this juncture, while Daleesa’s ordination was pending, that her minister father began to question his beliefs about the ordination of women. And this is when Flick decided to study the Bible for himself.

While reading the various texts which are often quoted, he noticed “that Article VI (*The Church*) in the 2KBF&M says nothing about female deacons. It speaks exclusively to pastors. Since the Bible speaks to both pastors and deacons, one wonders why the Article VI does not speak to both. A probable answer is the fundamentalists have no answer for Phoebe (*Rom. 16:1*) who was a female deacon.”<sup>54</sup>

In its translation for this verse, the Authorized/King James Version of Paul’s epistle says: “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea. . .” But about her the original text does not say *servant* but *deacon*. Here is the Greek for it: οὐσαν διακονον (ousan diakonon, “being a deacon”).

Of the first seven deacons, those who were chosen to officiate in the church at Jerusalem, we read that at their induction, “they laid their hands on them” (ἐπέθηκάν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας, *epethēkan autois tas cheiras*). A point of further interest is that the seven deacons were the very first Christians about whom we read that this was done to them. Even when Jesus appointed the twelve apostles, the Greek original does not use a special word for *ordain*, nor does it say that he laid hands on them. When Phebe was appointed as a deacon, surely this was also done through the laying on of hands!



At this point, an avalanche of ideas began to tumble through David Flick's mind. It soon made him juxtapose two key texts in the original, 1 Tim. 3:12 ("Let the deacons be husbands of one wife . . .") with Rom. 16:1 ("I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a deacon of the church"). He thought: "If I go with the Timothy passage, then ordaining women is patently and biblically wrong. If I go with the Roman passage, then why not ordain women?"<sup>55</sup>

What is so interesting about this argument is that Paul who wrote these epistles uses very similar language about *bishops*, a word which in the New Testament is synonymous with *elder*. We could nowadays reason similarly about *pastors*. Among other things, the apostle said: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife . . ." (1 Tim. 3:2).

Here was the sequel for Flick:

I wrestled with this issue long and hard. It was not easy to consider that I was wrong. Pride and peer pressure have a way of blocking a person into a particular view of Scripture. I was ready to shed the pride, but shedding the peer pressure was very difficult. I had been raised to believe that women are not qualified for certain offices in the church, including pastor and deacon. This was what my forebears had taught me. This was the tradition of Southern Baptists in my little corner of the world. And with the advent of Article XVIII and the changes made in the 2KBF7M, there seemed to be additional pressure for me to bow to the leaders who were tightening their theological noose around my neck. I felt tremendous fear of being rejected by my peers and my denomination.

Ultimately, after having given prayer and serious thought to this question, I have moved 180 degrees. I maintain that gender is a cultural issue, not a theological one. I maintain that God does not discriminate on the basis of gender. I maintain that those who use Scripture [to] fight hard against the ordination of women are doing so from a very questionable interpretation of the same.<sup>56</sup>

Naturally his opponents pounced on the conclusion that ordaining only men while refusing to lay hands on women was

a matter of culture rather than theology. But for this, too, Flick had an answer:

My critics declare that I'm *culturalizing* the Bible when I interpret it as I do. As I thought about it, I decided that I might be doing this. However, If I am *culturalizing* the Bible, then so are the fundamentalists. Whereas, I attempt to express my theology reflecting the current cultural gender norms, the fundamentalists attempt to use the Scriptures to superimpose 1st century gender norms on 21st century Christians. But the term "*culturalizing the Bible*" is so vague as to have little meaning for me. I subsequently decided that the Bible cannot be "*culturalized*." I believe the Bible fits all cultures for all times. As such, it speaks to every century, generation, and culture. Inasmuch as Paul was living in a 1st century culture, he used a 1st century paradigm for the church concerning pastors and deacons. The cultural gender norm in the 1st century was that men are superior to women in every facet of life, including the church. I believe it borders on the ridiculous to superimpose a 1st century cultural gender paradigm on the 21st century church.<sup>57</sup>

## XI

The upshot for David Flick personally was a change from one denomination to another. But what has been happening to the SBC?

Its churches have not resolved their dilemma and are fragmenting. Sometimes members leave to join other denominations; sometimes they do not, but preserve an internal dissent and act as they please in the matter of female ordination. That is, they rely on their congregationalist structure of governance, through which they enjoy substantial local autonomy.

This point was addressed by Austin Cline, an avowed agnostic, who has interested himself in this topic. Referring to the SBC decision in 1998 to deny leadership by women in their own families and in 2000 "to hold leadership roles in their churches," he said the change "did not say what should

happen to the 1,600 or so Southern Baptist clergy who existed at the time, about 100 of whom were leading congregations.” He thought these decisions were “not binding on individual Southern Baptists and the denomination’s 41,000 local congregations remained free to ordain women and hire them as pastors. Still, the fact that a change was made at all sent a powerful message and was designed to influence decisions at the congregational level.”<sup>58</sup>

Cline also swiped at the way in which SBC theologians used the Scriptures as well as their reasoning:

They don’t even appear to consistently follow the verses they do claim should be followed, for example the aforementioned 1 Timothy 2:11. Surely they allow women to teach Sunday School, sing in the choir, and speak at meetings. The fact of the matter is, they are being very selective in how they are trying to apply this “inerrant” verse.

Inerrantists say that the Bible is their “authoritative answer” to questions like that of women’s roles in church and family, but this isn’t entirely accurate. Instead, they follow a higher authority: a sexist attitude toward women which masks scripture so as to give their sexism a divine sanction. Is their problem with the ordination of women? No, their problem is more with women themselves.

Former SBC President Bailey Smith made some revealing statements when he told wives to be submissive to their husbands “just as if he were God.” Smith added that when a wife fails to meet the sexual needs of her husband, she is partly to blame if he is unfaithful to her. The goal for these fundamentalists seems to be to rule over women—in the Southern Baptist Convention, in the church, and in the home.<sup>59</sup>

On 23 June 2011, the *Houston Chronicle* published an item titled “Female Pastors on the Rise in Progressive Baptist Bodies.” It said:

The number of female pastors in Baptist churches has grown by a third in the past five years, according to a recent

report covered in the **Associated Baptist Press**.

*Baptist Women in Ministry* found that women's involvement in ordained ministry is slowly growing among organizations like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The Southern Baptist Convention's **position** is that Scripture forbids women from serving as pastors.

Outside of the SBC, though, a higher percentage of Baptist ministers are serving as pastors and co-pastors, with 135 women in these positions in 2010, up from 102 in 2005.<sup>60</sup>

More than a year earlier, on 30 October 2009, *ABC News* reported that the defections from SBC were having a nasty financial impact on its seminaries. The Baptist General Convention of Texas, also known as Texas Baptists, "voted to cut the amount of money they give to Southern Baptist seminaries by about 80 percent next year and send the \$4 million instead to three moderate campuses in Texas. Also the Texans virtually cut off support for the denomination's headquarters in Nashville, Tenn., and its social-issues agency—a cut amounting to \$1 million."

Even worse is the decrease in baptisms and attendance at SBC churches, which shows that as a denomination it is stagnating and in decline.

## XII

Baptist historians Ernest C. Reisinger and D. Matthew Allen have under the heading "The Schism in the Southern Baptist Convention" examined the problems of this denomination, citing a multiplicity of sources.

According to their evaluation, a general breakup was unlikely though not impossible. They did, however, record the following: "In 1997, a schism occurred in the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the largest state convention affiliated with the SBC. The newly formed 'Southern Baptists of Texas' is more conservative than the group they split from. In November of 1999 the Baptist General Convention of Texas implemented a change in their constitution which allows for

Baptist churches from outside the state to join them. This is believed to be the first step in establishing a “de facto alternative national convention” for churches unsatisfied with the SBC. In this same meeting the increasingly independent state convention rejected the national SBC’s amendment to the 1963 ‘Baptist Faith and Message’ that calls on husbands to lead the family and wives to ‘submit graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ.’”<sup>61</sup>

That was, of course, before the 2000 addition to *The Baptist Faith and Message Statement*, excluding women from pastoral office. But reviewing their sources, Reisinger and Allen painted a dismal picture and wrote:

Given these appalling facts, is it any wonder that the greatest segment of converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints comes from Southern Baptist congregations? And, is it any wonder that most of our Southern Baptist churches have a stagnant or declining membership? *The Wall Street Journal* reported in 1990 that, of the 14.9 million members of Southern Baptist churches (according to an official count), over 4.4 million are “non-resident members.” This means they are members with whom the church has lost touch. Another 3 million hadn’t attended church or donated to a church in the past year. That left about 7.4 million “active” members. However, according to Sunday School consultant Glenn Smith, even this is misleading, because included in this “active” figure are those members who only attended once a year at Easter or Christmas. The only conclusion to be drawn is that our Southern Baptist Convention is a denomination of unregenerate church members.

This, then, is the diagnosis: contemporary evangelical churches as a whole, and a large number of Southern Baptist churches as a subset (dare I say the majority?), are devoid of biblical and theological thinking, have abandoned a high view of the sufficiency of Scripture, and have traded in biblical values for modern notions of modernity. In our judgment, evangelicalism is collapsing of its own weight.<sup>62</sup>

This is terrible, especially the news about Southern Baptists, who are supposed to believe in the Trinity, becoming Mormons. The latter have an unchristian concept of God. Supposedly he was once a man, and every man will eventually become a god!

A much better option would surely have been to join the Seventh Day Baptist Church. Most if not all of its doctrines resemble those of the SBC. Originating in London, England, during 1651 or possibly even 1617, it also took root in North America during 1671 at Newport, Rhode Island. “The Seventh Day Baptist World Federation today represents over 50,000 Baptists in 22 countries.”<sup>63</sup> This denomination is one of the founding members of the Baptist World Alliance as well as the North American Baptist Fellowship.<sup>64</sup>

It has not been lacerated by the controversies which are threatening to tear the SBC apart, because

Seventh Day Baptists leave women’s ordination up to the local church. The Conference has issued no statement on ordination, although it has accredited some female pastors. A local church ordains, the Conference accredits after a person ordained by his or her church takes three required classes: Seventh Day Baptist history; polity and Sabbath Theology.

Then the candidate for accreditation must receive a positive vote from the Conference floor in annual meeting.<sup>65</sup>

An account of Baptist amity and tolerance titled “Pastor Shirley Ordained,” submitted by Gordon Lawton, a Seventh Day Baptist minister, was published on 29 March 2011 by the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference of the United States and Canada. This is a touching tale. It tells of Shirley Morgan, a Missionary Pastor whom the Seventh Day Baptist congregation at Miami, Florida, sent back to her native Corn Island, Nicaragua. She labored in that country for a year. Then the Miami church decided to ordain her. Several of its functionaries, including pastors Gordon Lawton and Andy Samuels, as well as Deaconess Kay Maltby from Plainfield, New Jersey, specially traveled there. She was ordained with

the laying on of hands at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, which “graciously allowed our use of their facility for this special time.” Many friends, who were mostly Baptists from other congregations and Moravians, attended. “A couple of the local Baptist Church Choirs aided the worship by each bringing special music.”<sup>66</sup>

### XIII

Those who launched the so-called Conservative Resurgence in 1979 had hoped that this would lead to an SBC renaissance. As noted above, the consequences have been quite otherwise. Quarrels, schismatic repercussions, and even uglier things have resulted from the fundamentalist tampering with *The Baptist Faith and Message Statement*.

Sadly, too, as Bob Allen, managing editor of *Associated Baptist Press*, wrote on 6 June 2013: “Southern Baptists declined in most statistical categories reported in this year’s Annual Church Profile compiled by Life Way Christian Resources.”<sup>67</sup> Incidentally, *ABP News* is a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship partner.

Bob Allen’s piece complements the previous one written by Reisinger and D. Matthew Allen thirteen years earlier. Its material is based on official SBC data as well as comments from several sources. Here are some of the details:

Annual baptisms in Southern Baptist churches have declined by 100,000 in the last 12 years, last year dropping to the smallest number in 64 years.

LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention released figures June 5 reporting 314,959 baptisms in 2012, down 18,385—or 5.5 percent—from 2011.

Total membership of 15,872,404 marked the sixth straight year of statistical decline for the nation’s second-largest faith group behind Roman Catholics. Membership dropped by 105,000—two-thirds of a percent. Weekly worship attendance meanwhile fell below 6 million to 5,966,735, down 3 percent.<sup>68</sup>

That is, almost two-thirds of SBC members do not turn up at church every Sunday, and fewer people are being baptized. The contrast with 1972, forty years ago, is startling. In that year, the baptisms totaled an all-time record of 445,725. But “they have declined six out of the last 10 years to the lowest number since 1948, the year Southern Baptists first exceeded the 300,000-baptism benchmark with 310,266.”<sup>69</sup>

According to Bob Allen, Prof. William Day of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 2003 said that one reason for this was “an increasing ratio between church membership and baptism rates. Before 1935 Southern Baptists baptized one person for every 20 members. Between 1935 and 1959 the ratio was less than 25:1. In 2012 it took 50 church members to baptize one person. Day said that indicates an overall loss of evangelistic zeal.”<sup>70</sup>

Another reason may well be that their children drift out of church.

Prime suspects were the aftereffects of the Conservative Resurgence from 1979 onward, which others have regarded as a Fundamentalist Takeover. “Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and co-founder of the conservative movement,” disagreed. He speculated that “Southern Baptists would be reaching even fewer converts if the denomination’s leftward drift had not been corrected.”<sup>71</sup>

But Bob Allen also cites another and more likely explanation: Ed Stetzer, head of LifeWay Research, has suggested that the “conservative resurgence,” while affirming the convention’s commitment to the Bible’s truthfulness, failed when it comes to evangelism.

“Satan has used our incessant bickering over non-essentials to promote his last great mission on earth—to keep lost people lost.” Stetzer wrote on his blog in 2008, “The communities in which we live simply do not want to hear what we have to say when we cannot speak kindly to one another.”<sup>72</sup>

How true and how sad! Further, I fear that similar problems besetting the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of which I am a member, can similarly bring about schism, heartache, and



failure for our worldwide mission.

## IX

In 2012, the Pacific Union Conference, the Columbia Union Conference, the Northern German Union of the SDAs, and other organizational entities voted for gender equality, including women's ordination to the gospel ministry.<sup>73</sup> Not to put too fine a point on it, they were then accused of rebellion against the General Conference, or at least its Executive Committee, headed by Dr. Ted N. C. Wilson. He was dismayed. The indications were that other denominational structures in North America might also wish to accept women's ordination as pastors, while scholars and others tried for the umpteenth time to formulate a theology concerned with it. Meanwhile in China, SDA female pastors have already been ordained aplenty. Closely linked to gender equality, women's ordination is largely a phenomenon of the northern hemisphere.

But SDA leaders in the developing countries of Latin America with its machismo and patriarchal sub-Saharan Africa mostly oppose it. They reject both gender equality and women's ordination as pastors. They also make up the majority of church members, although they are to a considerable extent dependent for financing on the more affluent North.

It is most unlikely that either side will yield to the viewpoint or the lifestyle of its opponents. Most North Americans will certainly not submit to the norms of what they regard as third-world cultures. But can a document by the Biblical Research Institute on the theology of ordination not do the trick, especially if the General Conference session in 2015 should seek to impose it as an additional doctrine?

The debate about this issue has, however, in one form or the other been simmering for more than a century and now seriously threatens to disunite and tear our Church apart. We really need no further studies. Almost everything that can be said for or against women's ordination has already been said. We have seen how the SBC has dithered and stumbled over this issue, with dire consequences—an object lesson to our

own denomination. Now let us obtain perspective on this matter from SDA history. We go back sixty years to the middle of the twentieth century.

## IX

Most enlightening in this regard is “An Outline of the History of Seventh-day Adventists and the Ordination of Women,” by Kit Watts. At its end, she gave her sources: “Vivianne Haenni provided valuable information about Adventist women in Europe. Josephine Benton’s book, *Called by God*, documents historical data on several women pastors, including Helen Williams, Minnie Day Sype, Lulu Russell Wightman, Anna Knight, Jessie Weiss Curtis, and Mary E. Walsh. Much of the research to update this document from 1990-1995 was done by Rebecca Brillhart and Cherie Rouse.” Critics of this chronicle need to note that it was not the work of one person.

When Kit Watts compiled it, she was an assistant editor of the *Adventist Review*, a position she occupied for ten years. Afterwards she worked at La Sierra University, directing the Women’s Resource Center, and as communications assistant for the President of the Southeastern California Conference.<sup>74</sup>

The following items from her Outline are incomplete. Omitted are the details between 1844 and 1881. But the ones I do cite indicate how “liberal” Seventh-day Adventists were during the nineteenth century with regard to women’s role in the church, their licensing as ministers, and even their possible ordination as pastors.

On 5 December 1881, during a session of the General Conference, a motion was introduced to ordain women to the gospel ministry. “*Resolved*, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.” Reported in *Review and Herald*, 20 December 1881. This item was referred to the General Conference Committee. How it was acted on became evident three years later.

In 1884, the Second *SDA Yearbook* listed several female licensed ministers: Kansas—Mrs. R. Hill, Mrs. H. Enoch.

Michigan—Mrs. E. B. Lane, Mrs. G. K. Owen. Minnesota—Anna M. Johnson, Libbie Collins. Ellen G. White was listed among those given *ordination credentials* by the General Conference. This last sentence does not, however, prove that she was actually ordained.

G. C. Tenney in the *Review and Herald* of 24 May 1892 commented favorably on “Women’s Relation to the Cause of Christ.” Regarding 1 Cor. 13:34, 35, and 1 Tim. 2:12, he argued that it is “manifestly illogical and unfair to give to any passage of Scripture an unqualified radical meaning that is at variance with the main tenor of the Bible.” This was reprinted almost a hundred years later in *Adventist Review*, 4 Feb. 1988, p. 19-21.

On 9 July 1895, Ellen G. White in a *Review and Herald* article said some women should be set apart for service in the church by “prayer and laying on of hands.”

In 1897, two women received licenses as Seventh-day Adventist ministers: Helen Williams (1897-1914) and Lulu Wightman (1897-1907, 1909-1910. In 1908, the latter was listed as an ordained minister. (See Josephine Benton, *Called by God*, Smithsburg, MD: Blackberry Hill Publishers, p. 80.)

On 30 March 1898, the General Conference Committee also issued a ministerial *license* to Mrs. S. M. I. Henry, a former WCTU evangelist. The first women’s ministry department was established on 6 December 1898. S. M. I. Henry outlined her plans for “a woman ministry” in a four-page supplement of the *Review and Herald*. She traveled and spoke widely in the denomination, and her weekly feature for women appeared in the *Review*.

The next year, on 4 March 1899, at a General Conference Session, S. M. I. Henry addressed delegates in a sermon, focusing attention on the need for a women’s ministry. She urged women first to serve in the home as Christian mothers and wives, and second to minister to others who came within their sphere of influence. Unfortunately she died the next year, on 16 January 1900.

At the end of the nineteenth century, on 6 January 1900, Adventists ordained deaconesses. W. C. White, Ellen G. White’s son, participated in a service to do so at the Ashfield church in Sydney, Australia. (The event was apparently not

widely publicized and remained undiscovered until Arthur Patrick in the *Adventist Review* of 16 January 1986 mentioned this fact.)

In 1902, Minnie Day Sype received a license as an Adventist minister (1902-1956). As an evangelist, she raised up churches in the Oklahoma Territory and Iowa, at times performing marriages and baptisms.

During 1904, Alma Bjugg, a captain in the Salvation Army who had converted to Adventism, became the first native ministerial worker in Finland. She received a ministerial license.

Ellen G. White died on 16 July 1915. She had not only exercised the prophetic gift but also, as a cofounder of the SDA Church, kept on counseling it.<sup>75</sup>

In 2015, the centennial of her passing, the General Conference is due to meet at San Antonio, Texas. An important agenda item will be about women's ordination. During the intervening time, so much has happened in the world and the denomination. Kit Watt noted that after the servant of the Lord had died the ecclesiastical status of women deteriorated.

I shall be continuing with excerpts from Watts's chronicle. First, however, I need to remark that another change also took place. During the twentieth century, after Ellen G. White's death, pastors increasingly usurped the role of elders and came to dominate local congregations. This was contrary to New Testament teaching as well as SDA practice during the nineteenth century. Dr. P. Gerard Damsteegt, Associate Professor of Church History at our Seminary, brilliantly dealt with this phenomenon in "Have Adventists Abandoned the Biblical Model of Leadership for the Local Church?"<sup>76</sup>

Where appropriate, I shall be considering the contents and arguments of his study and note how returning to the nineteenth-century model of SDA ministry could eliminate the conflict about female pastors. But let us now return to Kit Watts and look at further parts of her account.

In 1918 Louise Kleuser pastored churches in New Haven, Connecticut.

Six years after Ellen G. White's death, in 1921, Mary Walsh proved to be an effective evangelist in New England.

She was licensed as a minister and remained one for sixty years, from 1921 to 1981, when the church decided not to allow even those women who had carried the credential in the past to continue doing so.

In 1932, Maybelle Vandermark [Goransson] graduated from Washington Missionary College with a ministerial degree. She became an associate pastor and teacher, assisting Lester Coon in a district of churches in Virginia (Potomac Conference). During 1933-1935, she pastored a district of Virginia churches alone. From 1940 to 1952, she taught Bible at Washington Missionary College and was also the assistant dean of women.

After receiving a license as an Adventist minister (1945-1972), Jessie Weiss Curtis as an evangelist raised up several churches in Pennsylvania.

In 1948, Ida Matilainen began 40 years of evangelistic efforts in Kainuu, a sparsely populated area of Finland near the Arctic Circle.

On 3 May 1950, The GC Officers Meeting Minutes mentioned that ordination had been discussed. According to A. V. Olson, "A statement from the pen of Sister White, as found in the *Review and Herald* of July 9, 1895, has been understood by some to provide for the ordination of certain sisters in church service." After some discussion, it was "Agreed, to recommend to the General Conference Committee following the session that a small committee be appointed to study and report on this question."

In 1968, Margarete Prange graduated with a degree in theology at Marienhoehe Seminary, Darmstadt, Germany, becoming the co-pastor in Biclefeld district from 1970 to 1976.

On March 1968, W. Duncan Eva, President of the Northern European Division, wrote to W. R. Beach, the GC Secretary, requesting counsel "on ordaining women in Finland." Thereupon, on 8 April of the same year, the Minutes of the GC Officers Meeting recorded: "Agreed, to list on the agenda for the 1968 Autumn Council the subjection of the ordination of women." Then, on 30 September of the same year, "the Home and Overseas Officers briefly discussed the desirability of a study on the theology of ordination of women." A

committee was appointed consisting of H. W. Lowe, Raoul Dederen, and M. K. Eckenroth.

Minutes of the GC Officers Meeting, on 5 June 1970, show that they agreed to “appoint an adequate committee to consider this large topic . . . and to submit a report for consideration at the 1970 Autumn Council.”

In 1972, Dr. Josephine Benton became the first woman to be ordained as a local elder, at the Brotherhood Church, Washington, D.C., by Potomac Conference and Columbia Union Conference presidents, W. G. Quigley and Cree Sandefur, respectively.

Also in 1972, on 21 June, the GC Officers Meeting recorded that the Far Eastern Division requested counsel about ordaining women. It referred the task of studying “the place of women in the church” to the Biblical Research Committee and asked for its counsel.

On 19 July 1973, the GC committee established an *ad hoc* committee on the role of women in the church, with the goal of studying women’s ordination as well. W. J. Hackett, GC vice president, served as chairman; Gordon Hyde of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) was secretary.

That year, too, at Takoma Park, Maryland, Kit Watts joined the Sligo Church pastoral staff, as minister of publications (April 2), and Josephine Benton joined as an associate pastor (September 1). Dr. Benton was issued a ministerial license. Margaret Hempe at the University Church in Loma Linda, California, was acknowledged as a pastor.

Also in 1973, Margarete Prange’s success as a pastor in Germany prompted her conference leaders to write to GC leaders and ask about ordaining her as an elder. This was a factor that leads to Robert H. Pierson’s calling of a conference at Camp Mohaven in Ohio [junior camp]. An *ad hoc* committee convened there in September 1973 and discussed 29 papers from men and women on the role of women in the church. The group included 13 males and 14 females. It recommended that women be ordained as local church elders, and those with theological training be hired as “associates in pastoral care” primarily in multi-member pastoral staffs. It also proposed a pilot program that would lead to the ordination of women in 1975.

In October 1973, the Annual Council voted to “receive” the Camp Mohaven report, also “that continued study be given to the theological soundness of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination” and “that in areas receptive to such action, there be continued recognition of the appropriateness of appointing women to pastoral evangelistic work.”

A year later, in October 1974, the Annual Council voted to continue studying the theological issues involved and also asserted: “The time is neither ripe nor opportune” for the ordination of women to gospel ministry.

There would not, as suggested by the *ad hoc* committee at Camp Mohaven, be any ordinations of women as pastors in 1975. Instead, the Spring Meeting of March 1975 brought a twofold turning point. It approved women’s ordination as deaconesses. It also permitted women to be ordained as local elders, if “the greatest discretion and caution” is exercised. Further, it urged women to become Bible workers, or even assistant pastors. But the denomination would grant them only a *missionary* license. As Kit Watt pointed out, that Spring Meeting also ended “100 years of granting women ministerial licenses.” Thirteen scholarly papers, based on the Camp Mohaven work, were on this occasion prepared by the Biblical Research Institute but not released to church members for study.

## X

Behind and leading up to these decisions were several factors, including SDA church history against the background of the United States in the nineteenth century. Added to this was a later, curious development: money, and a disagreement with the American IRS about a parsonage allowance as well as Social Security taxes. These have powerfully affected our theology of ordination.

As a date, 1975 was close to 1979, when the Southern Baptists launched their so-called Conservative Resurgence, which some members regarded as a Fundamentalist Takeover, with its attendant purges and endless wrangling. The SDA Church seemed to be starting down an identical path. Eventually, in 2000 the SBC was to exclude women from ordination as ministers—whatever they were called, pastors or elders.

The SDA leadership was in 1975 unleashing a struggle concerned with its own Nehushtan, somewhat like the one that good King Hezekiah had destroyed.

And yet their decision to permit women's ordination for both deaconesses and elders—though not as pastors—was fraught with a potential beyond anything that they could at that time have imagined. After 1975, the debate could have gone in either of two directions, pro and contra. But following in Kit Watts's footsteps, I must show what actually happened, though we can also consider what could fruitfully have ensued.

## XI

In the early Christian Church, there were no pastors such as we know today, only elders and deacons; also, it seems, deaconesses. Similarly, in the early SDA Church, at first no pastors existed, only elders and deacons as well as deaconesses. In both cases, a wrong model replaced what God had intended. This is how Damsteegt startlingly put it:

“Soon after the death of the prophet John, many early Christians abandoned the New Testament leadership model of elders having the oversight of the local church, to a church



leadership that centered on the bishop as the head of the congregation while elders functioned as his assistants. Similarly, shortly after the death of the prophetess and messenger to the remnant church, Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists replaced the leadership of the local elders with a minister or pastor-centered leadership structure in which elders functioned as his assistants.”<sup>77</sup>

Why? The weaknesses of both elders and members were partly to blame, although there was more to it:

Ellen White strongly opposed the trend toward “settled pastors,” a model of church organization which existed among most Protestant churches. Seventh-day Adventists were not to follow their example, for Adventists were the remnant church of Bible prophecy—a prophetic movement whose mission mandate was to prepare the whole world for the soon return of Christ. They were not just another Protestant church that focused on nurturing its members and maintain its presence in the community.

After the death of the prophetess, the voice that spoke most strongly against the pastors taking control or hovering over local congregations was silent. As a result of the failure of elders and members to live up to their responsibilities in the local church, a gradual change began to take place in which the New Testament leadership model was abandoned and replaced by the “settled pastor” model. By having a paid “settled pastor” in charge of a church or several churches, church officials seemed to feel that this would be more beneficial than having ineffective elders in charge of the congregation.

The appointment of “settled pastors” had a dramatic impact on the leadership role of the elders in the congregation. With the minister as the most important leader in the organizational structure of the local church, the church board, after the minister, became the decisive leadership voice responsible for the direction of the local church. Now the influence of the elder was generally reduced to leading out in platform responsibilities, breaking bread at Communion, giving advice to the church board, visiting members, and assisting the local minister. Nearly

twenty years after Mrs. White's death, this change of the elders' authority became institutionalized with the official adoption of the first Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* in 1932.<sup>78</sup>

Actually it was not really the first, as Damsteegt also recounted. At the 1882 General Conference, it was decided to have three of its leaders prepare a Church Manual. Its draft was published in installments by the *Review and Herald*, and the editors asked for readers' input and criticism.<sup>79</sup> The proposed document described two classes of ministers: those who were able to raise up congregations and were basically evangelists and others who were not, since they lacked this talent. The latter, however, had other gifts and could be assigned to local churches as "settled pastors," an idea which was strongly opposed by Ellen G. White.<sup>80</sup>

What happened to the draft for this Church Manual? At the November 1883 session of the General Conference, its Executive, joined by a committee of ten, unanimously rejected it. One of the objections was that it looked too much like "a creed, or a discipline, other than the Bible, something we have always been opposed to as a denomination." The committee also remarked: "It was in taking similar steps that other bodies of Christians first began to lose their simplicity and become formal and spiritually lifeless. Why should we imitate them?"<sup>81</sup>

If in 1975, SDAs had still retained a sufficient grasp of this matter, some leaders might then have said: "We can also from our local churches phase out the "settled" pastors appointed and ordained by the conferences. The elders of our congregations could head them as they had done in the early church and during the nineteenth century. And these could now be women as well as men. They would, however, focus on spiritual work. In accordance with New Testament theology, administration should be left to the deacons and deaconesses.

That, of course, is not what was suggested. If it had been, our dear leaders might well have promptly rescinded their action to ordain any women—especially since such a reordering would have tended to weaken the power of the

hierarchy.

The 1975 decision was still to be “reaffirmed by the 1984 Annual Council.” Only later, the ordination of female elders as well as deaconesses would be recorded as General Conference policy: set forth in the 2009 *Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Handbook*, p, 94, and the 2010 *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, pp. 38, 78-79.<sup>82</sup>

In 1988, Carole L. Kilcher and Gan-Theow Ng, working for the Andrews University Institute of Church Ministry, conducted a “Survey on the Status of Women Elders in the North American Division.” This was “a Research Study Commissioned by the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists,” According to this document, “The total number of male elders serving the 3,036 churches which responded is 14,495. The total number of female elders serving within those same churches is 960 (See graph # 1),” and these women served in 457 churches. “That indicates that 2,579 or 85% of the churches which responded do not have female elders. The ratio of male elders to female elders in the Division is 15 males to 1 female.” Also: “Females serving as head elders number 66 for a Division ratio of 46 to 1.”<sup>83</sup>

If, as Damsteegt was to urge in 2005, the denomination reverted to the New Testament model which our pioneers implemented during the nineteenth century, elders rather than pastors ordained by the conference would lead out in our churches. The appellation of “pastor” would disappear, replaced by “elder.” The issue of female ordination as *pastors* would evaporate. After all, these women have already been ordained as elders. And there would be no more pastors! On the other hand, it would depend on the local congregations whether they wanted female elders. Most would not. What is not an option, however, is to eliminate women as elders or from any other position in the Church. That would be like trying to make the water at Niagara reverse its course and flow back up the waterfall. Any such attempt would reproduce in our midst the fragmentation and schism which has been plaguing the Southern Baptists.

The office of the pastor, as opposed to that of the elder, in the SDA Church can be given up and phased out. This is perfectly feasible and would represent a reversion to an older,

more Biblical setup. We could call it the Damsteegt solution, but Dr. Damsteegt has remained opposed to the practice of ordaining women even as elders. Therefore, it will have to be called by some another name. In any case, I suggest that we adopt this policy with the retention of female elders.

The impact of eliminating settled pastors would have far-reaching consequences for our hierarchy. It may, for instance, necessitate a change in its policy about the tithe and offerings. Local congregations would perhaps become entitled to the retention of more such funds to remunerate or subsidize the elders. Many other matters would also come to the fore. A major reorganization like the one in 1901 could follow.

If, however, the present controversy about ordaining women as pastors continues on its present course, it is likely to fragment the world unity of the SDA Church. Let us solve this problem in a simple way. Let us recognize that ordaining pastors is unbiblical and prohibit its continuation. Instead, the female ordination of elders is already a fact, an established policy.

## XII

As far as I could determine, no such solution was proposed in 1975 (or afterwards). Here is how things went according to Kit Watts—but, wait, not so fast! Readers first also need to know about the existence of another, background scenario that was shaping the thoughts of General Conference leaders: money. They were in conflict with the American Internal Revenue Service about unpaid Social Security taxes for their employees over almost a quarter of a century. And they were losing this battle. Therefore, astoundingly, the IRS was in effect shaping SDA ordination theology. This will be detailed below, since for the sake of continuity we must first continue with Kit Watts's account.

In 1975, Mrs. W. H. Anderson (Central Union), Mary E. Walsh (Pacific Union), and Mrs. Josephine Benton (Potomac Conference) were among the last women to be listed in the *SDA Yearbook* as having ministerial licenses.

Dr. Benton is of special interest. Previously, she had served on the General Conference *ad hoc* committee of 1973. Now,

in 1975, she “was ordained as an elder, and an associate pastor at Sligo church.” Afterwards, too, she fruitfully served in several ministerial capacities. Even when she retired in the Hagerstown, MD, area, “she secured a chaplaincy post at the Williamsport Retirement Village. She ministered there for 19 years.”

Ultimately, in the fall of 2012, when the Columbia Union Conference approved the ordination of sixteen female pastors, a woman pastor from the Sligo congregation invited the now 87-year-old Dr. Benton to attend the first such service. “On that same day, Dave Weigley, Columbia Union president, told her that the Union had also approved her name to receive emeritus ordination credentials.”<sup>84</sup>

Afterwards, as *Adventist Today* announced on 7 February 2013: “Dr. Josephine Benton will be ordained to the gospel ministry on Sabbath, February 16, at Sligo Seventh-day Adventist church in Takoma Park, Maryland. She has been a pioneer in ending gender discrimination in pastoral ministry in the Adventist denomination since the 1960s. She is 87 years of age and has been approved for ordination by the Potomac Conference and the Columbia Union Conference.”<sup>85</sup>

After 1975, Benton went on to write a book which she titled *Called by God*. Published in 1980, it is now out of print but available on the Internet. Its Appendix B, a “Partial list of Seventh-day Adventist Women Ministers 1844-1975,”<sup>86</sup> is extremely interesting.

But all of that still lay in the future, which is now, when the General Conference through yet another set of meetings is seeking what is likely to be an impossible worldwide consensus about ordaining *pastors*. Let us, in any case, review the course of events and nonevents which followed on the actions of 1975, taken from Kit Watts’s description. If it is rather long, it reveals a groundswell in favor of ordaining women in various capacities. This was, however, also opposed by both the denominational establishment and vociferous individuals.

On 28 October 1976, Gordon Hyde, Director of the Biblical Research Institute, in the *Review and Herald* summarized the theological work done by BRI about women since Camp Mohaven. He asked: “If God has called a woman, and her

ministry is fruitful, why should the church withhold its standard act of recognition [ordination]?”

That same year, Margarete Prange became the sole pastor of the Galsenkirchen, Bottrop, Gladbeck, and Dorsten churches in East Germany.

During February 1977, Frances Osborne became the first SDA woman to be certified as a chaplain for Huguley Memorial Medical Center in Fort Worth, Texas. In March, General Conference president Robert H. Pierson told the Spring Meeting that the role of women was under continuing study, and a report would be given at the 1977 Annual Council. But when a poll of the world field was taken and showed a negative response, women’s ordination was deleted from the Annual Council agenda. Thereupon the AC thought up the term Associates in Pastor Care to identify persons who were employed on pastoral staffs, but who were not in line for ordination (women).

In September 1977, the controversy about ordaining women *elders* heated up in many churches, including the Sligo congregation at Takoma Park, Maryland, where many GC employees who opposed the practice were members. Responding to a request by James Londis and Kit Watts, Neal C. Wilson, President of the North American Division, obtained permission to reproduce to the Sligo church thirteen BRI papers, which found no theological obstacle to ordaining women. In October, Wilson and Raoul Dederen were among the guest speakers in a Wednesday night series as Sligo Church continued the debate.

But in January 1978 the Sligo Church failed to endorse the ordination of women elders, though 60 percent of its members voted in favor. The motion failed because the General Conference, the Columbia Union, and the Potomac Conference had stipulated that a “clear majority” was necessary to settle the matter. This they interpreted as a 66 percent or two-thirds vote. That was strange, since the Spring Meeting of the General Conference had already approved the ordination of female elders three years earlier, in 1975!

October 1979 saw two noteworthy decisions. The Annual Council voted special internship allotments for women pastors and Bible instructors for the North American Division from

1980. The NAD also authorized unordained males, who had graduated from a seminary, to baptize in their local church. As a following section will show, the IRS factor had much to do with this. Likewise in the fall of 1979, a women's newsletter appeared. With Viveca Black as leader, women in metro Washington, D.C., produced an *Update* of news for and about Adventist women. This was a forerunner of *The Adventist Woman*.

As noted above, exactly that year also marked a turning point for the Southern Baptist Convention. It was in 1979 that it began its fateful Conservative Resurgence/Fundamentalist Takeover with much unhappiness and disruption to follow.

In 1979-1982, Dr. Josephine Benton became pastor of the Rockville, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

On 17 April 1980 at the General Conference Session in Dallas, Texas, its president, Neal C. Wilson, called for women's involvement. In his keynote address, as his fifth priority, he said: "The church must find ways to organize and utilize the vast potential represented by our talented, consecrated women. . . . I am not only urging that women be represented in the administrative structure of the church, but also that we harness the energies and talents of all the women so as to better accomplish the task of finishing the work assigned by our Lord."

That same year brought involvement in a concrete form. Margit Suring from Finland became the first SDA woman to earn a Th.D. degree at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Berrien Springs, Michigan, in theology and archaeology.

In 1982, the first women pastors were sponsored under the 1979 Annual Council plan for the M.Div. degrees at the Seminary. They were Walla Walla theology graduates Becky Lacy and Collette Crowell from the Southeastern California and Upper Columbia Conferences. Likewise during 1982, the Association of Adventist Women was officially organized with the goal of encouraging Adventist women to achieve their full potential.

On the mission front, from 1982 to 1984, Lang Van with a B.A. in theology from Collonges, France, taught Bible to Cambodian refugees in Thailand. Then, from 1984 to 1991,

she pastored Cambodians living in the north of France. Afterwards she moved to southeastern California to pastor refugees there.

During 1983, Helen Tyler, a chaplain with the New England Memorial Hospital, became the second Adventist woman to be certified as a Fellow in the College of Chaplains. She had completed an M.Div. degree in 1975 and a D.Min. degree in 1978 at Boston University. In 1987, she would also be certified as a Fellow by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.

In 1983, Olive J. Hemmings completed a B.A. in theology at West Indies College, and in 1989 an M.A. in New Testament Studies at Andrews University. Thereupon she taught religion at West Indies College.

Still during 1983, in response to a proposal originating with Otilie Stafford and Jan Daffern, Warren Banfield, director for the NAD's Office of Human Relations, received approval to establish the NAD Women's Commission. Alice Smith was the first chairperson. (In 1986, Thesba Johnston succeeded her.) But the General Conference instructed the commission *not* to discuss women's ordination. Obviously it found this an awkward topic.

In March 1984, Women pastors performed baptisms in the NAD. The Potomac Conference Committee had voted to permit eight local elders to baptize. These included three women in pastoral roles: Jan Daffern at the Sligo church and Frances Wiegand at the Beltsville Church, both in Maryland, as well as Marsha Frost in Virginia. This action precipitated trauma, particularly at the Beltsville church, which many GC officers attended. The Potomac Conference was chastised for defying GC authority and policy.

Four months later, in July 1984, the Association of Adventist Women held its second annual conference. Dialogue with church leaders was sought but rebuffed. The Women of Mission Conference was also held at Andrews University. Earlier in 1984, Dr. Richard Leshner, Director of the Biblical Research Institute, had okayed the release of the nine-year-old BRI study papers on women (continuing the work begun at Camp Mohaven). But when he was elected as Andrews University president, his successor at the BRI, Dr.



George Reid, rescinded the decision. Not until one week before the conference was the decision reversed. The first 100 copies of the 1975 BRI papers on the role of women were officially edited and released to interested church members. Julia Neuffer, veteran editor of the *SDA Commentary* series, assisted the BRI in preparing the final edited version.

But the next month, in August 1984, women pastors were ordered to stop baptizing in the NAD. The entire Potomac Conference Committee was summoned to Washington, D.C., to meet with the GC officers. They were asked to rescind their action permitting women pastors to baptize (as local elders). Nevertheless, the GC promised to renew a study of the ordination issue.

In October 1984, the Annual Council *reaffirmed* the 1975 Spring Meeting decision that women may be ordained as local elders. It voted to “advise each division that it is free to make provisions as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local church elders.” In this way, the provision was extended from the NAD to the world field. Also voted was a Commission on the Role of Women in the Church, with representatives from each division, to study women’s ordination. It promised to settle the issue “definitively” at the 1985 GC session.

Also during that year, two nonwhite women began their ministries, one in America, the other on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

During 1984, Wanda Grimes Davis became a hospital chaplain in the Regional Medical Center in Memphis, Tennessee. She had really wanted to become a military chaplain, but could not because the U.S. armed forces required that all chaplains be ordained by the denominations they represent. In far away Mauritius, Sally Kiasiong Andriamiarisoa, having earned a B.A. in theology, became an associate pastor in Mauritius, from 1984 to 1986.

On 26-28 March 1985, the 65-member Commission on the Role of Women in the Church met at Washington, D.C. Fifteen, i.e. a quarter, of its members were female. It decided against a “definitive” decision on women’s ordination, recommending:

(a) *More study*, especially on Pauline material and church

history, to be reviewed by a representative group in 1988, with actions to be brought to the 1989 Annual Council;

(b) *Affirmative action* for women in church leadership roles not requiring ordination;

(c) *Reform of present ordination practices*—that men not be ordained unless in true ministerial work;

(d) *Further study on the status of women pastors* in NAD to be considered at the 1985 Annual Council. The Spring Meeting accepted this report.

Later that year, on 6 June 1985, the SDA congregation at Geneva, Switzerland, ordained four women as deaconesses. This action culminated a nine-month study after speakers G. Steveny, J. C. Verrechia, V. Haenni, E. Zuber, and F. Hugh had spoken on the subject. But then the Swiss/French Conference President asked the senior pastor at Geneva to stop doing so. He believed the Euro-African Division had not authorized the ordination of women in any capacity, nor would it until the world church came to an agreement.

From 4 to 7 July 1985, women's ordination was openly discussed for the first time during the first French-speaking Adventist Women's Convention.

In July 1985, the GC Session at New Orleans voted for "affirmative action" by placing qualified women in leadership roles that do not require ordination. The delegates also accepted the recommendations of the 1985 Spring Meeting to give further study to women's ordination as pastors, as well as to reform ordination practices for men. However, a motion to update the *Church Manual* to reflect the 1975 decision to permit the ordination of *deaconesses* was protested by Hedwig Jemison and not voted on. This did not, however, nullify the policy.

The Annual Council during October 1985 rejected the NAD recommendation that women pastors with seminary training be allowed to baptize and solemnize marriages in the United States as young men with the same qualifications had been doing since 1979. Annual Council stated that women could do the same work but should not expect ordination.

Still in 1985, the General Conference Women's Ministries Advisory Committee was established to educate the church on acceptable leadership roles for Adventist women. The Annual

Council appointed Betty Holbrook as coordinator of Women's Ministries, in addition to her work as Director of the GC Home and Family Service. An advisory committee of women employed at GC headquarters was set up to assist her. Its members included Shirley Burton, Jocelyn Fay, Beverly Rumble, and Marie Spangler. Soon afterwards, Elizabeth Sterndale and Marjorie Felder were added. WMA was specifically asked to encourage denominational editors to include positive articles about women in their publications. Two days later, Elizabeth Sterndale was appointed as Women's Advisory Representative for NAD in addition to her full-time responsibilities in the NAD Health and Temperance Department.

Also during 1985, Lydia Justiano was chosen chairperson of the Women's Ministries Committee for the South American Division.

The next year, 1986, three women's groups became more public in their work to educate the church on various women's issues, although they were told not to discuss women's ordination. These were: (1) Shepherdess International (a support group for pastors' wives); (2) The revitalized NAD Women's Commission sponsored by the Office of Human Relations, which held its first Town Meeting at Andrews University in the summer; the NAD WC also agreed to gather material for a book on various women's issues; and (3) The GC Women's Ministries Advisory Committee, which began encouraging denominational papers to publish more news about women.

On 16 January 1986, the *Adventist Review* published evidence that Elder W. C. White—E. G. White's son—ordained *deaconesses* at the Ashfield church in Sydney, Australia, on 6 January 1900. This transcended objections raised against ordaining deaconesses at the 1985 GC session.

On 8 February 1986, Robert H. Carter, President of the Lake Union Conference, ordained three women Latina elders at the Spanish church in Berrien Springs, Michigan: Marcia Gomez, Antonia Elenes, and Vita Marquez. The church business meeting had voted overwhelmingly in favor of their ordination by 250-4.

In March 1986, the SDA Healthcare Chaplains Association

meeting at Denver, Colorado (during the National Conference of the College of American Chaplains) urged the hiring of more women in ministry.

But on 5 April 1986 the Pioneer Memorial church at Andrews University failed to approve the ordination of women as elders. Fifty-six percent of the members voted in favor, but the church board had required a 60 percent majority. This vote came after a series of Wednesday night studies by, among others, Richard Davidson, Patricia Mutch, and Russell Staples. However, on 2-4 May, Samuele Bacchiocchi emerged as an outspoken opponent of women's ordination.

That year, too, the 15th annual meeting of the West Coast Religion Teachers' Conference, meeting at Pacific Union College, voted 40-0 (with one abstention) to support women's ordination.

In the fall of 1986, the Southeastern California Conference voted to treat unordained men and women equally regarding the performance of baptisms. The effect of the vote, since the denomination allowed unordained males who are pastors to baptize, was also to give women that privilege.

Beyond the Atlantic, on 25 October 1986, the Newbold College Church in England ordained its first women elders: Aulikki Nahkola and Cynthia Bent. Also in that year, Yvonne Oster became a church pastor in Lintioping, Sweden, from 1986 to 1989.

In December 1986, Bible teachers of the North American Division supported women's ordination with an 83 percent majority, according to Roger Dudley of Andrews University. He had surveyed the religion faculties of eleven NAD colleges and the SDA Theological Seminary. The number of questionnaires returned was 94 out of 131.

On 20 December, Pastor Margaret Hempe baptized two candidates in the University Church, at Loma Linda, CA. She did so at the request of the pastoral staff and more than 100 members of the University Church board.

During February 1987, Bacchiocchi published *Women in the Church*, a book that strongly opposes women's ordination.

In 1-3 May 1987, the West Coast Religion Teachers reaffirmed their call for women's ordination during their meeting at Walla Walla College. They particularly named

Madelynn Haldeman and Margaret Hempe as suitable candidates.

On 21 May 1987, members of the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University voted to elect and ordain women elders by a 62.5 percent majority. Prior to the vote, members had received a 12-page document containing two position papers, for and against. The previous year, on 5 April 1986, they had failed to obtain the 60 percent demanded by the church board. Senior pastor Dwight Nelson now reversed his prior stand against women's ordination.

A study published on 4 June 1987 showed that age affected opinion about women's ordination. Roger Dudley's data in the *Adventist Review* revealed that 46 percent of pastors in the NAD favored the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. The majority of those under age 50 favored it, while the majority of those over 50 opposed it.

During August 1987, Roger Dudley in *Ministry Magazine* reported on a study of religion teachers throughout the Seventh-day Adventist world church. Overall, 69 percent agreed that it was appropriate for women who have demonstrated their calling to ministry to be ordained.

From 7 to 9 October 1987, the NAD sponsored a first gathering of its women in ministry. Of approximately 40 women 23 attended the first meeting for SDA female chaplains and pastors coordinated by Bob Dale, assistant to NAD President Charles E. Bradford. The facilitator of the meeting was Elizabeth Sterndale.

On 8-11 October 1987 the Association of Adventist Women, during its fifth annual conference, succeeded in organizing the first open dialogue with church leaders on such women's issues as pastoral ministry, church leadership, and ordination. Among those participating were Neal C. Wilson, Charles E. Bradford, Warren Banfield, A. C. McClure, and George Reid.

The next year, on 22-24 January 1988, The Adventist Women's Institute was organized during a meeting at McCormack's Creek State Park, Indiana, and officially incorporated in California on January 27, with Fay Blix as its chair. The group decided to pursue for women full and equal participation in the Church.

In February 1988, the Association of Adventist Women produced a 67-minute tape about *Adventist Women in Ministry: Our Stories*, which was also printed as a 10-page booklet. It featured women pastors and chaplains from Sweden, Norway, Korea, Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States. This material was sent to the 77 members preparing for the GC Commission on the Role of Women in the Church.

On 4 February 1988, the *Adventist Review* published its first “AR Seminar,” focusing on women in early Adventism. This included reprints of articles defending women’s public roles by James White and J. N. Andrews.

In March 1988, Neal Wilson appointed Karen Flowers to replace Betty Holbrook, retiring chair of the GC Women’s Ministries Advisory Committee.

From 24 to 27 March 1988, the Commission on the Role of Women in the Church–II met at the General Conference headquarters in Washington, D.C. Eighty persons, of whom nineteen were women, from the world Church testified. For the first time, women pastors were invited to speak for themselves to the commission, namely Delores Robinson, pastor from Southeastern California Conference; Penny Shell, chaplain at Thorek Hospital in Chicago; and Eva Nora de Monroy, from Mexico. Several Adventist women teachers were also invited, including Mercedes Dyer, Loretta Johns, and Launce Durrant, to speak *against* ordination. It was decided that further study was needed before a decision could be made on ordaining women.

That was a quarter of a century ago. Despite repeated further study during the intervening years, in 2013 the pundits are still at it.

In April 1988, Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry, with Patricia Habada as chairperson, was founded in Maryland. TEAM was created specifically to work toward the ordination of candidates to the gospel ministry regardless of race, social class, or gender.

The next month, on 10 and 11 May 1988, NAD leaders called for an end to discriminatory policies affecting Adventist women in ministry. During the meeting at Loma Linda, California, they unanimously voted their objection to the

current discrepancies in how the church treated men and women with the same training and qualifications.

Still in May 1988, the Potomac Conference echoed the NAD stand and voted to cease discriminating against women in ministry and permit them, along with unordained males, to baptize and conduct marriages in the local church.

In 1988, Madelynn Jones Haldeman graduated from the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University, the second woman to earn a Th.D. there. She was a member of the religion faculty of the Loma Linda University Riverside, campus in California. (This is now La Sierra University.)

During the summer of 1988, the Oregon Conference established a Women's Ministries Department, chaired by Marge Moreno.

In October 1988, the Andrews University Institute of Church Ministry presented a survey data on the status of women elders. Researchers Carole Kilcher and Gan-Theow Ng found there were 960 ordained women elders serving in 3,036 churches alongside 14,495 male elders. Seventy-eight percent of churches with women elders felt that they strengthened the church. The survey also revealed that women function as elders in churches of every size and racial and cultural background.

Over in England on 1 November 1988, the religion faculty of Newbold College pledged support for women who undertook theological study and sought a career in pastoral ministry.

Also in 1988, Mrs. Hui Ying Zhou, a woman pastor, was reported to have baptized at least 200 persons in Wuxi, China. She attracted up to 1,000 people for Sabbath services.

On 29 January 1989, delegates to the Southeastern California Conference's special constituency meeting established a twelve-member Gender Inclusiveness Task Force "to plan and implement a broad spectrum of programs and materials on gender inclusiveness in family and church." This action also stated that it was the will of SECC to ordain women in ministry as soon as possible.

On 14 March 1989, the Seventh-day Adventist Healthcare Chaplains Association meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, asked the denomination for "full recognition, by ordination, of the

ministry of women.” Then, on 30 April 1989, the Ohio Conference executive committee endorsed Pastor Leslie Bumgardner as a candidate for ordination. A few days later, on 4 May 1989, the Columbia Union Conference executive committee also endorsed her as a candidate for full ordination no earlier than August of 1990 on the ground that it was “morally right and theologically correct.”

Similarly, on 21 May 1989, the Southeastern California Conference constituents passed a resolution (279-179) mandating that local qualified women pastors be considered for ordination no sooner than August 1990.

This apparently sparked off, on 7 June 1989, a vote by the Pacific Union Conference executive committee, urging the General Conference “to eliminate gender as a consideration for ordination to the gospel ministry.” They added that “we endorse the ordination of qualified women to the gospel ministry in divisions, unions, and conferences where deemed helpful and appropriate.”

In mid-June 1989, the Union Presidents of the North-American Division voted unanimously to send an endorsement of women’s ordination to the Commission on the Role of Women meeting at Cohutta Springs, Georgia, “in those divisions where it would be deemed helpful and appropriate.” Also in those days the NAD officers by secret ballot, with a vote of 5-1, endorsed a resolution similar to the one passed by the Pacific Union Conference.

During that June, Hyveth Williams, previously associate pastor at Sligo Church, was appointed senior pastor of the Boston Temple, Boston, in Massachusetts. She was the first black woman to become the sole pastor of an SDA church.

Many of the expectations of the North American Church were dashed at Cohutta Springs, Georgia on 12-18 July 1989, when the Commission on the Role of Women in the Church—III voted against ordination for women, though these obtained some pastoral privileges. The commission had representatives from every world Division, including 17 women, though three Divisions declined to send women, namely Inter-America, South America, and Eastern Africa. These are regions where, due to prevalent Latino machismo and African patriarchy, females have a low status in society. General Conference and



Division Presidents were also present and submitted a controversial two-pronged recommendation. The Commission members voted 56-11 in favor of it, namely that (a) Women not be ordained to gospel ministry, and (b) that divisions could authorize qualified women in ministry to perform baptisms and marriages.

Karen Flowers, General Conference Women's Ministries Advisory coordinator, shared the results of an international survey documenting the concerns of Adventist women in leadership. Thereupon the women commissioners caucused and submitted a document to the commission calling for positive actions toward Adventist women. They wanted (a) equality and career opportunities, (b) full-time women's ministries coordinators, (c) inclusive language in church documents, (d) affirmative action bringing women into positions of leadership that do not require ordination, and (e) accountability for progress toward these goals.

A summary of Karen Flower's international survey of Adventist women in leadership appeared in the *Adventist Review* on 28 September 1989. Sixty-five percent of the women surveyed felt the associate pastor of a local church should be ordained, while 74 percent believed it would be appropriate for women to serve in such a capacity. The survey identified 1,872 women working as administrators, departmental directors and associates, pastors, chaplains, and Bible instructors. Of these, 875 had responded to the survey.

On 7 October 1989, Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry sponsored a "Celebration of Equality" in Sligo Church. This featured Charles E. Bradford, Hyveth Williams, Madelynn Haldeman, Duncan as well as Wilmore Eva, Harold Camacho, and singer Pat Taylor, together with TV personality and Adventist pastor Clifton Davis.

At the Annual Council in October 1989, delegates voted 187-97 in favor of accepting the two-pronged recommendation from the Commission on the Role of Women in the Church, which had met in Cohutta Springs—rejecting women's ordination, but with permission for qualified women to baptize and perform marriages. This constituted a nod toward women's concerns, but it made no promises. One useful result was a recommendation that women make up at least 25

percent of committees and boards “in those categories of membership where a sufficient number of women are eligible for membership.”

On 29 November 1989, the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences at Andrews University voted to establish the first Women’s Studies program in Adventist colleges. Classes for a minor in this degree work began with Fall 1990.

During 23-28 February 1990, the Seventh-day Adventist Healthcare Chaplains Association meeting at Nashville, Tennessee, voted strong support for ordaining women to ministry.

In April 1990, the Gender Inclusiveness Task Force of the Southeastern California Conference produced three educational items: (1) “Equals in Service,” a slide program featuring male and female theology students seeking a place in the Adventist ministry; (2) “What’s Good for the Gospel,” a video encouraging women’s full participation in church life and ministry; and (3) A pamphlet for readers of the *Pacific Union Recorder*, authored by John Brunt. This was titled “The Ordination of Women: A Bible Perspective.”

On 8 April 1990, The West Coast Religion Teachers voted unanimously to reaffirm their commitment to women’s ordination. They requested the General Conference session delegates “to take no action that would either forbid or compel the ordination of women in the gospel ministry in any part of the world.”

In June 1990, the Association of Adventist Women in the *Adventist Woman*, vol. 9. No. 3-4, documented the education, training, and public ministry of 62 women from 12 different countries, and included photographs of them.

Despite the many pro-ordination attempts in the North American Division, the General Conference in session at Indianapolis from 5 to 14 July 1990, for the present denied ordination for women, with a vote of 1,173 to 377. Especially delegates from abroad did not favor it. Women could, however, perform baptisms and marriages in Divisions that authorized it.

Throughout ten years spent in discussing women’s ordination, the General Conference officers in acts of denominational censorship had urged the Review and Herald

and Pacific Press not to publish books on the topic. Several books were stopped in manuscript form. This sort of thing was acceptable to and may even have been inspired by the overseas Divisions, like those in Africa and Latin America, where most countries had autocratic or dictatorial regimes. But it did not go down well in the United States, where freedom of the press is a First Amendment right. Therefore, American authors sought alternative publishers. Bacchiocchi self-published in February 1987, and in 1990 two additional books appeared:

(1) Josephine Benton's *Called by God* (Blackberry Hill Publishers, Route 2, Box 121, Smithsburg, MD 21783), 240 pages. It devoted a chapter to each of six Adventist women in public ministry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

(2) *Women, Church, God: A Socio-Biblical Study* by Caleb Rosado (Loma Linda University Press, Riverside, California), 173 pages. It addressed such issues as Jesus and the patriarchal system, "Is God Male?" and headship theology.

The North American Division on 19 September 1990 established an Office of Women's Ministries, with Elizabeth Stendale as Director.

On 24 September 1990, thirty-five leaders of women's groups met at Addison, Pennsylvania, mostly representing the Adventist Women Institute, Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry, the Association of Adventist Women or the Gender Inclusiveness Task Force of the Southeastern California Conference. They issued a joint statement responding to the 1990 General Conference decision to deny ordination to women. It called for the Church to implement equal opportunity and affirmative action for women, and to ordain them in Divisions where the move would be culturally acceptable. Further, they discussed the desirability of forming an Adventist Women's Coalition. A 17-member steering committee, chaired by Helen Thompson, agreed to work on proposals. Obviously, such developments indicated growing confrontation with the GC.

At the Annual Council in October 1990, President Robert H. Folkenberg, elected on 6 July, recommended that the General Conference should also establish an Office of Women's Ministries. Subsequently Rose Otis was named its

Director.

Afterwards, on 21 October 1990, the constituents of the Southeastern California Conference by a vote of 370 to 128 accepted a recommendation from President, L. Stephen Gifford to establish a Commission on Justice. Its objective was to “fulfill the church’s goals of racial, ethnic, and gender equality.” The SECC executive committee was to (a) “lead out in a strong concerted program in the recruitment, hiring, education, placement, and support of women in ministry,” and (b) to work closely with denominational leaders “to facilitate the ordination of all qualified ministerial candidates without gender discrimination,” and to report back on these efforts at the 1992 constituency meeting.

Folkenberg, however, was uncooperative and reminded denominational editors that discussing women’s ordination remained off limits. Nevertheless, in 1990 *Myth and Truth: Church, Priesthood and Ordination*, a scholarly study by V. Norskov Olsen was published. It supports the ordination of women.

Down Under, in 1991, Four Australian women, Jennifer Knight, Pamela Clifford, Merolyn Coombs, and Linette Lock, conducted research to study women’s perceptions of the SDA Church in Australia and New Zealand, and published a 125-page report, *The Adventist Woman in the Secular World: Her Ministry and Her Church*. It pleaded for change.

In 1992, the constituents of the Southeastern California Conference asked their executive committee to devise a plan for ordaining women within its jurisdiction and to conduct all future ordinations of men and women uniformly.

That year, the Review and Herald broke a General Conference taboo by publishing *A Woman’s Place*. The NAD Women’s Commission and its Office of Human Relations had been working on it since 1986. Edited by Rosa Taylor Banks, Director of the OHR, it surveys SDA women issues in the denomination and society.

In 1993 at a January meeting, 88 percent of the NAD ministerial directors along with the senior pastors of college churches asked their Division to authorize and promote women’s ordination on a regional basis.

During 1993, the Association of Adventist Women with a

special issue of *Adventist Woman* commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the Camp Mohaven Council. This had been convened to deliberate on the role of women. All the original Mohaven recommendations were published—alongside the actions that the 1974 Annual Council actually took. Three men and four women who were members of the Mohaven group shared their perspectives.

But delegates to the 1993 Autumn Council found that women's ordination, which had been discussed behind closed doors, was removed from the agenda by General Conference President Folkenberg. Reportedly he hoped to prevent conflict and polarization by waiting until the next year.

Raymond Holmes, a retired seminary professor, during 1994 self-published *The Tip of an Iceberg*. In it, he argued that the authority of the Bible, and all of Adventist's unique beliefs, is threatened if Scripture is interpreted to allow women's ordination. This book was widely distributed. Due to its endorsement by several highly placed SDA leaders, it gave the appearance of being the Church's "official position."

Also in 1994, General Conference President Folkenberg, discussed the ordination of women with the Southeastern California Conference leadership. He said he hoped consensus could be obtained among Division leaders. The SECC had been ready to move ahead with the ordination of women, but now voted to postpone the issue and take it up again at a meeting during November 1994, to determine a course of action should Folkenberg not get consensus at Annual Council.

On 22 September 1994, the Executive Committee of the Atlantic Union Conference voted a statement in support of women's ordination. But Southern New England Conference President Charles Case voted against the statement and asked that his name be excluded.

Just two days later, on 23-24 September 1994, the Sligo congregation celebrated women in ministry. All eight women who had been on the pastoral staff since 1973 took part in a reunion. The program concluded with a "procession of light" on Sabbath afternoon.

Marking the church's 150th anniversary of 1844, and the 21st anniversary of Camp Mohaven, candles were carried for

150 women in ministry as their names were read in a special ceremony. Eighteen women carried their own candles.

In October 1994, the Association of Adventist Women published a second list of women in ministry. The October/November issue (Vol. 13, No. 5) of *Adventist Women* featured ninety women with their stories and photographs. Included were women not only from the United States but also from Sweden, Switzerland, Canada, Germany, the Baltic Union, Russia, Norway, and Finland.

Six months later, in April 1995, the press of Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry optimistically published *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women*, in which fourteen prominent Adventist authors and scholars supported the ordination of women.

For them, that was a time of heady expectations.

### XIII

But Kit Watts, did not share their optimism. As an assistant editor of the *Adventist Review* she was living in Silver Spring, Maryland, near the General Conference headquarters. She knew, no doubt, what was being planned for the near future. At the upcoming GC session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, during July 1995, the delegates from the world field would be asked to approve a motion to give each Division the right to ordain whom it pleases, judiciously but also “without regard to gender.” This, she realized, would soon be facing very heavy weather.

Therefore, in April 1995, *Ministry Magazine*, which had renewed the discussion of ordination for women and decision-making in the Church, featured a piece by her. It had a foreboding title: “Moving Away from the Table: A Survey of Historical Factors Affecting Women Leaders.”<sup>87</sup>

This was a masterly piece of writing, but the first part of its title, “Moving Away from the Table,” contradicted “The Welcome Table” of the TEAM publication mentioned above.

Amongst other things, Kit Watts explained the nineteenth-century situation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church against a wider background in North America, the Catholic Middle Ages, and ancient paganism.

She stated: “Aristotle theorized that females were

‘misbegotten’ males. They are ‘weaker and colder in nature,’ he said, ‘and we must look upon the female character as being a sort of natural deficiency.’” Then she referred to Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274), who thought men were better at everything than women, though these were necessary for procreation. To this she added: “Such views persisted in the nineteenth century. In 1840 a writer for Godey’s Lady’s Book, one of the earliest magazines for females in the U.S., defined women as ‘the connecting link’ between man and the inferior animals.”

I find it fascinating to lay beside Kit Watts’s analysis an extract from a book by Isaac Asimov, *The Golden Door: The United States from 1865 to 1918*. After noting what had in that period happened to black people, he said:

Oddly enough one other group that was deprived of all political and most economic rights everywhere in the United States included millions of Whites and, indeed, many wealthy and upper-class Whites. They were deprived only because they were women and for no other reason.

In the Declaration of Independence, for instance, Thomas Jefferson stated that “all men were created equal.” It is doubtful if it even occurred to him to include women in that sentence. Indeed, through most of history, women have been considered as intermediate beings, higher than the four-legged animals, perhaps, but surely considerably lower than men.

Not only were women not permitted to vote, usually denied any but the most elementary education, and kept out of most jobs, but even when they did manage to work, they would get something like one third of the pay men got for the same work.<sup>88</sup>

We may wonder why men mete out such treatment. One answer is misogyny, a hatred of women. But do most men not love their sweethearts or their wives? Of course, they do and yet, in some ways, they do not. As some perceptive man, whose name I can unfortunately not recall, has pointed out an overt affection and at least some hidden hatred are not incompatible. He said: In the war between the genders, men love women but they do not like them.

Sex attracts them physically, even while a latent dislike may also be present. More than two thousand years ago, Gaius Valerius Catullus (c. 84-54 B.C.), a famous Roman poet, was tormented by this ambivalence, of which he was deeply aware. Addressing an unknown woman, possibly his mistress Lesbia, he famously wrote as part of Carmen 85:

Odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requires?  
nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

(I hate and love. You may ask why I should do so.  
I don't know, but I feel it happening and suffer torment.)<sup>89</sup>

No doubt there were also other reasons. Here are two of them. Men who are born and raised in countries where machismo or patriarchy prevails are powerfully motivated by it. Then, too, those who in the struggle of life must face competition from other more successful males do not also want to cope with women whose abilities equal or surpass their own. Suppressing measures against such females can, they think—consciously or subconsciously—deal with this factor. In that way, competition is greatly reduced by eliminating half of the human race. To salve their consciences, they could always quote Scripture to justify their actions. From time immemorial, since the Fall, these things have been part of the virtual servitude which the female of the species has had to endure, even though she has not always kept quiet about it.

In any case, Kit Watts went on to say:

At the dawn of the nineteenth century in the United States, women held approximately the same legal status as children and slaves. Married women generally could not own property independent of their husbands. If they were employed, their wages could be appropriated by their husbands. Legal say about their children resided entirely in the father's hands.

Women were not admitted to colleges or universities. They were not allowed to enter professions. They could not vote or hold an office. And women were not



permitted to speak in public.

Whenever these customs and laws were tested by proposals to change or enlarge women's role in the home, church, or society, emotional debate was likely to ensue.

Indeed. And I may add, it has been raging from at least as early as the American Declaration of Independence, including women's voices at the highest level, in the White House itself. Some of the First Ladies have been remarkably outspoken.

In March 1776, Abigail Adams (1744-1818) wrote to her husband John (1735-1826), who would one day succeed George Washington as the second president of the United States: "I long to hear that you have declared on independency," to which she added: "In the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation. That your sex are naturally tyrannical is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute."<sup>90</sup>

The relationship of these two people was actually excellent, a life-long and sometimes passionate love story, as can be observed from more than 1,100 letters that passed between them and have been preserved. When in office from 1797 to 1801, John Adams often consulted her, and she influenced him to such an extent that critics referred to her as "Mrs. President."<sup>91</sup>

A son of this celebrated couple, John Quincy Adams (1827-1898), became the sixth president of the United States and like his father spent only four years in the White House. His wife, a rather sickly and unhappy Louisa Johnson Adams (1775-1852), had no measurable political influence on her husband. She was, however, a very intellectual woman. Born in London to an English mother, she had "lived in France and spoke French fluently. She was accomplished on the harp and piano, wrote poetry, and loved to read, especially the classics."<sup>92</sup>

Further, “Louisa happens to have left us an extensive written record of her thoughts, and through them we discover a compassionate concern for the difficult conditions of the women of her time. Louisa realized the futility of seeking independence as a person, even within her own family, but beneath the passive, timid surface there beat the heart of a feminist who admired those strong women who were “what God intended woman to be, before she was owned by her Master, Man.”<sup>93</sup>

In the White House, their relationship was most unfortunate: “. . . because of the lingering bitterness of the election John Quincy was a most unpopular president, and the Adamses were often alone together. Both unhappy, they quarreled often, and she complained that their isolation had a “tendency to render us savages.” Also, “in one letter to her husband she complained of feeling like ‘a bird in a cage,’ brought out only when he needed her to make an appearance. She also objected to ‘that sense of inferiority which by nature and law’ women were made to feel and sardonically told him that it gave as much ‘satisfaction as the badge of slavery generally.’”<sup>94</sup>

Over the years, she tried writing her autobiography, under various titles, depending on how she felt at a given time. Once it was *Record of a Life* or *Adventures of a Nobody*. “In the last years of her life, while John Quincy was serving in Congress, Louisa tried to analyze women’s true role by studying the Old Testament, where she found evidence of an intended equality between the sexes. She and women’s rights activist Sarah Grimké corresponded frequently on the subject. She also discovered her mother-in-law’s [Abigail Adams’s] letters on women’s rights and considered them ‘treasures.’ A few years before her death in 1852, Louisa did for a woman slave what she could not do for herself; she bought the woman’s title and set her free.”<sup>95</sup>

For female rights, a very long struggle lay ahead, throughout the rest of the nineteenth and the whole of the twentieth century—and right up to the present. Three other First Ladies were also involved.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) was the most illustrious of them all. Together with her husband, President F. D.

Roosevelt, she spent twelve years in the White House. She supported all manner of civil rights issues. “Eleanor Roosevelt testified a last time before Congress in April 1962 in support of legislation that would guarantee gender pay equity. She also eventually came to support the Equal Rights Amendment, dropping her previous reservations about it. Her last official role was as chair of President Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women . . .”<sup>96</sup>

Betty Ford (1918-2011), the wife of President Gerald “Jerry” Ford (1913-2006), was a leader in the Women’s Movement. As such, she was “a passionate supporter of and activist for, the Equal Rights Amendment.”<sup>97</sup> When she called and wrote to legislators to ratify it, “the opposition picketed the White House with placards reading, ‘Betty Ford, Get Off the Phone.’” Further, she influenced Jerry “to encourage the appointment of women to high places.”<sup>98</sup> Due to her active political participation, *Time Magazine* called her America’s “Fighting First Lady” and named her a “Woman of the Year in 1975, representing American women along with other feminist icons.” But she was no bluestocking. She was married to Jerry for fifty-eight years, and “they were among the more openly affectionate First Couples in American history. Neither was shy about their mutual love and equal respect, and they were known to have a strong personal and political partnership.”<sup>99</sup>

We have already noted the role of Rosalynn Carter and how she influenced her husband, Jimmy Carter, who succeeded Jerry Ford as president. After leaving the White House during 1981, she and her husband founded the Carter Center. There, in 1988, she together with Betty Ford, Lady Bird Johnson, and Pat Nixon—three other former First Ladies—convened a Women and the Constitution conference. It featured more than “150 speakers and 1,500 attendees from all 50 states and 10 foreign countries.” Rosalynn Carter has been “honored by the National Organization for Women with an Award of Merit for her vigorous support of the Equal Rights Amendment.” She has been called the Steel Magnolia.<sup>100</sup> a nickname that combines “the contrasting images of *steel*, a hard metal, and *magnolia*, a flower.”<sup>101</sup>

Of all these developments, Kit Watts would have been well aware in April 1995, when she wrote her “Moving Away from the Table: A Survey of Historical Factors Affecting Women Leaders.” But she also understood the forces that had been and were still arrayed against them both in and outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She did not think it was necessarily a winning battle. I therefore resume and continue a survey of her study.

She pointed out that during the first Great Awakening of the 1740s John Wesley, who founded Methodism, gave “women public responsibilities, at first in small groups of other women. Next, he ‘welcomed their public speaking as it took the forms of prayer, personal testimony, exhortation, and exposition on religious literature.’” George Fox in England “argued from Scripture that women’s equality and their speaking in public could be justified.” This caused female preachers to cross the Atlantic and bring Quakerism to the colonies. But at the same time Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians lagged behind in this area.

During the Second Great Awakening (1795-1835) in America, “the convicting power of the gospel spurred many women out of traditional roles.” They were prominent in the antislavery movement and “rallied tens of thousands to join the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. They worked tirelessly to improve conditions in mental asylums, prisons, hospitals, and schools. Through diligence and self-sacrifice they organized and funded great missionary societies that reached India, Africa, China, and the islands of the sea.”

On the other hand, “for a woman to pray or speak publicly to both men and women was a daring thing in those days, even in religious circles.” But the Lord gave visions to Ellen Harmon (later White) and told her to go and proclaim them. In 1889, she “recalled that her own brother had begged her not to go public. ‘I beg of you do not disgrace the family. I will do anything for you if you will not go out as a preacher,’ he wrote to her.” Her response was: “Can it disgrace the family for me to preach Christ and him crucified? If you would give me all the gold your house could hold, I would not cease giving my testimony for God.”

Kit Watts referred to early articles in the *Review*, such as a

reprint by editor Uriah Smith in 1861 approving these words: “We consider the following a triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters to take part in the public worship of God.” Also M. H. Howard on 18 August 1868, who spoke of “that conservatism which so readily takes fright at the prominence accorded to a woman.”

Ellen E. White “became a model and spokesperson for her Adventist women temporaries,” and encouraged them to work for the Lord, as some of her utterances clearly show.

In 1878: “Sisters, God calls you to work in the harvest field and help gather in the sheaves.”

In 1886: “It was Mary who first preached a risen Jesus and the refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth now.”

In 1898: “There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God.”

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “scores of women were once elected to key decision-making roles where today [1995] there are almost none.” In 1905, “women held 20 out of 60 conference treasurer positions” and in 1915 “approximately two-thirds of the 60 educational department leaders and more than 50 of the 60 Sabbath School department leaders were women.”

Between 1884 and 1915, a period of 31 years, twenty-eight women were licensed as ministers.

In the latter year, Ellen G. White died. After that, far fewer women became prominent. For instance, “in the 60-year period between 1915 and 1975, only 25 women are named in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook as carrying this credential. (The cut-off in the late 1970s was made when the question of women’s ordination arose. The church then halted its 100-year practice of issuing ministerial licenses to females.)”

Addressing the decline, Kit Watts referred to various factors, such as policy decisions by church administrators, the effects of the Great Depression, and the aftermath of World War II, when “society gave renewed emphasis to home and motherhood.” Her Conclusion stated:

“By 1915 scores of Adventist women held decision-making

posts. Because the church was relatively small at the time (fewer than 137,000 members worldwide), women made up a noticeable proportion of the church's leaders. But their numbers declined dramatically. By the time World War II ended, Adventist women lost all the ground they had gained in the previous 100 years. They completely vanished from conference leadership. Now, 50 years later, it has become more and more difficult to recall women's former prominence and effectiveness."

That was a distressing story which Kit Watts wrote in 1995. It certainly vindicated her choice of words in heading her analysis: "Moving Away from the Table." Her version of events as well as her conclusions have, however, been challenged. Two examples will suffice.

David Trim, director of Archives, Statistics, and Research at the SDA World Headquarters, faulted her data in minor ways. But his main criticism concerned the idea that in the nineteenth century no women were ordained as pastors although, as he stated, "within five years, in August 1895 and January 1900, there were ordination services at two local churches in Australia at which elders, deacons *and deaconesses* were ordained"<sup>102</sup> This, however, is anachronistic; the early SDA denomination—like New Testament Christianity—did not distinguish between pastors and elders.

Another and fulsome attempt at rebuttal consisted in articles by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Ph.D., a scholar from Ghana. A series of three papers, which can be accessed via the ADVENTISTS AFFIRM website, are "To Ordain or Not to Ordain? The Campaign for Women's Ordination, Part 1"; "Does the Bible Support Ordaining Women as Elders or Pastors? Part 2"; and "Does the Bible Support Ordaining Women as Elders or Pastors? Part 3." A true African, he obviously believed in the patriarchal system. He opposed the ordination of women as either elders or pastors and rejected the idea that it is a cultural issue. For him, it was theology, pure and simple.<sup>103</sup> Because his arguments are similar to many others already noted, I shall not here be delving into them further.

But why did I say that Kit Watt's article had a *foreboding*

title? Because at the time when she wrote it, she was an assistant editor of the *Adventist Review* and living at Silver Spring, Maryland, near General Conference headquarters. From the discussions she had heard she knew what the leaders had in mind and were planning. And how right she was!

For consideration by the fifty-sixth General Conference Session, to be held at Utrecht in the Netherlands, the North American Division prepared the following text:

“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 committees take specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions.”

This recommendation was submitted to the Session on 5 July 1995—and rejected. The vote was

**In favor of the recommendation: 673**

**In opposition to the recommendation: 1,481<sup>104</sup>**

Just as Kit Watts must have feared! It was, in fact, a repetition of what had happened five years earlier during the General Conference Session at Indianapolis, IN, in 1990. Then, with a majority of almost 800 votes, the ordination of women pastors had been rejected and this statement added:

“In view of the widespread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world church and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the church, we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry.”<sup>105</sup>

Whenever the Seventh-day Adventist denomination puts this issue to the vote on a worldwide basis, this outcome is all but certain, for the foreseeable future if not forever. To achieve international consensus is, as I suggested in the first section above, a will-o'-the-wisp. Believers inhabiting various parts of our planet have, in their theology and hermeneutics, been strongly conditioned by economic and socio-cultural

presuppositions that differ far too much among themselves. North America, Western Europe, and other first-world countries have a view of women which is utterly incompatible with the one which prevails in third-world countries. Because the majority of Seventh-day Adventists now—which was not always the case—inhabit Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, which, with a few exceptions, mostly belong to the third world. Numerically they have the power to outvote the first-worlders every time.

## XV

It is now necessary to consider important components in the mental make-up of those regions, which has also affected the SDA worldview in the countries concerned. I begin with Africa, for that is the continent on which I was born and reared and in whose southernmost part I spent the first sixty-three years of my life.

Here are two paragraphs from Siphokazi Magadla's article, which was recently published by the *Mail and Guardian*, a newspaper in Johannesburg, South Africa. Its mostly black inhabitants still predominantly belong to the third world, though not entirely so. It is the most advanced country in sub-Saharan Africa, yet it is still steeped in the patriarchal values of that continent. Two of its notable features are spiritualist animism and polygamy. For instance, Jacob Zuma, still president in 2013, had six wives, to whom he was legally married. Siphokazi said:

For me what is particular in South Africa is the masculinisation of the public sphere which resembles an “*isibaya*”—a *kraal* [corral]. Our public space resembles “bulls” fighting each other in the *kraal* while the women watch on the sidelines crying or ululating for their favoured bull. While they may enter the *kraal*, this is done at their own risk.

What has increasingly been deemed a “feminist backlash” to the work of the 1990s to transform political culture by addressing a history of racism and sexism, has to some extent succeeded in punishing racists to a degree. Yet



when it comes to misogyny in our political culture we continue to give space and voice to men who eat sushi on women's bodies, a president who thinks women will not have succeeded in their civic duty if they do not have babies, and men who claim to champion "worker's rights" while seeing no problem with irregularly employing young women for the pure motive of attaining sexual favours.<sup>106</sup>

A black South African, this writer is evidently not a Seventh-day Adventist. What she has written is, however, genuine and relevant to this discussion; for our church members there—and also on the rest of the continent—are subject to several circumambient influences. People here in North America are largely unacquainted with the realities of traditional Africa.

Still powerfully present there is animism, the cult of the ancestral spirits, frequently blended with an indigenized Christianity. It can manifest itself as spiritualism, prophecy, and a kind of African Pentecostalism. Several examples occur in Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon's "Jo'burg hills are alive with visions," who reported on this phenomenon in modern Johannesburg, where many a so-called prophet posted his advertisements claiming to help the needy among migrant workers. These were often poor and destitute, with difficult challenges to face. One practitioner was prophet Tshabalala from Zimbabwe. To Wilhelm-Solomon in Rosettenville, where he had his practice, he explained the role of a prophet, who "hears the voice of God. It will be in tongues. You will be asking what the problem is. It changes the language. It also changes my language when I am talking, exchanging words. It's like when I am talking to this man, it can take my vision back [to] his birth and background and show me when the problem came. It changes my vision. I will see the problem." In this way, Tshabalala considered himself to be "the conduit for God, the healer and the oracle."<sup>107</sup>

It is hard for those who have not lived in Africa, and even for some whites who have, to understand the forces that have shaped its thinking among the blacks of that continent.

During 1982-1993, my wife and I were living within easy driving distance from Hammanskraal, a town in what was then

still called the Province of Transvaal (present-day Gauteng). In that area, within a few months, thirty people were burned for alleged witchcraft. This was illegal, but like ritual murders persisted all the same. The animistic worship of and even communication with dead ancestors was also rife.

At Tweefontein, a little west of Hammalskraal within what was then Bophuthatswana, we helped—together with other white SDAs—to build a church for our black believers. There I was astounded to discover from the local elder and his deacon that some members in the congregation had not only embraced the three angels' messages but also retained a belief in ancestral spirits. One reason for this was a scarcity of trained ministers and deficient instruction as to what the Bible really teaches. Another was the lack of literature and other resources that could alleviate the problem.

In both Muslim and sub-Saharan Africa, polygamy is a persistent and perplexing problem for the SDA Church, whose policies forbid it. It certainly contributes to the patriarchal elevation of men over women, who are degraded by it.

But what must a polygamous convert do with his extra wife or wives? Divorcing them can have nasty consequences for the women concerned. Stefan Höschele, who teaches theology at the Theologische Hochschule Friedensau in Germany, has argued eloquently for the relaxation of such policies as they affect the Maasai in East Africa. He spent six and a half years working for the SDA Church in Tanzania, “and from late 1997, I was involved in a church planting project among the Maasai which led to the establishment of four congregations.” This people group comprises a million individuals, 500,000 in Tanzania and another 500,000 in neighboring Kenya. By the year 2000, about 600 Tanzanian Maasai had become SDAs. In Kenya, it was 5,000.<sup>108</sup>

Traditionally they are cattle keepers. In fact, their economy and entire way of life is bound up with these animals. A man's social status is determined by how many heads of cattle he owns, and these are herded by his wives and children, who also need to be numerous. Further, a divorced woman is a disgrace and may be abandoned into prostitution.<sup>109</sup>

Höschele cites John Kisaka, the first Tanzanian SDA to receive a doctorate in the field of theology. “Dr. Kisaka is a

Pare who had been the driving force among the Adventist pioneer missionaries to the Maasai in the 1960s.” The title of his dissertation is *The Adventist Church’s Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa*. At times, his argumentation is ingenious. Here are some of his points:

1. Through divorce and remarriage, Westerners commit “consecutive polygamy” or “serial polygamy.”

2. The Bible does not forbid polygamy “and actually endorses it for the levirate institution.”

3. Traditionally, polygamy ensures offspring, helps avoid immorality, and is an economic asset. Therefore, it should not simply be dismissed as an adulterous condition.

4. Though admittedly polygamy is not an ideal, “there is no direct order from God that a polygamous husband . . . ‘shall on conversion be required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one’” before baptism.

Dr. Kisaka, now retired, has not been alone in adopting this stance. Höschele mentions several more such authors, including Godwin Lekundayo, who at the time of writing was doing a Ph.D. at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.<sup>110</sup>

Should we be surprised if, at General Conference Sessions, delegates from Africa vote against the values of those who represent the North American Division, whose women occupy a much loftier and very different station in life?

There is also something else, which Höschele does not address. I also wonder how the African SDA leaders and intelligentsia deal with it. I mean the horrors of female genital mutilation. This terrible practice, both painful and degrading, is intended to deprive a woman of enjoying sexual intercourse. Among other nasty consequences, it complicates childbirth. It has often been called female *circumcision*, but it is nothing of the kind. It is widespread in Africa and practically universal among the Maasai. Through it, their young women are initiated into adulthood “and then into early arranged marriages. The Maasai believe that female circumcision is necessary and Maasai men may reject any woman who has not undergone it as either not marriageable or worthy of a much-reduced bride price.”<sup>111</sup>

Do SDA girls and women in this people group have to endure female genital mutilation?

It exists in many African countries, especially in the North, where it “is predominant in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. The practice is rooted in gender inequality, ideas about purity, modesty, aesthetics, honour and cultural identity, and attempts to control women’s sexuality by reducing their sexual desire.” The United Nations General Assembly “voted unanimously in 2012 to ban the practice.” The World Health Organization maintains that “140 million women and girls around the world are living with the effects of the practice, including 101 million girls over the age of ten in Africa.” The motivations for it vary. For instance, “in Egypt, Sudan and Somalia, the focus is on curbing premarital sex, whereas in Kenya and Uganda it is carried out to reduce a woman’s sexual desire for her husband so that he can more easily take several wives.”<sup>112</sup> Male domination, again.

Female genital mutilation is deeply ingrained in African society. “Jomo Kenyatta (c. 1894-1978), who became Kenya’s first prime minister in 1963, wrote in 1930 that in the tribal psychology of the Kikuyu the institution of FGM (the initiation ceremonies and the procedure itself) had ‘enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications.’” Because of cultural indoctrination, many women in Africa also support it for a variety of reasons. Most startlingly, “as a result of immigration, FGM spread to Australia, Canada, Europe (particularly France and the UK, because of immigration from former colonies), New Zealand, Scandinavia and the United States.” In these first-world countries, it is generally illegal. Nevertheless, “families who have immigrated from practicing countries may send their daughters there to undergo FGM, ostensibly to visit a relative, or fly in circumcisers to conduct it in people’s homes.”<sup>113</sup>

The reader may recall the indignation of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, whom I cited above. Among other things, he said that the discrimination against women,

“unjustifiably attributed to a Higher Authority, has provided a reason or excuse for the deprivation of women’s equal rights across the world for centuries. The male interpretations of religious texts and the way they interact with, and reinforce, traditional practices justify some of the

most pervasive, persistent, flagrant and damaging examples of human rights abuses.

“At their most repugnant, the belief that women must be subjugated to the wishes of men excuses slavery, violence, forced prostitution, genital mutilation and national laws that omit rape as a crime. But it also costs many millions of girls and women control over their own bodies and lives, and continues to deny them fair access to education, health, employment and influence within their own communities.”<sup>114</sup>

For such reasons, Carter would not tolerate Southern Baptist rationalizations aimed at ensuring a lower status for women. Consequently, after a lifetime of serving his denomination, he broke with it. As I have said, the SBC is an object lesson and can be a cautionary tale for Seventh-day Adventists.

It is shameful to relate that female genital mutilation occurs among African SDAs. On 14 September 2013, I asked Dr. Asnake Manyazewal about it. He is an American-educated pharmacologist and a local elder of a congregation here in the United States. He hails from Ethiopia, where FGM is common. I asked him outright whether SDA girls also underwent such operations. He said they did in some rural areas, though not in the cities.<sup>115</sup>

To varying extents, FGM is performed in many sub-Saharan countries, all the way from the North to South Africa, though statistics are not available for all of them.

It is unclear to what extent the SDA Church has researched this phenomenon, although the General Conference has fortunately taken a stand against it, as reported by an article in *Adventist News Network* on 25 April 2000. It mentions that “FGM is a cross-cultural, cross-religious custom, which some justify on many different grounds. In some areas FGM is a quasi-religious ritual . . . . Possible immediate complications of FGM include hemorrhage, shock and infection. In the long term, an FGM procedure can result in urinary tract disorders (such as incontinence), infertility, sexual dysfunction, menstrual abnormalities and painful and prolonged labor during childbirth due to the buildup of scar tissue.”<sup>116</sup> This

report does not, however, explicitly say that FGM also exists among SDAs or to what extent.

## XVI

The situation in Latin America, where many Seventh-day Adventists live, is possibly not as bad as in sub-Saharan Africa. Some of its countries are more civilized and at least female genital mutilation is not a problem. Nevertheless, its prevalent machismo is also a vicious thing; it devalues and oppresses women and is a license for male immorality. Let us briefly look at it with reference to four major countries in Latin America, which make up more than half of its territory. Of these Argentina, Mexico, and Chile are Spanish speaking. In Brazil, the national language is Portuguese. But their machismo have many features in common.

I begin by quoting from two female writers.

Karissa Kieler, in Argentina writing on 10 December 2012, said machismo was “a strong or exaggerated sense of manliness, an assumptive attitude that virility, courage, strength, and entitlement to dominate are attributes of masculinity.” The men were the breadwinners and therefore in charge. They were supposed to have the first and last word. But it was also “accepted for men to commit adultery and participate in public sexual joking (piropos).” Kieler stated further: “The machista believes that he is superior. He is allowed to have a mistress in addition to his wife, plus many casual encounters. He isn’t affectionate to his wife, but merely wants to have control over her. He gets jealous easily and will be violent when necessary to show his strength. The women give in to this stereotype. They want their men to be strong and take care of them. They often pretend not to know about male adultery or choose not to accept it because ‘men have stronger sexual desires.’”<sup>117</sup>

Although machismo is less prevalent in Argentina today, market research reveals that 85 percent of women there still think their men are afflicted with it. These still consider females as “the weaker sex intellectually” and problematic in the work place.<sup>118</sup>

This is how Kieler accounted for their situation historically:

“It is said that Argentina’s Machismo comes from their Italian and Spanish ancestors, which are known to be very machista. Between 1880-1930, women mostly stayed at home and spent time only with other women and children. The only women who had a lot of male interaction were prostitutes. Even married women didn’t spend much time with their husbands. The men spent more time at bars and brothels.”<sup>119</sup>

Pervasive in Latin America is the influence of Catholicism, with which Kieler did not concern herself. But most of the people in Latin America belong to the Roman Church. It has through the centuries also been a purveyor of machista attitudes, which have affected secular as well as church affairs.

As Darius Jankiewicz of the SDA Seminary at Berrien Springs, MI, has shown, Catholicism inherited its ecclesiastic system from pre-Christian, pagan Rome, which ranked people into separate classes, called orders. “If, by any chance, a person was destined to move upward in rank, he—and in the Roman Empire it was always a ‘he’—was to go through the process of *ordination*. *Ordinatio* appears to have been used as a classical way of installing imperial officers and for the promotion of officers to a higher rank in the army. Finally, the idea of ordination appears also to have been used in the cultic context of pagan Roman Society. Here, a person would be appointed to the cultic office received from the gods of the ancient world.”<sup>120</sup>

Isabel Allende originally from Chile but later resident in the United States, had—like Karissa Kieler from neighboring Argentina—very ugly things to say about the men folk of her native country and machismo:

Sociologists have traced the causes back to the Spanish conquest, but since male dominance is a world problem, its roots must be much more ancient, it isn’t fair to blame only the Spaniards. At any rate, I will repeat what I’ve read about it. The Araucan Indians were polygamous and treated women very badly; they would abandon them, and their children, and leave as a group to look for new hunting grounds, where they took new women and had more children, whom they left in turn. The mothers took care of their offspring as best they could, a custom that in a way

persists in the psyche of our people. Chilean women tend to accept—but not forgive—abandonment by their men because they think of it as an endemic ill, something inherent in the male nature. As for the Spanish conquistadors, very few of them brought women with them, so they coupled with Indian women, whom they valued far less than a horse. From these unequal unions were born humiliated daughters who would themselves be raped as women, and sons who feared and admired the soldier father: bad-tempered, unjust, master of all rights, including those of life and death. As those sons grew up, they identified with their fathers, never with the conquered race of the mother. Some conquistadors had as many as thirty concubines. . . .<sup>121</sup>

Allende said that “Chilean women are abettors of machismo: they bring up their daughters to serve and their sons to be served. While on the one hand they fight for their rights and work tirelessly, on the other, they wait on their husband and male children, assisted by their daughters, who from an early age are well instructed regarding their obligations. Modern girls are rebelling, of course, but the minute they fall in love they repeat the learned pattern, confusing love with service. It makes me sad to see splendid girls waiting on their boyfriends as if they were invalids. They not only serve the meal, they offer to cut the meat. It makes me unhappy because I was the same way.”<sup>122</sup>

In passing, Allende also said: “There is no secret about machismo in Mexico; it’s in their *rancheras*, their country ballads . . .”<sup>123</sup>

We now turn to that country, just south of the United States and the Rio Grande. Living just north of the river, *entre dos mundos*, I even have some spillover knowledge of machismo as it affects Latinas here in America. During four years of teaching at a university and community college in southernmost Texas, I would sometime ask young women students: “Would you like to marry a Mexican?” Their almost uniform rejection of such a possibility at first astounded me. After all, the vast majority of them are the descendants of immigrants from over there. Why? So let us read about it



further.

In “The United States, Mexico, and *Machismo*,” Américo Paredes said the *macho*, “the superman of the multitude,” was “one of the most widely discussed Mexican national types.” It has been explained in terms of many factors, including the climate. With various writers, history linked with Freudian psychology is a great favorite. “*Machismo*—so they tell us—has its origins in the Conquest, when Hernán Cortés and his conquistadors arrived in Mexico and raped the women of the Aztecs. From this act of violence is born the *mestizo*, who hates and envies his Spanish father and despises his Indian mother—in both cases as a result of his Oedipal complexes.” Some well-known, characteristic traits of machismo, according to Paredes, are “the outrageous boast, a distinct phallic symbolism, the identification of the man with the male animal. . .”<sup>124</sup>

As for Brazil, this gender problem also persists in that country of 191 million inhabitants, although it is mitigated by *Machisma*, “Girl Power,” as Cynthia Gorney headlines it in her *National Geographic* report. Since the 1970s and the 1980s, “the nation was profoundly altered by the *movimento das mulheres*, the women’s movement . . .” They have simply decided to have no more than two children each, mostly for reasons of material betterment. And this has been true of poor as well as wealthy women. Despite the teachings of the Catholic Church to the contrary, they have not only used contraceptives but also resorted to large-scale, illegal abortions and frequently had themselves sterilized. Nevertheless, Gorney did also write: “*Machismo* means the same thing in the Portuguese of Brazil as it does in the rest of the continent’s Spanish, and it has been linked to the country’s high levels of domestic violence and other physical assaults on women.”<sup>125</sup>

Traditionally the Roman Church has favored male supremacy, but nowadays in that country, it is not the only denomination. “The 2010 Census reported that 22.6% of the Brazilian population is Protestant,” more than 38 million. Of these, Seventh-day Adventists make up 1.8 million. A study by Catholics has shown that “600,000 of their members convert annually to a Protestant denomination.”<sup>126</sup>

Protestantism, though it does not necessarily eliminate machismo, tends to bolster women's rights, and so does Spiritualism. "Brazil has the largest number of Spiritists in the world: over 2.3 million followers, around 1.3 percent of the total population and the third largest religious group, behind Catholics and Evangelicals."<sup>127</sup> Even more than Protestantism, it mitigates the effects of machismo. Likewise in North America, "many of the women's rights movement's strongest supporters had ties to Spiritualism, including Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Ashsa W. Sprague . . . . It is clear that at the height of the movement there were strong ties with the Spiritualist religion. With its more relaxed views on female equality and women's suffrage, Spiritualism was an attractive option for feminists and their supporters seeking an arena in which to speak."<sup>128</sup>

All the same, machismo retains a strong grip on Brazilians. Very insightful in this regard is a study by José Batista Loureiro De Oliveira, "Deconstructing 'Machismo': Victims of 'Machismo Ideology,'" prepared for delivery at the meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Hyatt Regency Miami, 16-18 March 2000. His abstract says: "This paper is a discussion of machismo present massively in the Brazilian culture, as this culture is mainly patriarchal and chauvinist. This talk is drawn from research in progress on social representation of machismo in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil . . ." In that year, Loureiro De Oliveira was employed by the Psychology Department of the University of Bologna, Italy.<sup>129</sup>

Citing several authorities, he found that "dominating in Brazil, Catholicism provided the ideology of female abnegation, and economic oppression blocked other sources of authority for men." The Roman Church promoted *marianismo*, "the cult of Virgin Mary," while the media and powerful institutions could "disseminate and confirm the dichotomy between men and women: stiletto heels for women, mustaches for men, perfume for women, sweat for men and so on. This framework renders things extremely conservative and overconformed."<sup>130</sup>

Loureiro De Oliveira thought, besides, that psychologists tended to underplay the role of historical factors. In this

regard, he cited a Brazilian scholar, Ieda Siqueira Wiarda, Ph.D. She wrote:

The Latin American systems have their roots in the ancient Greek notion of organic solidarity; in the Roman system of a hierarchy of laws and institutions; in historic Catholic concepts of the corporate, sectoral, and compartmentalized organization of society based on each person's acceptance of his or her station in life; in the similarly corporate organization (Army, Church, towns, nobility) of Iberian society during the late medieval era; in the warrior mentality and the walled enclave cities of the period of the Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors; in the centralized bureaucratic systems of the early modern Spanish and Portuguese states; and the absolutist, scholastic, Catholic, political culture and institutions of Spain of the Inquisition and the Counter Reformation. Of course, in the vast empty and "uncivilized" Western Hemisphere, which was under the constant threat that the thin veneer of Spanish and Portuguese culture and institutions would be submerged, and which had huge Indian (ten times larger in Latin America than in North America) and later African populations, the institutions transplanted from Iberia underwent various changes and permutations. The amazing thing is their capacity to survive, persist, and adapt even into the contemporary period.<sup>131</sup>

Through immigration, Latin machismo has also crossed over into the United States with disturbing results. One of them is that for young males it is "a cultural barrier to learning," according to Nick Newman, a student who researched this topic for the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. He discovered that a culture which values machismo has "rigid gender roles."

And in the U.S. educational system, those defined gender roles are being played out but not in the way one might expect. Male pride is losing out while Hispanic

females are increasingly succeeding.

The data present a stark contrast between male and female educational success among Hispanics in the U.S.: 61 percent of all Latino college students are women. There's an almost 60 percent difference in bachelor degree attainment between the Latino sexes in the last 30 years. By the time children finish the third grade, they will have developed a pattern of learning that will shape the rest of their lives.

Regardless of how you measure it, Latino boys are falling behind. And increasingly researchers are saying the time-honored machismo culture may be one reason for that stark discrepancy.<sup>132</sup>

Among the authorities whom Newman cited to support this contention was Dr. Gilberto Q. Conchas, an associate professor of education at the University of California-Irvine, who said that machismo among Latino males shaped their social ambitions as well as their academic performance. "He told [DiverseEducation.com](http://DiverseEducation.com) many Mexican-American boys regard education as a feminine pursuit." Conchas also maintained that "persisting and doing well in school is often seen being at odds with masculinity."<sup>133</sup>

Even more interesting were the responses that Newman got when he interviewed the male Latinos themselves. According to them, "there are positives that come with machismo that they are reluctant to abandon. Chief among them is the devotion to family and the obligation to provide for the family, dedication and values that are admired in most cultures."

Such attitudes are common north of the Mexican border. Here is another more subtle factor that undermines the achievement of Latino males: "'There are expectations you have to live up to, even as a little kid. Part of machismo is that you know it all,' said Julian Cavazos, a Mexican-American from Texas' Rio Grande Valley. 'So you might be scared to ask questions in school because people might think you're dumb. But if you do that, you can't progress in your education. You can get bored real quick.'"<sup>134</sup>

Scholarly Latinos, like Ponjuan and Saenz, whom Newman also quoted, have been most unhappy about this phenomenon.

They thought “the simplest way to change the status quo is for successful Latino males to become role models, and for society in general to be more aware and more vocal about these issues.” Perhaps, although I am skeptical. There is nothing simple about it. But I do commiserate and agree with statements like these: “We need to act now, because our males represent an untapped resource in the intellectual and economic workplace.”<sup>135</sup>

I think there is little to commend machismo, even in the absence of male depravity. It belongs to the past, and that is where our Church should also leave it.

## XVII

Oddly, the debate about women’s ordination among Seventh-day Adventists has also been influenced powerfully by the United States Internal Revenue Service. Among other things, this also illustrates how potently socio-cultural and especially financial matters can shape a church’s ecclesiology. The General Conference leaders entangled the denomination in a nightmare. Mark Tennyson, an SDA financial expert, explained in the *Ministry* magazine of March 1988 how it began.

In 1951, the American government decided to allow those who worked in not-for-profit organizations the option of entering the Social Security system. This “engendered a debate over whether ministers were employees or self-employed.” At first the GC president argued, honestly, “for treating ministers as employees.” Between 1951 and 1954, the Church had to pay 50 percent of a pastor’s Social Security. But in 1955, “the government allowed those ministers classified as self-employed the option of entering the Social Security program. To do so, they had to pay the full self-employment tax.” At this stage, the GC president fatefully decided not to pay that 50 percent and to say that our pastors were not employees of the Church but self-employed.<sup>136</sup>

This seems to have saved money for the denominational exchequer. But is it true to claim that its pastors are not employed by the Church? Of course they are! I do not know how those in high office convinced themselves that they were

not lying. Rather than accuse them of falsehood, I prefer to show what happened afterwards, remembering a statement by Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), the famous Scottish author and novelist, published in 1808:

Oh what a tangled web we weave,  
When first we practice to deceive!<sup>137</sup>

Let us now follow this money trail as traced by two SDA writers. I begin with Bert B. Haloviak, a historian working in the official Seventh-day Adventist Church Office of Archives and Statistics. His account first appeared in *Adventist Today* in June 1996.

In addition to Social Security, there was the question of a parsonage allowance. Because the ministers of different denominations had often in former times been poorly remunerated, the tax man allowed this perk without demur. But in 1965 “the U.S. Internal Revenue Service ruled that in order to receive the parsonage allowance and other tax benefits along with ordained ministers, licensed ministers ‘must be invested with the status and authority of an ordained minister.’” That is, they had to be “fully qualified to exercise all of the ecclesiastical duties.”<sup>138</sup>

Denying a parsonage allowance for licensed, as opposed to ordained, pastors meant that the former would receive about 9 percent less total income. They would therefore look to the Church to make up this shortfall. Another consequence of the IRS ruling was that “the employing organization would also have to assume 50 percent of the social security payments formerly paid by the self-employed licensed minister.”<sup>139</sup>

This was an opportunity for the denominational leaders to bite the bullet and pay up. But they elected not to do so. Instead, “General Conference President Reuben Figuhr and Secretary Walter Beach wrote to the IRS and intentionally minimized the differences between the licensed and ordained ministry.” They conceded that the former did not perform all the same functions but argued that licensed ministers were on “a one-track system,” which would eventually lead to their ordination as pastors; therefore, their work was “substantially equivalent.”

Haloviak also indicated the potential impact on the status of females. “At the same time, seven licensed women ministers served in North America, and by definitions of this letter as well as by actions since the 1870s, when Adventist women were first licensed, women were on the track for ordination.”<sup>140</sup>

In any case, the IRS was not impressed by that or subsequent GC letters. It insisted that to be eligible for tax purposes a licensed minister had to enjoy all the prerogatives of an ordained minister, including the performance of marriage ceremonies, as it stipulated in April 1976. Arguments between the Church leaders and an inflexible IRS dragged on after Figuhr’s twelve-year tenancy. They continued under the presidency of Robert H. Pierson. Especially prominent in this activity was Neal C. Wilson, GC Vice President for North America, who made one concession after the other.

Also by April 1976, “several conferences had received ‘final notice before seizure’ of church property in lieu of back taxes.” It was becoming plain that the denomination in the United States had lost its argument with the IRS. Wilson and the presidents of the North American Division capitulated. In August, they suggested a change in the responsibility of a fully-trained, licensed minister. He could “on a probationary basis perform all of the functions of an ordained minister under the supervision of his ecclesiastical superior.” On 14 September of the same year, Wilson presented this proposal to the GC President’s Executive Advisory Committee (PREXAD). He “rehearsed the history of the problem since 1965. He stressed the ‘considerable financial involvement,’ of both the Adventist church and of the individual licensed ministers. He believed that the difference between the functions of the licensed and ordained ministry was not a moral or theological issue, but a matter of church policy.” Wilson’s proposal contained the following critical statement: “A licensed minister is authorized by the Conference/Mission Executive Committee to perform all the functions of the ordained minister in the church or churches where he is assigned.” This was approved by both PREXAD and PRADCO (the President’s Executive Advisory Council).<sup>141</sup>

Licensed ministers would, however, need to be ordained as local elders.

On the face of it, this decision had a very good chance of solving the problems with the IRS. But within the denomination it opened or aggravated two serious fault lines. One concerned the status of women in ministry, the other the fact “that the field outside the United States would not approve the critical phrase quoted above. Thus the action voted at the October 20 afternoon Annual Council session differed from that voted at the North American section of the Annual Council held in the evening of October 20. Interestingly, the critical phrase was not printed in the Annual Council booklets for 1976, nor in the Review listing of Annual Council actions.” Nevertheless, “the 1976 Annual Council ‘voted to amend the policy governing licensed ministers to provide for appropriate latitude and flexibility within each division of the General Conference.’”<sup>142</sup> More strands were being added to the tangled web.

All the same, the financial sequel was, for our leadership, most gratifying. “In October of 1977, Wilson wrote the Commissioner of Internal Revenue about ‘some rather extensive ecclesiastical policy changes’ taken by Adventists. He enclosed the 1976 NAD Annual Council action that authorized the licensed minister to ‘perform all the functions of the ordained minister’ in his local church. There was joy at church world headquarters when it received the IRS letter of September 23, 1977: ‘We have reviewed the changes in your church’s ecclesiastical policy, and it is our view that licensed ministers in your church have, effective October 20, 1976, a recognized status that is the equivalent of ordination.’ After a decade, the licensed minister was again legally entitled to all tax advantages.”<sup>143</sup>

So were women, but with major differences. No more licenses were to be issued to them, as in the preceding 100 years. The 1977 NAD Annual Council gave them a new name: “‘Associates in Pastoral Care.’ That phrase identified ‘persons who are employed on pastoral staffs but who are not in line for ordination.’ Women were formally placed upon this separate track within Adventist ministry.”<sup>144</sup> If they had aspirations to ordination as pastors, they were thwarted.



About this and all these shenanigans, Haloviak's final comment was: "The interrelationship between money, theology, the IRS, and church administration had converged to create a moral dilemma within the Seventh-day Adventist Church."<sup>145</sup>

Interestingly, just two years later, in 1979, the Southern Baptist Convention fatefully changed its creed by adding to its *Faith and Message Statement* that "the office of pastor is limited to men that meet the qualifications found in Scripture," as cited above. Was that not the same thing as what happened in our denomination? Apparently so, but there was a significant difference. SDA women could now be ordained as *local elders*, which is still the case. Southern Baptists have only a two-tier system of ordination: for deacons and ministers, whether the latter are called elders or pastors. Seventh-day Adventists have a three-tier system: deacons, elders, and pastors. The last mentioned did not, however, exist as a separate category in either the New Testament or the early SDA Church. Being unbiblical, it is really spurious.

C. Mervyn Maxwell, Ph.D., who wrote the two-volume *God Cares on Prophecy*, and was formerly also a Professor of Church History at the Seminary of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, also commented on the events which we have described. His title was "How Money Got Us Into Trouble: A Very Surprising (and Interesting) History About Women's Ordination."

His account starts with an apology: "As you read this story, do remember that administrators are human like the rest of us, and need our prayers. Remember too that the money they attempted to save at a crucial point in this story was God's tithe; it was not their own money."<sup>146</sup> Ahem!

Maxwell showed how one thing strangely led to another, according to what may be called the law of unintended consequences. It was so advantageous for pastors not to pay income tax on the rent, mortgage, and utilities involved in the parsonage allowance! And their so-called self-employment also exempted them, as well as the denomination, from social security payments.<sup>147</sup>

But then in 1965 the IRS began to object when unordained licensed ministers claimed these benefits. Eventually, as

already pointed out, the Seventh-day Adventist leadership in the North American Division satisfied the tax gatherer by voting in 1976 that these young men could perform weddings and baptisms, “provided only that they were ordained as local elders,” with the approval of their conference committees. This decision met with opposition. For instance, “speaking for himself and for some of his associates, Robert Osborn, as assistant General Conference treasurer, wrote earnestly to the NAD leadership: ‘There is a definite detected feeling that it is hardly becoming to alter our attitude toward our licensed ministers for tax considerations in a particular country [the U.S.A.].’”<sup>148</sup>

A further development was that in 1978 the IRS said “it would accept a licensed minister as equivalent to an ordained minister whether the person had been licensed, ordained, or *commissioned*.” This word helped the General Conference jump over another hurdle. In the mid-1970s, voices were raised against the ordination of treasurers, departmental directors/secretaries, and institutional managers, “just so they could get the parsonage allowance.” They said it was wrong. But somebody now suggested that these could just be called “commissioned ministers,” with the right to perform weddings and baptisms. Soon, however, there were also “commissioned church school teachers.” Though not pastors, these qualified as “‘commissioned teachers,’ and again people felt it was right to recognize these often-unsung champions.”<sup>149</sup>

In this context, too, the question of female ordination was raised. “In 1975 the practice of granting ministerial licenses to women was discontinued, but at the same time the Annual Council of the General Conference voted that—if great caution were exercised—selected women might be ordained as local elders.” Two years afterwards, from 1977 onward, they were allowed to serve as “associates in pastoral care,” although they were not to be called “assistant pastors.”<sup>150</sup>

The next development was a baptism conducted by a young woman elder in the Potomac Conference during 1984. This alarmed the GC. In 1985, its Annual Council forbade any more baptisms by female elders, but in 1986 the Southeastern Conference “voted to let women baptize anyway.” Afterwards, however, the main question was increasingly whether or not

they could be ordained as *pastors*. To this demand, the subsequent General Conference sessions in 1990 and later said *no*.<sup>151</sup>

But the appointment of women as commissioned ministers opened another possibility. It morphed into a special service, with “prayers, Scripture readings, a sermon, a charge, *and the laying on of hands*.” This was very much like ordination!<sup>152</sup>

To Maxwell, all of this was both surprising and sad. He concluded: “In this way a process that began with a plan to reduce income taxes (a) produced the concept that ordination is merely a matter of church policy, and (b) developed into the concept that commissioned women ministers are equivalent to ordained male ministers.”<sup>153</sup>

That was his emphasis, and I likewise note it. But even more interesting is the tangled web into which the General Conference weaved itself. But the chief and enduring result is the ordination of women elders, which can no longer be undone—though some might wish it were otherwise.

## XVIII

On 19 March 2010, *Adventists Today* reported about a sermon of 6 February by Doug Batchelor, a high-profile televangelist based in Sacramento, California. His main point was “to assert that women should not be pastors (or elders), as God designed women to be subservient to men.” He stated: “Sin came into our world as a result of man neglecting and women disregarding the husband’s leadership role.”<sup>154</sup>

To this he added by “stressing the biological differences between the sexes.” He said, for instance, that men had more neurons in their brain. He also cited the *British Journal of Psychology* as asserting that men on an average scored “five points higher on an IQ test.” He maintained that the two sexes were “gifted differently and God has said there should be a difference.”<sup>155</sup>

Reactions poured in. To many women, Batchelor’s remarks were offensive. Many listeners thought his “conservative Biblical interpretations are being taken out of its historical and cultural context.”<sup>156</sup> In any case, some of the comments were very interesting. As one of them pointed out, Batchelor’s take on the “ordination versus commissioned” debate was really

just a play on words, as both male and female pastors are granted the same rights to perform their duties. Batchelor is not shy about his strong opposition of such rights for women pastors:

“I believe that we have been badgered and intimidated so that we are not really going by what does the Bible say. Matter of fact in the Seventh-day Adventist Church if you trace the history a little bit, I am sorry to say a lot of those changes and of course in North America, not so much in other parts of the world now, women are being ordained. They call it commissioned but it’s really the same thing as being ordained as pastors. And it’s . . . you know you can call it commissioned but in every other way it’s the same as ordination with all the rights, privileges. It’s like Abraham Lincoln used to say, ‘you can call a dog’s tail a leg, but it’s still a tail.’ And so just changing the label of something doesn’t change the definition of it. And what they have done is they have tried to pacify people who read the Bible and say only men should be ordained as pastors and say well we’re not ordaining women pastors—we’re commissioning them as pastors. That’s the same thing. And in every other way—the authority, they’re baptizing, they’re leading out in communion services, they’re fulfilling all the sacred offices that God originally said should be reserved for the man.<sup>157</sup>

This is a radical point of view, which refuses to concede that statements in the Bible about the status of women should be interpreted with due regard for the sociocultural factors that existed in ancient times. It is also curiously similar to the fateful Southern Baptist fundamentalism of *The Baptist Faith and Message Statement* as amended in 1998 and 2000, referred to earlier.

## XIX

Committees of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute have in the recent past been studying women’s ordination—as pastors. As presented by Mark A. Keller of *Adventist Review* and published in *Adventist News*

*Network* on 25 July 2013, an interim report is now available. Headed “multiple viewpoints aired on women’s ordination question,” it throws into sharp relief opposing ideas, personified by two scholars, both of them at our seminary:

In a paper on hermeneutical principles, Jiří Moskala, newly-appointed dean of the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University, told delegates there is no statement in the Bible commanding: “Ordain women to ministry!” Nor, he noted, is there one urging: “Do not ordain women to ministry!”

Moskala concluded: “There is no theological hindrance” to ordaining women. “On the contrary, the biblical-theological analysis points in that ultimate direction, because the Spirit of God tears down all barriers between different groups of people in the church, and gives freely His spiritual gifts to all, including women, in order to accomplish the mission God calls all of us to accomplish.”

Taking a contrary viewpoint, Gerard Damsteegt, an associate professor of church history at the SDA Theological Seminary, cited the Wesleyan-Methodist antecedents of Adventism, as well as early church fathers and Protestant reformers, to oppose women’s ordination: “If we look at the Adventist pioneers on women’s involvement in the mission of the church,” he said, “we notice that their position is very similar to that of Wesley and Methodism. These pioneers strongly encouraged female participation, excepting in the headship offices of elders and ministers.”

It is, however, interesting to note what these scholars had in common. Moskala referred to spiritual gifts, “including women”; Damsteegt said our Adventist pioneers as well as their Methodist antecedents, “strongly encouraged female participation.”

But what about the awkward fact that the apostle Paul, for the congregations which he had established in the Greek-speaking world, seems to have had some very different ideas? Quite clearly he did not include but excluded women, nor did

he encourage female participation. He also decreed that they should wear veils or otherwise closely shave off their hair. Here are the texts:

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak: but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” (1 Cor. 14:34-3, NKJV)

“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” (1 Tim. 2:11-12, NKJV)

“But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.” (1 Cor. 11:5-6, NKJV)

It has been argued that when the apostle stated: “keep silent,” “in silence,” and “it is shameful for women to speak in church,” he did not really mean what he said. Supposedly this is bolstered by that last text, for do prayer and prophesy not constitute speaking? Of course they do, and Paul records the fact that women at that time did pray and prophesy; but did he really approve of the practice in church?

However that may be, contemporary SDA women do not conform to this pattern. They do not keep quiet in church or refrain from teaching (in Sabbath School or elsewhere), they dare to think and therefore do not meekly defer to their husbands’ opinion, and they no longer even wear hats in church.

I also think that when we discuss the New Testament Church, we should consider that not everything about its ecclesiastical arrangements has necessarily been recorded, so we must not be dogmatic about it.

## XX

A most interesting observation in the interim report concerns a problem which is much older than any Protestant denomination: “Urging the committee to disavow models of male authority and headship that he maintains are rooted in post-apostolic Christianity, Darius Jankiewicz, Chair of our

seminary's Theology and Christian Philosophy department, maintained that 'if anything apart from commitment to Christ and His church, spiritual gifting and maturity determine fitness for various functions in the church, then, whether we intend it or not, we create an elitist community.'"<sup>158</sup>

Jankiewicz, already cited above with regard to another study that he has written, clarified this idea in his "Authority of the Christian Leader." It begins with a diagram contrasting Post-Apostolic Christianity with New Testament Christianity. The former, which developed historically after James and John as well as Paul, still influences Protestants as well as Catholics today. It is oriented toward male headship, elitist, sacramental, and hierarchical. The latter, described in the Bible and also our ideal for these times is not oriented toward male headship, non-elitist, non-sacramental, and non-hierarchical.<sup>159</sup>

Later in this study, Jankiewicz observed:

Paul's use of the Body of Christ imagery helps us to understand the reality of the church and the way it should function. Within such a community, all solidarities of race, class, culture, and gender are replaced by an allegiance to Christ alone. The old way of relating is replaced by a new relatedness in Christ (Gal. 3:28, 29). In this community all people are equal members of the Body of Christ, because all have experienced the risen Christ and all are gifted with a variety of Spiritual gifts of equal value (1 Cor. 12), which are to be utilized for the benefit of believers and the world (Rom 12:1-8). Thus, we do not find a hierarchy where some people rank above others according to status; neither do we find a division between ordained clergy and laity.<sup>160</sup>

This is profound, especially that last statement. It suggests a kinship with Gottfried Oosterwal's idea that the ministry is part of the laity. Apart from being stated explicitly, it is also suffused throughout his *Mission Possible: The Challenge of Mission Today*,<sup>161</sup> which has also influenced my thinking.

In Catholicism, priesthood is often thought of in more or less Aaronic terms, just as some Seventh-day Adventists who oppose women's ordination resort to a similar Old Testament

paradigm.

These point out the fatal results for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram as well and two hundred fifty princes who rebelled against the Lord's decree that the priesthood would be reserved to Aaron's descendants, who were males. The three ringleaders were swallowed up by the earth and the princes devoured with fire (Numbers 16:16-35).

Indeed, the Old Testament priesthood did consist entirely of males. But those who resort to this paradigm overlook the fact that the priests had to be biologically related to Aaron. To be logical, they should also insist that the head of the Seventh-day Adventist Church ought not to be Elder Ted Wilson, who is an elected functionary, but the eldest surviving male descendant of James White.

But let us go get back to the New Testament. It lacks the medieval difference between a mostly illiterate laity, whose deficiency in knowledge was presumed to match their lack of sanctity, and an educated, holier clergy. Instead, the λαος (laos, "people") of God was an indivisible concept.

Pastoral ordination is sacerdotal as well as hierarchical, especially when it is thought of as something higher than the ordination of an elder. It emits a whiff of priestcraft inherited from our Catholic forebears.

## XXI

To understand in just what ordination consisted during New Testament times, we need to go back to when our Lord appointed the twelve apostles. We look at passages in the Gospels and the book of Acts, using the Authorized (King James) Version, as well as the New King James Version, which is usually closer to the Greek. In what follows, all the emphases are supplied.

### **Mark 3:13, 14.**

“And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him, And he *ordained* twelve. . .” (AV)



“And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then he *appointed* [ἐποίησε (epoiēse), “made”] twelve . . .” (NKJV)

### **Matthew 10:1, 2.**

“And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power . . .” (AV)

“And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power . . .” (NKJV)

### **Luke 9:1, 2**

“Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority . . .” (AV)

“Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority . . .” (NKJV)

### **Acts 1:15-26**

After the Ascension, the eleven apostles decided to elect a substitute for Judas Iscariot, the Lord’s betrayer, who had committed suicide. Peter, their spokesman, stated an important qualification for this alternative apostle:

“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:21, 22).

They nominated two candidates and cast lots, electing Matthias. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out, Peter—seeking to convert a multitude amazed to hear the Galilean disciples speak in their mother tongues—said: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32).

In passing we note that these two verses totally demolish the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession. The Twelve were unique, and their office is unrepeatable. In perpetuating

the work of their Lord, they had to witness to all that they had seen: Jesus in the flesh, his baptism, his death on the cross, his appearances after the resurrection, and his physical ascent into heaven. None of this applies to Catholic prelates.

### **Acts 13: 1, 2**

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers: as Barnabas . . . and Saul.” (AV)

“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas . . . and Saul.” (NKJV)

Here we meet these two men just before they left on the first missionary journey in the book of Acts. Like the others also named, Barnabas and Saul (whom the Bible proceeded to call Paul) were already prophets and teachers in the congregation at Antioch.

This fact gives rise to interesting questions. For instance, had these men, including Barnabas and Saul, not already been ordained? In that case, laying hands on them would have constituted a second, specialized ordination. If not, the church at Antioch had up to that point been led by unordained men. Otherwise, we can reasonably suppose that there were elders. If so, Luke when writing Acts did not consider them worth mentioning or else they were those teachers and prophets “ministered to the Lord.”

All the same, as they all prayed and fasted, the Holy Spirit told them that he wanted Barnabas and Paul to be set apart for a special mission (vs. 2). This was to become itinerant evangelists and raise up new churches. Of these, most members would be converted Gentiles.

Saul had previously met the Lord on the Damascus road and received a divine call to be an apostle. But now in the purposes of God an important reason for this was to preach Jesus to the Gentiles.

In any case, those leaders at Antioch prayed and having fasted once more “laid their hands [*ἐπιθεντες τας χειρας*, *epithentes tas cheiras*] on them, they sent them away” (vs. 3). (AV)

## Acts 14: 23

On their return from that mission trip to their home church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas, to ensure leadership in these new congregations,

“*ordained* them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting . . .” (AV)

“appointed [χειροτονησαντες, *cheiropōnēsantes*] elders in every church, and prayed with fasting . . . (NKJV)

The Greek original of Mark 3:13, 14 lacks a special word for *ordain*. It simply uses the word *made*, so that *appointed* is a good translation. This Scripture does not say how Jesus made apostles of them but simply records the fact. In Acts 14:23, the word *cheiropōnēsantes* says how Paul and Barnabas had it done. They let the congregations choose their elders through a voting procedure by a show of hands, which is what χειροτονησαντες indicates. They were chosen, not by the laying on but the raising of hands.

So why does the Authorized (King James) Version for these two passages use the word *ordain*? Most of its translators belonged to the Church of England, which is very Catholic. This word was inherited from Medieval Latin: *ordinare*. Its cognate, from which we have *ordination*, is *ordinatio*, which to this day in the Roman Church means incorporating someone into Holy Orders.

These are Catholic words, which even among Protestants retain their Catholic overtones. But the Greek of the New Testament is different: ἐποίησε (epoiēse), “made” and χειροτονω (cheirotoneō), “to stretch out the hand,” “to vote for.”

When Jesus chose the Twelve, did he lay hands on them? According to Ellen G. White, he did, which I as a Seventh-day Adventist accept. And yet none of the Bible writers record the fact.

It seems that the Gospels do not focus on how the Saviour did it but rather on why he did it. The Bible says the twelve

apostles were appointed in order “that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14, 15). “He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease” (Matt. 10:1). “He . . . gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” (Luke 1, 2)

These men had to be with him, go out to preach the Gospel, exorcize devils, and heal.

In passing, it may be noted that unlike the three Synoptic Gospels, the one according to John, which he wrote decades later, does not contain an ordination scene. Its first chapter simply tells how two of John the Baptist’s followers decided to follow Jesus. Some of them brought their brothers to him. He himself found more disciples.

## XXII

Did the Seventh-day Adventists from the outset insist on the total subordination of women and did they reject the idea of female preachers? They did not. Of the latter, Ellen G. White was, of course, the most remarkably prominent. Or did the denomination accept the idea that women should keep quiet in church and not presume to teach? No, it did not.

From the earliest days, we have also been happy to use them as Sabbath School superintendents, teachers, youth leaders, Bible workers, missionaries, and evangelists. Later, from the twentieth century onward, female pastors—though not always called so—have also become a reality.

If our Church did not want this to happen, their choice of such a career and future employment as pastors, should from the outset have been discouraged by not allowing them to take or graduate from theology courses at our seminaries. Gender equality has, in any case, crept up on us and is now—at least in English-speaking North America and Western Europe—largely a fact, which can no longer be ignored or undone. (Some countries have also made salary discrimination based on the fact that an employee is female a criminal offense.)

In short, it is too late. Nevertheless, two camps in the church are still with equal resolution and very many

arguments opposing each other. On all these topics, research has been done for decades and papers, both relevant and irrelevant, are swarming around us like gnats that buzz and bite. More of the same will not solve these problems but can sow more discord.

Let us therefore, while there is a lull in the conflict, ask what can be done to end it—and get on with what we should really be doing: revive, reform, and preach the three angels' messages to a perishing world. We can apply the Hezekiah option and get rid of our Nehushtan by abolishing pastoral ordination for both men and women. If it no longer exists, the hubbub around it can gradually subside and die away.

But is pastoral ordination not intrinsically a holy thing? No, as already indicated, it is unbiblical. Even if (like the bronze serpent) at one time it used to have its uses, it should certainly not be an idol or, to change the imagery, remain a bone of contention. Let us simply abolish it.

Instead, to the elders of the local church, an additional, full-time elder can be appointed. He or she should be ordained by the first congregation where service is required. Credentials would still be issued. Such a seminary-trained full-time elder would not, however, become the head elder automatically. He or she would require annual approval by the congregation through its nominating committee and voting procedure. On the other hand, an elder with formal theological training at a seminary would mostly, by virtue of that fact, tend to be elected to leadership positions.

This is what invariably happened in the Dutch Reformed Church of the old South Africa. This is one of several Presbyterian denominations. Any Presbyterian minister is, theoretically, just another elder, a *presbyter* as the Bible puts it. In practice, however, he was often the most learned man of his congregation, even of the local community. Called the “dominee,” he was the undoubted leader.

Such or a similar setup for Seventh-day Adventists would counteract the sacerdotal element and ministerial elitism which we have—in a diluted form—inherited from our Catholic forebears. SDA democracy would be strengthened at the local church level. This would incidentally also weaken the hierarchical principle or “kingly power,” as Ellen G. White

called it in her time.

What Dilday objected to and rejected for the SBC looks very much like the structure of the SDA Church, which is explicitly opposed to congregationalism. Its strength lies in the allocation of funds, both tithes and offerings, for wider distribution in a worldwide work. Its weakness is a very limited democracy. In theory, SDA authority and power reach upward, all the way from the local congregation up to the president of the General Conference. In practice, that is not how it works.

SDA nominating committees are chaired and guided by functionaries of the next higher structure. This is especially true of the election of officers.

Candidates are not nominated from the floor. Instead, a nominating committee is constituted. As a rule, this cannot elect its own chair. He (it is normally a *he*) represents the next highest structure. At the conference level, this is the President of the Union Conference; at union conference level, it is the President of the Division, etc. For every office, only one candidate is decided on. Deliberations are secret. The larger body to which the results are reported has for every office only one nominee to accept or reject. The constituency meeting can never choose between alternative candidates. Therefore, its votes have only a rubberstamping function. In fact, the name *nominating committee* is a misnomer. It is really an *appointments* committee. The result is a hierarchy of top-down governance, an ecclesiastical pyramid working through a system of committees. At its apex is the president of the General Conference.

Pastoral ordination is clearly hierarchical and administered from higher up. It does not, as in the SBC, occur at the discretion of a local congregation. Ironically, though, the office of the pastor is unbiblical. Scripture speaks of elders, not pastors.

But most of these shortcomings in the SDA Church can be remedied by discontinuing that kind of ordination. Pastors would be elders, elected by the local congregation. Full-time ministers, professionally trained, would still exist, but the career of such an elder would always begin as a local, not a Conference, ordination. Some congregations may not need or

wish to have a full-time minister, which could save a great deal of money.

In addition to this, three democratic procedures should be adopted: 1. The nominating committee elects its chair from among its own members, excluding higher-level functionaries. 2. Wherever possible, alternative candidates are nominated for every office. 3. The larger body is clearly informed who the candidates are and, in each case, votes to make its final appointment. Alternatively, 4. Lots are cast to decide between two final candidates.

This was how it was done by the apostles in electing a replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 2:15-26, NKJV). Peter stood up among the disciples, numbering about one hundred and twenty. They proposed two candidates, prayer was offered, asking God to decide, and lots were cast, which excluded manipulation by the top leaders. As far as possible, they involved the larger body of believers. Likewise for electing the deacons, the apostles refrained from imposing their will but asked the disciples to choose. They did so, appointing seven. Then the apostles prayed and ordained them by the laying on of hands. (Acts 6:1-6)

### XXIII

With the substitution of elders for pastors, the present controversy about female ordination would soon disappear.

The 2009 *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook*, p. 94, an official publication, already explicitly authorizes the ordination of women as elders: "By action of the Annual Council of 1975, reaffirmed at the 1984 Annual Council, both men and women are eligible to serve as elders and receive ordination to this position of service in the church. The ordination for deaconesses is likewise permitted, according to the 2010 edition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual."

Renaming pastors as elders and ordaining no more of them would be to adopt a New Testament theology of ordination. First-century churches had elders, otherwise called *bishops* in the original Greek (Acts 20:17, 28). The word means "overseers." There were also Apostles, who functioned, it would seem, inter-congregationally. After Christ, they were

the founders of the Christian Church. But what about *pastors* with an ordination that differed from that of the elders? As a theological species, they did not exist.

To eliminate special ordination for pastors would leave intact and enhance the role of the elder, both male and female. It would not abolish the role of the Conference President or introduce full congregationalism into the Remnant Church. But it would restore a healthy balance between these levels of governance.

## XXIV

But how could a General Conference in session be induced to vote the acceptance of such a new arrangement?

The answer is that, strictly speaking, it does not need to. If necessary, its North American Division could at a pinch proceed in a unilateral way by simply discontinuing the ordination of any more pastors. Even renaming them as *elders* need not to be too controversial. After all, that is an old and honorable title which used to be common in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even the President of the General Conference is customarily still referred to as *Elder* Ted Wilson. To mute the critics, our theologians should at the same time point out that pastoral ordination is unbiblical and is causing no end of trouble.

It is likely, of course, that such a solution for a seemingly otherwise intractable problem would meet with resistance, from—amongst others—members of a hierarchy that should never have existed. But because it finds itself between a rock and a hard place, the General Conference may have no alternative. Otherwise, by trying to maintain the status quo, it could see the unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church shattered and thereby face its own demise.

Time is suddenly running out for the denomination to solve this problem. Scholars and ministers invited by Ted N. C. Wilson, elected GC President in 2010, were once again multiplying their studies at the same old leisurely pace in a move toward international consensus, the will-o'-the-wisp that keeps on eluding us. Sixteen years earlier, in 1994, President Robert H. Folkenberg was also doing so. Wilson wanted



consensus involving all the world Divisions by 2014, perhaps for rubber-stamping at the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas. But the outcome has been anticipated by events, which in 2012 and 2013 snowballed into a menacing avalanche.

In February 2010, the General Conference requested its world Divisions to survey their leadership “to gain a clear understanding of their position on women’s ordination to the gospel ministry.” Among other things, it also reminded these men that the topic had been studied for decades. But no consensus had emerged as to whether the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy advocated or denied the ordination of females.

On the other hand, it remains a fact that “in the course of these discussions, provision has been made for women to serve as church elders and pastors. The ordination of women as church deaconesses and elders has been approved ‘where the division found it applicable, or possible, or profitable . . .’”<sup>162</sup> (Though nothing was said about the role which the American IRS had played in creating such a state of affairs!)

## XXV

From east of the Atlantic, the leadership in Washington, DC, received a dramatic response: “The outcome of the survey within the Trans-European Division was that while two or three unions were not prepared to ordain women due to cultural considerations, all thirteen supported women’s ordination in principle within the TED.”<sup>163</sup> This conclusion was buttressed with further considerations, especially two of them:

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church within the TED faces extraordinary mission challenges where people are extremely resistant to the gospel and joining a church is an exception rather than the norm. To effectively meet this need the church needs to mobilize all members for ministry and outreach, including women, who constitute two-thirds of the membership. Opening the doors for women in leadership and the ordination of women would strengthen the growth of the church in Europe.

“Within the church and European society at large gender equality and excellence in leadership are priorities. In many of

the TED territories it is, or soon will become, illegal to make any differentiation on the basis of gender.”<sup>164</sup>

In support of the latter statement, a footnote said: “The European Social Charter, which supplements the European Declaration of Human Rights states in Article 20 that there should be equality in all stages of working life—access to employment, remuneration and other working conditions, including dismissal and other forms of detriment, vocational training and guidance and promotion.”<sup>165</sup>

The report ended with four recommendations. The last of them was “to request the General Conference for permission to ordain women to the gospel ministry within the Trans-European Division, thereby creating parity between female and male ministers and follow the same process and procedure as currently applies to ordained men and credentialed ministers.”<sup>166</sup>

For such permission, the earliest chance would be the GC session scheduled for San Antonio in 2015. But two structures in Western Europe were not prepared to wait or to risk another denial: A year apart from each other, The North German Union Conference and the Netherlands Union Conference, went straight ahead and approved the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

The former “covers 11 states in the northern region of the German Federal Republic, including Berlin and other major urban areas. It is made up of four local conferences with a total of about 20,000 church members among a population of more than 47 million. There are 346 local churches and 149 ministers, including two women.” It is noteworthy that the NGUC is located in Germany, where “both the law and social values strongly condemn discrimination against women in the selection of leaders in any organization, including the Church.”<sup>167</sup>

And so “the fifth constituency session of the North German Union Conference, meeting in Geseke on April 22 and 23 [2012], was the first gathering since the 1881 General Conference session to vote approval of ordination for women serving in pastoral ministry. The resolution was approved by more than two-thirds majority of the delegates.”<sup>168</sup>

*Adventist Today*, reporting this decision on 27 April 2012,

had more to say about it. “The text of the action reads as follows:

“Voted, to ordain in the North German Union female pastors [in the same way] as their male colleagues.’ Pastor Klaus van Treeck, union conference president, told *Adventist Today* that the action is ‘without any limitations in terms of when it will be implemented. It did not include language such as that in a similar vote by the Southern Union Conference executive committee in the United States deferring to the granting of permission by the General Conference.’”<sup>169</sup>

The Netherlands Union Conference made the same decision. At its 2012 session, it voted: “Considering the biblical principle of the equality of men and women, the delegates in session indicate that they reject the current situation of inequality in the church on principle. For this reason, and considering the context of Dutch society, they charge the Executive Board to vigorously promote this perspective in the worldwide church. As quickly as possible, and no later than six months after the next session of the General Conference (2015), equality between men and women will be implemented at all organizational levels of the church in the Netherlands. The equal ordination of female pastors also falls into this category.”<sup>170</sup>

The sequel came on 30 May 2013, when “the Executive Committee of the Netherlands Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church decided to ordain female pastors, recognizing them equal to their male colleagues.” As its leadership admitted, through this decision the Union “will be at variance with the policies of the world church.”<sup>171</sup>

Two factors had to be taken into consideration. “In the end, this decision was the result of weighing the principle of unity against the principle of equality. Other possibilities were also discussed, including the option of not ordaining any pastors until the world church recognizes equality, and the option of waiting until the upcoming session of the General Conference of the world church to reach a decision. Ultimately it was decided that from June 1st, 2013, all ordained and commissioned pastors, regardless of gender, will be considered ordained in the Netherlands. In practice this means that Pastor Elise Happé-Heikoop (Pastor of Arnhem,

Nijmegen and Doetichem) is now considered ordained, and that on September 21st Guisèle Berkel-Larmonie will be ordained together with her (male) colleague Enrico Karg.”<sup>172</sup>

The Netherlands Union Conference “has 5276 members, spread over 55 churches and 16 church plants. Last year the 26 pastors in the Netherlands baptized more than 150 new members. In recent years the church has grown steadily, averaging at 3.5%. While some of this growth can be attributed to immigration, the church-planting movement has been particularly successful in reaching the native (Dutch) population in one of the most secular countries in the world.”<sup>173</sup>

In making these decisions, those Union Conferences were undoubtedly aware of the shock that they would cause at General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, next to Washington, D.C. At the same time, they knew that Germans and Hollanders were not Africans or Latins. Their sociocultural differences could not be papered over with more and more studies or pushed into the background by further votes at GC sessions.

## XXVI

But as the General Conference leadership saw the matter, these unilateral decisions in Western Europe constituted a threat to the Church’s international unity, in practice if not theology. It was, however, diplomatically careful in how it voiced its reactions.

But the same cannot be said about the very vocal Council of Adventist Pastors (CAP), which strongly opposes women’s ordination. This is how this group describes itself:

“The ‘North Pacific Union Conference Supporting Pastors’ (NPUC-SP) came into being in December 2012 and launched the website [OrdinationTruth.com](http://OrdinationTruth.com) on February 4, 2013 after the NPUC Executive Committee had announced that they would ‘educate’ church members in respect to ‘ordination without regard to gender,’ then, as Columbia and Pacific Unions, hold a special constituency meeting centered on the topic.

“NUC pastors have been contacted by those who take a similar anti-insubordinatin position in other unions within the

North American field. The pastors are ready to work with others.”<sup>174</sup>

As a matter of fact, CAP does not confine its comments to North America, though this Division is its main concern. It has also attacked the Northern German Union and (especially) the Netherlands Union Conference, which it describes as being on “a path of insubordination.” It comes out strongly against any candidate who receives “ordination illegally.” Therefore, it opposes what it calls “a misguided and disunifying drive for the ordination of women to pastoral and administrative headship positions,” which is “clearly defying General Conference session actions.” Such actions, it says, promote “the fragmentation and disunity of the church.”<sup>175</sup> CAP in all of this stresses and insists on the global unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, by which it really means uniformity.

## XXVII

But international uniformity is somewhat of a myth. This especially becomes clear from a look at the situation of Seventh-day Adventists in Communist China.

With 1,300,000 inhabitants, this has long been regarded as a third-world country; yet suddenly—to the amazement of the United States—it stands revealed as having perhaps the best-educated population in the world. On 7 December 2010, Mary Bruce in *ABC News* announced this fact with a startling headline: “China Debuts at Top of International Education Rankings.” Her report was based on “Highlights from PISA 2009: Performance of U.S. 15-Year-Old Students in Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy in an International Contest.”<sup>176</sup>

This focused on a comparison between the scores of young Americans, showing that “the U.S. now ranks 25th in math, 17th in science, and 14th in reading of the 34 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.” According to the new data, they continued to be outpaced by kids in Finland, South Korea, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, and New Zealand. But now, for the first time, China was also included “as a non-OECD education system.” And lo and behold, “Shanghai ranked first in all three categories. Hong Kong came in second in reading and science and third in

math”!<sup>177</sup>

Another notable fact about contemporary China is a strong reaction against gender discrimination. For instance, as Joanna Chiu pointed out on 24 October 2013, women professionals in that country “challenge workplace inequality.”<sup>178</sup>

But what do these statistics with the circumstances that they reflect have to do with Seventh-day Adventists? Very much, and for several reasons.

First, it is plain that we should give up the idea that China is simply a developing country. In many sectors, it has become extremely advanced. Consequently, women there, as in all such countries, have much greater self-confidence and a status which has greatly improved. Second, this can be seen in the makeup of both the SDA congregations and their leadership.

Former General Conference president Jan Paulsen went to China in 2009, where he found that there were about 400,000 Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>179</sup> Bill Knott as well as the staff of Adventist News Network, who accompanied him, reported about their week-long visit on 18 May 2009. It was the first one by a GC president in sixty years.<sup>180</sup>

Some congregations possess their own buildings, others share with Protestants not of our faith. Conferences as we understand them in America are nonexistent. Instead, every congregation is the hub and “responsible for dozens of area church plants,” and “more than half of Adventist pastors in China are women.”<sup>181</sup>

One example is “church planter Zu Xiu Hua, who started 380 congregations in the northeastern province of Jilin” and spoke with Paulsen through an interpreter. This is what she told him: “Her congregations, now attended by more than 20,000 members in the province’s mostly rural region, are served by dozens of volunteer women whom she trains to conduct Bible studies, preach, and offer spiritual care.” Like their pastors, “a majority of the members are also female.”<sup>182</sup>

The Beiguan Church, with nearly 3,000 members, is in a modern neighborhood. Other local church leaders came to meet their world leader, of whom some traveled three hours by train from far away. Pastor Hao Ya Jie “described for the church leaders the ministries and outreach services she and her fellow leaders coordinate, including literacy classes,

ministerial training, lay pracher training and wedding services. Up to five Shenyang couples are married in the church per week, which is often their first exposure to Adventism.”<sup>183</sup>

What was the reaction? The GC president was impressed: “‘You have managed to make this church what we hope Seventh-day Adventist churches everywhere would be,’ said Paulsen after he learned of the church’s community-based ministries. ‘It is a center for worship, a center for ministerial training, a center open to the community.’”<sup>184</sup>

This was the face of Adventism which Paulsen saw over there. It had emerged in the years since Christian churches began to reopen in the 1980s after much tribulation. “During the Cultural Revolution, a dozen turbulent years that marked the greatest difficulty for religion in modern China, all Christian churches were closed, pastors forced to take up other work, and Bibles burned.”<sup>185</sup>

While still in that country, Jan Paulsen declared: “I am often asked, ‘How are our brothers and sisters in China?’ Now, I will be able to say—they are well and vibrant.”<sup>186</sup> But just how he reported on their situation to General Conference headquarters after returning to America is unknown. It is, however, implausible to suppose that nothing was said about women’s ordination.

## XXVIII

Paulsen visited China in 2009. Three years later, a trio of Union Conferences in North America voted to authorize women’s ordination for pastors. Before doing so, one of them likewise sent top officers to China. *Adventist Today* on 2 June 2012 began its report about their visit as follows:

“Pastor Dave Weigley, president of the Columbia Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Pastor Raj Attiken, president of the Ohio Conference, recently returned from a 13-day visit in China. They met with local churches and pastors in Shanghia, Beijing, Hangzhou, Wenzhou, Xi’an, Guilin, and Chengdu, as well as leaders of the Chinese Union Mission in Hong Kong. They took with them Taashi Rowe, an editor for the union conference periodical, who wrote a report on their trip which was

published in the last few days in the *Columbia Union Visitor* along with an announcement of the special constituency meeting that will decide on the ordination of women serving as pastors in the Columbia Union Conference.”<sup>187</sup>

Some of their findings follow.

Fearing that they can be a tool of imperialism, the Communist regime in China does not allow its mainland churches to be headquartered in any foreign country. Consequently “there is no such thing as the ‘Adventist Church in China!’” All the same, there are many Chinese Seventh-day Adventist congregations.

Formally, “the territory of mainland China is considered by the General Conference as part of the China Union Mission, based in Hong Kong. However, the Mission has no administrative or governance authority within the mainland.” From Hong Kong, leaders are allowed to visit it and encourage the churches. That is the only kind of linkage, with no official reports. Therefore, “it is difficult for anyone to know exactly how many churches and how many members there are in mainland China!”<sup>188</sup> The figure of 400,000 Seventh-day Adventists in that country is an informal estimate. There may be fewer, there may be more.

According to John Ash, associate secretary of the Chinese Union Mission in Hong Kong, “there are some 48 ‘mother churches,’ each with hundreds of church plants.”

Weigley and Attiken made further remarkable discoveries. One was that “with a ratio of one pastor to every 4,000 members, the mainland churches must rely heavily on local elders . . . It is also common and practical for women, who make up a majority of the membership, to pastor mainland churches. In fact, some of the women who are ordained ministers are responsible for hundreds of the churches. In the West, these women would be equal to conference and union presidents.”<sup>189</sup>

They are ordained through the laying on of hands by ordinary Seventh-day Adventist ministers and mostly not by the Three Self Movement. And, as one male leader said: “When we choose pastors here, gender doesn’t enter into our minds; only who is available and capable.” Also, “our Chinese brothers and sisters seem baffled that this is so much of an



issue in the rest of the world.”<sup>190</sup>

Historically, “women serving as elders in China go back to 1949 when the [Communists took over and the] missionaries left. The first ordination of a woman to the gospel ministry occurred in the 1980s, which means this has been a reality there during almost all of the debate on this topic in North America and Europe.”<sup>191</sup>

Two months later, after Dave Weigley and Raj Attiken had returned to America, delegates to a Special Constituency Meeting of the Columbia Union Conference voted on 29 July 2012 to “authorize ordination to the gospel ministry without regard to gender.” This was with a 4-to-1 majority. “The actual vote was 209 in favor and 51 opposed, with nine abstentions.”<sup>192</sup>

One of those who was present and spoke out in opposition was General Conference President Ted N. C. Wilson. He “appealed to the delegates not to move forward with the motion but to wait for a new church study scheduled to be completed in 2014.” In all such cases, he always pleaded that priority be given to worldwide denominational unity. But Bill Miller, president of the Potomac Conference, who had chaired the ad hoc committee tasked with studying the issue, asserted: “The world church at various General Conference Sessions has aptly demonstrated its inability to act decisively” and added: “Gender-based discrimination must not continue. The right time to do the right thing is right now.”<sup>193</sup>

One of the women who spoke up was Bonnie Heath, a member of the Allegheny East Conference. She said she found Elder Wilson’s counsel touching. She also wanted unity, but “would like some assurance that [the world church] hears our pain and our embarrassment that we are treating our people differentially. We are deeply upset and ashamed, and we want to be also given equal say.”<sup>194</sup>

## XXIX

On 8 March 2012 and therefore before the Columbia Union Conference, the Mid-America Union Conference through its executive committee voted to support the ordination of women. According to a news release by Communication Director Martin Weber, its President, Thomas L. Lemon,

rejected the charge of disloyalty to the Church. Further, as *Adventist Today* pointed out, “under the *General Conference Working Policy*, it is the union conferences that have authority to approve ordinations.”<sup>195</sup>

Later that month, on 22 March, the Executive Committee of the Pacific Union Conference followed a similar path, in its own way. It voted “To remove the term ‘Ordained-Commissioned’ and replace it with the term ‘Ordained’ on all ministerial credentials, regardless of the gender of the credential holder.” One of the entities within the Pacific Union Conference is the Southeastern California Conference. “More than 10 women are employed as pastors in the conference. Since the 1980s, it has repeatedly asked the General Conference to provide for equity between men and women in ministry.”<sup>196</sup>

The *Adventist Review* published an online reaction by the GC Executive Committee to such developments, specifically the decision of the Columbia Union Conference Constituency Meeting. While it styled itself “An Appeal for Oneness in Christ,”<sup>197</sup> its main thrust was its own authority.

In a question-and-answer format, the article reproduced the reactions of Elder Ted N. C. Wilson, GC President, together with the Division Presidents, especially this statement:

While it is true that local churches approve candidates for baptism, and local conferences recommend to union for approval all requests for ordination, none of these levels establish the criteria for baptism or ordination. A local church board determines who is going to be baptized; it does not determine the criteria for baptism. The 28 Fundamental Beliefs and the baptismal vows have been mutually agreed upon by the world church. This keeps the church unified internationally. In the same way a union conference has the delegated authority to approve candidates for ordination based on their satisfying the criteria for ordination established by the world church; it does not have the authority to ignore the mutually agreed-upon criteria. That is why the unions are not authorized to move forward unilaterally with ordination without regard to gender. If the church were to accept such a premise, there

would be varying standards of ordination and criteria for ministry. Such a path would not likely end there. It would open the door to varying standards for baptism, church membership, etc. The issue here is not women's ordination per se; it is which level of church organization has the constitutionally given authority to determine what qualifies a person for ordination. This can only be done by the General Conference in Session, or the General Conference Executive Committee, which acts between General Conference Sessions (General Conference *Working Policy* L 35).<sup>198</sup>

While on the whole the cited words ring true, that second last sentence begins with a bit of sophistry: "The issue here is not women's ordination per se . . ." Of course it was! After all, this appeal for unity constituted "A Response by the General Conference Officers and Division Presidents to the Columbia Union Conference Constituency Meeting Action," which was to "authorize ordination to the gospel ministry without regard to gender." The next question in this article makes it even clearer: "Was it constitutionally appropriate for the General Conference Sessions of 1990 and 1995 to discuss and vote on the issue of ordaining women to ministry?" To this, the answer was "yes."<sup>199</sup>

Everybody who has studied this matter knows that in both 1990 and 1995 the GC rejected the ordination of women as pastors. Against the background sketched above, it is most likely, perhaps all but certain, that the same will happen in San Antonio, Texas, at the 2015 Session.

The reader will remember that just before the Columbia Union Conference held its Special Constituency Meeting, its president, Dave Weigley, as well as Raj Attiken, president of the Ohio Conference, had visited China. It seems that what they discovered influenced them as well as their Union Conference in making their momentous decision. Therefore, the issue of women's ordination in that country was also raised.

In dealing with it, the GC President and the Division Presidents, made the following statement:

Women have [done] and are doing a powerful work for God in ministry in China. They are serving as pastors and church planters. Of more than 6,000 pastors in China, approximately 4,000, or 70 percent, are women. While a few (currently, 20 women) have been ordained, we need to understand the complexity of the situation in China and the reality of life there. In China, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a formal church organization. There are no conferences or unions. There is no official Adventist Theological Seminary in China. There is no standardized ministerial training. Pastors typically are chosen from the members of a local congregation as they demonstrate a calling for ministry to teaching Sabbath school, lay preaching, and church planting. Chinese pastors, male or female, are usually ordained in one of two ways: either by the local congregation with the participation of Adventist senior pastors from their region, or by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement operates under the China Christian Council and is a nondenominational entity approved by the Chinese government.<sup>200</sup>

The statement continued to say: “While the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church acknowledges the fact of women’s ordination in China, it neither recognizes it nor endorses it.” Also, in response to the query “Is the ordination of female pastors in China recognized by the world church?” the answer was: “No. Ordination in China is not officially recognized by any entity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church outside of China.”<sup>201</sup>

That is to say, 400,000 of loving, warm-hearted fellow-believers are left out in the cold, an attitude which may one day come back to haunt those who manifested it.

In their follow-up, on 7 August, the “General Conference leaders indicated the Columbia Union Conference action could bring consequences,” because it “represents a serious threat to the unity of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, and thus, at its next meeting in October 2012, the General Conference Executive Committee will carefully review the situation and determine how to respond.”<sup>202</sup>

But despite these reactions, the Pacific Union Conference later that month agreed with its Executive Committee. According to *Adventist Today* on 20 August, its constituency session also, with a 79 percent majority, voted to authorize the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.<sup>203</sup>

This was in spite of a personal intervention by General Conference President Ted N. C. Wilson, two speeches by Doug Batchelor of *Amazing Facts*, and televangelist Stephen Bohr.

“Wilson and Lowell Cooper, one of the GC vice presidents, made the same appeal that they presented to the Columbia Union Conference constituency session in July, although the language was somewhat softened with no reference to unspecified ‘grave consequences.’ The delegates were asked to wait until the GC completes a study of the denomination’s theology of ordination launched last year.”

Many delegates, however, “throughout the day specifically rejected this appeal because the GC has conducted three previous studies of the topic. Each time almost all of the Bible scholars involved have come to the conclusion that there is nothing in the Bible or Adventist heritage to prohibit extending ordination to women, yet the final recommendation is always negative because of ‘unity’.”

Ernie Castillo, a Vice President of the North American Division and former Executive Secretary of the Pacific Union Conference, unexpectedly referred to a further reason for such resolutions all over the United States: “the actions of these union conferences are in direct response to steps taken last fall by the GC Officers to force the NAD to back off on a policy that would have permitted commissioned ministers, including women, to serve as *conference presidents*. What is known as Working Policy E 60” (emphasis added). In other words, more was involved: not just ordination but presidential, hierarchic governance. “‘This is not rebellion,’ Castillo said directly to Wilson in front of the entire body. ‘This is a reaction. People who for 40 years have been repressed and discriminated against will eventually react. That is sociology 101.’” A year later, events during and after the constituency meeting of the

Southeastern California Conference would bear him out.

Telling statements were also uttered by Randy Roberts, senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Church, the largest congregation in the world. He “pointed out that there are at least five policies on this topic that are clearly stated in the *Church Manual* and the *General Conference Working Policy* which are disregarded in many parts of the world and these variances have not caused significant disunity. He names these policies: (1) that deaconesses are to be ordained, (2) that women may serve as local elders, (3) that women serving as local elders are to be ordained, (4) that women may be employed as pastors, and (5) that women employed as pastors may conduct baptisms, weddings and the same sacred duties that men conduct.”<sup>204</sup>

Indeed, those SDA leaders elsewhere on our planet who deny the same right of variance for North Americans are thereby being hypocritical. Why should they have it both ways?

Among other things, Doug Batchelor said: “The majority of Adventists are opposed to this.” He probably meant believers throughout the world. That, however, has not been verified. Church governance in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa is not necessarily democratic, which cannot fail to impact on the selection of delegates. One cardinal fact makes one doubt: more than two-thirds of the membership is female. Their sullen submissiveness is likely to be shattered in a properly organized and supervised referendum, by secret ballot, of all church members. But so far as the Pacific Union Conference was concerned, Batchelor was dead wrong; a most impressive majority of delegates at its constituency meeting voted for women’s ordination.

As for Stephen Bohr, he thought it was not an equality issue. After all, “the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal, but have different functions.” He also “cited an editorial (not written by Ellen White) in the *Signs of the Times* (January 24, 1895) which he said states that women should not serve as local elders.”<sup>205</sup>

This was, of course, a different issue—although in a sense it was not. As already cited, the ordination of female elders and of deaconesses is already established General Conference

policy, according to the *Seventh-day Adventist's Handbook* as well as the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. Behind this lay a vote in 1975 by the General Conference Annual Council that, “if great caution were exercised—selected women might be ordained as local elders.”<sup>206</sup>

The original motive, as C. Mervyn Maxwell pointed out, which I also discussed above, was purely financial. The GC wanted to save on taxes and satisfy the American IRS. All the same, by 2012 this decision about ordaining women as elders could no longer be undone.

Far from being irrelevant, Bohr's concern should not, however, be brushed aside but be confronted as a *sola Scriptura* issue. The New Testament says nothing about the ordination of pastors. For this office, the early Church had only elders. No pastors as a separate order of ministers.

Seventh-day Adventists, believing in the Bible as our guide, could therefore, especially at a time like this, annul the ordination of their pastors, withdrawing their credentials but not their financial benefits. These dear people can with great profit to the Church be reclassified as elders, a category which has since 1975 included women. The present, horrible controversy with which Satan is trying to tear our Church apart would then disappear. It is a bogus issue, based on unbiblical thinking.

That, however, was not what those constituency meetings in 2012 were debating.

### XXXI

On Sunday, 27 October 2013, the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at its constituency meeting elected Sandra E. Roberts as president. More than two-thirds of the delegates voted for her, 72 percent for and 28 percent against.<sup>207</sup> The solidarity of their support was truly impressive. There were more than 1,100 delegates.<sup>208</sup>

Academically she had garnered impeccable qualifications. After obtaining a Master's degree from Andrews University in 1984, she was made a Doctor of Ministry by the Claremont School of Theology in 2006. She worked her way up through the ranks, as a teacher, chaplain, youth director, and pastor, before serving as executive secretary of the SECC since

2004.<sup>209</sup>

There was, however, a special problem: Sandra E. Roberts was a female. Also present was Ricardo Graham, President of the Pacific Union Conference. He “reminded delegates that the General Conference does not endorse women’s ordination, and he passed on a message from Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the world church, clarifying that the election of a woman as president would not be recognized by the General Conference.”

But Graham “continued by stating that because delegates to the Pacific Union Special Session voted in 2012 to authorize the ordination of women, that the recommendation of the SECC nominating committee is in harmony with conference and union bylaws and policies.”<sup>210</sup>

But the Council of Adventist Pastors, reporting on the Roberts appointment, promptly rejected it. For these men, worldwide organizational unity and uniformity, together with her alleged nonordination, was the only thing that really mattered. Or so they said. Their stance was unambiguous, simple, severe. Among other things, they reminded their readers: “In 1990 and 1995 General Conference sessions the Church rejected proposals to permit individual divisions, unions, or conferences (like SECC) to ordain women or appoint them to positions exercising authority over men. . . . Unilateral contrary actions—such as that today voted by SECC—are disunifying in nature and prima facie evidence of direct opposition to the world church.”<sup>211</sup>

These pastors chose not to mention the tendency in other Divisions to cherry-pick what they liked from the menu of General Conference policy but to spit out the pips.

Instead, they asked and stated:

What next? In just four days (Oct. 31) North American Division Year-end Meetings begin, where those gathered include the NAD conference presidents. But current *Church Manual* (p. 32) and current NAD *Working Policy* (E-60, p. 244) explicitly prohibit a woman from serving in this position. The North American Division will not be able to include Mrs. Roberts as a presidential participant in its meetings without joining itself to SECC in premeditated opposition toward the world church. All eyes will be on the



North American Division and its president as it opens its Year-end Meeting.

The world church is watching the North American Division. After all, ultimately it was NAD's change of Working Policy E-60 in 2010—and later recognition of its having exceeded its own authority—that led NAD President Dan Jackson to instruct NAD unions on January 31, 2012 concerning how to 'move this matter forward' and 'consider new approaches.'<sup>212</sup>

And further: "The crisis which has been caused by the NAD has now landed again on their own door step. The global Adventist Church will have evidence whether or not the NAD officers shall demonstrate true respect for the sisterhood of Adventist churches round the world very soon now. On October 31, NAD shall either respect the world church and disallow Mrs. Roberts' participation in the Year-end Meeting, or they will include her, in demonstration of a spirit of opposition to the world church.'<sup>213</sup>

In passing, we note the disdainful tone of referring to this gifted lady as Mrs. and Ms. Roberts rather than Dr. Roberts. Her qualifications, expertise, and experience did not matter. She was a *woman*!

But before her election, she had already been ordained as an elder. This is the only kind of minister, apart from the original Apostles, approved by the New Testament. Among Seventh-day Adventists, the female ordination of elders goes back as far as 1975 and is established Church policy. As already mentioned, this has been recorded in the 2009 *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook*, p. 94, and the 2010 *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, pp. 38, 78-79.<sup>214</sup>

## XXXII

So what did happen at the year-end meeting of the North American Division?

Together with other newly elected Conference Presidents, Dr. Roberts was accepted as a full participant. In itself, this did not cause trouble. Nevertheless, the agenda included a potentially explosive item: addressing the E-60 policy.<sup>215</sup>

This had been reworded by the NAD at its year-end

meeting in 2011 to read as follows:

**“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/*commissioned* minister”<sup>216</sup> (emphasis added).

But in 2012, the General Conference rejected this wording on the grounds that “while Divisions have the authority to develop and implement policies related to their field they may not act independently when it comes to voted General Conference policies.”<sup>217</sup>

Now, on 28 October 2013, the NAD again took up the issue.

“[President Daniel R.] Jackson suggested that 30 minutes be allowed for discussion before receiving a motion. That time was extended to allow for more than two dozen speeches, most of which were in support of reaffirming the E-60 policy as previously voted. A number of delegates also spoke to the question of ordination and our understanding of its theology and tradition, with some speaking in favor of women’s ordination although that was not on the agenda. The discussion continued for nearly two hours and included a call to prayer by the two designated prayer leaders. After sufficient discussion, a motion was made to reaffirm the E-60 policy as voted the previous year, and vote was taken by secret ballot. The motion passed 161 to 62.”<sup>218</sup>

Both liberal and ultraconservative Seventh-day Adventists as well as the General Conference have reacted strongly to the events at this NAD year-end meeting.

On 31 October 2013, Charles Scriven, who publishes *Spectrum* magazine, reported with an article headlined: “The Fraternity Welcomes a woman.” He wrote that after the preliminaries of song and prayer Jackson “welcomed visitors (including Ted Wilson, General Conference president) into the meeting room. Then, following formalities bearing on the official start of business, he invited new members (three recently elected conference presidents) to stand. There was applause for each; applause for Sandra Roberts was sustained.”<sup>219</sup>

According to Scriven, Alexander Bryant, Secretary of the

NAD, “explained that the Division’s leaders were welcoming Roberts’ full participation on the Executive Committee because she had been ‘duly elected’ by a proper Adventist entity. A few minutes later Ricardo Graham, president of the Pacific Union assured hearers that the Southeast Conference’s election had put the ‘best qualified person’ into office. He said further that the conference’s nominating committee had been fully faithful to that conference’s by-laws, noting, however, that that [*sic*] policies are in any case beholden to a higher authority, and need to be regularly reviewed.”<sup>220</sup>

As stated above, the 2013 year-end meeting again approved the controversial E-60 policy.

Scriven also revealed that “less than two hours before, the General Conference Executive Officers . . . had released a written response to what had happened on Sunday in California. Without mentioning her name, the statement said that because Dr. Roberts is ‘not recognized by the world church as an ordained minister,’ she does not qualify for the position of conference president.”<sup>221</sup>

However, “Daniel Jackson made no reference to this statement.”<sup>222</sup>

On 4 November, he dropped a bombshell. First, however, he “adjured delegates to refrain from applauding in deference to the sensitivity of the subject. The subject was the North American Division Theology of Ordination Study Committee report and its conclusion that both women and men should receive ordination. Even in the absence of applause, the buzz among delegates made clear their approval of the outcome: 182 in favor of ordaining women, 31 opposed, and three abstained.” The vote was six to one.<sup>223</sup>

The report was presented by Gordon Bietz, the President of Southern Adventist University, who chaired the NAD Study Committee. He first made several video presentations. Afterwards, he “read off a litany of prior occasions spanning the past fifty years that women’s roles have been studied by some church entity. For each event, a member of the committee (all of whom sat on stage) stacked the respective event’s report on a table. The resulting pile of documents stood precariously, nearly two feet high, looking as though it might fall.”<sup>224</sup>

This made one thing clear: it will be difficult to find ideas on this topic that have not already been expressed at some time in the past.

Bietz then read from the executive summary of the report, which included the committee's consensus statement, worded as follows: "We believe that an individual, as a Seventh-day Adventist in thorough commitment to the full authority of Scripture, may build a defensible case in favor of or in opposition to the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, although each of us views one position or the other as stronger and more compelling."<sup>225</sup>

The summary also included the two recommendations of the committee:

"1. In harmony with our biblical study, we recommend that ordination to gospel ministry, as an affirmation of the call of God, be conferred by the church on men and women.

"2. We humbly recommend that the North American Division support the authorization of each division to consider, through prayer and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, its most appropriate approach to the ordination of women to gospel ministry."<sup>226</sup>

But there was also a minority report presented by Edwin Reynolds, professor at Southern Adventist University, and Clinton Wahlen, Associate Director at the Biblical Research Institute. They argued that "a proper reading of Scripture would affirm male headship."<sup>227</sup>

Several of those who supported women's ordination made telling remarks, including Jiri Moskala, Dean of the Adventist Seminary at Andrews University. Two professors at Andrews, Richard Davidson and Darius Jankiewicz directly opposed the Reynolds-Wahlen viewpoint.

Davidson "posited that male headship is not simply about roles—roles are flexible and transitory, he observed. 'It is nothing less than a caste system in which there is permanent subordination of the female gender to the male gender.'" Jankiewicz "suggested that a counterfeit view of authority, which entered the Church, was hierarchical, non-elitist, non-sacramental and servant-oriented."<sup>228</sup>

Finally Dr. Bietz "considered the question of whether ordaining women would threaten church unity. He noted that

ordaining would not necessarily indicate authorization to practice in places where the ordinations were not recognized. Focus on Jesus will ensure world-wide unity, Bietz argued, and cautioned that disunity would result if all were forced to come to an agreement on issues over which there is no consensus. ‘We assure schism in the church when that which is conditioned by history is imposed by law, when that which grows from culture is made policy for all, when that which is local in importance is made universal in application.’”<sup>229</sup>

That last statement was ominous, because now near the end of 2013 the NAD was assuming exactly the same position as in the past but added a thinly veiled threat. Again it was asking for tolerance on the part of the other Divisions: to grant to English-speaking North Americans the right to a certain independence. But now a potential schism was mentioned. If past General Conference Sessions are anything to go by, the upcoming Session at San Antonio in 2015 will probably again not manifest that tolerance or recognize such a right.

### XXXIII

In November 2013, two more major structures of the world Church adopted basically the same position as the North American and the Trans-European Divisions. They likewise decided in favor of ordaining women pastors.

On 12 November, the Executive Committee of the Inter-European Division announced it was planning to make such a recommendation to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee of the SDA world denomination. This was based on the conclusions of both the Theology of Ordination Study Committee on 15-17 January as well as 22-24 July this year, and those of the Division’s Biblical Research Committee. The following six reasons were cited:

The Bible does not specifically define what ordination for pastoral ministry is.

There are no direct statements in the Bible either commanding or prohibiting women’s ordination.

As the church felt free to develop its organizational structure to further its mission based on biblical principles, division BRC members consider ordination not as a

doctrinal or biblical issue, but something that must be handled at an administrative level.

There are no clear biblical principles that would require or guide the application of headship in the family or the church.

The Old Testament priesthood has its fulfillment in the unique priesthood of Christ, which is the basis for the priesthood of all believers.

BRC members were unclear over why ordination requires a differentiation between genders that doesn't exist in other levels of ministry of service, such as teachers, deacons, prophets and leaders.<sup>230</sup>

Therefore, “based on the report of the Biblical Research Committee, the Executive Committee of the Inter-European Division recommends the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, taking into consideration the possibility of applying it according to the needs of the field.”<sup>231</sup>

The next day, on 13 November, the South Pacific Division, comprising Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji, as well as other island fields, adopted a similar stance—although it did not advocate a unilateral approach.<sup>232</sup>

There are now four Divisions—all of them controlled by Caucasians and relatively wealthy—that favor women's ordination. But world wide the Seventh-day Adventist Church has thirteen Divisions. That is where the majority of its members are to be found, especially in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. On the whole these are poor people. As pointed out above, they are also subjected to machismo or patriarchy.

If the past reactions of these other Divisions is anything to go by, they are unlikely to support the idea. One of them has already indicated as much. In response to the statement by the Inter-European Division, “a spokesman for the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, based in Pretoria, South Africa, said in an email to ANN: ‘the action taken by the [division's committee] supported the position against the ordination of women to the gospel ministry’ and ‘in the absence of clear biblical revelation, the established model and practice of ministry should be upheld.’”<sup>233</sup> In other words, the ordination of women pastors should be allowed only if the Bible says so

explicitly!

But that is a spurious demand. The Good Book says nothing about the ordination of *pastors* for a very good reason: in New Testament times they simply did not exist. The early Christian Church had deacons, it had elders, it had apostles; but it had no pastors. No doubt it was for this reason that the scholars of the Inter-European Division concluded: “The Bible does not specifically define what ordination for pastoral ministry is.”

Arguing and growing passionate about this issue is like the one about the unicorn, supposedly a horselike animal with a horn on its forehead. As Nathan Hoffman has pointed out, the Authorized (King James) translation of the Bible mentions it nine times in five different books: Num. 23:22, Num. 24:8, Deut. 33:17, Job 39:9, Job 39:10, Ps. 22:21 Ps. 29:6, Ps. 92:10, and Isa. 34:7. Nevertheless, “this animal is totally fictitious.” It is not “alive today and no scientist has ever found a fossil of one.”<sup>234</sup>

Why does the AV/KJV refer to it? None of the modern English translations says anything about unicorns. There are, however, learned speculations about them, some of them based on Latin texts.<sup>235</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the animal concerned was the “Aurochs, or wild ox (*Urus bos orunugenius*),” which “is undoubtedly the *rimu* of the Assyrian inscriptions, and consequently corresponds to the *re'm* or *rêm* of the Hebrews.”<sup>236</sup>

But there is more to it. As an Internet search reveals, from ancient pagan times people have believed in the existence of the unicorn. It became an important heraldic element. For instance, in the United Kingdom Queen Elizabeth’s royal coats of arms, which symbolizes dominion, contains a lion as well as a unicorn. Further there was a belief that, though the unicorn was a very fierce creature, it could easily be tamed by a virgin. It was also associated with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Nevertheless, the unicorn—a horselike creature with cloven hoofs like those of a goat and a horn between its eyes—is a mythological animal, except perhaps for hardened devotees of the King James Version. If they so wished, they could even set up a commission to study the theology of unicorns, and this could produce some very interesting papers. For instance, is

the unicorn a clean or an unclean animal, which would have a direct bearing on how many pairs of this species Noah took aboard the ark. Also, is one allowed to eat a unicorn? It had cloven hoofs, but did it chew the cud? A horse does not, but the unicorn was only *horselike*. And so on.

Well, there are no unicorns. In the original languages, the Bible says nothing about them. Just so, it also does not refer to pastoral ordination. How Satan must be enjoying himself over the immense expenditure and wasted manhours devoted to the latter topic, and how he rubs his hands at the thought that he could possibly cause a schism in the SDA Church and see God's Remnant torn apart!

So where can we go from here? To me, the solution seems plain. As stated from time to time throughout this paper, let us abolish pastoral ordination. It is not Biblical but a Nehushtan, or a unicorn!



Strange as it may seem, the groundwork for such a better approach is already being laid—within the third world, where a vast majority of our believers live.

On the front page of its 1 October 2013 newsletter, the Inter-American Division headlined a wonderful story: “Church elders authorized to baptize during historic event.” A striking photograph, taken on 28 September, shows Elder Levon Walcott of the Rest Store Adventist Church in Manchester, Camp Verley, Jamaica, and Cortis Nolan of the Wynters Acres Adventist Church in St. Catherine with raised hands standing in the water with two people whom they are about to immerse. All of them are black. Cortis Nolan is a female elder. Another is Clara Davidson, 62, from Harry Watch Seventh-day Adventist Church in Central Jamaica.<sup>237</sup>

We note that these “were among hundreds of ordained church elders across the Inter-American Division authorized to baptize new believers into the church on the special event, as part of Inter-America’s Year of the Laity this year.”<sup>238</sup>

Both the Division President, Israel Leito, and Hector Sanchez, his Ministerial Director, approved and endorsed this action. As the latter explained: “The special baptismal events climaxed nine months of evangelistic work performed by laypeople in the vast Division Territory.”<sup>239</sup>

And, indeed, it is vast. In fact, it is the most populous of our world Divisions, seeking to evangelize nearly 280 million people of the Caribbean as well as North, Central, and South America as far down as Venezuela.<sup>240</sup> Several languages are spoken in that multiracial region. Interestingly, Elder Leito, President since 1993, is a native of Curaçao whose ancestry was partly African. An obviously gifted man, “he is fluent in Dutch, English, Spanish, and Papiamentu, and has a working knowledge of French.”<sup>241</sup>

The IAD has a Seventh-day Adventist membership of more than 3.5 million<sup>242</sup> with many assets, including no fewer than thirteen universities.<sup>243</sup> But some of its demographics reveal a less optimistic picture. According to Pastor Sanchez, “the IAD boasts over 15,000 congregations but has only 3,200 pastors to serve them, so the role of the church elder is vital for the healthy growth and running of the local churches.” Indeed.

“The figures point out that a pastor in the IAD has an average of five churches to oversee each week. That’s why the 50,000 church elders in Inter-America are essential in the functioning of the churches.”<sup>244</sup>

For the baptisms of October 2013, four sensible guidelines, in keeping with the Church Manual, were applied: “The elder must be appointed by the church, ordained, authorized to baptize by the conference or mission president, and have a baptismal candidate or candidates that he or she brought in through Bible studies.”<sup>245</sup>

The results were most gratifying. “According to reports from the IAD territory nearly 2,000 people were baptized by church elders in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, over 600 in Cuba, over 900 in Haiti and hundreds in the Dominican Republic as well as The Bahamas, St. Vincent, West Venezuela, Jamaica and more.”<sup>246</sup>

Near the end of the report, we read: “For now, the event was a one-time occurrence throughout the IAD territory, church leaders said.”<sup>247</sup> Yes, for the time being. It did, however, set a precedent, which we believe will have a magnificent aftermath; for nothing succeeds like success.

### XXXV

Although the report did not concern itself with education for either these elders or their flocks, this is likely to be an important issue. On an earlier page, I mentioned it in relation to South Africa two decades ago. Consequently, the theology of some Seventh-day Adventists there was still tinged with superstitions about alleged ancestral spirits.

In the Transvaal province of that country, the ordained pastor (appropriately called the Director), was typically responsible for supervising fourteen, twenty, or even more congregations. He would be assisted by two licensed ministers with two years of theological training. For the rest, he had to depend on the local elders and deacons.

Another crucial fact that the Church in Africa must deal with is the great preponderance of female converts. Writing in the *Adventist World*, Bill Knott on April 2013 asserted: “Women now make up nearly two thirds of the 17 million baptized members of the church.”<sup>248</sup> In West Africa, they

constitute an even larger percentage.

Suzy Baldwin belongs to a self-supporting ministry. During March 2013, she reported in *Adventist Frontiers* on an Adventist Women's Congress held in West Africa, at the National University Campus of Benin. It was supported by the denomination. "The weeks before had been very busy for many of the departments in all levels of the Sahel Union Mission as various people prepared the program, got necessary permissions, ordered materials, invited the First Lady of the Republic of Benin and readied the large hall for the opening ceremony. Hard-working pastors and Pathfinders spent hours cleaning dormitories and getting them ready to house participants."

Women, rich and poor, arrived from all over, by bus and airplane. Some paid more than \$1,200 to come. In an African context, that is a huge amount. "The main theme throughout the congress was that women are the primary Christian workforce in Africa (around 70 percent of it), so they have a big part to play in finishing the Great-Commission work. Much of the teaching focused on practical ways women can reach out to their families and those around them."<sup>249</sup>

### XXXVI

Some other countries suffer from an even greater shortage of clerical manpower than in Central America. I have already referred to China. Also in Asia is India, which will soon be the most populous country on our planet.

Bruce Price, a veteran minister from Australia, wrote about his visit to the Western Indian Union on 12-30 September 2013. He had been invited to come and help with the training of workers. According to his report, the WIU "has a population of 150+ million with Mumbai/Bombay having the equivalent of the entire population of Australia. To tackle this enormous challenge we have only 34 ordained and 20 licensed ministers."<sup>250</sup> The problem is greatly aggravated by a lack of both money and training, so what is the solution in India?

"In each conference or district they have an army of volunteers. Some are completely self-supporting and others get some financial help—largely from Americans . . . One conference president told me he can only afford 17 ministers

in his large conference—but he has 68 volunteers. If those volunteers do not produce souls—then he replaces them. If they are able to raise groups of believers that can make the volunteer’s work self-supporting then their name is considered for full time ministry!”<sup>251</sup>

For India, according to Price, “The problem is then: how does the leadership throughout this poor Union train and equip these volunteers as soul-winners as well as update their ministers. The visit was primarily to address this problem. So besides giving out hundreds of copies of my story book to confirm the faith of those who could read English, we also had printed a soul-winning manual, with Bible studies, Bible Marking Guides and charts. Added to this were a DVD we printed by the hundreds that contained 5 GBs of videos, sermons, files, etc. for seminar materials for soul winning. Few volunteers had computers—but many had family or friends that did—who they believed would help them!”<sup>252</sup>

## XXXVII

Paradoxically the Seventh-day Adventist Divisions in third-world countries which, at General Conference level, have persistently nixed the idea of women’s ordination are at times the very the ones who find it most difficult to cope with large congregations. To evangelize, provide congregational care, or even baptize—the things we normally associate with ministers of the Gospel—is way beyond what can be managed by pastors trained at our seminaries. There are not and, it seems, there are never likely to be enough of them. In areas like the Inter-America Division, the local elders are vitally needed and indispensable.

From statistics, formal or otherwise, it is also plain that the SDA Church is a predominantly female denomination, though radical armchair theologians—some of them in the United States—maintain that only men should be ministers or be allowed to preach.

Meanwhile, those who favor female ordination have grown desperate. They realize that no amount of studies, scholarly or otherwise, will ever persuade their opponents. And therefore, tired out by a powwow that seems to go on forever, they have

grown determined to go ahead with the ordination of women, even though a schism might be the consequence.

As it concerns especially English-speaking North America but also Western Europe and China, this issue—simmering for decades—has now boiled over.

In the United States, it was for a considerable time part of the movement for women's emancipation. It goes way back to the very beginning of the Republic, in the late eighteenth century or even earlier. As we have seen, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband about it before 1776. According to Asimov, describing women's status in nineteenth century America, it was "higher than the four-legged animals, perhaps, but surely considerably lower than men." This matches the observations by Kit Watts, who looked back much further to the derogatory remarks of ancient Aristotle and medieval Thomas Aquinas.

All this has stoked the fire. In our year of grace, 2013, the women of the NAD (and their husbands) can take no more of it.

On the other hand, the historic backgrounds have been completely different in Latin America with its machismo and sub-Saharan Africa where patriarchy still prevails. About the ordination of women, the men folk reared in those parts of the world think on a different wavelength from northerners, who just cannot communicate with them. They may as well talk to a blank wall. Also lacking is tolerance, the willingness to live and let live in variance.

This may soon lead to schism, resulting in two Seventh-day Adventist General Conferences, one for a wealthy North America, Western Europe, and China, the other for the largely impecunious South: Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. How happy this would make Satan!

No, my dear brethren and sisters, there is a better way, as already indicated. Let us abolish the unbiblical pastoral ordination as something higher than the ordination of elders. And let those congregations that choose to do so ordain not only men but also women as elders, in accordance with the General Conference policy that already exists.

If necessary, the North American Division could decide to proceed along those lines unilaterally. They can transform its

existing ministers into elders, in accordance with Scriptural requirements, also remembering that the Lord's servant opposed settled pastors hovering over congregations.

Of course, the General Conference might contest the right of the NAD to act on its own, with the argument that the Church must for the sake of international uniformity maintain the status quo. It should, where possible, but not at all costs. We are not Roman Catholics. The *Minister's Handbook* and the *Church Manual* are not Canon Law, elevated above the Bible. When necessary, items in these documents can be modified. If they are in conflict with the Holy Scripture, they must be changed. To say otherwise is theologically ultra vires.

Some, of course, continue to find female elders offensive. They could try to undo the 1975 decision which allows such ordination. But that is just wishful thinking for English-speaking North America, for Western Europe, and for China. Politics, as has often been said, is the art of the possible. Though that is a secular saying, it also applies to ecclesiastical affairs. We have to accept reality as it is, not as we would like it to have been and move on from there. The ordination of women elders is a fact and will remain so.

A new emphasis on local elders would necessitate some reorganization of our Church. That can, to the extent that it is feasible, be done along Presbyterian (not Congregational) lines.

While we are about it, we should ensure that elders will always exercise a spiritual ministry, and not be burdened with an excess of administrative work. The New Testament teaches that the practical affairs of the Church should be largely handled by the deacons. "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. . . we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2-4, NKJV).

Pray earnestly and let common sense prevail, so that we can get on with the job of doing God's work by preparing a suffering Planet Earth for the coming King. To prepare for him a people from every nation, kindred, and tongue, and people must be our passion, not an unseemly wrangling about who will be the greatest here on earth.

As a friend, a now retired Ministerial Director and former Conference President, recently said to me: the Lord can speak through a man, through a woman, or through a child to finish the Great Commission before he returns.

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

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