

Keeping the Church Unified

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Ideas have a life of their own

- Ideas and doctrines have a tendency throughout the years to develop a life of their own.
- People then do not know anymore what is their origin, but perceive everything through a prism of these ideas or doctrines and are genuinely convinced that this is what the Bible teaches.
- We do not see the world the way it is, we see the world the way we are. (Talmud)

The 2015 GC Session Question:

“After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G. White, and the reports of the study commissions, and; after your careful consideration of what is best for the church and the fulfilment of its mission, is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No.”

- Hermeneutical question
- Exegetical question
- Historical issue
- Sociological problem
- Emotional (psychological) issue
- Theological issue

Opponents of Women Ordination

- Opponents of women ordination base their argument on what they call a “clear reading of the Bible”.
- Most of our pioneers who spread Adventism in our countries did not have any theological training or specialised exegetical skills to deal with Bible texts.

Opponents of Women Ordination

- When they preached their message to their audience, who used the history, tradition, decision of church councils, local spiritual authority figures, etc. to defend Sunday keeping, they appealed to simple reading of the Bible to defend not only the Sabbath, but also creation, clean and unclean meat food laws, foot washing, tithing, etc.
- Our entire belief structure, our reason for existence and our mission to the world, are all based on the authority of the Bible. “The clear reading of the Bible” is the way to understand it.

Key Passages:

■ There are six key passages in the New Testament which are crucial for both sides of the debate. The primacy is given to 1 Tim 2:9-15 and all other texts are interpreted in its light.

- 1 Tim 2:9-15;
- 1 Cor 14:33b-36;
- 1 Cor 11:3-16;
- Eph 5:21-23;
- 1 Tim 3:1-7 and
- Gal 3:26-29.

Key Texts

"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. (1 Tim 2:12)

"Now the bishop (elder, overseer) must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach... (1 Tim 3:1-2; Tit 1:5-6)

"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." (1 Cor 14:33-35)

Implications:

- These instructions are clearly not only for one church (Ephesus or Corinth) but for all Christian churches throughout the ages.
- Being against ordination of women is not perceived as being against women in church service or ministry.
- The Bible presents women as full participants with men in the religious and social life of the church. Women served in the Old Testament temple, laboured side-by-side with the Apostle Paul, etc.

Implications:

- But because women did not serve as priests in the OT temple (though there were women priests in the surrounding nations), and they were not chosen as either apostles by Jesus or into prominent leadership roles by the early church, this should be seen as a precedent showing us how things ought to stay till the second coming of Jesus.

Implications:

- Therefore the hierarchical model is seen as part of the creation order that must be accepted if we are to hold to the doctrine of creation on which the Sabbath commandment rests.
- The text in Gal 3:28 deals with religious status but not with abolishing role distinctions between men and women. Therefore no role interchangeability is implied here. Both men and women have equal worth but not equal functions.

- Because the Bible was written for everyone, we must take it the way it reads (plain reading)
 - The Bible is clear on ordination
 - Our authority is the Bible not the culture
 - Domino effect of ordination
- Distinguish between spiritual gifts and offices
- Ordination is gender specific in the Bible

Questions to the Opponents:

- 1) Does sound biblical hermeneutic start with 1 Tim or with the state before sin and fall? How would our reading of 1 Tim and Titus be different if we had a different starting point?
- 2) If Paul is not dealing with the ordination issue in these texts, how legitimate is it to use the phrase "husband of one wife" in this discussion? After all we do not use it to refuse serving as an elder and ordination to single men, married men with no children, married men with one child, married men whose children are not in the truth.
- Does not the fact that there are at least eight different interpretations of this phrase indicate that simple reading of the phrase in 21st century is in danger of missing the point the author wanted to make and allows the reader to read into the text their own agenda?

Questions to the Opponents:

- 3) The simple reading of the Bible fuses the horizon of a 21st century reader into the horizon of a 1st century writer. Is this a responsible way of approaching the Bible? Would not respecting the creation-fall-redemption model be much more appropriate for understanding the Bible storyline and derived at the same time from the Bible?

Proponents of Women Ordination

- When we say that we believe the Bible is the Word of God we do not mean that it is primarily a collection of applications (or proof texts) that are to be blindly followed.
- The Bible came to us as a story with a simple three-fold model:
- Creation – Fall – Redemption.
- Everything in the Bible needs to be related to these three concepts.

Proponents of Women Ordination

- The Creation presents divine original intentions for human beings;
- The Fall shows temporary thwarting of God's purposes and disruption of God's original design in creation.
- The Redemption shows God's desire to reclaim human beings so that the original creation purposes could be worked out in the individual lives and corporate destiny of God's people.

Proponents of Women Ordination

- Only when we understand the storyline we can correctly apply the eternal principles into specific situations.
- To understand the problem of women in ministry (whether deaconesses, elders, or pastors), we need to ask three basic questions:

Proponents of Women Ordination

- 1) What was the nature of male/female relations in God's original design of creation? [The answer is in Genesis 1 & 2 chapters.]
- 2) How did the Fall distort those relations? [The answer is in Genesis 3.]
- 3) How does God try to redeem the consequences of the fall; first through the ministry of Christ (as seen in the gospels) and then also through the ministry of the apostolic church (as reflected in Acts and Epistles)?

Proponents of Women Ordination

- 1) In the creation story of Genesis 1 & 2 neither maleness or femaleness is introduced with any disparity in rank, nature or function.
- Both man and woman complementarily bear the image of God and as a result both share equally in the God-given task of rulership of creation.
- There is an essential unity in male and female; they are expected to enjoy a relationship of mutuality and equality.

Proponents of Women Ordination

- 2) In the Fall story of Genesis 3 we see the catastrophic consequences of sin and the alienation it brings to relationships between God and humans.
- When humans are alienated from God a reject dependency on Him, they assume primal **dependency on their original element.**

Proponents of Women Ordination

- Thus Adam's life is subject to the ground (from which he was taken) and Eve's life is subject to the man (from whom she had been taken).
- For Eve to be subjected to Adam is an application of the same death principle as for Adam to be subjected to the soil.
- The ruler/subject relationship between Adam & Eve starts with the fall. Because it resulted from the fall, the rule of Adam over Eve is not seen as a part of creation order but as alien in its origin, just as the death itself.

Proponents of Women Ordination

- 3) Throughout the Bible, God took people where they were culturally and tried to initiate a process of redemption.
- Because redemption is a process, we find a tension in the OT between negative factors derived from the Fall and positive elements based on redemption.
- The negative aspects can be seen in things like: polygamy, patriarchal system, double standards on adultery; uneven divorce laws, etc.

Proponents of Women Ordination

- Positive aspects can be seen in: roles of women prophets as religious authority, example of women leaders in civil life (Deborah & Jael) and also authority within marriage (1 Sam 25), Edenic equality seen in the Song of Solomon, etc.
- The mixture of negative and positive elements makes the OT times a period of a compromise between the equality of the creation ideal and post-fall subjection that introduced a rulership system.

Proponents of Women Ordination

- However, the New Testament shows that redemption came to fulfilment in the ministry of Jesus Christ who came to bring "the glorious liberty of the children of God".
- To this end he established a new community – the church, which should model that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the effects of the Fall are conquered and a new situation established.

Proponents of Women Ordination

- In this community men and women are called by God to occupy kingdom functions and to assume kingdom roles at maximum level of involvement and visibility that is acceptable/tolerable within their contemporary culture.
- Ministry in the NT is based on spiritual gifts.
- The work of redemption will finally be completed at the Second Coming when everything that suffered decay from the Fall will be purged away from God's presence and death will be finally destroyed (Rom 8:18-25; Rev 21:1-4).

Questions to the Proponents:

- 1) To what extent is your way of reading the Scripture based on humanistic Ideology rather than principles of the Scripture?
- 2) Is there any connection between the facts that modern push for ordination of women came in the same decade as the feministic ideology that tries to reinterpret the Bible on values foreign to it?

Questions to the Proponents:

- 3) If we admit that the Bible is culturally conditioned, where shall we stop? Will soon the ordination of gay men be also justified?

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The Future of the Debate

- A) Opponents' Practical Suggestions
 - (1) Reaffirm and encourage, with public recognition and licensure, women whom God has called to gospel work;
 - (2) Provide enhanced access to educational opportunities for women in gospel work and ensure fair and just treatment upon their placement in ministry;

The Future of the Debate

- A) Opponents' Practical Suggestions
 - (3) Promote the greater development of various lines of ministry for women, according to their spiritual gifts, including but not limited to personal and public evangelism, teaching, preaching, ministering to families, counselling, medical missionary work, departmental leadership, etc. While increasing opportunities for women in ministry, we also recommend that the Church;

The Future of the Debate

- **A) Opponents' Practical Suggestions**
 - (4) Retain the scriptural practice of ordaining /commissioning only qualified men to the office of pastor/minister throughout the world church in harmony with the consistent example of Christ, the apostles, and the Adventist pioneers; and
 - (5) Return to the biblical practice of electing and ordaining only men to the office of local elder throughout the world church, while providing for women to serve as un-ordained church leaders under certain circumstances.

The Future of the Debate

- **B) Proponents' Practical Suggestions**
 - (1) Each entity responsible for calling pastors be authorized to choose either to have only men as ordained pastors or to have both men and women as ordained pastors.
 - [This choice will be protected by guarantees in the relevant documents of each union, division and the General Conference, so that no entity can be directed against its will to adopt a position other than the one to which the collective conscience of its constituency points.]

The Future of the Debate

- **B) Proponents' Practical Suggestions**

- (2) The union, at which organizational level decisions for ordination have historically been made in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, be enabled by its division to make the decision as to whether to approve the ordination of both men and women to gospel ministry.

The 2015 GC session question:

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The Way Forward:

- **1) Theological versus non-Theological Issues (communion cups; bread; forms of liturgy, etc.)**
 - A) Does this issue belong to the core beliefs of our church?
 - B) Is this a belief that allows for some difference of position? (Matter of application?)
 - C) Is this an issue that time and love will remedy?

The Way Forward:

- **2) Dogmatic versus Narrative Christianity**
 - A) If the issue is between "right and wrong" then theological purity is the desired goal and this admits no compromise.
 - B) Faithfulness to God requires that people submit to an interpretation which is attributed to God.
 - C) Enforcing this results in varying levels of inhumanity

The Way Forward:

- **2) Dogmatic versus Narrative Christianity**
 - D) We certainly want to keep our doctrines and beliefs pure, but we are called to do so in love and forgiveness.
 - E) When we begin to see ourselves (rather than God) as the repository of all theological truth, we lose sight of our own fallibility.
 - F) Arrogance and ruthlessness, in the name of God, will result.

The Way Forward:

- **3) Biblical versus reductionist Ecclesiology**
 - A) Unity and diversity in the Body of Christ:
 - I do not belong (1 Cor 12:12-20)
 - I don't need you (1 Cor 12:21-31)
 - B) Church as a community
 - "They better..." syndrome
 - The shyness of timidity in the Trinity
 - C) Really diverse people, yet capable of loving each other and living in unity

The Way Forward:

- "The serious Christian, who sets down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him/her a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be and then they try to realize it. But God's grace speedily shatters such dreams. Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and if we are fortunate, with ourselves."
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together*)

The Way Forward:

- Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. (Acts 15:36)

The Way Forward:

- "For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

The Way Forward:

- "20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

(Eph 3:17-21)