

BACK TO CREATION: AN ADVENTIST HERMENEUTIC

IMPORTANCE AND NEED FOR HERMENEUTICS

1. There is no statement in the Bible: “Ordain women to ministry!” Moreover, there is also no command: “Do not ordain women to ministry!” Yet, we want to have a biblical answer to our fundamental question of whether to ordain women to ministry. So we need to reflect on, evaluate, and interpret the biblical data in order to arrive at a sound conclusion about this matter.
2. Two groups of scholars who love the Lord and take the Holy Scriptures seriously as the Word of God come to opposite conclusions from the same Bible on the same subject. How can this be that they come to different results? Let me stress that this is not primarily a theological discussion between liberals and conservatives, between those whose main arguments for ordination of women are based on culture or social justice (even though these arguments need to be also taken seriously) and scholars or theologians who maintain faith in God, but it is a debate among those who strongly uphold the authority of the Holy Bible.
3. Our distance in time and space from the biblical world necessitates the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Today we use a different language, have a different culture, thinking, habits, customs, and worldview, and we also deal with different issues and audiences.

It is not enough to read or quote the biblical text; it is necessary to explain it. Even though the disciples of Jesus knew many biblical passages by heart, yet they did not understand that the Hebrew Scriptures testified about the Messiah Jesus. “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40 NKJV). On the resurrection Sunday, two disciples on the way to Emmaus needed to understand the Scriptures regarding the role and mission of the Messiah, so Jesus explained the Old Testament teaching to them: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted [*diermeneuō*] to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27 ESV). The correct understanding of the Bible enables the understanding of Jesus, and the understanding of Jesus gives better insights into the Scriptures. The word “interpreted” (*diermeneuō*) points to hermeneutics. The Apostle Paul asks how people can believe, and it is only if someone comes and proclaims the word of God to them: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Rom 10:14 ESV). Furthermore, the Ethiopian eunuch answered the question of the evangelist Philip: “Do you understand what you are reading?”

by stating “‘How can I, . . . ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him” (Act 8:31 NIV).

The verb “explain” is a translation of the Greek word *hodegeō* which means “lead,” “guide,” “explain,” “teach,” or “instruct.”

This short overview demonstrates that there is an urgent need for proper hermeneutics—how to interpret the biblical texts in regard to the ordination of women. And it is also evident that the issue of the ordination of women is first of all a hermeneutical issue; it is about how we read and interpret the biblical text in this case and in all our theology. Therefore, establishing principles of interpretation of the Bible are crucial in order to arrive at an accurate meaning of the Scriptures concerning gender relationships in Christ.

This paper summarizes and illustrates the hermeneutical principles from an Adventist perspective without going into minute detail and providing substantiation for each point, because other colleagues are presenting specific studies on these raised issues. The goal of the present study is to set a biblical-theological pattern of thinking, a mindset on how to approach and interpret biblical material in regard to the ordination of women.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS?

Biblical hermeneutics is a science of interpreting the Holy Scriptures in order to ascertain its meaning.¹ This science follows principles of interpretation as well as a clear methodology. Hermeneutics does not

only deal with understanding of the Bible, but also with the process of thinking about and evaluating biblical interpretation. One cannot manipulate the biblical text to say whatever the interpreter would wish. We need to follow sound principles. Exegesis then applies these principles to particular texts, and exposition in preaching or teaching is the actual communication of God’s message.² One cannot strictly dissect hermeneutics and exegesis. The goal of the hermeneutical-exegetical process is to discover what the message meant to the original audience, and what it means for us today: What does the author mean by what he writes?

Biblical hermeneutics is also an art, because putting different texts together and understanding its theology and significance requires special insight into the whole biblical teaching. It must be done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is why it is important that this task is done by a dedicated believer in God. As members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we accept the historical grammatical-theological method of interpreting the Bible as a proper tool for understanding the Bible.³ At the same time, we firmly reject the historical-critical method of the interpretation of the biblical material.⁴ This historical-critical method can only discover the horizontal dimension of the biblical text and uses a distorted methodology of imposing some preconceived patterns on the text, such as reconstructed history (e.g., there was no worldwide flood or Exodus from Egypt; the book of Daniel was written in the time of the Maccabean war around

165 B.C.) and literary compositions (like the JEDP [Jahvist, Elohist, Deuteronomist and Priestly writer] approach to the Pentateuch; Deutero-Isaiah; the book of Deuteronomy being the result of Josiah's reform in the 7th century B.C.; etc.).

It is not enough to use the right tools and follow the proper methodology of interpreting the Holy Scriptures; the exegete needs to also have the proper attitude toward the revealed Word:

1. **To accept the Bible as the Word of God.** It is of high significance to underline that the ultimate Author of Scriptures is God, that the biblical writers were guided by the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Bible is God's inspired revelation (2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21). As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and we accept the so called "incarnational" or "thought" model of inspiration.⁵
2. **To study the Word of God in a humble and teachable spirit.** The Lord declares: "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word" (Isa 66:2b NIV). This is why the first task in doing exegesis is a prayer! Praying for the Holy Spirit and wisdom from above is existentially crucial so the interpreter will be in harmony and in tune with the Author of the Bible in order to understand it. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the interpretation process is limited and in jeopardy. Bible reading is first of all a spiritual discipline, and we need to read it with open eyes.
3. **To be willing to obey and follow the revealed Word.** The practice of the discovered meaning of the biblical message is the key element in the interpretation of the Bible. This means that the interpreter must be open to different interpretative options and cannot approach the text with given preconceived ideas. Thus, the proper

attitude to the text includes a readiness to follow God's instructions, and not to try beforehand to reject a specific view even if it goes against an established pattern of thinking or *status quo* behavior. Jesus aptly states: "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority" (John 7:17 NKJV).

4. **To recognize our human limitations.** The Bible contains propositional truth, but our understanding of it is partial, tentative, never final (1 Cor 13:9-13). The final word always belongs to God. All our statements of faith are under His judgment and authority. This is why we need to carefully study His revelation, tremble at His Word, and attentively listen to each other and study together so that we can advance in the knowledge of His truth.

As time progresses, believers can better discern and understand the meaning of God's revelation:

1. Jesus declared to His disciples: "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matt 24:15-16 ESV). When Jesus's followers saw the "abomination of desolation" (fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of 9:27), they were to flee from Jerusalem.
2. Jesus proclaimed that his followers could understand and remember His Word better after certain things were fulfilled: "And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe" (John 14:29 NKJV; see also 13:19, 16:4).
3. The New Testament church's radical discovery of the inclusion of Gentiles only became gradually clear for the Christian church (see Acts 10-11 and 15; Gal 2:11-16).

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The Bible is normative and has the ultimate authority in doctrine and practice. As Adventists, we believe in the self-testimony of Scriptures, and we accept the general principles of *sola scriptura* (Scriptures alone determines matters of faith and ethics) and *tota scriptura* (the use of Scriptures in its totality/entirety). The whole biblical canon needs to be seriously studied. We adhere to the principle of *scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (Scripture interprets itself); however, this does not mean that the student of the Bible will not look at the historical background, the context of the studied verse(s), and the intent of the biblical passage. On the contrary, this principle requires the study of the historical and literary context in order to know to what issue(s) the particular text responds and thus avoid misapplying it.

We need to let the biblical text speak! Exegesis is not a luxury or a necessary evil. It is not a mere playing with words and sentences, but it is a diligent work with the biblical text in order to discover its meaning. This process includes biblical theology as an inseparable part. Questions of relevancy and practical applications cannot be separated from the exegetical process. It may also prove useful to the entire hermeneutical process to know the history of the interpretation of the studied biblical text(s) up to the present time in order to be informed by it, understand the current debate, and avoid the pitfalls of interpretation by not repeating the same mistakes (e.g., the Trinitarian and Christological discussions; understanding of the structure, role, mission, and authority of the church; debates on revelation and inspiration; the doctrine of the nature of humanity; interpretation of ordination and the role of women in the Old Testament and the Christian church; etc.).

The historical-grammatical-theological method of interpreting the Bible uses the following main hermeneutical principles:

Historical Background—The Basic Six “Ws”

To understand the meaning of the biblical message, one needs to discover the basic historical background. Six “Ws” can help in this regard.

1. Who

- A. Who wrote or said it? Deciding on the authorship of the book may radically affect the understanding of the book (e.g., Job, Isaiah, or Daniel). To know the authorship of some biblical books is very crucial for their interpretation. For examples, we accept that Genesis was authored by Moses in spite of the claim of the historical-critical scholars that it is not the case; we accept Paul’s authorship of 1–2 Tim even though they belong among the Pastoral Epistles which some critical scholars regard as written later than Paul’s time.
- B. Who are the main protagonists, figures, or players in the studied text? What can be known about them (for example, see Junia, the Apostle in Rom 16:7)?⁶

2. When

When was the book written, when did the event happen, and/or on what occasion was the mentioned speech/message given? For the majority of the biblical books, it is very important to know when events took place. For example, see the background of the book of Deuteronomy (were they speeches delivered by Moses in 1410 B.C. or were they only fabricated around 622 B.C.?) or the events in the beginning of the book of Daniel (a real besiegement of Jerusalem in 605 B.C. or only a made-up story from the Maccabean time?).

The inclusio in Genesis 2 makes clear that the man and the woman are presented as equals in this chapter.

3. Where

Where was it written or said? The historical place and what happened there may play a key role in the understanding of the biblical message (e.g., the book of Joshua) or even prophecy (e.g., the fall of Babylon and the drying up of the Euphrates river in Rev 16). Study of the historical background includes the knowledge of language, culture, habits, worldview, etc. (e.g., the extra-biblical creation and flood narratives). The value of historical documents and archaeology for an understanding of the biblical world is indispensable, because it helps to better understand the ancient world and their worldview in which biblical history and polemic took place (e.g., understanding the cult of Artemis or Diana and other cultural movements afoot in Ephesus at the time of Paul helps one to better understand Acts 19:23-41 and 1 Tim 2).

4. To Whom

Discovering the original audience determines its understanding and application (e.g., the audience of three speeches of Moses according to the book of Deuteronomy; or the audience of Ezekiel or Daniel). With regard to 1 Tim 2, what was the makeup of the believing community in Ephesus in Paul's day; in particular, who were the false teachers in Ephesus concerning whom the epistle gives counsel?

5. Why

Why was it written or said? The author's purpose or intention reveals the main focus of the message. Discerning the intended drive of

the biblical book is of utmost importance (e.g., the intent of the first and the second Creation accounts points to the Sabbath and Marriage as their focus, i.e., vertical and horizontal relationships and dimensions of our life; the purpose of the Fall account is to demonstrate God's grace in the midst of His judgments; etc.). Again regarding 1 Tim, what was the particular problem or problems that Paul was addressing in the epistle?

6. What

What was written or said? To summarize the message into one sentence or short paragraph helps to discover the content, basic message, main teaching, and principal thought(s).

GRAMMATICAL OR LITERARY STUDY

Literary Study

Word Study. The careful study of words is necessary, because their meaning may change in time. The meaning of the biblical phrases is always determined by the context in which they are used.

For example, consider the different meanings of the words "head" or "authority." The immediate context should decide the particular meaning of these terms. So for example, in 1 Cor 11:3, does the expression "head" (*kephalē*) mean "authority" or does it mean "source" or something else? Does it carry the same meaning in vv. 4-7, 10? What is the meaning of *exousia* ("authority") in v. 10? Does it have the same meaning here as elsewhere in the NT? There are all good and legitimate questions.

In 1 Tim 2:12, does the word *authentēin* mean "to have authority" or does it mean "to domineer over" or some other negative connotation? And what about the meaning of *hēsychia* in the same verse: does it mean that a woman must be totally "in silence, silent" (KJV, NKJV, NIV), or does it refer to her overall demeanor which should be "at peace"

(CJB), acting “quietly” (NLT), as this same root word means just a few verses earlier with regard to all Christians (v. 2)?

For OT examples, in the Genesis creation narratives, does the word “man” (*’adam*) in Gen 1:26-28 and elsewhere imply male gender (and thus hint at male headship) or is it a gender-inclusive word that means “human” with no implication of maleness? Does the word “helper” (Heb. *’ezer*) in Gen 2:18, 20 imply a subordinate status for Eve, or is this term more neutral by having no reference to relative status since even God is referred to as “*’ezer*” (Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; 1 Chr 12:19; Pss 20:3; 33:20; 70:6; 89:20; 115:7-11; 121:2; 124:8; 146:5; Hos 13:9)? The title *’ezer* for Eve in Gen 2 is actually a great compliment!

Grammar and Syntax. Martin Luther already said that theology is grammar because on it depends the understanding of the text. Grammar, for example, helps to determine which time is involved in the text—past, present, or future (e.g., the eternity of the Word which became flesh in a precise moment of time according to the use of the Greek past tenses [like imperfect and aorist] in John 1:1-3, 14). The study of syntax is very important in discerning the relationship of words and sentences to each other. For example, “naming” of animals (Gen 2:20) and Eve (3:20) in contrast to “calling” the newly formed woman a “woman” (2:23), i.e., recognizing the closeness and unity between Adam and his wife (received as a gift from God).

Another example: Paul’s list of qualification for elders in the masculine gender “**husband of one wife**” (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). This can be explained on the basis of understanding the biblical languages, how they express their thoughts. An important feature of biblical languages is the simple recognition that when both genders are included in a biblical text, they are described in the masculine gender. Also Phoebe is described as *diakonos* (but also

adelphē [sister {fem.}] in Rom 16:1). The masculine gender is used throughout the Decalogue, but it does not exclude women from obedience too (the wife is not even mentioned, but is included in “YOU”). Jesus proclaimed: “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:28 NIV). However, it does not mean that women can look lustfully at men.

Statistics. Biblical statistics will help to determine the importance of words or phrases, and to discover key, rare, or unique words (*hapax legomena*). So, for example, the meaning of the Hebrew word *teshuqah* in Gen 3:16. Since it appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible, it is important to note the only other time where it occurs in the context of a man-woman relationship, i.e. Song 7:11 (English v. 10), where it clearly has a positive connotation of “[romantic, sexual] desire.”

In 1 Tim 2:12, it is important to realize that the word *authentein* (to govern, have authority) in 1 Tim 2:12 is a *hapax legomenon*. Thus it is crucial to understand the meaning of this word in light of the current meaning of the Greek in the time of Paul, and not to import a meaning only current several centuries later into the text.

Different literary features. Literary study helps to discover special literary features like puns, grammatical anomalies, ironies, figures of speech, Hebrew parallelism, inclusio (envelope construction), metaphors, etc. For example, the inclusio in Gen 2 makes clear that the man and the woman are presented as equals in this chapter, and the flow of the passage from incomplete to complete is just the opposite of those who claim that this chapter emphasizes the priority of the man in creation. Again, the Hebrew parallelism of Gen 3:16 helps to explain the meaning of the divine judgments given upon the woman.

Contextual Study

It is of utmost importance to study the particular biblical word, phrase, or sentence in its immediate and larger context, because the context decides its meaning.

For example, Adam's wife is created as "helper suitable to him [Adam]" (NIV). The Hebrew phrase *'ezer kedegdo* literally translated is "help as opposite to him" or "help as corresponding to him" meaning that they are equal partners in life, even though they are sexually different (the biblical Creation text stresses the sexuality of both of them). Thus, even though they have different physical functions, there is no subordinate or superordinate hierarchical status in their relationship. Their difference is good, and only because they are different can they be a contribution to each other.

Another example is that there is no causative connection between vv. 12 and 13 in 1 Tim 2: "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For [Gr. *gar*] Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1Tim 2:12 NKJV). The Greek conjunction *gar* in the beginning of v. 13 is explicative (as it is in v. 5) and needs to be translated as "for," and not as causative "therefore or because." Paul's reasoning apparently does not make sense: Why should a woman or a wife be silent/quiet in Ephesian church, because Adam was created first and Eve second? In reality, to be silent or quiet has nothing to do with the sequence of the creation of the first pair! This puzzle makes sense only if Paul is responding to a specific claim of his opponents, namely their claim that a woman—the goddess Artemis—was created first, and from her everyone else. Paul is difficult to understand because he is very polemic; **he reacts to a special proto-gnostic heresy which uplifted the woman to cosmic supremacy built on the cult of Artemis (Diana).** This woman's supremacy claimed that woman was

created first, and everyone (including men) should submit to this goddess Mother. Due to worshipping this mother-goddess, women (especially the wives) were probably domineering over the men (including their husbands) in public meetings. The myth of Cybele and Attis, from which the Ephesian Artemis sprang, emphasized the creation of the goddess first, then her male consort.⁸ Paul simply argues in reference to the Creation account that Adam was created first (Paul does not explain the Creation account). On that basis, he urges that such noisy women teachers must be silent, because their teaching is disruptive and their claims do not confer with the biblical Creation account. So he categorically states that he does not permit them to teach.

Literary Genre

Is the text under scrutiny history, prophecy, parable, song, genealogy, polemic, law, prayer, etc.? This is an extremely important point because on this recognition depends the whole approach to and the interpretation of the text. A different set of rules applies to the interpretation of parables, and again different ones apply to prophecies. The kind of literature determines the application of various interpretative rules. For example, if 1 Tim is a polemical letter then one needs to know the arguments to which Paul is responding, and then interpret the text accordingly. In this polemical epistle Paul reacts to serious problems and writes against incipient Gnosticism, false teachers refusal of the Creation order and their defense of multiple mediators, asceticism, and the women's cult of Artemis's supremacy (see 1 Tim 1:3-7; 2:3-6; 2:11-15; 4:1-5).

The Literary Structure

The literary structure of the book and the selected passage is very crucial for understanding the message of the Bible. This will determine the literary

units and delimitate them in order to know which verses belong together. It also shows the main flow of thoughts and helps to understand the principal points and the purpose of the biblical text (e.g., see the first and second Genesis Creation accounts; the Flood story; the books of Ezekiel; Daniel, and Revelation). For example, the chiasmic structure of Gen 3 helps to explain the order in which God addresses the ones under judgment in this chapter. Again, the symmetrical macrostructure of the Song of Songs underscores the egalitarian relationship between Solomon and the Shulammitte.

THEOLOGICAL STUDY

Understand the Big Picture of Biblical Revelation

The most important issue in our life is how we think about God because everything in our life depends upon it. A proper understanding of God's character, the Great Controversy, and the Plan of Salvation are the key entry points to the interpretation of the Bible.⁹ The goal of interpreting the Holy Scriptures is to know God and His plans, and understand how we should live. Our discussion about the ordination of women is related to the big theological picture of how we view God, but comes down first of all to the basic issue of what is our—men—attitude toward women and toward our sisters in the church. How do we think, perceive, and talk about them? How do we relate and behave toward them? What kind of jokes do we say about them? Our studies on the ministry of women are not a mere theological exercise; at stake is how we treat women in general. In this context, we need to ask additional pertinent questions: What is God's view of women and how does He value them? How should the relationship between men and women be cultivated among believers in Christ? This set of issues leads to the other two specific theological questions closely related to our discussion: What

kind of picture of God will be presented in my/our interpretation in favor of the ordination of women? What kind of picture of God will be painted by my/our denial of women's ordination?

From the Clear to the Unclear Texts, From the Known to the Unknown, From the Plain to the Problematic Verses

For example, the texts about Jesus as the beginning (*archē*) of God's creation, to be the begotten (*monogenēs*) Son of God, or to be the firstborn (*prototokos*), etc. Some have taken these passages to mean that Jesus is not fully God, or that He has eternally been subordinate to the Father. Others further the argument, based upon these kinds/ of passages, that if Jesus was subordinate to the Father, then this provides a model of female subordination to males in the home and the church. Such argumentation fails to start with the clear texts about the relationships in the Trinity, and interpret the unclear in light of the clear.

Another example is the need to proceed from Moses (Gen 1–3) to Paul (1 Tim 2) and not to try to obscure the clear statements in Genesis by beginning with Paul and pressing this meaning upon the Genesis text in order to explain the difficult verses of the Apostle Paul. To read Paul's statement "Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman, who was deceived and *became a sinner*" is very incomplete, because Adam also sinned *and became a sinner*, not only Eve. Yet, Paul does not say one word here about Adam's fall and sinfulness. This verse makes sense only if Paul (while referring to the Genesis Creation story) reacts to the specific heretical claims of his opponents who try to make the cult of Woman (Artemis) and the primacy of women dominant. Paul in Romans explains and proves that we are all sinners and points to Adam only. Is he contradicting himself? Not at all, because each text

needs to be explained in its proper context! Romans is a doctrinal epistle which teaches about true faith and how to be saved in Christ Jesus, but 1 Tim is a polemical letter.

Literal or Spiritual/Figurative Meaning?

How should we read the biblical text? Does the Bible have *sensus literalis*, i.e., a literal meaning, or *sensus spiritualis*, i.e., spiritual meaning? Is it possible to speak also about *sensus plenior*, i.e., a deeper meaning? Our guiding principle is that we read the biblical text literally unless the context demands otherwise, because we encounter parables, symbols, songs, prophecy, metaphors, etc. For example, Gen 2:4 characterizes the Creation account as “genealogy,” i.e., as a historical, factual account as are nine other genealogies in the book of Genesis, including the genealogy of Adam, Noah, Terah, and Jacob (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). If the genealogies of these patriarchs are historical and really happened in a literal way, so must also “the genealogy of the heavens and the earth” be historical.

There is a difference between the literal and literalistic meaning of the text. “Literal” means that one reads the biblical text in its context with its intended message meanwhile “literalistic” reading means that the biblical text is taken in a very narrow dogmatic way without applying its contextual and larger theological considerations. For example, some have read 1 Cor 14:34 (“Let your women/wives keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak”) literalistically, to mean that women are not to speak at all in public worship services. But information in this same epistle of 1 Cor indicates that women were indeed speaking in worship services (11:5), with Paul’s blessing! Certainly this passage is not to be taken as a literal ban on all female speaking in church!¹⁰

As Seventh-day Adventists we realize the complexity of the biblical message. We have never interpreted the biblical text in a literalistic or simplistic way. For examples: (1) We do not accept that texts like Rev 14:10-11 and 20:10 teach eternal conscious torture in fire even though they explicitly claim that; our reading of these texts is not literalistic or simplistic. (2) We refuse to believe that texts like Mal 4:2-3 and Rom 9:15-24 speaks about double predestination. (3) We do not believe in a literalistic way that after death we go immediately to heaven to be with Jesus, even though Paul sounds like he is claiming it (see Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:6-9). (4) We do not accept dichotomy between law and grace (that they are against each other) in spite of texts like Rom 6:14 and Gal 2:16-17. As Adventist we always seriously study the historical background, immediate and larger context, audience, theology, purpose, and intention of the text. Otherwise it is easy to be misled and come to false conclusions. In other words, the safeguard of the balanced interpretation does not lie in a simple quotation of the Bible, but in finding principles which need to be rightly applied.

Prescriptive or Descriptive Texts?

Does the biblical text only describe what happened (e.g., the behavior of people; the consequences of sin) or does it prescribe a certain behavior in stories, parables, or legal texts? Examples include Noah’s drunkenness, David’s adultery, Nehemiah’s beating of people for not knowing Hebrew and for intermarriage with unbelievers/idolaters, etc. Regarding Gen 3:16, is it a permanent prescription of male headship or a remedial redemptive provision to facilitate the return to the Creation ideal (see Gal 3:26-29; Eph 5:21-33; similar to the “painful toil” for Adam in Gen 3:17b, NIV)?¹¹

Additional questions need to be always carefully studied: To whom does the prescription apply? Is it

temporal or universal? Does it apply to an individual or to all people? To Israel only or also to all nations? The scope of the biblical instruction is important. For example, in 1 Tim 2:11-15 Paul uses the ambiguous vocabulary (*anēr-gynē*) which may refer to “man-woman” or “husband-wife” relationship.¹² Does Paul’s counsel in 1 Tim 2:11-15 apply to all women everywhere for all time, or does it apply only to those in the specific situation in Ephesus (or similar situations which might occur elsewhere and/or later), in which women/wives domineer over men/their husbands in the worship service? Does Paul speak about men-women relationship or only about husbands-wives relationship, or has he in mind both relationships? Similarly, In 1 Cor 14:34, does the counsel regarding “women/wives” (*gynē*) apply to the men-women relationship in general in society and/or the church or to the marriage relationship between husband-wife only?

First Indicative and then Imperative of the Gospel

Grace always comes first and then the law follows. Faith and obedience go hand to hand, but faith is always the root of salvation and an ethical life is its fruit. The Spirit of the law, i.e., its intention, has priority over its literalistic application (e.g., the six antitheses of Matt 5:21–48 in the Sermon on the Mount). The act of ordination needs to be understood as the result of experiencing God’s grace and the power of His Spirit in life.

Importance of the Study Within the Overall Biblical Teaching

Not all things are equally important that are taught in the Bible. For example, the death of Jesus on the cross is the great center truth of the Bible around which all other biblical teachings clusters.¹³ We need to ask what place ordination has in God’s system of truth, how it belongs in the plan of salvation,

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and how it fits into the great controversy issues. Is the ordination of men or women a central or more peripheral teaching of the Bible? As a matter of fact, it is not something directly prescribed or repeatedly taught by biblical authors. Is it telling that Ellen White never once refers to the crucial passages like 1 Tim 2:8-14 and 1 Cor 11:3, which provide the foundational argument for those who oppose women’s ordination?

Intra- and Inter-Textuality

How do the same and then later biblical authors use the previously revealed biblical material? Is it used in a dogmatic, ethical, exhortative, or polemical way? All related texts need to be a part of the conversation. At the same time, we need to be careful not to put together texts that do not belong together even though at first glimpse it may suggest so.

For example, the use of Mark 7:19 or Acts 10 as a denial of the biblical teaching on the clean and unclean food of Lev 11. Another example, Peter actually gives the right interpretation of Paul (because he is so easily misinterpreted) in order to show the true meaning of the husband-wife relationship (compare 1 Tim 2:8–15 with 1 Pet 3:1–7).

As another example, the Song of Songs has been widely recognized as an inspired commentary on gender relations in Gen 1–2. There are numerous intertextual links between the Song and Gen 1–2. Furthermore, the Song links with Gen 3:16, and

explicitly reverses the remedial provision of male headship and female submission as it underscores the possibility of returning to the Creation ideal for marriage as in Gen 2:24. One cannot overlook this crucial inspired testimony in interpreting the relationships between men and women in the early chapters of Genesis.

Unity of the Bible

The biblical authors do not contradict themselves. The analogy of faith is an important principle and needs to be maintained, because it is supported by the inner biblical evidence. For examples, the harmony between Moses, the prophets, Jesus, Paul, and James on justification by faith; the attitude toward women in the Old and New Testaments.

With regard to the role of women in the church, one cannot set Paul against Paul: one cannot interpret 1 Tim 2:8-14 in a way that contradicts Paul's numerous statements affirming women in positions of leadership in the church, and his basic principled statement regarding gender relations in Gal 3:28. One cannot set Paul against Moses and Solomon, by interpreting 1 Tim 2:8-14 in such a way that contradicts the exegesis of Gen 1-3 and the inspired OT commentary on this passage in the Song of Solomon.

Therefore, we need to read the Bible wisely, i.e., prayerfully, humbly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in its historical, grammatical, literary and theological context.

DANGERS AND FALLACIES IN INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

Selectivity

We need to **avoid being selective—choosing only some texts which fit our own interpretative construct.**

For example, the Rabbinic identification of the Messiah in the time of Jesus focused on the

righteous King (Isa 11) while ignoring another Messianic figure, namely the Suffering Servant or the Servant of the Lord of Isa 53. When Jesus Christ came as the Suffering Servant, they rejected Him because He did not fit into their interpretative category. What a tragedy due to the misunderstanding the Scriptures!

One needs to be willing to deal with a complexity of issues and to not avoid some tough problems, because what criteria we apply to interpret one problem may affect other issues. For example, we cannot speak only about the silence of women during worship in the church (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-12) but avoid dealing with other closely related issues pertaining to women in the church—the head covering of women (1 Cor 11:5-6, 13) or their obligation to have long hair (1 Cor 11:6). We need to have a good reason for why we take so seriously 1 Tim 2 about women's silence (quietness), but ignore applying Paul's instructions about women's long hair or their head cover. These two other practices are not advocated in our church even by those who argue against the ordination of women. Why not? It seems that Paul does not use different reasons for defending these three practices; he advocates all of them with references to the Genesis Creation order (1 Cor 11:3-16; 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11-15). Can the knowledge of specific social habits, circumstances, or problems in the churches in Corinth and Ephesus help us to discern if these practices are or are not relevant to us?

Inconsistency

To speak about the silence of women in the church and to not allow them to teach according to 1 Tim 2:11-12, and then to apply it only to the ordination of women and/or to the work of an ordained pastor is very arbitrary and inconsistent. Generally speaking, in our churches this rule is not applied to women as they are teachers in schools and

churches, they are Bible workers, preachers, elders, deaconesses, Sabbath School teachers, etc. They are not silent in the church, they sing, pray, make announcements, teach, preach, etc. We need to be consistent in the interpretation and application of the Bible.

Eisegesis

Eisegesis is imposing on the text a meaning which is foreign to the whole thrust of the text. Thoughts coming from outside are pushed onto the meaning of the passage without substantive support or textual evidence. This imposition ignores the historical background, audience, the immediate and larger context, and the author's intention of what truth he really wants to communicate.

For example, the Bible testifies that we were created to the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). Some people would like to deduce from this fact that Adam and Eve were created with different functions, as there are different functions among the Godhead—one Person of the Deity cannot do what another Person is doing—so the Son and Spirit must submit to the will of the Father. Therefore, they claim that women have different functions from men, and they must submit to the authority of men. These interpreters are violating a basic theological assumption of the equality of the divine Persons and the equality of their different functions. This reasoning is absolutely theologically wrong because it makes God in our image and tries from this theological construct to build our human relationships.

This is more a philosophical approach to the biblical text, good for some gnostic esoteric speculations, but absolutely out of place in the issues about the subordination of women to men. We cannot compare the incomparable. For example, it is absolutely unsustainable in biblical-theological thinking to develop a hierarchy among angels with

their different functions and subordinations, and then transfer or compare it to the relationship between men and women. Humans were not created in the image of angels! We know absolutely nothing about angels' sexuality, their marriage or family life (see Matt 22:29–30). There is evidently no analogy between angels' hierarchy and man-woman or husband-wife relationships, because there is no gender relationship between angels (at least it is not revealed in the Bible). We cannot project our own wishes or ideas onto the biblical text and its overall message.

Ellen G. White warns: "It is true that many theories and doctrines popularly supposed to be derived from the Bible have no foundation in its teaching, and indeed are *contrary to the whole tenor of inspiration*."¹⁴

Not Recognizing and Defining Personal Presuppositions

It is impossible to come to the biblical text without cultural, theological, and other presuppositions. We cannot pretend to come with a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, and interpret the text purely objectively without any bias. Though we cannot avoid coming with presuppositions, we can seek to recognize and define what presuppositions, preunderstandings, and assumptions we bring to the text. We can ask the Holy Spirit to show us our presuppositions, and to help us evaluate these assumptions in light of Scripture, to see if they are truly biblical.

In discussing with some individuals regarding the ordination of women, when they have heard all the exegetical arguments, finally they have made the statement which revealed their unexamined presupposition: "Everyone knows that it is part of human nature: men lead and women follow." Such reveals a cultural bias that colors the interpretation of all the relevant texts. Others come to the

subject of women's ordination with presuppositions based upon liberal feminism or western concepts of social justice rather than the biblical understanding. These unconscious assumptions need to be recognized, defined, and then the Bible student needs to be open to the possibility for Scripture to verify, change, or correct one's presuppositions in harmony with the biblical teaching.

Circular Reasoning

In our interpretation of the Bible we need to avoid circular reasoning. The exegete needs to be keenly aware of this trap because it is so easy to fall into this danger. Each text needs to be interpreted in its proper historical, grammatical, literary, and theological context, and only then can it be put into dialogue with other texts (analogy of faith). An interpreter cannot import into the studied text the meaning taken from another text in order to "fit" these two seemingly contradictory passages together, and then claim that these two biblical texts confirm each other. In reality this is reading into the studied text foreign ideas which are contrary to its intention and flow of thoughts.

For example, some interpreters are reading into Moses's Creation Story (Gen 1-2) their own thoughts about the headship of man and submission of Eve to Adam as they think Paul is stating it in 1 Tim 2:11-14 (thus projecting the idea of headship and the submission of Eve to Adam into the Genesis accounts), and then they interpret 1 Tim 2 and argue that this is what Paul says since it is consistent with the teaching of Moses. In order to do this, they need to impose on the Genesis text their own philosophical construct of ontological equality but functional hierarchy (in matter of leadership) in Gen 2,¹⁵ take things out of their immediate context, and severely violate the biblical concept of the original harmony and unity of the first human pair. Thus the

Textual discrepancies have no power to overthrow the main thrust and teaching of the Bible. They do not diminish the certainty of the biblical message in its totality.

intention of Gen 2 is ignored and the idea of male headship is introduced even though not once is this concept or category mentioned in this chapter.

Dismissing All Difficulties, Tensions, and Problems

The student of the Bible needs to recognize that he/she will not solve all the problems related to the biblical text. However, these textual discrepancies have no power to overthrow the main thrust and teaching of the Bible. They do not diminish the certainty of the biblical message in its totality.

For example, 1 Tim 2:15 reads that women will be saved by bearing children. This statement presents a huge problem for interpreters to understand; however, we may know and be sure what Paul does not want to say through this statement: he is not advocating salvation by works, salvation by having children, because this thought runs completely contrary to what he teaches in his epistles. Otherwise, women with many children would be automatically saved as having babies would be the cause of their salvation. So, we know what Paul does not mean by it but to be exactly sure what Paul wanted to say is a matter of interpretation, and several compelling theories have been presented. I think it should be understood in the context of Paul's sharp polemic against those who advocated a woman's supremacy and the gnostic teaching about despising physical and bodily activities and rejected marriage (1 Tim 4:3). He probably encourages believers in Christ to

have children and tells wives that bringing children into the world does not endanger their salvation in Christ Jesus, they need only to continue in their “faith, love and holiness with propriety.”

Apparent discrepancies and contradictions may help us to carefully study given passages, avoid simplicity, and find a better solution. For example, compare the story about sending the spies into the Promised Land: Did God or the people initiate it? See the apparent contradictory statements in Num 13:1-3 and Deut 1:22-23.

Another example: Are Paul and James in contradiction about justification by faith? No, if you know (1) how differently they define the two terms of faith and works; (2) what is the purpose of their statements (to what problem were each of them responding); and (3) who were their opponents (their different audiences). The harmony between both of them can then be established.¹⁶

Another example is where Paul is apparently contradicting himself when, on the one hand, he allows women to pray and prophecy publicly, as it is explicitly stated in 1 Cor 11:5: “**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” (1 Cor 11:5 NKJV; for Paul to prophecy means to edify the church, strengthen, encourage, and comfort people, see 1 Cor 14:3-4), and on the other hand, forbids women to speak in the church (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-12). We should not put Paul against Paul! This must be a hermeneutical key for us. Only in two cities were there such big problems that Paul did not permit women to speak publicly in worship; this happened in Corinth (see 1 Cor 11:3-16 and 14:34-35) and Ephesus (1 Tim 2:11-12). Both cities were pagan centers with immense populations and many moral and syncretistic problems in the church. In Corinth, there was a disruption of worship by women through

uncontrollable speaking in tongues, and there was a disturbing of worship in Ephesus by women who were still adhering to the cult of Artemis. So what Paul is really forbidding the women in those cities is disorderly speaking in worship (1 Cor 14:29-33, 40), because Paul is only in favor of orderly, decent, fitting, and honorable worship.

ACTS 15: JERUSALEM COUNCIL—A HERMENEUTICAL KEY

What are we to do as believers in Christ when we are seriously challenged in our practice or belief? The Apostolic Council in Jerusalem may serve as a pattern and the key on how to approach such difficulties.

The early church faced a huge new problem: the acceptance of believing Gentiles into the church. So far, it had only been a Jewish-Christian church. Gentiles were coming to the Jewish-Christian church, and believers in Jesus were growing in number. But the early church was not ready to open their arms to the uncircumcised Gentile believers because for centuries the uncircumcised Gentiles had been excluded from the community of believers. God had to dramatically intervene with dreams and with the gift of the Holy Spirit before the church was willing to baptize and accept Gentile believers (see Acts 10-11).

The Jerusalem Council was called, because two main questions had arisen:

1. Do Gentiles need to first become Jews in order to become Christians? Do they need to be circumcised as the Abrahamic covenant requires?
2. What do Gentile Christians need to keep from the Mosaic Law?

How were these questions decided? On what basis? By studying the Holy Scriptures, by going back to the Hebrew Bible, the apostles discovered

biblical-theological principles. Judaizers, legalistic people, had plenty of “good” reasons and biblical-theological “proofs” to argue for asking Gentiles to be circumcised and keep all the requirements of the Mosaic law. Their arguments sounded good; they were logical. They could build their reasoning on the facts of God’s eternal covenant, clear requirements of the Abrahamic covenant, the validity of God’s laws, the unchangeability of God’s teaching, the categorical language of Gen 17:14, the necessity of faith and obedience to go together, etc. However, the council decided on the basis of Amos 9:11–12 (quoted in Acts 15:16–17) that Gentiles should be part of the church without requesting them to become first Jews by circumcision. Then another question arose about what laws from the Law of Moses were they to keep, and their decision was made on the basis of Lev 17–18.¹⁷

The apostles studied the already previously known Scriptures, but now with a new comprehension and understanding of the Word of God, they applied them differently. They were willing to restudy familiar texts and to see them under the influence of the Holy Spirit in a new light. In this way they discovered the original intent of these texts that was not clear to them before, and they opened their arms to the Gentiles. This new study of the Word of God under new circumstances and the guidance of the Holy Spirit helped them to discover the right meaning and application of the biblical principles. The apostles could appeal only to a few texts, but they could show that in this time after Jesus first coming, God wanted all to be in His church, both Jews and Gentiles. They were not reading into the text, because the meaning they stressed was always there and present in it. **“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirement:”** (Acts 15:28 NIV). They were not using their apostolic

authority, but the authority of the Word of God. They were not appealing to the Holy Spirit apart from the Word but in combination. Moreover, they studied the Scriptures together and submitted to this new and correct interpretation.

All their decisions were made on the basis of the Scriptures and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. What is really important to catch is that, as for circumcision, their decision was made with a difference: Jews could go through this ritual if they wished to do so (because it was their national identity), but Gentiles were not obliged to be circumcised. This double practice was a radical step forward and a wise decision in harmony with the intention and spirit of the biblical text.¹⁸ One decision was limited to the nation (for the Jews) and the other was universal (for the Gentiles)!

God intervened and gave them a new and fresh understanding of the Holy Scriptures. They knew the biblical texts before but the meaning was hidden and obscure to them. The apostolic church had to reflect on the same Old Testament material from a new perspective, the first coming of Jesus Christ. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the leaders now saw new hints in the biblical texts and a new light in the original purpose that helped them, led them, and gave new direction to the decision-making process as to what to do in new situations.

APPLICATION TO THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Establishing Biblical Guiding Principles

We need to reflect on the biblical material and extrapolate principles out of texts that can guide us in the process regarding the ordination of women. Ellen G. White states: “We are to stand firm as a rock to the *principles* of the Word of God, remembering that God is with us to give us strength to meet each new experience. Let us ever maintain in

our lives the *principles* of righteousness that we may go forward from strength to strength in the name of the Lord.”¹⁹ Ekkehardt Muller in his articles in *Ministry* and *BRI Newsletter*²⁰ accurately argues for “using biblical principles to determine how questions on theological issues should be decided.”²¹ This approach I would call “principled hermeneutics” or “principle based hermeneutics.”

We need to follow sound hermeneutical principles (not a proof-text method or literalistic reading of the Bible). We need a balanced and biblically informed understanding of the biblical text which must be built on solid theological reasoning. We need to reason, seriously reflect on the divine revelation, and cultivate biblical-theological thinking. These guiding principles can be established on the basis of the metanarrative of the Bible, biblical-theological thinking on the recognition of the flow of doctrines and main events, prediction-fulfillments model, and biblical trajectory.

If we explained biblical truth simply by proof-texts instead of finding and applying principles (thus work with so-called “principled hermeneutics”), we would be not able take a stand against smoking or use of drugs. We would have immense problems to present and defend the doctrine of the Trinity, the sanctuary doctrine, system of tithing, etc. But because we derive principles on the basis of the biblical text, we can build doctrinal positions. As the SDA Church we have never read the Bible simplistically; we do not explain, for examples, such metaphors as “pluck out your eye” (Matt 5:29; 18:9), “cut off your hand” (Matt 5:30; 18:8), “move the mountain” (Matt 17:20), and the story of the rich man and Lazarus” (Luke 16:19-31), in a literalistic way.

Creation is the fundamental and overarching principle of biblical teaching. The doctrine of Creation is an article of faith on which the Seventh-day Adventist church stands or falls. Creation is also

crucial for our theology because our essential doctrinal points can be directly or indirectly traced to Creation roots. Each of our 28 Fundamental Beliefs is somehow tied to Creation. Even where SDA teachings on doctrine and lifestyle issues are not unambiguously affirmed by explicit biblical references, these beliefs find their ultimate foundation in the doctrine of Creation. Let us look at a few examples:

1. **Why do we not as Seventh-day Adventists drink alcohol?** There is no text in the Bible which would explicitly prohibit the drinking of alcohol: “Do not drink alcohol.” On the contrary, there is a legislation to use the (second) tithe for buying wine (*yayin*) and fermented drink (*shekar*)—see Deut 14:26: “. . . buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish . . .” However, there are texts against alcoholism, to drink in moderation. In addition, there are a plenty of examples of drinking alcohol in the Bible, but key stories are negative (see, for example, Noah’s and Nabal’s drunkenness). There are a few texts that present the ideal: Lev 10:8–9; Prov 20:1; 23:20–21, 29–35; 31:4–7; Rechabites—Jer 35:6. These few texts point to the real intention of God’s revelation. This is why it is important to know what the biblical trajectory is in this regard. According to my understanding, it is abstinence, even though there is no proof text for it. Because we are in the service of our Lord continually and have received a special call to live for him and represent him well, I think it is proper to abstain from the drinking of alcohol.²² The safeguard lies in the hints of the biblical texts and not behind the texts or outside of them! This recognition is against William Webb’s usage of the trajectory of the Bible, because to him this trajectory is rooted outside of the biblical

We need to go back to the ideal of God's Creation when nothing was spoiled but pure.

text.²³ We need to go back to the ideal of God's Creation when nothing was spoiled but pure.

2. **Why are many SDAs vegetarians? Why are we vegetarians?** There is no biblical statement: "Be a vegetarian!" You have clear divine regulations for eating clean meat (Lev 11 and Deut 14). We theologially reason from Lev 11 back to the ideal of Creation. The main rationale behind the clean and unclean food legislation is the respect for the Creator.²⁴ Genesis 1 sets the tone! Behind the Pentateuchal dietary laws is the theological Creation-Fall-New Creation pattern. The main reason is theological: we go back to the **ideal before sin**—to the lifestyle in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1–2).
3. **Why are we against divorce? We adhere to Jesus's principle: "In the beginning it was not so!" We go back to the Creation ideal.** Jesus Christ's opponents argued on the basis of Deut 24:1, but he explained that divorce was allowed only because of the stubbornness of man's heart (*sklerokardia*; see Matt 19:1–9).²⁵ Another important hermeneutical principle is God's condensation to our level in time of need and sin (see, e.g., the killing of animals for food according to Gen 9:3 and divorce as shown in Deut 24:1–4).
4. **Why do we not practice polygamy? We go back to the ideal of Creation, when the marriage relationship was defined between one man and one women (Gen 2:24)! Jesus's principle** (when discussing divorce): "But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matt 19:8), should be applied here also.

5. **Why are we against slavery?** There are plenty of texts which regulate the relationship between masters and slaves in the Old and New Testaments (see Exod 21:2–11; Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22; 1 Tim 6:1). But study Paul's letter to **Philemon** about how he urged him to have a new relationship with **Onesimus** (his fugitive slave) and how to treat him differently: "no longer as a slave but better than a slave, as a dear brother" . . . "welcome him as you would welcome me" (Phlm 1:16, 17). This is the direction to follow, it is the biblical trajectory! We are against slavery on the basis of the equality of all people created in the image of God (*imago Dei*, Gen 1:27). We go back to the ideal of Creation.

The Distinctive Adventist Hermeneutic: Creation—Fall—Re-Creation

We need to see the big picture of God's revelation, the unity of the Scriptures, and the ultimate intention of the biblical material as a whole (a canonical approach) in order to discern correctly the meaning of God's message. The biblical trajectory, built on the biblical metanarrative, from creation, to de-creation (the Fall, sin) and to re-creation presents for us Adventists the crucial pattern. We do not go beyond the biblical text; all is firmly rooted in it. It is Adventist hermeneutics that is reflected also in our name: we are Seventh-day (Creation) Adventists (Re-Creation), so the whole plan of salvation or story of redemption is included! Adventist hermeneutics moves from Creation to the Fall and from the Fall to the Plan of Salvation and to Re-Creation (from Gen 1–2 to Rev 21–22). "In the beginning it was not so." Our hermeneutic is built against the background of the Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy.²⁶

Adam and Eve are representative of all humanity, and they were both priests in their position of

responsibility as head of humanity. Thus, the ministry of women is rooted in Creation (see below).²⁷

This principled hermeneutics, tracing its roots back to Creation, is consistent, for example, with our Adventist stand against approving homosexuality as a lifestyle, because the biblical account of Creation provides the fundamental reasoning for a total opposition to the practice of homosexuality. Biblical teaching against homosexuality is rooted in the Creation legislation, is universal, not temporal, never changed, and is valid in all times (see Gen 1:26-28; 2:24; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27). It is consistent with the biblical trajectory built on the pattern from Creation through the Fall to the Re-Creation.²⁸

REREADING THE BIBLICAL TEXT AND DISCOVERING A NEW EMPHASIS: SOME OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT HINTS FOR ORDINATION

What are the “new” texts which speak in favor of the ordination of women?

We are not reading back into the biblical text something which is not there, nor are we imposing on the text an external pattern. The truth was always present in the text, but it was simply not acknowledged or was forgotten. What we are doing is merely recognizing the “hidden” truth; we are rediscovering and reapplying it. The intention of the text is in harmony with the overall metanarrative of the Bible and the character of God. We reflect on this revelation of God from the perspective of the first coming of Christ, from the revelation which shines from the cross, the perspective of the plan of salvation, and the Creation-Fall-Re-Creation pattern. This is a consistent Adventist paradigm!

I. Both Equally, Man and Women, Created in God’s Image

“So God created mankind [*ha’adam*] in his own

image, in the image of God he created them [object marker with suffix 3rd person sg.]; male and female he created them [suf. 3rd pl]” (Gen 1:27 NIV). Note carefully that both, male and female, are created in the **image of God!** They are **equal** and what is one is also the other—the image of God; and they together form it too! What is different is only their sexuality and with it their particular role in it (like parenting and motherhood). To be a woman is not to be subordinate to men or imperfect or wrong (or even evil)!

2. Adam and Eve Were Priests in the Garden of Eden

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it [*le’abdah uleshomrah*] (Gen 2:15 NIV). The Garden of Eden was a sanctuary, and Adam and Eve were priests in this garden! They should “work it and keep it” (ESV), and these are activities of priests (see Num 3:8–9; 18:3–7). In the Garden of Eden, the work assigned to man was actually to “serve” (*abad* = serve, till) and “keep” (*shamar*) the garden (2:15), and it is more than coincidence that these are the very terms used to describe the work of the priests and Levites in the sanctuary (Num 3:7–8; 18:3–7). That the Garden of Eden was a sanctuary was discovered by non-Adventist scholars and is well established among scholars.²⁹

3. Partnership and Equality

Genesis 2:18—*ezer kenegdo* (“help as against him” or “as corresponding to him”). They are different but **equal**, they contribute to each other; they are **partners**.

4. Belonging Together

Genesis 2:23-24 is a poetic statement of surprise and appreciation on the part of Adam to receive this special gift from God: a beautiful wife.

Adam uses a recognition formula, they belong together; they form a unity; it is not a naming formula (the word *shem* does not occur in 2:23 as it is present in the text of 2:19 and 3:20 Adam names Eve only after sin (see **Gen 3:20**).

5. **Genesis 3:16**

To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire [longing for love, support, safety, affections and care] will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (NIV). How to understand **Gen 3:16**? It does not prescribe a husband to subdue and rule over his wife (the Hebrew word is *mashal*; this term ultimately focuses on the servant leadership); a different Hebrew word is used here than in Gen 1:28 (Hebrew words *kabash* and *radah* are employed).

God’s punishing statement does not prescribe that humans be passive and not try to help. These complications come as the result and consequence of sin, so this divine judgment about the pain in having a baby, in giving birth, and raising children should not hinder us in doing everything possible within our human power to ease the pain of the women in delivery.

In the same way, the verse describes the difficulties in the husband-wife relationship, and it obliges us to overcome it by God’s grace and through true conversion (see Eph 5:21–33; 1 Pet 3:1–7). This is impossible without God’s help. So both husband and wife (the Lord is not talking about a general relationship between men and women!) need to dedicate their lives to God and live in a personal relationship with God so there is harmony in the marriage, a mutual submission and love! Truly a beautiful marriage may be possible only for converted people.

Ellen G. White powerfully explains: “Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her husband. Had the principles joined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, **this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them**; but man’s abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden.”³⁰

When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting. But after Eve’s sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse. In many cases the curse has made the lot of woman very grievous and her life a burden. The superiority which God has given man he has abused in many respects by exercising arbitrary power. *Infinite wisdom devised the plan of redemption, which places the race on a second probation by giving them another trial.*³¹

6. **Both Are Priests even After Sin**

“The LORD God made garments [*kotnot*] of skin [*’or*] for Adam and his wife and clothed [*labash*] them” (**Genesis 3:21** NIV). God **clothed** (*labash*) Adam and his wife with “**coats**” (*ketonet*, pl. *kotnot*). These are the very terms used to describe the clothing of Aaron and his sons (Lev 8:7, 13; Num 20:28; cf. Exod 28:4; 29:5; 40:14).

7. **Believers, Both Men and Women, Are the Kingdom of Priests**

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites” (Exod 19:5-6 NIV). Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness an alternate plan was given: **only one family from one tribe of Israel** would be “a kingdom of priests.” However, Peter in 1 Pet 2:9 is applying Exod 19:5-6 to the priesthood of all believers.

8. **Women in Leadership Positions in the Old Testament**

See, for example, Miriam (Exod 15:20-21); Deborah (Judg 4-5); Huldah (2 Kgs 22:13-14; 2 Chr 34:22-28); Esth; Exod 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22; 2 Sam 14:2-20; 20:14-22.

9. **A Host of Women Preachers**

“The Lord gives the word; the women who announce the news are a great host” (Ps 68:11 ESV, NASB).

10. **Holy Spirit Given to All Believers at the Time of the End Including Women**

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. **Your sons and daughters** will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, **both men and women**, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke” (Joel 2:28-30 NIV).

11. **Practice in the New Testament Church**

See, for instance, Phoebe, a deacon (Rom 16:1); Junia, a female apostle (Rom 16:7); leaders of the church in Philippi church were women (Phil 4:2-3). Priscilla assumed an authoritative teaching role (Acts 18; see especially Rom 16:3).

The “Elect Lady” (2 John) was probably a church leader in a congregation under her care.

12. **Galatians 3:26-29**

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus**. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (NIV). This is not merely a statement on equal access to salvation among various groups (see Gal 2:11-15; Eph 2:14-15). I once understood it only from this perspective, but deeper studies show more. Paul also speaks about equality in general. He especially focuses on three relationships in which the Jews of his time perverted God’s original plan of Gen 1 by making one group subordinate to another: 1) **Jew-Gentiles Relationship**; 2) **Master-Slave Relationship**; and 3) **Male-Female Relationship**.

In regard to the male-female relationship, by using a specific Greek pair vocabulary *arsēn-thēlys* [man-woman] instead of *anēr-gynē* [husband-wife]), Paul establishes a link with Gen 1:27 (LXX employs *arsēn-thēlys* language), and thus shows how the Gospel calls us back to the divine ideal, which has no place for the general subordination of females to males. Two additional arguments which go beyond the biblical evidence:

13. **Practical Reason in Favor of the Ordination of Women**

The Spirit of God gives freely spiritual gifts, including to women (Joel 2). If God gives His spiritual gifts to women, who am I to stop it! If God calls women to ministry we should be able to recognize, accept, and implement it. God’s

work can only gain if godly consecrated women will work in leadership positions in His vineyard.

This has been demonstrated, for instance, by my mother-in-law who was a Bible worker in Communist Czechoslovakia. She prepared people for baptism and preached with everyone listening carefully, even the children. She was a very wise mother in Israel who had great experiences and witnessed miracles.

In **China** women are in practical ministry where they not only preach but also baptize and serve the Lord's Supper. At least 16 women in China have been ordained to the Gospel Ministry by Seventh-day Adventists there. This ministerial ordination of women pastors is a reality that has arisen in China for very practical reasons, and these women are powerful instruments for sharing the Gospel among the Chinese people.

14. **Ellen G. White's Inspired Support for Women in Pastoral Ministry**

"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."³²

"It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God."³³

The study by Denis Fortin considers these and other references by Ellen White in their context, and drawn important implications for the discussion of women's ordination.³⁴

CONCLUSION

Even though there is no direct biblical statement that we should ordain women to ministry, there is no theological hindrance to doing so. 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.

In this time of the closing of this world's history, God calls His remnant to go back to Creation (see Rev 14:7) and reestablish the ideals of God's original plan of equality between men and women. The Advent movement should be an example of this true human relationship and genuine worship. The last-day people should be a model for the rest of the world and should assume a leadership role in this issue by fully demonstrating the true meaning of the theology of Creation.

Even though men and women are biologically different and have thus different physiological functions, the spiritual role for both genders is the same: to be the leaders in God's church today.

We need to go back to the Creation ideal in spite of the sin problem, because God's grace is more powerful than evil, and God's grace is a transforming grace, changing the old system into the new in the Church which should be a model of the world to come. From creation to re-creation! This is the biblical pattern built on our denominational name Seventh-day (Creation) Adventists (re-Creation). ■

To view the three appendices included with the original document, please visit adventistarchives.org.



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