

NAD Claims EGW Dealt With Male Chauvinists?

March 24, 2013 Best Practices Newsletter

“Where There is One There Should Be Twenty--Ellen White on Female Leadership”

A Brief Review by Larry Kirkpatrick

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The North American Division (NAD) publishes a "Best Practices" newsletter for pastors who sign up for it. The e-mail newsletter also serves as a link to longer articles. The most recent item is titled, "Where there is one there should be twenty--Ellen White on Female Leadership"

(<http://www.nadministerial.org/article/374/for-nad-pastors/pastor-life/women-clergy/why-the-nad-needs-women-pastors/where-there-is-one-there-should-be-twenty-ellen-white-on-female-leadership>, accessed on 2013-03-25).

The thrust of the article is that Ellen White wanted more women in leadership positions and saw there to be no restrictions to such leadership. Appearing along with the article in the e-mail newsletter is a video of an Andrews University Theology professor making assertions, mostly about a set of EGW quotes (<http://vimeo.com/62170998>). All of this, of course, in support of women serving in leadership roles--the most recent stand-in phrase for the ordination of women as pastors.

Did Ellen White encourage women to serve in some kinds of leadership positions? Yes. But did she encourage women to enter into to headship-role positions? No. Not all leadership positions are headship positions. It may be useful to clarify somewhat of what we mean by headship. Here is a widely circulated definition:

Paul teaches that in the church, God's household, women are not to exercise authority over men, just as in a human family they are not to exercise authority over their husbands. Paul understands the position of overseer [elder] as involving the exercise of fatherly care over God's household. Hence, women are excluded from being overseers [elders] on the basis of general biblical principles concerning the family, not on the basis of some temporary circumstances (Vern Sheridan Poythress, "The Church as Family," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds., John Piper and Wayne Grudem, p. 239).

There are myriads of ways women can minister or even lead as Christians that do not require them to serve in headship positions. But let us keep focused. We are looking at the NAD newsletter. Is it true as claimed of White that, "she advocated for more women to become pastors, criticized male chauvinists within the church who sneered at female leaders, and insisted that women working in ministry receive pay equal to their male counterparts"?

Male Chauvinism is commonly defined as the belief that men are superior and women inferior. Doubtless there were men who held such beliefs in her day. It would be interesting to locate such a case and see how Mrs. White criticized such male chauvinists a century ago. It does seem that the author of the NAD article has in mind a man named Johnson whom Ellen White rebukes in Letter 33, 1879, which we'll consider momentarily.

However, it should be kept in mind that many Adventists today who oppose Women's Ordination do not believe that men are superior and women inferior. In fact, none of us know a single person who holds that view. Rather, many hold that both sexes

are equally valuable, neither inferior nor superior to each other, and that our Creator has built role differentiation into His creation. One author has stated this position thus:

At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships. At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships (John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 36).

It may be useful to maintain a clarity about these positions so as not to find ourselves addressing a view others do not hold.

In any case, we do know that Ellen White wanted women to receive proper financial reimbursement for their labors. But what of her alleged concern that the church have more women pastors. Did she have in mind women serving as pastors over congregations--that is, in headship positions? Do any of the references given in the NAD Best Practices article and associated video support such an idea? This, after all, is exactly what advocates of Women's Ordination today are calling for--for women to serve in headship roles over congregations. Let's Consider the material offered by the NAD.

The first Ellen White reference presented in the article is from *Review and Herald*, August 26, 1902, highlighting the portion that says, "The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life."

It is claimed that the statement appears in the context of women doing ministerial work. It does. And yet, as one reads White's 1902 article, one finds it *not* to be addressing any idea of women leading a congregation. In the 1902 article a situation is outlined in which a congregation is without a pastor, and where the families of the church including men and women are encouraged to visit people, make literature

available, and study the Bible with them door to door. There is no evidence here for women as pastors serving in headship roles.

The next White reference offered in the NAD Best Practices newsletter comes from her Letter 33, 1879 and is concerned with women managing a church. Her letter makes clear that the leading male elder of the South Lancaster church was unconsecrated, separated from God, and was one with "a disposition to dictate and control matters. . ." But there were several women in the church who were godly. And yet, in the letter, White never suggests that these women serve as pastor to the church.

Today we manage our churches especially by means of a church board, the board of elders, and various committees. There are a variety of tasks. Managing a church involves the work of treasurers, clerks, sabbath school superintendents, as well as deacons, deaconesses, elders, and other officers. The man mentioned in Letter 33 had a predisposition toward control, and doubtless was thus engaged in the attempt to run everything. White's counsel to him was firm, yet there is no suggestion here that she envisioned women functioning in headship roles.

The issue in the South Lancaster church was about consecration. There is no evidence in the letter that this man's viewpoint had anything to do with a chauvinistic attitude toward women; he was a controller in a church plagued with "picking, faultfinding, seeking spot and stain, ridiculing, gainsaying," and more. White mentions no fault specific to the women in this church. This poor, unconsecrated man, as described by White, may have been a chauvinist, but there is no mention of such a problem in her letter. (The text of Letter 33, 1879 is found in the pro-Women's Ordination volume, *The Welcome Table*, eds. Patricia A. Habada, Rebecca Frost Brillhart, pp. 302, 303.)

The next reference in the NAD Newsletter is to another *Review and Herald* article by Ellen G. White, this time July 9, 1895. We agree with the author that what White is

addressing here is a deaconess position. One read-through of it makes clear that none of these words have reference to a woman being ordained to a headship position.

Is there a pattern developing here?

The newsletter is linked to a five-minute video of a theology professor offering a pastiche mostly of Ellen White statements, none of which suggests women serving in headship roles. Along the way, he states,

Now Paul uses the masculine as inclusive of men and women in 1 Timothy 5:17 when he says, 'Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and doctrine' (<http://vimeo.com/62170998>, time stamp 3:30f).

The assertion he makes is groundless. Paul never speaks anywhere in the Bible of elders as including women, but we find him referring to them with the Greek word *ANDRA* at 1 Timothy 3:2 and again *ANER* in Titus 1:6 (these are singular accusative and nominative forms of the same irregular third declension Greek noun). This is not the generic *ANTHROPOS*, but it is the gender-specific word always indicating the male sex. There are no "elders who rule well" in the Bible who are female. Why then would Paul use the words for elder "as inclusive of men and women"? There are no women elders in all the Scriptures. Nothing in the context of 1 Timothy suggests otherwise. The statement in the video is a bald assertion unsupported by Scripture evidence.

The NAD article concludes with statements by various persons summarizing what they state to be White's views. Lines are offered such as, "Ellen White placed absolutely no limitations on women in leadership." Which is a significant thing to say, and one I would be much more interested in hearing--if only it came from White's own pen.

By no means have we here considered all that might be addressed in a full-on review of everything in the NAD article and accompanying video. But we have taken

enough of a look to make clear that the material offers little in support of Women's Ordination. "Where there is one, there should be 20" is a true statement if we are considering women helping God's church advance. But if the question is about women serving in headship roles, neither article nor video presents substantive evidence in favor.

It should be pointed out that the article and video nowhere use the word headship, and are at least somewhat indirect in terms of addressing Women's Ordination. But in our opinion this is a part of the problem. Why is it that the concept of headship is consistently sidestepped? And why do articles like this persistently pushing in one direction regularly appear? It all fits perfectly with the plan voted by the North American Division in the 1997, "[President's Commission on Women in Ministry—Report](#)," which indicated that from that time henceforth the resources of the Division and its unions, contra the world church, would be used for the promotion of Women's Ordination. In a time when the God's Church needs unity, more division. Can we change this?

In conclusion, here is the point which perhaps should come to the reader's mind: When you see material offered by the North American Division touching the question of Women's Ordination, either run the other way as fast as you can, or, plan to dig out all of your study materials and take the necessary time to see whether the references and assertions can actually be validated. At least some of the material on this topic, produced under the auspices of the NAD, is factually problematic.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick has served churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and presently in the forest fastness of Northern Idaho. Larry and wife Pamela live with their children Seamus (age 7) and Mikayla (age 6).