

## Artful Dissembling

### A Plea for Change of Direction Regarding

### Recent North Pacific Union Conference (NPUC) Actions and Statements

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I have been following with interest the subject of Women's Ordination now being agitated in the church, and it is with deep sadness that I see God's professed people chasing the devil's dogs. It has ever been among his most effective ruses to lead the church of God to focus inwardly so that its proclamation to the world is muted if not destroyed altogether.

For the Advent people however, there is a greater expectation they will understand well what it means to be facing life's record when

[O]pposite each name in the books of heaven is entered with terrible exactness every wrong word, every selfish act, every unfulfilled duty, and every secret sin, with every artful dissembling. . . the influence exerted for good or for evil, with its far-reaching results, all chronicled by the recording angel (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 462).

Compared with our meek and lowly Savior the contention over women's ordination should not even be named among the professed followers of Jesus, especially

at this late hour. Can we not follow Jesus even more closely in these last few days before His glorious return?

I must appeal to you my dear brothers and sisters, to lay aside all selfishness and self-seeking for what you perceive to be this thing called equal rights and privileges in gospel ministry. By this contention we make the gospel stink!

On the other hand, what is the example of our Lord and Savior? It has been written plainly for all to see. What has the Spirit said but "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (Revelation 2:29). And so the Spirit of prophecy has instructed us, saying,

Jesus did not contend for His rights. Often His work was made unnecessarily severe because He was willing and uncomplaining. Yet He did not fail nor become discouraged. He lived above these difficulties, as if in the light of God's countenance. He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 89).

When you stop to think about it, wouldn't you really rather live above this pettiness in the light of God's countenance than to grovel in this worldly contention? I fear however, that there is a disturbing measure of "artful dissembling" ("Dissemble"---to conceal. *Oxford American Dictionary*) going on among we who claim to be looking for the soon return of our Lord. Has anyone considered how ludicrous it must appear to heaven for us to be in contention with one another on the borders of the heavenly Canaan? How must it appear to heaven when one part of the church says to another,

If past history is repeated, and the issue is delayed or 'punted' to succeeding GC committees or future world church sessions, the NPUC has resolved to then move ahead on its own, as per the February 20 action (Feb. 21, 2013, GleanerNOW, art. "NPUC Updates Its Ordination Plan," retrieved 5/21/2013 <http://www.gleaneronline.org/2013/02/npuc-updates-its-ordination-plan>).

Here is the dissembling. While the same article asserts, “and yes, the definitive voice of our world church is the General Conference [GC] in session,” it is also maintained that “If past history is repeated, and the issue is delayed or ‘punted’ to succeeding GC committees or future world church sessions, the NPUC has resolved to then move ahead on its own, as per the February 20 action.” This makes the expression of “careful” reflection on “the call for unity” seem disingenuous.

Again, dissembling may be detected in the assertion of concern for maintaining unity while also intimating that if the world church doesn’t resolve the ordination question “in a timely manner” the Union will “then move ahead on its own, as per the February 20 action.”

There are several disturbing things about this dissembling. First, statements are made that sound supportive of doing right, but then the underlying jab arrives---that if the world church doesn’t do what is expected, then the Union will no longer play as a team member.

Second, this sets a very bad example for the rank and file of the church. Already I’ve heard in the hinterland of the districts in the field in which I pastor that such expressions by their Union are perceived as giving license for the local churches to make their own rules as well, and not necessarily feel they need to be team players with the local Conference. This is not what we want, but these are sentiments expressed because of the dissembling talk of unity by the very ones setting the stage for the destruction of unity in the body.

This is already being felt in the culture of the tithing practices of many members (though not necessarily connected to the ordination issue) who see the church run amuck of religious politics, infighting, and corporate misappropriation of tithe funds who now say the “storehouse” is wherever there is true integrity in spending and being spent for the gospel’s sake.

I must say, brethren and sisters, as one pastor who has served this wonderful church family for many decades, such foolish dissembling is already exacting high costs against the continuing strength of the body of Christ. We on the front lines need your unified support to be able to successfully press the battle on. Please do not weaken our hands by a show of disrespect for the GC no matter how much you think you have a right to go your own way on these matters.

Third, I would venture there is in fact the scent of rebellion in this mischievous posturing of the unions and other institutions that have exhibited similar tendencies relative to the GC. This of course is the most serious of all, for the servant of God has written the following disturbing bit of counsel:

Rebellion and apostasy are in the very air we breathe. We shall be affected by it unless we by faith hang our helpless souls upon Christ. If men are so easily misled, how will they stand when Satan shall personate Christ, and work miracles? Who will be unmoved by his misrepresentations, professing to be Christ when it is only Satan assuming the person of Christ, and apparently working the works of Christ? What will hold God's people from giving their allegiance to false christs? (*White, Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 58).

And in another place these disturbing words were penned by the Lord's servant: "I question whether genuine rebellion is ever curable" (*Ibid.*, p. 393).

Hopefully, brethren and sisters, we have not yet passed the threshold to rebellion in the Pacific Northwest, but there are elements bringing us perilously close and many blind eyes seem not to see the danger we are in. I appeal to every member and leader in the NPUC and the North American Division to fall on our faces before the Lord and ask that He have mercy upon us and continue to guide His people. It may yet be that His displeasure will be turned from His people and He will bless them with the outpouring of his Holy Spirit.

The gravity of the situation cannot be missed. If “an overwhelming majority” of the NPUC committee agrees with the idea of moving ahead regardless of harmony with our world church, there seems to be a very independent spirit here that would draw apart from the world body.

Again, the dissembling spirit is apparent. First it is stated “We have expressed our desire to move in harmony with our world church.” Then comes the “but”---“but we believe our church mission and Bible-based doctrines must drive our policies, not the other way around.” Who does not know that following up with “but” after making an intended positive statement actually negates the positive expression? More seriously is the dissembling that has just occurred, and the seed of confusion that has been planted in the reader's mind.

Are we not a world family of believers that stand on the idea that “our church mission and Bible-based doctrines must drive our policies”? The February 21 *Gleaner* article made it sound as if the fundamental basis for operation is not the same. Are we to believe the “Bible-based” mission and doctrines of the Union are not the same as those of the GC? Here again, the seeds of doubt and division are sown. This cannot be acceptable to the faithful Seventh-day Adventist believer who knows the importance of the counsel to “press together” (*Ibid.*, p. 69. See also note at end of this article).

Pressing together does not mean ignoring the ordination discussion. It does however suggest that at the very least we divest ourselves of any vestige of “artful dissembling” in our Unions, Conferences, and churches while the matter is being determined by the world Church. To the extent we do not get this, to that extent the health, spiritual vitality, and unity of the world family will suffer.

Fourth, it is a mistake to think that we have the Lord’s blessing because we have gathered together for prayer to discuss matters that in the end we know we will do differently than what the rest of the world body requests of us. To carry on in such a manner is to go on in spiritual arrogance and blindness, and for this we will be found

utterly powerless before the world. The Lord simply will not sanction disobedience to his chosen vessels.

We claim to be Bible-believing Christians. Then let us act out our belief. Would we listen to and obey the apostle Paul were he in our midst today? Then let us act upon his admonition to, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

If in true repentance and contrition of heart we can give up our personal and institutional agendas for the love Christ and the brethren and sisters, then we will have the blessing of God in due course. As the scriptures admonish,

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Galatians 6:7, 8).

Divine counsel has pointed out, "It is hardly possible for men to offer a greater insult to God than to despise and reject the instrumentalities that He has appointed to lead them" (White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 680). Brothers and sisters let it not be said of us that we insulted God by rejecting and disobeying those who have the rule over us as we are moving through the next few years while the GC further studies the ordination question.

Our NPUC president expressed it well when he wrote, "Ordination is really not the main issue. The calling of Jesus is!" (Max Torkelsen III, "Now Is the Time for all . . .," *Gleaner*, p. 5, Feb. 2013). And he reminded us that "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" (White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 15, 1901). Truly ordination ought not to be the issue, and in this time of the end---"the time for all"---when all should come up to

the help of the Lord, we should push away from the dissembling rhetoric that draws the attention from the Spirit and work of our Savior.

If our calling in Christ really is the most important thing, then following in the footsteps of His Spirit will empower us to let the selfish lobbying on ordination go by the way. Did He not say, "I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27)? Shame on us for thinking that we have to get this ordination thing just right for the ministry of the church to be effective today. Where do we see this in the teachings of Jesus? On the contrary, He says, "And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:27, 28). Was your Savior and mine looking for "fair play" when He came to minister and give his life a ransom? Will the true follower of Christ lobby for gender equality in the functions of ministry? How sad! How truly sad when compared to the selflessness of our dear Savior who gave His life a ransom for our corrupted selfish hearts!

Can we not bring our hearts to the foot of the cross and be satisfied that our Redeemer purchased our pardon and has given us a good work to do? Then let us go forth with joy, not counting the cost and pining for some notion of earthly equality.

By the way, men and women, what do we now think of the fact that our mothers and sisters and daughters can also go to war learning the art of killing other human beings, and in the process also come back maimed, broken, or not come back at all? Remember, the culture that is under the tutelage of the enemy of our souls is always at work to press his diabolic agenda. And because we are so immersed in this world of sin if we are not constantly on watch, that same culture oozes into the pores and seams of the church's fabric of life, making us think that what we have done without for two thousand years of church history is somehow indispensable to the finishing of the gospel work in these last moments of time. How the devil must be laughing up his sleeve as a result of this ordination agitation! But I digress.

Lest you should think this pastor is opposed to women's ordination let me be clear as I have expressed elsewhere that I do not think the case can be made conclusively either for or against women's ordination. When we realize that this question has been unresolved for one hundred years and running, this should say something about the inability of the church's being able to point to a clear thus saith the Lord. Nevertheless there should be a conclusive decision on the matter. But dear friend, this will only be accomplished through the auspices of the Holy Spirit and not through religio/political contentions and dissembling as thus far demonstrated within the household of faith.

Notwithstanding all of the articles and dialogue pro and con, good and bad, strong or weak, I still fail to hear a thus saith the Lord. For faith and practice Seventh-day Adventists have always believed there must be a thus saith the Lord. Without it, if there is to be an acceptable adjustment to cultural context the Holy Spirit must make it known through a body unified in humility before Him.

Of course, it may be felt that I have taken too much upon myself in addressing us in this manner and in suggesting that we in the North American field of labor have stepped out of the will of God in our approach to the matter of female ordination either for the positions of elders or pastors. Have I made my missteps? Indeed! But in this post I currently occupy as one of the Lord's anointed ministers, I am duty bound to speak what is laid upon the heart. In this context the Lord reminds us all that

Those whom God has set apart as ministers of righteousness have solemn responsibilities laid upon them to reprove the sins of the people. Paul commanded Titus: 'These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.' There are ever those who will despise the one who dares to reprove sin; but there are times when reproof must be given. Paul directs Titus to rebuke a certain class sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. Men and women who, with their different organizations, are brought together in church capacity have peculiarities and faults. As these are developed,

they will require reproof. If those who are placed in important positions are never reproofed, never rebuked, there would soon be a demoralized condition of things that would greatly dishonor God. But how shall the reproof be given? Let the apostle answer: 'With all long-suffering and doctrine.' Principle should be brought to bear upon the one who needs reproof, but never should the wrongs of God's people be passed by indifferently.

There will be men and women who despise reproof and whose feelings will ever rise up against it. It is not pleasant to be told of our wrongs. In almost every case where reproof is necessary, there will be some who entirely overlook the fact that the Spirit of the Lord has been grieved and His cause reproached. These will pity those who deserved reproof, because personal feelings have been hurt. All this unsanctified sympathy places the sympathizers where they are sharers in the guilt of the one reproofed. In nine cases out of ten if the one reproofed had been left under a sense of his wrongs, he might have been helped to see them and thereby have been reformed. But meddling, unsanctified sympathizers place altogether a wrong construction upon the motives of the reprover and the nature of the reproof given, and by sympathizing with the one reproofed lead him to feel that he has been really abused; and his feelings rise up in rebellion against the one who has only done his duty. Those who faithfully discharge their unpleasant duties under a sense of their accountability to God will receive His blessings. God requires His servants to be always in earnest to do His will.

God would have His people disciplined and brought into harmony of action, that they may see eye to eye and be of the same mind and of the same judgment. In order to bring about this state of things, there is much to be done. The carnal heart must be subdued and transformed. God designs that there shall ever be a living testimony in the church. It will be necessary to reprove and exhort, and some will need to be rebuked sharply, as the case demands. We hear the plea: 'Oh, I am so sensitive, I cannot bear the least reflection!' If these persons would state the case correctly, they would say: 'I am so self-willed, so self-sufficient, so proud-spirited, that I will not be dictated to; I will not be reproofed. I claim the right of individual judgment; I have a right to believe and talk as I please.' The Lord would not have us yield up our individuality. But what man is proper judge of how far this matter of individual independence should be carried.

God designs that His people shall be a unit, that they shall see eye to eye and be of the same mind and of the same judgment. This cannot be accomplished without a clear, pointed, living testimony in the church. The prayer of Christ was that His disciples might be one as He was one with His Father. 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that

they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou has sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou has sent Me, and has loved them, as Thou hast loved Me (White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 358-362).

I have to admit I feel a bit like the prophet whom the Lord told would speak for Him, but he was to be prepared for the fact that the people would not listen. Nevertheless, it was his duty to speak and he would have to leave the results with the Lord.

So, my brothers and sisters, my appeal to you is none other than to encourage the adoption of the mind of Christ,

Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 6:6-8).

I believe if this is our mind too, the “issue” of female ordination will suddenly cease to be an issue, and we will be released from the inclination to chase the devil’s dogs. Jesus is coming soon, we are in the great Day of Atonement when it behooves each one of us to send our sins beforehand to judgment. Let us therefore divest ourselves of any vestige of artful dissembling, and let go our selfish inclinations to make the church after our sinful image. Christ is our head. Let us truly follow Him.

Note. See also White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 56, 57. Here the servant of the Lord is addressing the influence of false teachers proclaiming the church to be Babylon, and so counsels the church to press together rather than pull apart when influences were working to divide. Said the servant of God, and quoting the words of the angel: "Why did they not quote the words of the angel, 'Press together, press together, press together,'? Why did they not repeat the admonition and state the principle, that 'in union there is strength, in division there is weakness'? It is such messages as these men have borne that divide the church, and put us to shame before the enemies of truth; and in such messages is plainly revealed the specious working of the great deceiver, who would hinder the church from attaining unto perfection in unity. These teachers follow the sparks of their own kindling, move according to their own independent judgment, and cumber the truth with false notions and theories. They refuse the counsel of their brethren, and press on in their own way until they become just what Satan would desire to have them---unbalanced in mind. I warn my brethren to guard against the working of Satan in every form. . . . I urge those who claim to believe the truth, to walk in unity with their brethren."

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