

**Foundations of Women's Ordination  
Part 7: Feminist Theology in Adventism**

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2013-06-25

The previous six articles in this series have outlined the theological foundations of Women's Ordination with increasing specificity. We now turn to this manifestation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Five Arguments**

There are five arguments particular to Seventh-day Adventists.

ELLEN G. WHITE ORDINATION CREDENTIAL. The Ellen G. White Estate has “Ordination Certificates” on hand that identify Mrs. White as an ordained minister although the information in this set of certificates is not consistent. The church kept information forms for those who received financial sustenance. No record exists of an “ordination” service for Mrs. White. The argument is inconclusive.

ELLEN G. WHITE QUOTATIONS. There are, in the body of Mrs. White's writings, a list of statements pertaining to ordination, the laying on of hands, headship, submission, and men's and women's roles. Since White is seen as an inspired, authoritative voice, these statements contribute to the total written inspired guidance

available. The statements have often been presented selectively and without sufficient context to verify the validity of interpretations given. No statement by White suggests that females should fill roles designed by the Creator for males. Had even one clear statement been found it would have been triumphantly set forth decades ago. No such statement has been located.

ELLEN G. WHITE AS PROPHETESS. Many point to White's role as prophetess and the significant part she played in the guidance and development of the early Adventist Church. "How can we have a female prophet and then choose not to ordain women pastors?" goes the argument. But prophets are directly appointed by God, while clergy are appointed by the church led by God in accordance with the specifications given by God. Like White's "ordination credentials," the argument that Ellen White was given the gift of prophecy offers no guidance in respect to the ordination of ministers by an ecclesiastical body.

EARLY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PRACTICE. In the earliest years of the church, some women were employed as Bible workers or even titled as pastors and engaged in traveling and preaching. But the role of congregation-leading clergy was in virtually all cases held only by males. Preaching is not the same as pastoring, and offering Bible studies or Bible readings, as important as are such activities, does not carry the symbolic significance of the male headship role in the congregational worship setting.

CONTEMPORARY APPROVAL OF WOMEN ELDERS. In 1975 the General Conference (GC) Spring Meeting approved the ordination of women elders on a limited basis. Over time this has led to a number of women serving as elders in their local churches. It also provides at least a provisional GC approval of the practice. In the Adventist Church, pastors and local elders hold identical rank. Pastor and local elder are both headship positions; if women can serve as ordained local elders, only inconsistency

would prevent their serving as ordained pastors. This practice, once implemented, became a fairness issue which it before had not been.

Of the above items, the last seems most significant, since it makes the church guilty of an apparent double-standard. It also created a previously non-existent group of women now titled “elders,” and for which the removal of said title might seem an indication of devaluation. The introduction of inconsistent practice, compromise, and half-steps, lends apparent credibility to charges of unfairness. Hence, this last, a contemporary development, makes it by far the strongest pro-Women's Ordination argument from among the five.

### *The Welcome Table*

A main focus in this article is on the two books most widely distributed in the Adventist Church offering arguments in favor of Women's Ordination. The first of these was *The Welcome Table* (1995, 408 pp.). What follows is merely a rough summary; we have not here included all arguments, nor offered detailed responses. We investigate seeking to identify certain approaches to Scripture used, and which sources and arguments constitute the presenting framework behind feminist theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Raymond F. Cottrell, a significant figure in Adventism, discusses interpretation and hermeneutics in chapter three. He correctly notes that one's prior assumptions greatly impact one's conclusions drawn from Bible study. Cottrell subscribes to what he calls the “Historical” method of interpretation---a method which this author has never heard of before or since, and for which Cottrell cites no references. He identifies four methods as defective biblical hermeneutics: Historical-critical, Fundamentalist, Proof-text, and Historical-grammatical methods. He complains that

The historical-critical method *a priori* eliminates the divine aspect of the revelatory process, while, for practical purposes, the other three eliminate the human aspect. These *a priori* presuppositions infect the process of exegesis with a hermeneutical virus that compromises its integrity and warps its conclusions to make them fit its presuppositions (p. 80).

A look at the sentiments expressed by Cottrell in other cases (he came to deny the biblical truth of the Investigative Judgment teaching), leads some to see his own approach as more accurately described as a version of the historical-critical method. He claims to accept the inspiration of the Bible, although it is unclear exactly how such a claim is significant once one adopts the theory of the Bible's subjection to alleged "cultural conditioning" as Cottrell does. In Cottrell's use, this means assigning parts of Scripture as being limited in their significance to certain times and places, no longer current for today. Some use the cultural conditioning argument as a convenient disposal chute by which to eliminate unwanted material. In contrast, the historical-grammatical method---the one supported by the Seventh-day Adventist Church---deals with the issue of culture in a faithful manner. That is,

In connection with the study of the biblical text, explore the historical and cultural factors. Archaeology, anthropology, and history may contribute to understanding the meaning of the text ("Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods." This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 12, 1986).

Even as in the same document Adventists recognize that

Although it was given to those who lived in an ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean context, the Bible transcends its cultural backgrounds to serve as God's Word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages (*Ibid.*).

We are unsurprised, then, when Cottrell singles out the historical-grammatical method for special complaint. According to Cottrell, it is merely “a variant of the fundamentalist hermeneutic” in which,

Subjective nonbiblical presuppositions about the nature of the revelatory process constitute the controlling principle of the historical-grammatical method. It rejects the dictation/verbal theory of inspiration, but relies on a revelatory process equivalent to that theory. This leads to the related fundamentalist idea that the Bible has an artificial unity that upon occasion overrides explicit biblical evidence incompatible with the theory (p. 83).

In Cottrell's eyes, the historical-grammatical method is only the “fundamentalist” method in disguise. Especially problematic to Cottrell is historical-grammatical's affirmation of underlying harmony in Scripture. Hence, he attacks historical-grammatical. This is understandable, for if the historical-grammatical method is valid, there is no reason to subscribe to Cottrell's essentially historical-critical method which he has disguised as the heretofore unknown “Historical” method.

Cottrell has recourse to his method in the few pages he devotes to Women's Ordination, disposing of the “creation order” argument in one paragraph as having merely been read into the Bible, while the headship teaching is dispatched as being “culturally conditioned” (pp. 84-89).

Most interesting to us is Cottrell's reaction to the views of C. Raymond Holmes. Cottrell makes Holmes out as being sincere but misinformed when Holmes attacks the use of the historical-critical method. Cottrell claims, “No Adventist scholar subscribes to that method, or to its presuppositions or conclusions” (p. 84). Actually, Cottrell misrepresents here, for it is evident that his method and much that is seen in the interpretive method of those Adventists who favor Women's Ordination is either historical-critical or indebted to its more contemporary postmodern descendants.

Cottrell's animus toward historical-grammatical is understandable, since, as we have seen before, (it bears repeating), the historical-grammatical method especially targets the historical-critical method as being faulty for subordinating Scripture to human reason. In 1986 the Seventh-day Adventist Church officially offered the following guidance:

In recent decades the most prominent method in biblical studies has been known as the historical-critical method. Scholars who use this method, as classically formulated, operate on the basis of presuppositions which, prior to studying the biblical text, reject the reliability of accounts of miracles and other supernatural events narrated in the Bible. Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.

The historical-critical method minimizes the need for faith in God and obedience to His commandments. In addition, because such a method de-emphasizes the divine element in the Bible as an inspired book (including its resultant unity) and depreciates or misunderstands apocalyptic prophecy and the eschatological portions of the Bible, we urge Adventist Bible students to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method (“Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods”).

By including Raymond F. Cottrell's so-called “Historical” method in *The Welcome Table*, with his disavowal of the historical-grammatical method, a practical admission is made by its advocates. The admission? That to create a space for Women's Ordination, will tend to departing from the historical-grammatical in favor of doubt-based methods such as the historical-critical.

Donna Jeana Haerich, in chapter four, “Genesis Revisited,” appreciates Genesis one as factual in its mention of men and women being formed in God's image. But when it comes to Genesis two,

It is a story of beginnings, a story to instruct and even entertain, told in such a fashion as to be easily remembered and retold. It is not history or science. It isn't even theology in the way that we today 'do' theology. It is a story told to a certain audience in a certain time with specific meaning and intent (*The Welcome Table*, pp. 99, 100).

Yes, Genesis two tells a story, but is *more* than merely a story; it is also a part of the history recorded in the Bible. Every story is told in a certain place and time; this does not make it fictional. Haerich's arbitrary assignment of this chapter as mere story reminds us of the second article in this series where we saw Elizabeth Cady Stanton downgrading Genesis two as the work of some "highly imaginative editor," "some wily writer," and being "no part of the real history of creation's dawn."

According to Haerich, Adam's sex "is only incidental" (p. 101), and she proceeds to tell us what the storyteller's intentions in writing Genesis two were. Haerich also quotes from feminists already mentioned in this series, including Phyllis Trible, Paul Jewett, and Virginia R. Mollenkott. The reader will recognize Haerich's opinion about Genesis two as rising from historical-critical presuppositions.

David Larson's chapter five in *Welcome Table* offers arguments already noted in this series. Larson especially favors trajectory theology (pp. 124, 126, 127, 133), alleges obscurity in Paul's arguments (p. 131), and claims that Paul was "constant in his efforts to dismantle" "artificial" barriers including "gender" (p. 132). He mentions the deuterio-Pauline possibility, but instead pursues the idea that Paul felt the alleged gospel norm of operating "without respect to gender could not be fully implemented at that time and place" (*Ibid.*). His footnotes also show him to be influenced by Paul Jewett. Larson does endeavor to praise and find the good in the argument favored by those with whom he disagrees, a spirit some have found but rarely among those holding views similar to his. This spirit makes his chapter the most appealing in the book.

Fritz Guy wrote the sixth chapter. He wants us to “reread and rehear” (p. 138) the Genesis story without “any theological axe to grind. We have no agenda. . .” (p. 139). This may be, but in his endnotes, he repeatedly refers to Christian Feminist authors including Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (5 times), Phyllis Trible (13 times), Carol Meyers (3 times), and Gilbert Bilezikian (3 times). Guy traces what he calls male domination to the Fall in Genesis three, rather than headship and submission designed into the creation order in Genesis two. He warns that those who have translated the Bible have usually been (shudder) male, and their work “may reflect the cultural assumptions and inevitable biases” of the translators (p. 139). Here again we see manifest the expectation that bias is inevitable.

Edwin Zachrison wrote chapter seven, and spends several pages outlining what he describes as his prejudiced upbringing. Likewise, he views the issues surrounding Women's Ordination as involving cultural conditioning, even in the New Testament:

I do not believe that the refusal to recognize a woman's *call* to professional ministry ultimately rests on exegetical considerations. Rather, the arguments against ordaining women to professional ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are cultural, and where Scripture is used to justify continuance of this practice, it represents a patchwork of Old Testament analogies and historically conditioned New Testament passages which are filtered through unique contemporary cultural mind-sets to present applications. Hence if the official church chooses *not* to honor a woman's sense of divine *calling* to professional ministry, it should not argue that it has done a *biblical* thing or leave the impression that it has acted on a *scriptural mandate* (p. 157, emphasis in original).

Zachrison considers that Genesis does not in any way address the question of the earth's creation in six literal days. He insists that the New Testament does not deal with anything of geological significance, but “confines its remarks about the passage to the area of redemption. The age of the earth is the issue of geologists and scientists” (p. 158). For Zachrison,

Christians fought the battle against slavery and won it. Christians are fighting the battle against racial discrimination and are winning it. The next battle to win in the discrimination war is for women in the church (p. 174).

Zachrison, after serving in the theology department of Southern Adventist University and also at Andrews, is now a Disciples of Christ minister, and is no longer a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Halcyon Westphal Wilson in chapter eight cites a variety of instances involving women in the New Testament---none of which constitute meaningful evidence for her assertion that

One's place of ministry is decided solely upon the recognition of spiritual gifts bestowed, service rendered, and acknowledging the work of God in that disciple. There is no other valid criteria, including gender, as stated by Paul in Galatians 3:26-28). . . (p. 189).

Wilson says,

Our choice as Christians is to refuse to incorporate this prejudice and discrimination and reconstruct the church to include all disciple's gifts, or to defend our crippling traditions for the sake of people's comfort zones (p. 192).

According to Wilson, Junias is actually a female apostle (Romans 16:7), “there is no such thing as gift discrimination based on gender,” and members of the church have no legitimate exercise of “veto power” (p. 193). She also references the Kroegers.

Sheryl Prinz-McMillan in chapter nine tries to connect “headship theology” with domestic violence. She picks up the idea that the Greek *kephale* means not “head” but “source” (pp. 200-203). She deals with Paul “As a man of his culture” who “may often have been blind to the implications of his own words” (p. 204) and who in 1 Corinthians

11 “was addressing a hairstyle concern” (*Ibid.*). The problems Paul was dealing with are identified as “cultural norms in Paul's time” (p. 205). Sometimes,

Paul gives in to the current social order. . . . Though he occasionally glimpsed the ideal that Jesus established during His time of earth, he nonetheless fell into old patterns of coping during times of crisis (p. 212).

First Timothy two and other passages are repeatedly explained by Prinz-McMillan with recourse to sketchy theories where she has recourse to qualifiers such as “implies,” “possibly,” “may,” “might be,” “possibly implying,” “could have a number of meanings,” “could,” “could be.” But, she concludes, “In reviewing these Pauline passages, it becomes clear that there is no such thing as biblical 'headship'” (p. 216). Alas, for Prinz-McMillan, no number of “possibly's” make even one “it becomes clear.” Although careful not to use the term, her approach is that Paul is culturally conditioned.

Joyce Hanscom Lorntz in chapter ten unleashes a shrill tirade wherein she states, “we must avoid the heresy that individuals or religions control God's authority in any way” (p. 224), and that “The burden of proof is on individuals who would restrict in any way the spiritual gifts of women” (p. 231). “The church must do more to confront those who profess to base their teachings on the 'authority of God's Word,' but who are really perpetuating ungodly systems” (p. 233). Lorntz' chapter suffers from the same affliction seen in several others in *The Welcome Table*, namely, incoherent argumentation followed by disconnected assertions. We would like to commend Lorntz for the fact that she does not at any point reference Feminist authors. And yet, she may be heavily influenced by ideas beyond what she references.

Ralph E. Neall in chapter 12 says that Jesus “gave no instructions at all about ordination or church organization” (p. 254; cf. p. 258). He likes Catherine Clark Kroeger's theory on 1 Timothy 2 that reduces the prohibition there to a local refutation

of early gnosticism in Ephesus (pp. 263, 264). He also likes the trajectory argument (p. 262, 265). Although he scoffs at using a single text like Galatians 3:28 to draw a conclusion, at the end of his chapter he concludes by returning to this same text as breaking down male and female barriers (pp. 252, 262, 264).

We have not here outlined every chapter in *The Welcome Table*. Still, the reader might be interested in knowing that besides some uses already noted, the ideas of Feminist Theology authors are found in this book's recommended reading section (pp. 406-408). These include works by Gilbert Bilezikian, Mary J. Evans, Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, Paul K. Jewett, Catherine C. and Richard Kroeger, Virginia R. Mollenkott, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell, Phyllis Tribble, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen and Ben Witherington, among others. It must be apparent to the reader who has perused this series of articles ("Foundations of Women's Ordination") that the quest for Women's Ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is indeed substantially influenced from outside Seventh-day Adventist walls.

### ***Women in Ministry***

A group of professors from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary released another pro-Women's Ordination book, *Women in Ministry* (1998, 440 pp.). It claims that its authors agree with the 27 fundamental beliefs and accept the Scriptures as "divinely inspired," that "the Bible's message transcends its cultural backgrounds," Scripture interprets itself, and so on (pp. 3, 4)---all this an anticipated claim. But there is a wiggle clause:

While recognizing that good decisions are based on hard facts, we are also cognizant of the fact that at times clear evidence may be lacking, thus making necessary the use of sanctified judgment and imagination to resolve questions and issues (p. 5).

In other words, there is a gap between what editor Nancy Jean Vyhmeister would *like* to demonstrate via hard evidence and what she *can* demonstrate via hard evidence. Vyhmeister's admission calls to mind the remark by Shüssler-Fiorenza, that, in part, her work was to engage “in an imaginative reconstruction of historical reality” (see the fourth article in this series for this and other references from Fiorenza).

The paragraphs that follow provide thumbnail sketches of certain chapters in *Women in Ministry*.

Peter van Bemmelen contributed the first chapter, focusing on the priesthood of all believers. His base argument is that all gifts are extended to all the priesthood. The priesthood includes among its gifts the calling to leadership. This gift then must be extended to women as well as men (p. 23). The question is asked, “Did Paul ever indicate that some gifts are bestowed upon men and others upon women?” and answered, “no.” This answer ignores specific qualifications given for leadership, in the New Testament church no less, including that they be of the male sex (1 Timothy 2:11-14; 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-12). Van Bemmelen's answer is only assertion.

Jacques B. Doukhan presents the next chapter dealing with the absence of female priests in the Old Testament. He asserts that when Adam and Eve were clothed by God both were clothed as priests. Doukhan further asserts that while female priests served in pagan cults, and because the priest is associated with killing the sacrifice, but women with giving life (birth), women did not serve as priests. Because neither of these matters are significant in the same way after the cross, “there is no case for women's exclusion” (p. 39) in terms of Women's Ordination. This is a novel conclusion and argument. And yet, the post-Calvary New Testament qualifications for elder still stand; Doukhan does not address them.

The third chapter in the book is written by Robert M. Johnston. He concludes that *Junias* in Romans 16:7 was female, although he admits that maleness or femaleness of

the name is not possible to determine in the Greek accusative case found in this verse (p. 47). He also concludes (without explaining how he arrives at his understanding) that since Paul lists a variety of gifts given by the Holy Spirit, these are not limited on a gender basis (p. 48), apparently finding the Scriptural limitation to males to be mere “artificial human limitation” (*Ibid.*).

More interesting is his theory that deacons and elders are the same in the early church and that since we find, he claims, a female deacon in Romans 16:2, no gender restrictions adhere to the office of elder (pp. 49, 50). The totality of inspired evidence would reject this idea.

Daniel A. Augsburger adds chapter five on the early church. His conclusion is that the current Adventist system of ordination is a form of error seen after departure from the practice of the early church (p. 96).

J.H. Denis Fortin pens chapter seven wherein he looks at the writings of Ellen G. White. He focuses on her allegedly pragmatic approach, affirming his opinion that “the church can determine, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which ministries are beneficial and who is to function as an officer in the church” (p. 122). Fortin confirms that women should be ordained.

Russell Staples offers the eighth chapter. The strongest part of his presentation compares Methodist history to Adventist. He notes,

If the thesis is accepted that the primary basis for ministry is the inward call of God, then the Adventist Church now faces the issue of the ordination of women on precisely the same grounds as did the Methodists 150 years ago (p. 149).

Then, like the Methodists, Staples anticipates that Adventists will also choose to ordain women. And yet, the Scriptures are not silent concerning the ordination of women; the fact of leadership headship and specificity of male gender for the position of elder remains. We also note that 150 years ago neither did the Methodists accept the

seventh day Sabbath as binding and biblical. Adventists did. There are differences in how each group has reacted to revealed truth.

Jo Ann Davidson in chapter nine engages in a survey of women in Scripture. Hers is one chapter among many that raises the question of all women being under the authority of all men. All authors who mention this idea in the book deny it with vigor. Davidson quotes from Feminist authors extensively in the first portion of her chapter, documenting their more radical ideas, with which she contrasts herself. She brings insights but nothing conclusive. Nine pages are invested in women in the Hebrew Scriptures, seven on them in the New Testament.

She quotes others who suggest that Jesus stopped short of addressing questions about women because at that time these practices remained too societally entrenched (p. 176). She repeats standard approaches in other cases, implying that Junias was actually a female apostle (p. 177) and suggesting that Paul's prohibitions were limited and local rather than universal (p. 178). Her conclusion is that all the Bible affirms women, “whether in the home or in public ministry” (p. 179). This is a vague conclusion. We know of no one who opposes women in public ministry! The issue is over women filling male-headship positions of congregational leadership.

Jerry Moon's close examination of the writings of Ellen G. White in chapter ten has much to recommend. Moon highlights White's encouragement of husband-wife gospel worker teams, pay for both spouses doing gospel work, and also a more particularized ministry for women, rather than in male headship roles of whole congregational leadership. Moon is correct:

Of Ellen White's many references to women 'in ministry,' the majority refer specifically to the ministry of evangelistic and pastoral visiting, giving Bible instruction and spiritual guidance in families---the calling here spoken of as 'Bible work' (p. 197).

A weakness in Moon's chapter is a failure to closely investigate White's references to headship and the distinct offices of male leadership.

Richard M. Davidson writes chapter 13 concerning headship. Since this question, along with the problem of the use of dangerous interpretive methodologies, are the two truly premium theological centers in the larger debate, this is the most necessary chapter in the book.

Davidson notes that “Over the centuries the preponderance of commentators on Genesis two have espoused the hierarchical interpretation” of that chapter, but agrees with Feminist Phyllis Trible (Davidson refers to Trible eight times in his endnotes) that “there is nothing in Genesis 2 to indicate a hierarchical view of the sexes” (pp. 260-264). Of course, proponents of the view espoused by Adventists disagreeing with Trible and Davidson do not frame the question thus; to us, it is a question of complementarianism.

Surveying headship in the Old Testament, Davidson cannot help but find numerous examples. But he traces them to the Fall in Genesis three, not to Genesis two. One observation of interest---Davidson notes certain cases of female leadership and calls them exercises of headship over men (Judges 4-5; 2 Kings 22:14-20; Judges 5:28-30; 2 Samuel 14; 20). However, prophets are directly appointed by God, and the practice of leadership in Judgship and other state or local cases differs significantly with headship in the spiritual, congregational setting. Female exercise of “headship” in the texts noted by Davidson (none of which use the Hebrew word *ROSH*, “head”), is dubious and unsupported.

Turning to the New Testament, we learn from Davidson that

Within the social constraints of his day, Paul and the early church (like Jesus) did not act precipitously. The inequality of Gentiles was difficult to root out, even in Peter. . . (pp. 281, 282).

Were Paul and Peter (and Jesus) “culturally conditioned”? Davidson never writes such words, but still seems to be employing a different hermeneutic than the conventional Adventist historical-grammatical view, which as we noted on page four insists that “the Bible transcends its cultural backgrounds to serve as God’s Word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages.” In any case, Davidson quickly dispatches Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy as merely dealing with local problems (pp. 276, 280), or, that Paul did not give enough information. The New Testament creation-order passages (1 Corinthians 11:3, 8, 9; 1 Timothy 2:13) are not addressed in depth. Davidson also assigns any and all submission not only as being strictly a product of the Fall, but as manifest only within the marital union (p. 275); no reference to headship/subordination has significance to the church he says. His chapter closes with positive references to Evangelical Feminists Stanley Grenz, Sharon Gritz, Ben Witherington.

We have noted Davidson’s arguments in more detail because they constitute what some have seen as being the strongest arguments for the pro-Women’s Ordination position in Adventism.

Peter M. van Bemmelen prepared chapter 14 on headship in the writings of Ellen G. White. He reasons so as to claim Eve had headship in Eden:

In view of the fact that Eve was 'his second self, that 'in all things she should be his equal,' and that they 'were to have no interest independent of each other,' we may conclude that Eve fully shared in Adam's headship of God's earthly family (p. 298).

But van Bemmelen says something here never said in the whole of the inspired record---and something God might easily have inspired to be said had He intended to say it. His forgetfulness is here corrected.

Professor van Bemmelen finds items stating clearly that husband and wife are equal, also that the husband is to be head in the family setting. And yet van Bemmelen denies any kind of headship in the church but the headship of Christ. We would argue that the headship indicated for the elders in the church, however, *is* the headship of Christ, for it is only exercised in Jesus' Church in Jesus' behalf. As is common in *Women in Ministry*, the closing paragraph simply asserts the desired conclusion.

W. Larry Richards adds chapter 15 dealing with 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. He claims that Paul “is not in any sense of the word” dealing with “male female relationships as they are so often applied in our day. . .” (p. 316). Richards points out that “The concepts (subordination and equality) existed side by side without any sense of contradiction” (p. 327). This is an important observation, but he does not follow it out. Rather, Richards says that “As individuals and in corporate worship, Christians should relate to one another with a unity that allows for subordination to church leaders, without respect to gender or to the notion of superiority” (p. 322). Subordination is not really a problem then---except when it comes to the component based upon one's sex?

Nancy Jean Vyhmeister writes chapter 16 on 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Vyhmeister is meticulous in endeavoring to deal with the Greek text and reviewing opinions of other scholars. Be that as it may, after many words she concludes that the question of Women's Ordination “must be answered on other grounds than the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15” (p. 350). Predictably, Vyhmeister limits Paul's intended purpose in 1 Timothy “to a specific situation in Ephesus” (*Ibid.*). She warns that “to take eternally normative the limited prohibition of women's teaching (v. 12)---when in other passages Paul clearly approves female participation in teaching, praying, and prophesying---does violence to the hermeneutical principle of the unity of Scripture” (*Ibid.*).

Thus Vyhmeister declares the passage to be only local and limited in significance, claims that it disagrees with Paul elsewhere, then withdraws the whole passage from

consideration. And, what does she mean by “Paul clearly approves of female participation in teaching. . . .”? The only case we have of this is Priscilla in tandem with Aquila teaching Apollos---not in any worship or congregational setting but in private. Vyhmeister's chapter seems an unsuccessful attempt to address the testimony of this difficult passage which unambiguously refers to creation-order.

Walter B.T. Douglass' chapter compares present opponents of Women's Ordination with those who in the previous century resisted ending slavery. Douglass purports to compare their use of Scripture and find parallels. His chart on p. 395 draws seven alleged parallels. Proslavery advocates considered slavery a “divine creation ordinance” with Genesis nine as a basis, while antiordination people see male and female role differentiation as a divine creation ordinance from Genesis one and two. But the latter is prefall and the former is postfall.

Where is the parallel?

The same two groups, he says, argue that their understanding stems from a high view of Scripture. So what else is new? Many argue thus. Stated principles do not mean principles realized; fealty to sound hermeneutical practice declared is not necessarily seen in interpretations actually worked out. Theodore Shmauk had the matter right when he noted,

The real question is not what do you subscribe, but what do you believe and publicly teach, and what are you transmitting to those who come after? (op. cit. Theodore Shmauk, in Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: A Theological Analysis of the Missouri Synod Conflict*, p. 37).

Both offer “slippery slope arguments,” Douglass says, because proslavers argued that if slavery was abolished soon all divine social laws would be in question, while anti-women's ordination Adventists warn that if the church permits the ordination of women it will soon allow homosexuality. However, a later section of this article shall

show, some current advocates of Feminist theology in the Adventist Church are also openly engaged in advocating for homosexuality within the denomination. A decade and a half has passed since Douglass' chapter and we can see today that which may have been unclear to him then---that these issues *are deeply linked because of what is inside the Liberation Theology machine* that drives current Liberation, Feminist, and Queer Theological strands (see the third, fourth, and fifth articles in this series). Douglass' use of language like “construction of reality” and “structures of oppression” (pp. 382, 387), combined with his loose broadbrushing attack is not a high point---in spirit or in reasoning---for the book.

Vyhmeister closes the book with a summary of its “findings,” among them, this gem with reference to Douglass' chapter:

[A] study of the biblical hermeneutics and arguments of nineteenth century American slaveholders in favor of the permanence and desirability of slavery showed a curious twisting of the Bible. Parallels with the argumentation of those who oppose the ordination of women to pastoral leadership were striking (p. 435).

Parallels? Striking? And this on Headship:

'Headship' belongs to the husband-wife relationship, not to any male preponderance over all females; it is part of God's plan for fallen human beings rather than an original mandate for the sinless world (p. 434).

And so, the book which purports to follow sound Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutics ends in quite a righteous pose, denying clear Bible material, arguing in some places for cultural conditioning, offering little serious treatment of the main New Testament passages under discussion, using a “reduction to local significance” approach for the truly teflon Pauline passages its authors would have preferred to have

disposed of, and generally failing to advance the pro-Women's Ordination argument in any substantive way. The book's chief utility therefore seems to have been to align the weight of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary semi-officially on the side of Women's Ordination.

### ***The Welcome Table and Women in Ministry Compared***

Chapters in *The Welcome Table* were written largely by Adventists safely employed in conferences where the idea of Women's Ordination was held in appreciation. These writers more openly and with approval referred to voices from the world of Feminist Theology including Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Shüssler-Fiorenza, Virginia R. Mollenkott. In contrast, the chapters written by people at Seminary, while also favoring Women's Ordination, were more restrained. For the most part, they limit their sources to Evangelical Feminists, and then quote them with less zeal.

The Seminary authors attempt to make their case on an Evangelical Feminist basis---trying to hold in tension the authority of Scripture as well as key principles of Feminism. Therefore, they focus on racking up word studies, references in commentaries, and how one scholar's views comport with another. The tone is different. In *The Welcome Table*, it is sometimes shrill, assertions loud. *Women in Ministry* by and large is subdued, with restrained assertions.

When it comes to interpretive methodology, *The Welcome Table* is more open about cultural conditioning and contains an extended argument opposing the historical-grammatical method of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The *Women in Ministry* chapter authors affirm their adherence to Adventist hermeneutics, even while the results are not reassuring.

By no means has this been a conclusive or exhaustive review. Although we have written in definite terms, we do not wish to be misunderstood. There is scarcely a

professor writing in *Women in Ministry* that the author did not study under with appreciation. I cannot doubt their commitment to the church and its mission. Their theological gifts are, in my opinion, stronger than *Women in Ministry* leads them to appear. It may have been that preparing the material for this book was not a pleasant task; for they must express their own convictions, yet all the time aware that the biblical evidence for their position was thin and that the larger Seventh-day Adventist Church would be largely in disagreement with them.

### **The President's Report**

The North American Division voted to follow a set of proposals that came to be known as “The President's Commission on Women in Ministry---Report” (available in full on OrdinationTruth.com at “[http://ordinationtruth.com/?attachment\\_id=498](http://ordinationtruth.com/?attachment_id=498)”). This was voted in 1997 while the two books reviewed above were coming to fruition. It was truly a time of urgency and insubordination. The sting of refusals to pass Women's Ordination in 1990 and 1995 General Conference sessions was still felt. But advocates for Women's Ordination refused to take “No” for an answer. Randal Wisbey describes the action taken:

On 9 October 1997, the North American Division year-end meeting formally accepted the report of the President's Commission on Women in Ministry, which contained 13 recommendations aimed at affirming and encouraging women in ministry. These included the appointment of a woman as ministerial associate secretary (on this item the North American Division was asked to move with a sense of urgency) and the development of a professional association for women serving in pastoral ministry. Also recommended were the development of additional ways to aid communication, including an electronic linkage service to help seasoned women pastors to serve as mentors of women ministerial students and interns; the development of a newsletter, database, placement service, and speaker's bureau for women in ministry; and a recommendation to church magazines to publish more articles about women in ministry. The report also recommended that conferences promptly conduct commissioning services for

eligible women and that the church be encouraged to hire increasing numbers of women pastors. In addition the report also encouraged conferences to set realistic goals for gender diversity on boards, committees, and staffs. The development of a Resource Center for Women in Ministry was recommended, and the commitment to educate church members on the topic of women in ministry was affirmed (Randal R. Wisbey, "SDA Women in Ministry 1970-1998," in *Women in Ministry*, Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., p. 250).

This background fits between the publication of *The Welcome Table* and *Women in Ministry*. To our knowledge, no North American Division union paper subsequently to this action has published any article addressing the topic that is not favorable to the ordination of women.

### **Repenting of Patriarchy and Heterosexism**

This article has not been exhaustive, and has not addressed some actions internal to North American Division, such as Southeastern California Conference's out of policy non-gender specific ordination credential.

But we should still review a recent item. On February 23, 2013, at the Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church, Trisha Famisaran delivered the Sabbath sermon she titled "Repenting Our Patriarchy," but which *Spectrum Magazine* fittingly retitled "Repenting of our Patriarchy and Heterosexism."

Famisaran teaches theology at Seventh-day Adventist La Sierra University. She is completing a PhD at Claremont University in Claremont, California. Claremont is known as a "progressive" theological school. Its location relatively near La Sierra and Loma Linda has led to many west coast Adventist theologians receiving PhD's from there. Claremont Graduate University is home to faculty we met in the fourth article in this series: Rosemary Radford Ruether.

Famisaran's content was an unusual case of openly linking Mainstream Feminist issues with homosexuality issues in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Famisaran's stated goal is to help us "love more fully" and to be "more inclusive" in our communities. Famisaran credits Joan Chittister, Roman Catholic nun from Notre Dame, for ideas used in the sermon. She also quotes positively from Anaïs Nin, female writer of erotic literature who was raised a Roman Catholic. The quote is, "We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are." This fits with the classic claims of Mainstream Feminism that everyone is biased and that everyone brings their experience with them to the texts they interpret. Next, Famisaran claims that because theology has been done exclusively by men for so many centuries, Christianity has suffered from an absence of feminine perspective.

Famisaran continues at length stating her appreciation for a movie she viewed at the Hollywood church the previous week: "Seventh Gay-Adventists." "To be gay," Famisaran says, "is to be vulnerable to marginalization and various forms of violence. Just as to be a woman under patriarchy is to be vulnerable to oppression and various forms of violence." She claims that in reading Job, she gained insights into what it means to live in a society that is both patriarchal and heterosexist. "Heterosexism," she says, "is this idea that to be straight is to be within the norm, and if you're anything but straight, you're somewhere on the outside and then subject to discrimination, but there's this kind of privilege going on if you are straight." The problem she says is that these two ideologies put people in a place where they are vulnerable to loss and violence.

Notice that according to this way of thinking, a person who accepts the biblical pattern of heterosexuality as the Creator-designed norm for men and women, is not in a positive place or even a neutral one; he is in a bad place ideologically, because his adherence to these views causes women and homosexual people to feel excluded and to be at risk of violence. Job was feeling vulnerable and subject to violence, and his friends were claiming that the reason for his problems was within Job himself. Famisaran draws a parallel from Job to women and homosexuals, who by simply being women or

homosexuals, “because of who they are” in Christianity, she claims begin at a greater distance from God than males or heterosexuals.

Famisan says we have all been conditioned by different sources outside of ourselves to think in wrong ways. She mentions, as Shüssler-Fiorenza, Mollenkott, and others, that in the biblical Greek, “Wisdom,” a word used to speak of God, is *SOPHIA*, a feminine word. “No person should be treated as anything less than equal because they were born into one kind of body or one kind of sexual orientation and not another,” she says. Ideas akin to male headship are unequal treatment according to Famisan. “Sexism is deeply embedded in social structures and has widespread effects.” She opposes what she calls social hierarchies of domination and submission. Women have always had a part in shaping history, but were not allowed to take on roles that would place them in the history books.

According to Famisan,

Patriarchy, as it manifests itself in sexism and heterosexism, constrains the humanity of both men and women by limiting who they are and what they might become. It constrains us to certain roles that we are told are natural because they are thought to be biologically prescribed or even morally prescribed through religion because God, we are told, thinks this order is best.

Her reaction to this is that actually culture does most of the defining of roles. Men and women, she warns, are at fault in perpetuating these destructive roles, that is, for coasting along with the culture. But having thus complained about a cultural captivity in those who reject her anti-heteropatriarchal concerns, she quotes popular musician Lady Gaga, who sings, “I am beautiful in my own way, cause' God makes no mistakes. I'm on the right track baby; I was born this way.” Famisan says Gaga's message is, “If you believe that God created you, then don't reject that perfect uniqueness, rather embrace it. Be who you are. You were born this way.” She agrees

with this and believes that homosexuals are made “that way” by God and that He accepts their homosexuality. Famisaran says,

Like Job, women and LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer] individuals are made to feel that the lack they experience in their lives, and the social oppression put upon them, or the exclusion they experience in their communities, is their own fault.

She argues that it cannot be that God would be opposed to something intrinsic to a person, such as that person's sexual orientation. She calls for the church to be inclusive and accept homosexual persons as they are. She does not spell out exactly how this would play out, but the conclusion is inevitable. It would follow that the church should not only accept practicing homosexuals into its fellowship, not only ordain persons without regard to gender (without regard to gender means not only without regard to biological sex but also without regard to sexual orientation), but even that the church should recognize homosexual unions as legitimate. At the end of her presentation, she states that, “It is God who creates the parts [of the body of Christ] just as She thinks they should be.”

This material was presented in a Seventh-day Adventist Church by a Seventh-day Adventist Associate professor of Theology who teaches at a Seventh-day Adventist University. It is full-blown Mainstream Feminist Theology. It is even Queer Theology. Its presentation may have been a chief reason why the pastor of that congregation was asked to leave.

## **Conclusion**

Remember the first item in this series of articles? The president of the North American Division plead with delegates 18 years ago at Utrecht that they could be sure that the North American Division request for Women's Ordination was not driven by

any kind of feminist agenda. Not any kind. Others, for example, in the Seminary's volume *Women in Ministry*, suggested that the claim that there were homosexual entailments attached to Women's Ordination was a false argument. But here we are in 2013 with a clear example of full-blown Mainstream Feminism and its attached homosexual agenda.

Seventh-day Adventists as a people must decide whether or not *this* will be their future. It is really that simple.

God has been merciful to His people. In the presentation that was made in God's name in Hollywood, the endpoint of this whole track is revealed. When we throw aside the interpretation of Scripture by Scripture, when we make experience the driving authority, when we adopt the views of NEO-PROTESTANT interpretation of Scripture, i.e., when we validate the historical-critical and kindred doubt-based methods, picking and choosing, keeping this bit and dropping that bit, we come to a place far removed from our beginnings with Scripture. And we think He led us there.

He is not leading us there. He is not leading us to a place where His values are to be discarded because they hurt the feelings of sinners, and where those who are wrong are those who uphold the teaching of the Bible.

We don't want to say it or think it, but the foundations of Women's Ordination lead to a another gospel.

Next, in part 8, a brief look at the impacts of postmodernism on the Women's Ordination debate, a discussion of unity, and the conclusion of this series.

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