

When No! is Yes!

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No one regrets more than I that it has been women's ordination that has forced to the surface of our consciousness the fundamental issue of how we read, understand, and apply the principles of God's Word. But something had to get our attention and evidently in God's plan and timing this was it, as painful and distressing as it has been. The event can be compared to that of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3). God had something to say to him as well as something important for him to do, and while he was busy tending sheep got his attention in an unmistakable and dramatic way.

God has something to say to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the midst of Protestantism's gradual abandonment of the Reformation and its basic principle of sola scriptura, the Bible and the Bible alone for faith and life. The great controversy struggle at the time of the Reformation was between the authority of the Bible and church tradition. Today, 500 years later, the great controversy struggle is between the Bible and secular culture. The time is short and the Remnant Church cannot afford to cave-in to the demands of secular culture and its ever-changing human tradition. It is the Word of God, not time and culture, that defines right action for the church.

The right time to adhere to that definition is the General Conference Session 2015, at which delegates will vote on whether it is "acceptable for division committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the

gospel ministry." A definite Yes or No vote will be called for. A No vote would constitute a Yes because it would acknowledge and support the biblical definition. If we are to "preach the Word" to the present generation it is imperative that we stay faithful to that Word. How do we do that?

First, by having the Spirit empowered courage to repent of wrong actions. We did our faithful women a terrible wrong and disservice by means of the 1975 Autumn Council action. This was not an action taken by the world church in General Conference session allowing for the ordination of women as local elders. It was wrong and a disservice because it gave so many gifted and talented women false hope, and that needs to be rectified. How? By rescinding that action in order to open the way to a process in harmony with those biblical principles that apply to the call and appointment of individuals for church leadership and pastoral work. A No would be Yes!

Second, by applying Spirit of Prophecy principles of Bible interpretation that assure outcomes pleasing to God:

(1) The Bible interprets the Bible (Ev:581).

(2) Take the Bible as it reads (GC:88).

(3) Focus on the Bible's plain statements (RH: 1/27/1885, 7/17/1888).

(4) Explain the language of the Bible according to its obvious meaning (GC:598). One example will suffice: "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, A spiritual leader such as bishop, pastor, elder, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife. . ." (1 Timothy 3:1-2, also Titus 1:5-6 ESV). The context of these verses must be taken into account in order to fully understand their meaning, such as "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise [usurp - KJV] authority over a man" on the basis of the fact that "Adam was formed first, then Eve. . ." (1 Timothy 2:12-13).

Applying these principles it is plainly obvious that the prerequisite for the specific office of overseer/spiritual leader is that the candidate be male, because a husband is a man not a woman. These principles are transcultural, applicable to the understanding and

meaning of Scripture in every culture, and in every age, in which we evangelize and establish churches. A No vote means culture does not prevail but that Scripture does, which would promote and sustain theological unity. Again No would be Yes!

Third, in order to finish the work that God has assigned to us we must be united. Unity is based on truth, on common beliefs not on common mission. Mission grows out of truth and shared theological/doctrinal beliefs. So the question is, What is the truth? God's truth alone must determine right action. In the interest of mission and unity we must be sensitive to, and surrendered to, God's truth in every time and every culture. A Yes vote would actually constitute a No to church unity because it would officially approve and sustain the division and disunity already demonstrated by unilateral actions. A No vote would be Yes! Because it would sustain and uphold the Biblical witness of the whole, united, world church.

In conclusion, and as a member of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC), I am obligated to make the following observation. The recent website statement that the findings of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee was that "there is no Biblical consensus on this issue, and thus it must be treated as a matter of practice and not of theology" is incorrect and misleading. The truth is that the lack of consensus on the part of TOSC was not that there is no biblical consensus, it was that the committee was virtually divided on what that consensus actually is. The TOSC participants who support position 1 find ample biblical consensus.

Letting the Bible interpret itself apart from the influence of contemporary culture, and with the aid of Spirit of Prophecy counsel and insight together with the application of Ellen White's principles of interpretation, we find that: (1) God created the human species "male and female" (Gen 1:27); (2) that He created them equal in essence and being but having differing functional roles; (3) that in terms of salvation and baptism He treats them as equal with one having no advantage over the other (Gal 3:26-29); (4) that the trajectory of male leadership/headship extends from Genesis through the Old and New Testaments and into the early church; (5) that when it comes to the organization of the church God has reserved

the office of spiritual leader/overseer/bishop/elder/pastor for men (1 Tim 3 and Titus 1); and (6) that God is calling women to a specialized ministry for which they are uniquely qualified and gifted, and for which they must be trained. It is our failure to provide such specialized training that constitutes unfairness and injustice. Therefore, a No vote would be a resounding Yes! to the biblical consensus and trajectory!

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: C. Raymond Holmes, D.Min. left the ministry of the Lutheran Church to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Holmes has taught at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, MI, as well as at SDA Theological Seminary Far East. He wrote The Tip of an Iceberg, was part of the General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee, and presently serves in pastoral ministry in the Michigan Conference.