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Yes

Richard Davidson

The Bible supports the ordination/commissioning of women as pastors

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1. Genesis 1 teaches us that male and female participate equally in the image of God. "So God created man [Heb. *ha'adam* 'humankind'] in His own image, in the image of God created he Him; male and female created He them" (Gen 1:27). This foundational passage (and its surrounding context) gives no hint of a divine creation order. Here man and woman are fully equal, with no subordination of one to the other. We find that this description of the relationship between man and woman holds throughout Scripture and beyond. No inspired writer — not Moses, Jesus, Paul, or Ellen White — teaches the creation headship of man over woman. Nor has this position ever been accepted in the history of Adventism.
2. Genesis 2 reinforces Genesis 1. In Gen 2, woman is presented as the climax, the crowning work of creation. She is created from a rib from Adam's side, to show that she is "to stand by his side as an equal" (Gen 2:21-22; PP 46). She is man's *'ezer kenegdo* ("help meet for him," Gen 2:18 KJV), which in the original does not denote a subordinate helper or assistant. Elsewhere in Scripture it is most often God Himself who is called *'ezer* ("helper") (Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26; Ps 33:20; 70:5; 115:9, 10, 11). The phrase *'ezer kenegdo* in Gen 2 means no less than an equal counterpart, a "partner" (Gen 2:18, 22 NEB). Contrary to popular argument, Adam does not name the woman (and thereby exercise authority over her) before the fall in Gen 2:23. Adam does not name Eve till after the fall (Gen 3:20). In short, Gen 2 contains no creation order subordinating woman to man or restricting her from entering into full and equal participation with man in any ministry to which God may call her.
3. Subjection or submission of wife to husband comes about only after the fall. A subjection of Eve to Adam is mentioned in Gen 3. God says to Eve: "Your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16). But it is crucial to recognize that the subjection of Eve to Adam comes after the fall. Furthermore, it is limited to the husband-wife relationship, and therefore does not involve a general subordination of women to men. This is precisely the consistent interpretation of Ellen White (see especially PP 58-59, 1T 307-308, and 3T 484) and *The SDA Bible Commentary*. The servant headship of the husband set forth in this passage can no more be broadened to men-women relationships in general than can the sexual desire of the wife for her husband be broadened to mean the sexual desire of all women for all men.
4. Paul's writings maintain the Eden model. Paul gives much instruction regarding the relationship between husbands and wives. As can be seen by 1 Tim 2:14 (see also 1 Cor 14:34 and PP 58-59), it is ultimately in light of Gen 3:16 that he indicates the "head of a wife is her husband" (1 Cor 11:3 ESV) and calls upon wives to "be subject in everything to their husbands" (Eph 5:24). Such passages as 1 Cor 11:3-12, 1 Cor 14:34-35, and 1 Tim 2:11-12 all concern the issue of the submission of wives to their husbands and not of women to men in general. Furthermore, in 1 Tim 2:13, Paul is not arguing for a creation headship of man over woman as has often been assumed. Rather, he is correcting a false syncretistic theology in Ephesus which claimed that woman was created first and man fell first, and

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therefore women are superior to men. Because of this false theology, wives were apparently domineering over their husbands in public church meetings. Paul's counsel for husbands and wives cannot be extended to the relationship of men and women in general. The apostle himself shows how the marriage relationship applies to the church. Husband headship in the home is not equated with male headship in the church. Rather, the Husband/Head of the church is Christ, and all the church — including males — are His "bride," equally submissive to Him (Eph 5:21-23).

5. In the Old Testament we see numerous women in ministry, including leadership roles over men, thus confirming Genesis 1: the matriarchs of Genesis; Deborah (Judges 4 and 5), one of the judges over the people of Israel — women and men; Miriam (Exod 15:20-21); Huldah (2 Kgs 22:13-14; 2 Chr 34:22-28); Esther, and others (e.g., Exod 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22; 2 Sam 14:2-20; 20:14-22). And a host of women preachers (Psalm 68:11, ESV, NASB)! Although in OT Israel there did exist social inequalities for women, reflecting a distortion of the divine ideal set forth in Gen 1, there are no legal restrictions barring women from positions of influence, leadership, and authority over men. God's original plan was that all Israel be a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). Because of Israel's sin, an alternate plan was given in which even most men were excluded — except for one family in one tribe in Israel. Yet in the New Testament, the Gospel restores God's original plan. Not a few male priests, but once more the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6). Joel 2:28-30 predicts a time in the last days when both men and women will have equal access to the gifts of the Spirit (see also the radical new covenant promise regarding women's roles in Jer 31:22, 31-34).
6. Jesus called His people back to the original plan regarding the role of women. In the NT, Jesus Himself set the tone for the Gospel restoration by pointing His hearers to God's original plan "from the beginning" (Matt 19:8). He did not move precipitously, upsetting the very fabric of Jewish culture; He did not ordain women as His immediate disciples, just as He did not ordain Gentiles. But He pointed the way toward the Edenic ideal in His revolutionary treatment and exaltation of women (see John 4:7-30; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:1-3; Matt 15:21-28; John 20:1-18, etc.).
7. The Gospel ideal is the return to the Eden model. Paul emphatically declared: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This is not merely a statement on equal access to salvation among various groups (cf. Gal 2:11-15; Eph 2:14-15). Rather, it specifically singles out those three relationships in which the Jews had perverted God's original plan of Gen 1 by making one group subordinate to another: (1) Jew-Gentile, (2) slave-master, and (3) male-female. By using the rare NT terms "male-female" (*arsenthēly*) instead of "husband-wife" (*anēr-gunē*) Paul establishes a link with Gen 1:27 and thus shows how the Gospel calls us back to the divine ideal, which has no place for general subordination of females to males.

Within the cultural restraints of his day, Paul and the early church (like Jesus) did not act precipitously. The subordination of Gentiles was difficult to root out (even in Peter! [Gal 2:11-14]). Slavery was not immediately abolished in the church (see Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22; Phlm 12; 1 Tim 6:1).

Likewise, women did not immediately receive full and equal participation with men in the ministry of the church. However, Phoebe is mentioned as a "deacon" (Rom 16:1); Junia was a female apostle (Rom 16:7), and leaders of the church at Philippi were women (Phil 4:2-3). Priscilla assumed an authoritative teaching role over men (Acts 18), and the "Elect Lady" (2 John) may well have been a prominent church leader with a congregation under her care.

Paul's list of qualifications for elders framed in the masculine gender ("husband of one wife," literally, "a one-wife husband" [1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9]) does not exclude women from serving as elders any more than the masculine gender throughout the Ten Commandments (Exod 20; see esp. vs. 17) exempts women from obedience. Rather, these passages are again upholding the Edenic ideal — the principle of monogamy (Gen 2:24).

God does not speak directly to the question of the ordination of women in the NT, just as He does not deal directly with the abolition of slavery, with vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol, and many other issues based on principles set forth "from the beginning." But He has given clear Biblical principles to guide our decision-making.

In these last days God has called His church to return to His original blueprint for every area of our lives: our diet, our day of worship — and the three human relationships mentioned in Gal 3. God calls us to return to the Edenic ideal for male-female relationships that allows women equal access to the gifts of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-30; Eph 4:11-13). As the Spirit gifts women for ministry, "distributing to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor 12:11), may the church follow the Spirit's leading!

In the interest of brevity, references for further study were edited out of this outline. To read the entire outline with references, go to <http://session.adventistfaith.org> and click on Bible Texts in the left sidebar.

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