

**“NOT A HAND BOUND; NOT A VOICE HUSHED”:¹
ORDINATION AND FOUNDATIONAL ADVENTIST
UNDERSTANDINGS OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY**

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It was the work of the gospel to remove distinctions among men in race, nationality, sex, or condition. Paul declares that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3:28. This text has a generic application; it is of universal force wherever the gospel reaches. In the light of such a statement, how can woman be excluded from the privileges of the gospel?

-George C. Tenney, “Woman’s Relation to the Cause of Christ”²

Introduction

Near the end of the nineteenth century, the *Review and Herald* published an editorial written by Australian church leader Elder G. C. Tenney titled, “Woman’s Relation to the Cause of Christ.”³ As editor of the Australian Adventist Church paper, Tenney was responding to a query concerning certain New Testament passages that were traditionally used to prohibit women from serving as preachers, teachers, and leaders both in the Christian churches and the public arena. A questioner had asked the editor of the *Bible Echo*,

Will you kindly give your opinion upon 1 Cor. 14: 34, 35; and 1 Tim. 2: 12, where the apostle seems to teach that women should not speak in the churches. —A. G.⁴

Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, decided to reprint Tenney’s answer in the *Review* with the following introduction: “[OUR esteemed editorial contributor, Elder G. C. Tenney, now editor of the *Bible Echo* in Melbourne, Australia, has, it seems, the usual editorial experience of being frequently called upon to explain 1 Cor. 14:34, with reference to the question

¹“Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work.” Ellen G. White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *Review and Herald* 72, no. 28 (July 9, 1895): 433-434.

²George C. Tenney, “Woman’s Relation to the Cause of Christ,” *Review and Herald* 69, no. 21 (May 24, 1892): 328-329.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

whether women should take any public part in the worship of God . . .”⁵ Smith remarks that “he [Tenney] gives, under the foregoing heading, the following excellent thoughts upon this subject, which we are happy to transfer to our columns as a further reply to those to whom we are so often called upon to respond on this question:—”⁶

It is clear that this type of question was frequently raised in the 1890s, as Tenney began his comments with the following statement:

There is no point of Scripture teaching that excites more questioning than that raised by our correspondent. Several times we have replied to similar questions, and some have been passed by. The queries come by post and by word of mouth. Devout people, skeptics, believers, advocates of women’s rights, advocates of men’s rights, church people, non-church people, husbands of meek wives, husbands of garrulous women, wives of meek husbands, wives of lordly husbands, people that are neither husbands nor wives,—all are interested in the solution of this question, What is woman’s place in the church, and what would happen if she should get out of it into the man’s place? People who slight judgment, mercy, and the weightier matters of the law, halt, hesitate, ahem, shake the head, and perhaps do worse, when they learn that some women do actually speak in church, because Paul said: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak;” and, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”⁷

After this telling introduction to the topic, Tenney launched into his explanation of the texts in question and directly addressed the concerns voiced. He argued forcefully that the perceived prohibition of women’s full participation in every aspect of Christian ministry comes from an inadequate hermeneutical approach.

The difficulty with these texts is almost entirely chargeable to immature conclusions reached in regard to them. It is manifestly illogical and unfair to give to any passage of Scripture an unqualified radical meaning that is at variance with the main tenor of the Bible, and directly in conflict with its plain teachings. The Bible may be reconciled in all its parts without going outside the lines of consistent interpretation. But great difficulty is likely to be experienced by those who interpret isolated passages in an independent light according to the ideas they happen to entertain upon them. Those who were brought up to believe it to be a shame for women to speak in meeting, look no further than these texts, and give them sweeping application. Critics of the Bible, critics of womankind, as well [as] women who are looking for an excuse for idleness, seize these passages in the same manner. By their misuse of these texts, many conscientious people are led into a misconception of what Paul meant to teach.⁸

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸George C. Tenney, “Woman’s Relation to the Cause of Christ,” *Review and Herald* 69, no. 21 (May 24, 1892): 328-329.

The question itself, along with Tenney's response and the introductory notes supplied in the *Review*, goes to the heart of the current debate on the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. While the debate is now framed in terms of whether or not women should be ordained, the deeper question in the mind of many is how women can be recognized as spiritual leaders and affirmed as ministers by ordination when certain passages in Paul appear to require women's silent submission and nowhere does the Bible contain a mandate to ordain women. For many, unanswered questions remain concerning the relationship of scriptural instructions on proper gender behavior to Adventist practices of ordaining women to church offices and utilizing women's gifts in the preaching ministry and ordained leadership of the church.

The explanation for the current impulse towards inclusivity lies within Adventism's very roots. While many other conservative churches struggle against their own tradition as well as their misreading of the biblical text, Seventh-day Adventism has a heritage of encouraging women to become educated and to use their gifts in the public arena. This chapter will review the major stages of Adventism in the nineteenth century, outlining the working realities, policies, and understandings of ministry and ordination and the role of women in church evangelism and outreach.

Women in Ministry and the Legacy of Millerism

Seventh-day Adventists trace the beginning of their denomination to the movement begun in the early nineteenth century by New England farmer, soldier, and justice of the peace William Miller. After a careful two-year study of the Bible (1816-1818), Miller concluded that "in about twenty-five years from that time all the affairs of our present state would be wound up,"⁹ and Jesus would return (circa 1843 or 1844). His conclusion drove him back into further Bible study for another fourteen years, sharing his conviction only casually with family members and friends. By 1830, Miller covenanted with God to share the results of his study if asked, and requests from rural New England towns began to press him into action. His Scripture studies drew many to embrace his conclusion that the Second Advent was near, forming a movement around his message. This movement was jump-started when clergyman Joshua V. Himes of Boston heard Miller deliver his series. Himes became William Miller's publicist, using all his contacts and skills to give Miller a hearing in the large urban churches.

Joshua Himes was an energetic, popular, and well-connected minister affiliated with the Christian Connexion, a new Christian church endeavoring to rid the church of human traditions and restore a "primitive," or a New Testament form, of Christianity.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that seven of the sixteen

⁹William Miller, *Apology and Defense* (Boston: Joshua Himes, 1845), 6.

¹⁰Connexionists believed that it was necessary to strip away the accrued layers of traditions, creeds, and social conventions and start fresh with worship practices based on scriptural models and mandates. They emphasized the importance of the

preachers who called for the first General Conference on the Advent Near were Christian Connexion members. Himes was also a prominent member of Boston's reform movement.¹¹ Experience working with women on reform projects convinced some of the male reformers that women's voices were necessary for the success of the various campaigns and needed to be heard despite strong cultural conventions to the contrary.

When Himes became the publicist and engine behind the Millerite movement, he utilized his influence and drew on his contacts from both these groups. In short, the Millerite movement was soon populated by Christian Connexion members and led by men drawn from reform circles. Individuals from both of these circles (which frequently overlapped) were more accustomed to and in favor of women's participation in the public sphere than were the vast majority of their contemporaries. While not all Millerites were ready to think beyond the social and religious conventions of the day, there were both men and women willing to do so. Those from the Connexion were willing to argue that women's preaching was a fulfillment of the Acts 2: 17 prophecy: "In the last days . . . your daughters shall prophesy."

The inspired women who accepted the call to preach faced and endured persecution, as they defied social expectations when they spoke before crowds containing men as well as women. Despite the hardships of travel, public ridicule, and, occasionally, family resistance, they continued as itinerant preachers. The urgency of the message of Christ's soon-coming meant that all believers should do whatever they could to warn the world. As difficult as breaking social norms and convention was, they reasoned that if one's gift

Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit as evidence of God's presence, affirmation, and blessing on their Christian endeavors. They were open to a larger role for women in their meetings than was permitted by most of their contemporaries, as they valued the scriptural promises of spiritual gifts given to the church. They noted that both Joel and Acts claimed that in the last days, "Your daughters shall prophesy." Joshua Himes became an important link between the Christian Connexion and Millerism. For a general discussion of the Christian Connexion and its relationship to Adventism, see ch. 3, "The Christian Connexion," in Gerald Wheeler, *James White: Innovator and Overcomer* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 29-36. Two focused and helpful sources on this tie are Bert Haloviak's articles, "Some Great Connexions: Our Seventh-day Adventist Heritage from the Christian Church," General Conference Archives, May 1994, and "A Heritage of Freedom: The Christian Connection Roots to Seventh-day Adventism (Some Pertinent Documents)," General Conference Archives, November 1995.

¹¹An outgrowth of the Second Great Awakening, the reform impulse was fueled by the postmillennialist belief that Christ would come after a period of a thousand years of peace. This peace was to be accomplished by human resolve to establish God's kingdom on earth and to order society along the lines of God's intentions for human relationships. Their commitment to create a society whose institutions reflected Christian standards of conduct led to reform efforts in a variety of areas, including peace (nonresistance or pacifism), abolition, temperance, care for the indigent and the mentally ill, and eventually, women's rights.

lay in preaching, to bury that talent rather than to use it could only lead to spiritual disaster. As they ventured forth, certain of the women drew great crowds and were considered excellent evangelists. Among these were Lucy Maria Hersey Stoddard, Laretta Elysian Armstrong Fassett, and Emily C. Clemons, who worked New York State and City; Mary D. Wellcome and Sarah J. Paine Higgins, who were laborers from Massachusetts, while Anna Eliza Boyd Smith and Clorinda S. Minor from Philadelphia played active, public roles in the movement there. Even beyond the borders of the United States, women such as Miriam McKinstry carried the message in Quebec, Canada.¹²

While these women's skill at preaching and commitment to the movement did not erase general religious and social prescriptions concerning women's appropriate sphere, it did introduce many more individuals to the experience of women speaking in religious meetings and the effectiveness of their public ministry. It left a legacy in the Millerite movement that persisted even after the failure of the expected return of Christ on October 22, 1844.

*Women in Ministry During Sabbatarian Adventism's
Formative Period, 1844-1863*

After considerable effort by Captain Joseph Bates, James and Ellen White, and a handful of other stalwarts such as Hiram Edson, Samuel Rhodes, and J. N. Loughborough, the sabbatarian branch of the Advent movement emerged and began to take hold. The growth was painfully slow during the eight-year shut-door period in which they recruited among Millerites only, with the group reaching only 200 in 1850. Yet by 1852, about 2,000 adherents had made the covenant to "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."¹³ Joseph Bates and James White began issuing signed identification cards to the messengers in order to "thwart imposters" who either taught a confusing mix of doctrine or meant to simply abscond with monies collected for the *Review* and the support of the work.¹⁴ Movement leaders would soon find a need to ordain ministers, as well, an action which brought criticism from those quick to note that they had no formal authority to do so. As an upstart movement, they lacked direct sanction or link to apostolic succession. Although not fully articulated in the *Review* until later, they had their reply to such a charge. They asked, "What man or woman who has labored to any great extent in the cause of evangelical Protestantism, or religious reform, has failed to have cast at him or her the Romish objection to his or her work, 'You have no right to labor. You have not apostolic succession?'" Their bold response was that they had the "same authority that the apostles had for preaching the 'unsearchable riches of Christ.' Their power and authority for

¹²Carole Rayburn, "Women Heralds of 'The Advent Near,'" *Adventist Heritage* 17, no. 2 (1997): 11-20.

¹³George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 58.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 59.

labor came direct *from the Lord.*"¹⁵ They proceeded from a New Testament model, stressing the call to discipleship and empowerment by the Holy Spirit over the Jewish model of priesthood or traditions later adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. They modeled their activities on the freedom found among the various communities of the early church to set apart individuals for ministry by the laying on of hands. The gift of the Spirit and the community affirmation of the individual's call to preach were deemed an adequate basis for inclusion into the ranks of Adventist ministry.

By the time the Adventist Church was formally organized in 1863, there were thirty full-time ministers recognized by the Church and 3,500 members. By 1863, Seventh-day Adventists embraced a mission to take the three angels' messages to the world and had managed to create an organizational base to support their movement. During this period, Sabbatarian Adventists relied on two main avenues of endeavor for recruiting members. The first was the labor of itinerant preachers, or "messengers" as they were called, who variously visited former Millerites to share the group's emerging theological stance or headed into new territory, trying to obtain a hearing from other Christians. After James White began publishing the *Review and Herald* in 1850, the journal served as a printed "messenger," reaching individuals in areas where the traveling ministers had not yet arrived.¹⁶ While the paper also became

¹⁵H.M.J. Richards, "Apostolic Succession," *Review and Herald* 68, no. 7 (February 17, 1891): 107. The complete introductory passage reads as follows:

"What man or woman who has labored to any great extent in the cause of evangelical Protestantism, or religious reform, has failed to have cast at him or her the Romish objection to his or her work, 'You have no right to labor. You have not apostolic succession?'

"To such as present this objection, it is of no consequence that God's Spirit has attended the work with power, and bound souls have been made free from the galling yoke of sin, and caused to 'sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' Eph. 2:6. The Romanist says, 'It amounts to naught. You labor in vain. You have not the succession!' As if God and his power could be limited by such 'worms of the earth' as men, or by any circumstances poor mortal man could devise or arrange!

"Are we not told that God is able of the very stones 'to raise up children unto Abraham?' Matt. 3:9. From whence, then, comes the succession? What shall we say, then, of those honest souls who, having sought the Lord earnestly, have found pardon, complied with his known will, and received the gift of the Holy Spirit?—They are 'created in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:10), by 'The Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!' Rom 8:15. For 'now are we the sons of God.' 1 John 3:2. These tell of the mighty things God has wrought for them, and of the wondrous Saviour they have found. From whom is their succession? Since they are the 'sons of God,' is it not directly from God himself? Does not the line of succession run from father to son?—It certainly does.

"But this is the same authority that the apostles had for preaching the gospel of the 'unsearchable riches of Christ.' Their power and authority for labor came direct from the Lord."

¹⁶For a discussion of the role of the *Review* during this critical period, see

a way for messengers to communicate their proposed destinations and interested individuals to request a visit of a messenger to their areas, the work was loosely organized, with no central agency to coordinate the itinerants' efforts.¹⁷ Every bit as problematic for the group was the lack of regular salary for the messengers, who were self-supporting. It is small wonder that even by 1863 there were only about thirty ministers.

Groups of believers organized as congregational churches, even though a legal mega-structure had not been formalized. The process they followed was simple, reflecting the Connexion roots of James White and others. A letter from Joseph Bates to the *Review*, describing organization in a Michigan village, reflects the recommended process:

Monterey, Nov. 9, 10. After faithfully acting upon the plan suggested in the conference address, fifty brethren and sisters solemnly covenanted together to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ, leaving the way open for several that were not present, or could not attend the meeting, to unite with us, provided they come in by unanimous consent of all the members.¹⁸

Wherever possible, groups of believers were organized into companies or churches to function as a local or regional base for spiritual nurture and missionary outreach.

In a significant essay in 1858, "Unity and Gifts of the Church," James White articulated his stance on the responsibilities and expectations of Sabbatarian Adventists in a period when differences in former church affiliation, theology, ecclesiology, and vision for the future created internal tension and conflicts.¹⁹ White believed that adopting a common approach to their life as a spiritual community could create unity. Basing his understanding

Ginger Hanks Harwood, "Like the Leaves of Autumn: The Utilization of the Press to Maintain Millennial Expectations in the Wake of Prophetic Failure," *Journal for Millennial Studies*, <http://www.mille.org/publications/winter2001/Harwood.html>.

¹⁷Examples of the way this communication worked can be found in a notice posted in the "Appointments" section of the *Review*: "The Lord willing, there will be a gathering of the brethren in Western New York at the house of Bro. J. Lamson, Clarkson Center, Monroe Co., N. Y. on Sabbath and first-day, May 25 and 26. It is expected that Brn. M. Hull and C. W. Sperry will meet with us. B .F. C." Similarly, the following notice read, "Providence permitting, we will meet the brethren in conference in the neighborhood of Bro. Moses Porter's, five miles north of Mantorville, Dodge Co., Minn., on the 25th and 26th of May. We hope to see a general attendance of brethren and sisters. We would like to see Bro. Morse at this meeting. We wish to take into consideration some matters connected with the running of the tent this season. We would like to hear from Bro. Andrews at this meeting. Jno. Bostwick. H. F. Lashier." *Review and Herald* 18, no. 1 (May 21, 1861): 8.

¹⁸Joseph Bates, "Meetings in Michigan," *Review and Herald* 18, no. 25 (November 19, 1861): 197.

¹⁹James White, "Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4," *Review and Herald* 11, no. 9 (January 7, 1858): 68-69.

roughly on the hermeneutic used by Miller, White created what could be termed “the Adventist way.” The “way” that would unify them did not attempt to close the gap between idiosyncratic understandings in conflicting areas. Instead, it created common ground by establishing a minimalist doctrinal concord and a standard process and approach to spiritual life together. Adventists were expected to continue to search and study the Scriptures as they continued in their quest for more knowledge and understanding of God and godliness. They were to apply reason as they sought to understand the sayings, teachings, and commandments. They were to expect that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them, as had been promised to those in the last days. White was clear that true spiritual growth required a willingness to abandon previously held beliefs and customs when new light was discerned.

In his article, White also pressed the necessity of accepting and supporting the spiritual gifts given to the Church through all members, regardless of gender. He saw the gift of prophecy as particularly significant, as it is the personal and direct communication of God to an individual for the purpose of making that person “a minister and a witness” to what has been seen for the purpose of redeeming the lost. He built on the generally accepted understanding that the gift of prophecy is for the building up of the Church and that to prophesy is to exhort, edify, and comfort the Church, as specified in 1 Cor 14:3. Using 1 Thess 5:19-21 as the core of his argument, he reminded the believers of Paul’s admonition to the early church community. Believers must “Quench not the Spirit,” “Despise not prophesyings,” “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” He was certain that adhering to these instructions would assist believers in moving beyond their religious and cultural conditioning into a unified body, growing in spiritual discernment and discipline, willing to embrace truth, correction, and exhortation from whomever the Holy Spirit had sent to give the message, even when the message came from a woman. He also sounded a word of warning from Thessalonians: If the gift of prophecy were not cherished, it would be withdrawn.²⁰

In addition to assisting Adventist efforts to move beyond difference into a cohering body, movement leaders labored to create structure for the newly formed congregations. One major task was that of sketching the relationships between the itinerant ministers and the churches. One aspect of this task involved an examination of church offices and a clarification of their duties. In 1856, R. F. Cottrell published an article discussing the expected operation of local churches and the function of various persons within them. He pointed out the need for better understanding of the church offices: the officers were servants of the group, not dominating rulers over it. The itinerant ministers proclaimed the gospel in new areas, established new congregations, and ordained local church members to their offices.²¹ It should

²⁰White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4,” 68-69.

²¹“Order in the Church of God has been vindicated by different writers in the *Review*, and has been established to a considerable extent by the ordinations of officers in the churches. But perhaps the duties of those officers have not been made

be noted that Cottrell expected the congregation to be self-sustaining and functioning independently of the labor of the minister. While the itinerants were busy taking the message to new fields, the local congregations saw to the operation of the individual churches.

For James White and many others, it was apparent that local organization was not sufficient to meet the needs of the expanding movement. He, along with others, launched a full-scale campaign for “Gospel Order,” the establishment of the Church as a legal entity. As he determined the necessity of incorporation, he came to a crossroads. As a Connexion member, he had understood that a church had no working brief beyond the explicit instructions found in Scripture. Yet an honest assessment of the needs of the situation revealed that biblical descriptions of the early church did not cover the complexity of the situation in which the nineteenth-century church found itself. Based on logic and pragmatic considerations, White found it imperative to move beyond his former belief in the necessity of finding scriptural warrant for every church practice. He made the decision to take the road that led beyond that limitation, and encouraged others to follow his lead. In his argumentation for church organization, he presented a reasoned discussion to help others see that acknowledging the move beyond a specific “Thus saith the Lord” for every church action was a necessary step forward. He carefully demonstrated to his readers ways in which they had already started on that path, even if they had not been acknowledging it.

In his 1860 reply to those who were certain that formal organization would rend apart their spiritual movement and plunge it into a fallen state,

sufficiently clear. . . . I shall not disagree with the generally received opinion that the difference between an elder and a deacon is that the former serve more especially in a spiritual, and the latter in a temporal sense. Both are not only leaders and rulers, but servants of the church. As servants they should do such duties in behalf of the church as are not common to each member individually. All moral duties are common to all; but in attending to the ordinances of the gospel, some one must act as a servant of all to administer. I believe that each church should have the power and means within itself to walk in all the ordinances of the house of God, and to admit others who may be brought into the truth to all the privileges of membership with them. A traveling elder or evangelist is not always at hand to administer in those duties that frequently devolve upon a church. A Timothy or a Titus whose duty it is to travel from place to place and “ordain elders in every city,” cannot be expected to be present to administer the ordinances in every church on every occasion; but when he has performed his duty— has “set in order” the church by ordaining proper officers, they should be prepared to keep the faith of Jesus, to celebrate his death, to shine as the light of the world, and thus bring others into the fold of Christ, to administer baptism, receive to membership, and be the pillar and support of the truth; while those who labor in the field are going into new places to raise the standard of truth, gathering churches, and setting them into order. Thus the churches would be sending out the truth to others, while they were living it out at home.” R. F. C., “What Are the Duties of Church Officers?” *Review and Herald* 8, no. 22 (October 2, 1856): 173.

White established the rule that was to guide the church in the choices it would need to make in the future:

But if it be asked, where are your plain texts of scripture for holding church property legally? we reply, The Bible does not furnish any; neither does it say that we should have a weekly paper, a steam printing-press, that we should publish books, build places of worship, and send out tents. Jesus says, "Let your light so shine before men," etc.; but he does not give all the particulars how this shall be done. The church is left to move forward in the great work, praying for divine guidance, acting upon the most efficient plans for its accomplishment. We believe it safe to be governed by the following RULE: All means which, according to sound judgment, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations, should be employed.²²

That stance permitted the church to begin a rapid growth as it committed the group to utilize all available means and methods not biblically forbidden or contrary to its spirit, for the advancement of the Adventist message. It meant that it was possible to establish church structures and define policies that the Scriptures had not explicitly mandated. Given the seriousness with which the group regarded Scripture, if the decision had not been made to go beyond explicit commands found in the Bible, continuing the trajectories indicated, as long as an action forwarded the spread of the gospel and did not countermand clear biblical instructions, the Seventh-day Adventist Church could not have been started or grown to become what it is today. As James White would have been quick to point out, there are no Scriptures commanding us to operate health-care facilities, educational systems, and publishing houses, to say nothing of an institutional church.

*The Sabbatarian Adventist Movement's
View of Women and Church*

Far from being cautious or uncertain concerning the expanded roles women were playing in the Sabbatarian Advent movement, the leaders in the group understood women's preaching, teaching, exhorting, and prophesying as a significant identifying mark of the true end-time church. It was a fulfillment of the prophecies in Joel and Acts that the last days would experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all people. They argued,

Seeing that females were admitted to the high office of prophecy under the old dispensation, and in the promise of the more general effusion of this gift, the daughters and handmaidens were equally included with the other sex, that they were among the first messengers of the gospel, and after the churches were formed and settled received particular instruction how to conduct themselves in the church, in the exercise of their gifts, it is strange that the privilege should have ever been called in question.²³

²²James White, "Making Us a Name," *Review and Herald* 15, no. 23 (April 26, 1860): 180-182.

²³S. C. Welcome, "Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches?" *Review and Herald* 15, no. 14 (February 23, 1860): 109-110.

They articulated women's public presentation of the gospel message as a restoration of the biblical model rather than an innovation. They repeatedly cited examples from both the Hebrew Scriptures and the letters of Paul, who commended women ministers and officers to church leaders in new areas where they were going to work. They contrasted their inclusive practices and recognition of the gifts of the Spirit with the restrictive practices of society and the "fallen churches." They enjoyed gospel freedom, whereas other churches "quenched the Spirit" if it did not flow through socially accepted channels. Naturally, the obligation to exercise the gifts given applied to women as well as men and was viewed as necessary for individual salvation.

B. F. Robbins made a particularly strong case for this practice in his article, "To the Female Disciples of the Third Angel's Message," when he depicted their tendency to ignore or deny their gifts in terms of defective religious socialization. After noting that "I have my fears that many of you who I believe are sincerely endeavoring to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, are lacking in that entire heart consecration to God and his cause which he requires of us all; and a want of the experience of the promise of the Father to his sons and daughters of the gift of his Spirit, the endowment of power from on high in order to their usefulness," he began an effort at re-education:

Here in the precious promise there is neither male nor female, all are one in Christ Jesus. I know that the most of us have been gathered into the message of the third angel from the sectarian churches where we received our religious training, which we now, in the clear light of God's truth see was defective, both in doctrine and practice; and we are aware that in them the pride, and popularity, and conformity to the world, and worldly fashions tolerated by them, and besides in some of them the prejudice against woman's efforts and labors in the church, have crushed out her usefulness. This kind of training has in many of you caused timidity, and discouragement, and the neglect of the use of gifts designed to edify the church and glorify God. Perhaps many of you feel the embarrassing influence of our former associations; for I believe it is so with some with whom I am acquainted, and to such, scattered abroad, let me speak a few words of encouragement and exhortation.²⁴

Robbins continued with his review of the biblical model of women's inclusion in spiritual gifts and their practice in the early church. For Robbins, this was argument enough that the "sisters" needed to get over their hesitancy and assume their duties as full disciples of Christ.

The charismatic model that movement leaders applied created a new set of responsibilities and expectations for women. No longer relegated to the listener's role, women were expected to recognize their position as disciples and fully participate in God's mission of redemption. They needed to utilize their spiritual gifts for the building up of the church and be willing to endure censure or hardship when their calling took them beyond convention.

²⁴B. F. Robbins, "To the Female Disciples in the Third Angel's Message," *Review and Herald* 15, no. 3 (December 8, 1859): 21-22.

Between the time when the *Review and Herald* was first published in 1850 and the church was formally organized in 1863, the *Review* published eight articles specifically focused on women's public speaking ministry. The authors included Adventist noteworthies, such as James White, J. A. Mowatt, David Hewitt, B. F. Robbins, S. C. Welcome, and Uriah Smith.²⁵ Each article, from James White's challenge to opponents of women's spiritual leadership in "Paul Says So" to Uriah Smith's "triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters" to preach, broke with traditional views that women should be silent in the church. Each article supported the participation of women in the preaching ministry, often naming women's speaking or preaching as a distinguishing mark of the Adventist movement and setting it apart from the established churches which denied women an active role in preaching and teaching.

Their conviction of the right of the sisters to publicly proclaim the Word was based on their understanding of spiritual gifts as given to men and women equally according to the will of the Spirit. Their defense of women's preaching, particularly against those who would cite the Pauline injunction that women should keep silent in the church, was based on their interpretation of the Bible and modeled the principles of Adventist hermeneutics used to establish the doctrines and practices of the fledgling church. Most specifically in this discussion, the principles of biblical interpretation used in this study of women's role included comparing Scripture with Scripture, understanding the context of a biblical text, and examining the functions that women filled in biblical history. These principles led the early Adventist Church to defend vigorously the right of the sisters to engage in public ministry against those who, as James White noted, "do not like to hear the Marys preach a risen or coming Saviour."²⁶

*Women in Ministry and the Realities and
Issues in SDA Ministry, 1863-1881*

Although certain factions within the movement continued to be ambivalent about Adventism's new status as an established church, completion of the campaign for formal organization allowed James White and other recognized leaders to turn their attention to additional issues concerning church life, mission, and the state of the ministry itself. These issues became increasingly important during the time between formal church organization and James White's death in 1881. The church underwent a significant transformation in numbers, growing from 3,500 members, all located in the United States, to nearly 15,500 with about 600 outside the U.S.²⁷ The percentage of non-Millerite adherents increased, and the church's commitment to structural

²⁵Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood, "'Your Daughters Shall Prophesy': James White, Uriah Smith, and the 'Triumphant Vindication of the Right of the Sisters' to Preach," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 41-58.

²⁶James White, "Paul Says So," *Review and Herald* 10, no. 19 (September 10, 1857): 152.

²⁷Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 132.

formalization encouraged its redefinition of and commitment to worldwide mission.

Once the Civil War had subsided and the church was freer to concentrate on its mission to a split and ravaged country, as well as to the larger world field, the issue of mission rose to the surface. J. N. Andrews captured the group's commitment to continued expansion and their understanding of the urgency of their mission in an 1874 article, "Our Work." As he stated there,

God has committed to the Seventh-day Adventists a work of immense magnitude and of vast importance. It is to give warning to the world of the near advent of Christ, and to teach the true preparation for that great event. Never was a greater responsibility committed to a body of men than that which God has given to this people. The time for this work is short. It can only be accomplished by the direct help of the Spirit of God.²⁸

Statements urging the participation of all members in the outreach of the gospel ministry, like that provided by Andrews above, filled the pages of the *Review* with increasing frequency as the decade moved forward. Every member was challenged to ask where his or her gifts could be utilized to bring a saving knowledge of Christ to the world. This call would become even more intense later in the decades of the 1880s and '90s.

Despite a numerical growth of individuals considering themselves messengers/evangelists, the situation of the ministry and the ministers remained a major challenge to the church. Even after the formal organization of the movement into a church in 1863, Adventist clergy continued to be missionaries or traveling evangelists. Ministers journeyed from site to site, preaching, conducting Bible studies, selling church literature, and organizing companies of believers within the state or area in which they were licensed.²⁹ This type of ministry posed several distinct challenges to women, as the lack of funds available for regular lodgings, the entry into new towns without proper introductions, and traveling alone or with a partner outside their own family,

²⁸J. N. Andrews, "Our Work," *The True Missionary* (November 1874): 84.

²⁹A report from one such minister, Bro. Lawrence, serves to highlight the frenetic nature of the labor: "My last report was from St. Clair, May 15. Bro. Gurney and myself found a good home with warm friends of the truth. I gave five discourses in their district school-house which seemed to awake a good interest to hear, and it was thought some would obey the truth. First-day, the 21st, I went ten miles to Smith's Creek; preached in the forenoon, after which I baptized two. I spoke again in the evening, with great liberty, to a full house. The people manifested a good interest to hear more. The 23rd, we went twelve miles north-east to Kenochee where an appointment had been sent, but it did not reach them. We had appointments circulated. In the meantime, Brn. Lamson and Wakeling came from Brockway Center where they had stirred up an interest and some opposition, so that the school-house had been closed against them. After consultation, it was decided that Bro. Gurney should go to Port Huron, and telegraph for the tent, and Brn. Lamson and Wakeling return to Brockway Center, and I remain there to fill my two appointments Wednesday and Thursday evenings." R. J. Lawrence, "Report from Bro. Lawrence," *Review and Herald* 38, no. 1 (June 20, 1871): 7.

compromised a woman's respectability and thus diminished her usefulness for the spread of Adventism. Thus, most women found it almost impossible to be a messenger without either being married to another messenger or having their husband as a traveling companion. It is not surprising that the idea of partnered ministry found such favor during this time.

The messengers' mission was to spread the gospel to new areas, which they did through several methods. One of these was through engagement with local clergy, typically through publicized debates or challenges in the area papers, depending on the arguments presented to convince the audience that its previous understandings of Scripture and Christian practice were in error. Occasionally, ministers were invited to come to an area to give a series of meetings and Bible studies after an individual or small group became interested in Adventism through Adventist publications or letters from a friend or family member encouraging them to examine their Bible on issues of Sabbath, the state of the dead, or the soon coming of Christ. The missionary evangelists would move on after establishing an interest and organizing a company committed to observe the Sabbath and further the message in the local community. This understanding of the minister's role continued until the beginning of the 20th century. As late as March of 1912, when the General Conference president addressed a ministerial institute in Los Angeles, he was able to say,

We have not settled our ministers over churches as pastors to any large extent. In some of the very large churches we have elected pastors, but as a rule we have held ourselves ready for field service, evangelistic work and our brethren and sisters have held themselves ready to maintain their church services and carry forward their church work without settled pastors.³⁰

However positive the effects of congregational responsibility in this time period, the practice of messengers attempting to respond to specific calls for their help from whatever direction they might come, along with the lack of a central coordination of these efforts, led to clergy exhaustion and burnout.³¹ Thus, Dudley Canright had every reason to call the 1879 decision to assign defined fields of labor in which the messengers stayed at least a year "A Move in the Right Direction."³² Yet it was not a sufficient move to overcome certain of the flaws in the organization's model of ministry.

³⁰ A. G. Daniells, quoted in Russell Burrill, *Revolution in the Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 41.

³¹For an interesting story of the near loss of two of Adventism's finest pioneer preachers (J. N. Andrews and J. N. Loughborough) due to the lack of pay and grueling tours of duty, see Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Lightbearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 84-86.

³²D. M. Canright. "A Move in the Right Direction," *Review and Herald* 53, no. 5 (January 30, 1879): 37. "At the late Conference in Battle Creek, a resolution was adopted recommending that ministers be assigned their fields of labor at the commencement of the Conference year, and that they continue to labor in that section of the Conferences at least one year. I see that other Conferences have since recommended

In addition to the fact that the number of ministers was inadequate to meet the needs, many of the messengers enrolled on the records lacked any formal or systematic preparation for the ministry. The Millerite experience of fervor and knowledge of specific points in Bible prophecy as the only necessary qualifications for an evangelist called by the Spirit to teach and preach the warning message had created a tradition of untrained clergy. While the Millerite movement boasted many leaders who were theologically educated as well as enthusiastic lay evangelists, few recognized clerics accepted Sabbatarian Adventism, and none were being trained for the future. The church did not possess any institutions for ministerial education to remedy the situation. James and Ellen White were both concerned about the meaning of an untrained clergy for the future of the church.

As a stopgap measure, a program for clergy education was begun through the pages of the *Review*. Since many of the messengers lacked the resources or academic background necessary to pursue a formal course of study at a recognized university, lists of books and questions on their content were provided to encourage and begin the project of self-education. The concern was that Adventist ministers would not only know enough to help individuals review a set of texts on basic religious doctrines, but that they also would be able to interact with and answer the questions of educated individuals. Recommended work extended from basic grammar to respected books on history and theology. The lessons in the *Review* were just a first step toward a more professionally trained clergy.

The next step was to provide training for ministers through a month-long series of lectures. It should be noted, that even as men were invited to sign up for this short course, women were specifically encouraged to attend the sessions and train, as well. The following notification of the proposed course, sponsored by the Minister's Lecture Association, a group open to both men and women, invited all interested parties to enroll:

MINISTER'S LECTURE ASSOCIATION

PROVIDENCE permitting, there will be a course of lectures before this association at Battle Creek, Mich., for the term of four weeks following General Conference. The price of membership is \$5 for men, and \$3 for women. During the term there will be as many lectures, and sessions of Bible-class, as members may desire. There will be, if desired, lessons given in penmanship, and English grammar. Board will not exceed \$2 per week. All those persons, far and near, who wish to become members of this association, and attend these lectures, and the course of instruction

the same thing. The importance of this move can readily be seen. As it has been in the past, in many cases the traveling expenses of the ministers have been about as much as their weekly wages. This should not be so. Sometimes our most efficient ministers have been called hither and thither to different parts of the field, and they have had to travel hundreds of miles to reach their appointments. In the case of one of the presidents of a Conference or some such person, this cannot be avoided; but there is no reason why all the ministers in a Conference should thus run about."

connected therewith, will please inform us without delay. More particulars hereafter.³³

This notice, one of several that appeared during this period, reveals the expectation that women as well as men would train for the ministry. It is especially interesting to note that the cost of the program was reduced for women so that finances would not be a major impediment to them.³⁴

The Church and Women in Ministry

During the first two decades after the church was organized, the *Review and Herald* periodically printed articles defending women in ministry, just as it had earlier defended women as public speakers. The authors of these articles included church noteworthies M. W. Howard, I. Fetterhoof, M. E. Cornell, James White, J. N. Andrews, George Starr, and N. J. Bowers. In addition to the articles written by Adventist leaders, the *Review* featured pieces that supported women's preaching and teaching activities gleaned from other religious publications.³⁵

The call to faithful discipleship was portrayed in the *Review* as inclusive, binding on all. The May 19, 1874, issue of the *Review* featured a short article, "Who Shall Preach?" urging all members to take up their responsibilities as preachers of the gospel. Pressing the soul-winning obligation of all Christians, the author challenged the reader, "Let each one proclaim the message, so that all may hear; for how can they hear without a preacher, and how can they preach unless they be sent?" While recognizing that churches ordain

³³[James] W[hite], "Minister's Lecture Association," *Review and Herald* 37, no. 4 (January 10, 1871): 32. Further articles on the need for ministers' training before the school could be opened include an article by the General Conference Committee reviewing the General Conference resolution that Brother Uriah Smith would present a series of lectures to help prepare the "young men and women among us who would be glad to receive instruction in the doctrines of our faith" to labor for souls. The sense of urgency was strong: "It is well known to most of the readers of the *Review* that our cause stands in great want of laborers properly qualified to present our views to the people who are everywhere ready to listen to them." "Ministerial Lecturers," *Review and Herald* 41, no. 15 (March 25, 1873): 117.

³⁴Calls for workers were frequent and gender-inclusive, as every person's effort was needed to accomplish the work. In the article cited above, James White concluded his description of the proposed lectures with a challenging appeal to all. It read, "We earnestly call the attention of our young men and women of inquiring minds to this subject. Is it not time to recognize the claims of God upon you? When are we going to realize that a world is to be warned of its approaching doom? Will your skirts be clear of the blood of souls if you neglect opportunities for proper preparation to labor in the cause of God?" "Ministerial Lectures," 117.

³⁵Ginger Hanks Harwood and Beverly Beem. "It Was Mary That First Preached a Risen Jesus': Early Seventh-day Adventist Answers to Objections to Women as Public Spiritual Leaders," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 45, no. 2 (Autumn 2007): 221-245.

certain individuals to ministry, the author directed the reader's attention to a larger reality, "the Heaven-ordained ministry of *all* Christ's disciples." The author explicitly included women among those so ordained and obligated to preach: "... let it be done by all sorts of instrumentalities, young or old, men, women, or children." He added, "The Head of the church would fain call into the field a great many more of those preachers, who, like those scattered men and women in the early days of Christianity, went everywhere preaching the word." The article closed with the reminder that "we are our brother's keepers," prompting believers to take up their duties to preach.³⁶

Rather than struggling with what women could do and still remain within the bounds of scriptural propriety, the church's concern was with women who insisted on staying within the socially accepted roles for Christian women. Merritt Cornell, reporting in the *Review* on his evangelistic work in California in 1873, noted, "One of the greatest drawbacks here has been the prevailing idea that women ought not to speak in social meetings. Many seem more than willing to have it so—to believe the sentiment. Being unused to speaking, they regard it as a great cross." He was not willing to accept their tradition-based passivity, correcting their notions by referencing the biblical model. Reflecting the Adventist understanding of the matter, he remarked, "But the Scriptures seem clear on the point. Not one word in the whole Bible is ever found with which to oppose it, except in the writings of the apostle Paul. And a careful comparison of all Paul's statements on the subject shows that he had reference only to unbecoming conduct of women in the public assembly, such as contradicting, altercation, and assuming authority over men in business meetings of the church."³⁷

Until his death in 1881, James White continued his support for the active role of women in every aspect of church ministry. He assured the *Review's* readers that women in positions of spiritual leadership were part of a natural and consistent trajectory experienced since New Testament times. He reminded the church that "The Christian age was ushered in with glory. Both men and women enjoyed the inspiration of the hallowed hour, and were teachers of the people. . . . And the dispensation which was ushered in with glory, honored with the labors of holy women, will close with the same honors."³⁸

Ellen White added her voice to express similar sentiments. In an 1879 address to the church printed in the *Review*, she stressed the need to mobilize all Christians in the work of the gospel. In it, she unequivocally endorsed women as preachers and appealed for more women to dedicate their lives to the ministry. As she stated, "Women can be the instruments of righteousness, rendering holy service. It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus. . . . If

³⁶"Who Shall Preach?" *Review and Herald* 43, no. 23 (May 19, 1874): 178 (selected).

³⁷M. E. Cornell, "Woodland, Cal.," *Review and Herald* 41, no. 25 (June 3, 1873): 198.

³⁸[James] W[hite], "Women in the Church," *Review and Herald* 53, no. 22 (May 29, 1879): 172.

there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth.”³⁹

Church Practices: Women Preachers and Evangelists

The church continued to utilize women as preachers and evangelists after its official organization, and the women filed their reports of work in the *Review* along with all other evangelists.⁴⁰ Church officials expected women to apply for licenses to preach and participate in the same process as their male colleagues. Church policies regarding women’s ministerial licenses did not differ from those for males. Individuals obtained their licenses as a preliminary step toward being ordained.

In many ways, the attitude of the church toward women during this time is best summarized in a brief 1871 *Review* advertisement that announced a journal, “Woman and Her Work.” The authors reported that the Woman’s Christian Association monthly journal stated that its objective was to “help those women who labor in the gospel” and to enlarge “the sphere of woman’s usefulness, especially in that department which becomes her so well, namely, Christian charity.” The paper wishes them “God-speed” for helping women prepare themselves to work among the poor. It is at that point the editors’ stance becomes clear as they put forward their own policy, one that did not promote the nineteenth-century definition of “woman’s sphere” or limit women to a ministry of individual acts of compassion, however significant that function might be. The editors noted,

We are not among those who would hedge up before woman any avenue of labor or usefulness. Of the thirty-one persons now employed in this Office, twenty are women, filling positions with eminent ability, as editors, book-keepers, mailing clerks, compositors, proof-readers, and book-binders. Let woman work in public, and in private, in whatever position her varied capacities may render her efficient.⁴¹

Despite the fact that Protestant churches were becoming increasingly polarized on the issue of women’s “place” in the church, dividing themselves into liberal and conservative camps around the issue, the *Review* continued to report women’s evangelistic labors and successes and encouraged women to move into active and visible roles within church life. M. W. Howard, in his 1868 article, “Woman As A Co-Worker,” captured the essence of Adventist

³⁹Ellen G. White, “Address and Appeal, Setting Forth the Importance of Missionary Work,” *Review and Herald* 53, no. 1 (January 2, 1879): 1-2.

⁴⁰The reports filed by John and Sarah Lindsey in the 1870s serve as examples of the many reports that indicate the work done by women (frequently as part of a husband-wife team). See, John Lindsey, S.A.H. Lindsey, “Pennsylvania,” *Review and Herald* 37, no. 17 (April 11, 1871): 134; “Report of Meetings,” *Review and Herald* 35, no. 10 (February 22, 1870): 78; “Beaver Dam, N.Y.,” *Review and Herald* 39, no. 7 (January 30, 1872): 54.

⁴¹“Woman and Her Work,” *Review and Herald* 37, no. 12 (March 7, 1871): 96.

Church leaders' response to those who would "hedge up" or restrict the arenas in which women could function on the basis of a "conservative" approach to the Bible. He related that his own search of the scriptural record of women's leadership and teaching in the early church convinced him that conservative Christians (those who follow scriptural teaching and practice) must welcome the labors and messages of women. In the article, he noted, "And thus as I reflected upon that conservatism which so readily takes fright at the prominence accorded to a woman, I was convinced that the conservatism should be in another direction."⁴²

*The 1881 General Conference Resolution
to Ordain Women to the Gospel Ministry*

It is not surprising that the General Conference in Session took up the question of women's ordination to the gospel ministry for formal action in 1881. Given the group's practice of recognizing women as messengers and licensing them as ministers, women such as Ellen Lane, Sarah Lindsey, and Julia Owen serving as evangelists in various areas of the United States, and the record of successful evangelism that women had established, the next logical step was to ordain these licensed ministers. The resolution read as follows:

Resolved, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.⁴³

This resolution, recorded in the *Review* as discussed and referred to the General Conference Committee (George Butler, Stephen Haskell, and Uriah Smith), demonstrates the church's recognition of women as ministers and the need to consider them for ordination. Close reading of the resolution shows that the issue is whether women can be ordained with "perfect propriety," not whether or not women are regular ministers. Political correctness or timing seems to be the concern. The discussion in the session of the resolution involved Elders J. O. Corliss, A. C. Bourdeau, E. R. Jones, D. H. Lamson, W. H. Littlejohn, A. S. Hutchins, D. M. Canright, and J. N. Loughborough, and was referred to the General Conference Committee. The account published in the *Signs of the Times* listed the motion to ordain women as among the resolutions adopted at the General Conference.⁴⁴

The conflicting reports on the action offered between the denomination's two major papers are not altogether surprising, as the 1881 General Conference itself was conflicted and confused. The recent death of James White had deprived the group of one of its most powerful voices and created an upset in the balance of power within the church. Ellen White was not in attendance

⁴²M. W. Howard, "Woman As A Co-Worker," *Review and Herald* 32, no. 9 (August 18, 1868): 133.

⁴³"General Conference—Business Proceedings (Continued)," *Review and Herald* 58, no. 25 (December 20, 1881): 392.

⁴⁴"General Conference," *Signs of the Times* 8, no. 1 (January 5, 1882): 8.

to add the weight of her influence to help resolve any of the issues before the group. The split between the “conservative” and “progressive” camps within the church, as well as the tension between John Harvey Kellogg and the Whites, added to a general sense of disunity and low morale. Additionally, recent changes in the definition of tithing to 10% of all personal income to be used “to support his servants in their labors,” introduced in a series of *Review* articles by Dudley Canright, was also a source of tension and discontent.

Given the number of challenges facing the Church immediately following the General Conference Session, including the pending National Sunday Law legislation sponsored by Senator Blair in the U.S. Senate and the mobilization of Adventist resources to deal with the legal situation of Adventists who had been arrested and imprisoned for Sunday breaking in several states, it is not surprising that women’s ordination did not receive priority. For the handful of women who were ready and qualified to receive ordination, the timing was inopportune.

A thorough examination of issues presented in the *Review* between the years of 1863 and 1881 reveals the theology and practices of early, established Adventism. In this period of expanding mission, the labors of all were needed to accomplish the great work of the Third Angel’s message. Calls for laborers were inclusive, citing the need for men and women to serve in various capacities. Women were regarded as workers, called by God, gifted with spiritual gifts in a process common to all. Women were regularly reminded that they were responsible for the salvation of others and that their own spiritual well-being and security depended on their willingness to exercise the talents entrusted to them.

Reports from women evangelists continued to appear in the *Review*, along with those of male workers, and letters were published that testified to the efficacy of their ministry. During this time, ministers were more like roving evangelists than pastors of a single church which created a particular set of challenges for women. Women traveling alone were regarded with suspicion, yet women found ways to circumvent the obstacles and serve as full-time evangelists. The *Review* regularly reported their selection as conference officers and licentiates.

During this period of time, the emphasis in the *Review* articles dedicated to the question of women and the church focused on women’s obligation to serve as fully functioning disciples rather than debating whether or not women had the right to exert spiritual leadership. Although the relatively small number of articles devoted to addressing the topic reflects that women’s ministry was not a highly contested subject, the articles that did appear indicate that some members needed assistance harmonizing the practice of women’s spiritual leadership with certain Pauline passages. The articles addressing this issue did just that and instructed the readers in Adventist hermeneutics, as well.

The various authors read each text in its historical context, examined the heritage of women’s leadership through the biblical record, compared Scripture with Scripture, and demanded that the selected Pauline texts be harmonized with the whole of Paul’s teachings and example to resolve

inconsistency. The Paul that instructed women in proper attire when leading out in worship could not be used to silence women on the basis of isolated verses taken out of context. Paul's instructions had to be viewed in light of the context in which they were given and his purpose to eliminate confusion and disorder.

Going even beyond this step, the authors insisted that Paul's teaching be harmonized with the rest of the scriptural record, which included numerous examples of women in public scriptural leadership. They reflected on God's freedom to select whomever he might choose, and the positive results of the work of biblical women. The authors repeatedly stressed Joel's promise, repeated in Acts 2:16, that the handmaidens would prophesy in the last days, and they defined "prophesying" as speaking "to edification, exhortation, and comfort."⁴⁵ This was a promise that applied to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thus the gifts of the sisters should be cherished, not rejected.

Throughout this period, the writers and editors of the *Review* were forceful and unambiguous in their defense of the appropriateness, even the duty, of women to engage fully in preaching and teaching in the church. The primary arguments, as shown above, were that God had always used women, as well as men, to lead and instruct his people, and that he has promised to pour out his Spirit on all, both sons and daughters, in the last days. Far from being a problem, or unscriptural, the presence of women who preach and lead was considered to be the very sign of God's presence among his remnant people.⁴⁶

*Women in Ministry and the Realities and
Issues in Adventism, 1880-1900*

Both the size and composition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church changed radically in the two decades following James White's death. While membership was calculated to be a little over 15,000 in 1880, that number nearly doubled in the next ten years to some 29,711 by 1890.⁴⁷ With the heightened missionary activity through the end of the century, numbers continued to explode: by

⁴⁵Geo[rge] B. Starr, "Does Paul Contradict Himself?" *Review and Herald* 56, no. 25 (December 16, 1880): 388. Starr's article presents this discussion clearly and serves as a good example of the articles that carefully defined the meaning of the term "to prophesy" in such a way as to point the readers to its exhortative, educational, and consolatory aspects rather than the occasional "foretelling" function.

⁴⁶Harwood and Beem, "It Was Mary That First Preached a Risen Jesus," 221-45.

⁴⁷It is important to note that growth more than doubled in some areas. Doug Johnson has detailed church growth in the Pacific Northwest during this period and has shown that it expanded from a total of 231 members and nine churches served by four ministers in 1880 to a membership of 3,375, with 104 churches and 62 ministers (32 ordained) by 1900. During that same period, the church in the state of Montana grew from a membership of 25 in 1890 to a membership of 339, with ten churches and eight ministers by 1900. Doug Johnson, *Adventism in the Pacific Northwest: Since the 1860's* (Olympia, WA: American Speedy Printing Center, 1989), 16, 70.

1900, membership stood at 75,767. Further, 12,432 of these members resided outside of North America.⁴⁸ The evangelistic success had added to the pews an overwhelming number of Adventists whose religious background was different from the original New Englanders with a Millerite heritage. The new converts created a tremendous challenge to Adventism in terms of creating and maintaining common ground among the members, fostering group identity, international communication and cooperation, ongoing religious education, and organizational coordination, responsiveness, and flexibility. The basic structures developed in 1863 to promote “church order” for the 3,500 members in the 125 North American Adventist churches were outgrown and unwieldy by the 1890s.⁴⁹

This period was also marked by tremendous growth in the numbers and types of church-related institutions. In addition to the original newspaper, printing operations, and the 125 churches that claimed Adventism in 1863, denominational interest in health, education, and missionary outreach had created a myriad of institutions. Battle Creek Sanitarium had become an imposing structure employing hundreds, and the publishing house was becoming the largest press in all Michigan. Equally impressive were the size and influence of the Tract and Missionary Society. The *SDA Encyclopedia* states, “According to J. N. Loughborough, from 1871 onward almost as many converts were won by the efforts of Tract and Missionary Society lay workers as through the work of the ministry itself.”⁵⁰

Shape of the Ministry

Church growth created a need for an increased number of ministers and required increasing sophistication in preparation for ministry, coordination of efforts, and supervision. From the thirty ministers licensed in 1863, the number grew to 260 by 1880, 400 by 1890, and just under 1,500 by 1900.⁵¹ By then, the ministry had evolved from being a small band of messengers well known to the leaders at the Conference hub in Battle Creek to a legion scattered over several continents. Earlier concerns about efficiency and

⁴⁸Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 132.

⁴⁹Ellen White’s experiences in both Europe and Australia had convinced her of the inadequacy of the church’s structure and the necessity for a general rethinking of its structure and a major reorganization of the various arms of its work. While her call for structural change during the 1901 General Conference is considered the starting point for the changes that were fine-tuned in the early twentieth century, it is important to note that the problems had been so apparent that various church leaders had been experimenting with new patterns of organizing the work since the mid-1880s. Innovations in Europe, South Africa, and Australia all contributed to the 1901 resolution addressing the problems of over-centralization.

⁵⁰*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 10 of The Commentary Reference Series (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1966), svv. “Tract and Missionary Societies.”

⁵¹Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 132.

effectiveness were joined by an increased awareness over matters of pastoral accountability, educational levels, and spiritual fitness to minister.

In 1883, the *Review* published the established policy articulating the path for ordination. The statement began with a brief justification for church oversight of those representing themselves as Seventh-day Adventist ministers:

It is but just that every denomination of Christians should be permitted to determine who shall, and who shall not, represent them in the capacity of public teachers. In doing so it is customary to employ credentials and licenses. These are certificates issued by competent authority, setting forth the fact that the persons holding them are accredited ministers of the denomination issuing the same.

The article then explained the process with finer detail:

Credentials are given to those ministers only who have been ordained. Licenses, on the contrary, are granted to certain persons before their ordination.

Whenever a member of the church feels that it is his duty to labor in the capacity of a preacher of the gospel, he should apply for a license, personally, or through his friends, to either the State Conference Committee, or (in case the State Conference itself is in session) to the Committee on Credentials and Licenses.

Before the license is granted to him, he will be subjected to an examination with a view to ascertaining whether he is sound in matters of doctrine, and qualified both spiritually and intellectually for the work in which he wishes to engage. It is necessary that licenses should be renewed every year.

After an individual has preached acceptably one or more years as a licentiate, it is customary for the State Conference to ordain him, and give him credentials, and a certificate of ordination.⁵²

⁵²The remainder of the policy states that, "These credentials, like licenses, are to be renewed each year. Like licenses, they can also be withdrawn from the individual, even before the year terminates, provided that, in the judgment of the State Conference Committee, the individuals to whom they were granted have proved themselves unworthy of them. Licentiates are not allowed to organize churches or to administer the ordinances of the Lord's house. As efficient laborers are too few in number, and as excessive modesty sometimes prevents those who are well qualified for that work from applying for licenses, churches who have among them individuals who they think would make successful ministers, should by vote recommend them for that purpose to the favorable consideration of the State Conference." W. H. L[ittlejohn], "The Church Manual (Continued)," *Review and Herald* 60, no. 37 (September 11, 1883): 586-587.

*Ellen White's Concern for the Church's Understanding
and Practice of Ministry*

During her final decades of service, Ellen White fought to establish a theology of grace, move the church into being an active incarnation of God's love for humanity, and transform the SDA church structure and understanding of ministry. While Ellen White had provided counsel on the pastoral nature of ministry since 1871, by the 1890s she was actively lobbying for major changes in Adventist ministerial style. She felt that the church needed to re-vision ministry and the role of the minister, believing that the model then employed was insufficient to accomplish the mission of the church. She noted,

I am now writing upon the great mistakes made in extending our labors where we can not look after it, and having a feverish unrest to create new interests and leave the people already raised up to die for want of help. This is the case all over the different states. I tell you there must be more visiting the churches and caring for those already raised up, strengthening the things that are ready to die. . . . Churches are raised up and left to go down while new fields are being entered.⁵³

Concerned about the way churches were started and then left to “ravel out,” she stressed the need to train ministers to do their work more thoroughly, even as she labored to broaden the definition of ministry and the working brief of ministers. In letters to church leaders, as well as in public statements and addresses, she pushed ministers to rethink the responsibilities of their position, to impress upon them that ministry involved more than just preaching. “Merely to preach the Word is not ministry. The Lord desires His ministering servants to occupy a place worthy of the highest consideration. In the mind of God, *the ministry of men and women* existed before the world was created.”⁵⁴ She pointed ministers to Christ as their example in ministry, urging them to adopt his methods. “Our Savior went from house to house, healing the sick, comforting the mourners, soothing the afflicted, speaking peace to the disconsolate.”⁵⁵

In Ellen White's eyes, the mission of the minister was to reach souls for God, and soul-winning required personal labor with individuals. “Many love to preach, but they have very little experience in ministering. Search the Scriptures with the families you visit,”⁵⁶ she wrote. “It is not preaching alone that must be done. Far less preaching is needed. More time should be devoted to patiently educating others, giving the hearers opportunity to

⁵³Ellen G. White, Letter H-1, 1879 (to S. N. Haskell, January 27, 1879), 1; portions repr., *Evangelism*, 323-24.

⁵⁴Ellen G. White, diary entry, Sunday, March 15, 1891, MS 23, 1891, emphasis supplied.

⁵⁵Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers: Instruction for All Who Are “Laborers Together with God”* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915 [1948]), 188.

⁵⁶Ellen G. White, MS 7, 1891, 6. This letter partially documents Ellen White's efforts to expand the concept of ministry in the SDA Church.

express themselves. It is instruction that many need, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little.”⁵⁷ She reflected sadly that “It is very difficult to impress the minds of our ministering brethren with the idea that sermons alone cannot do the work that is needed for our churches.”⁵⁸

Ellen White identified specific components that needed to be regarded as legitimate and essential to the minister’s brief if the mission of the church were to be realized. They included preparation to teach Adventist doctrines and strengthen the faith of both believers and those just exploring Adventism. She considered it important that individuals who possessed these abilities be selected for the ministry:

There should be selected for the work wise, consecrated men who can do a good work in reaching souls. Women also should be chosen who can present the truth in a clear, intelligent, straightforward manner. . . . We need as workers men and women who understand the reasons of our faith, and who realize the work to be done in communicating truth, and who will refuse to speak any words that will weaken the confidence of any soul in the word of God or destroy the fellowship that should exist between those of like faith.⁵⁹

At the same time, she was clear that the minister was to be a shepherd of the flock, not an expositor only. The task facing the expanding church by the last two decades of the century demanded that the ministers be ready to nurture the converted that had found their way into the church. When she addressed a group of ministers, she noted that

There is a word more I had almost forgotten. It is in regard to the influence the minister should exert in his preaching. It is not merely to stand in the desk. His work is but just begun there. It is to enter into the different families, and carry Christ there; to carry his sermons there; to carry them out in his actions and his words. As he visits a family, he should inquire into the condition of that family. Is he the shepherd of the flock? The work of a shepherd is not all done in the desk. He should talk with all the members of the flock; with the parents, to learn their standing; and with the children, to learn theirs. A minister should feed the flock over which God has made him overseer.⁶⁰

An essential part of the minister’s role was visitation in the homes of individuals who showed an interest in public meetings:

When a minister has presented the gospel message from the pulpit, his work is only begun. There is personal work for him to do. He should visit the people in their homes, talking and praying with them in earnestness and humility. There are families who will never be reached by the truths of God’s word unless the stewards of His grace enter their homes and point them to the higher way. . . . Let ministers teach the truth in families, drawing

⁵⁷Ellen G. White, MS 7, 1891, 7; repr., *Evangelism*, 338.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ellen G. White, Letter D-142, 1909, 8; repr., *Evangelism*, 472.

⁶⁰Ellen G. White, “Address to Ministers,” *Review and Herald* 37, no. 24 (May 30, 1871): 187.

close to those for whom they labor; and as they thus co-operate with God, He will clothe them with spiritual power.⁶¹

She made the case even stronger by naming the willingness to engage in personal ministry as an identifying mark of the legitimate pastor. She was unhappy that

“While in the midst of a religious interest, some neglect the most important part of the work. They fail to visit and become acquainted with those who have shown an interest to present themselves night after night to listen to the explanation of the Scriptures. . . . Ministers who neglect their duty in this respect are not true shepherds of the flock.”⁶²

Ellen White emphasized that giving Bible studies in the home should be regarded as an essential task for the minister. Far from being peripheral or a labor to be carried on by a lesser part of the team, Bible studies were a minister’s work:

To my ministering brethren I would say, By personal labor reach the people where they are. Become acquainted with them. This work cannot be done by proxy. Money loaned or given cannot accomplish it. Sermons from the pulpit cannot do it. Teaching the Scriptures in families,—this is the work of an evangelist, and this work is to be united with preaching. If it is omitted, the preaching will be, to a great extent, a failure.⁶³

She also suggested that a minister’s training should begin with public visitation, where one might be introduced to the community and their needs, spiritual and otherwise. She tied this activity with literature evangelism, which she saw as being a means both to introduce Adventism into the homes of strangers and to acquaint aspiring ministers with the broader community whom they were to reach for God. This work put them face to face with the world of souls looking for a word of hope:

All who wish an opportunity for true ministry, and who will give themselves unreservedly to God, will find in the canvassing work opportunities to speak upon many things pertaining to the future immortal life. The experience thus gained will be of the greatest value to those who are fitting themselves for the work of the ministry. 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.⁶⁴

Ellen White believed that women were ideal for labor in many of these aspects of ministry. She saw that they had been prepared to make the individual contacts and had greater ease entering into the homes and finding out the needs of neighbors. As women, they posed less of a threat to propriety than men

⁶¹Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, 187.

⁶²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948 [1881]), 4: 535-36.

⁶³Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, 188.

⁶⁴Ellen G. White, “Canvassers As Gospel Evangelists,” *Review and Herald* 78, no. 3 (January 15, 1901): 33-34. Ellen White clearly recognized that women had the capacity for being pastors, as is evidenced in this article.

would when entering the domestic sphere during hours when husbands were absent. While she recognized the limitations that motherhood and household duties imposed on women's time, she was convinced that their labor in the ministry was needed. She did not believe that accepting the ministerial call resulted in a neglect of "women's duties." Instead she pressed for wages for ministering women so that they could pay for domestic assistance. Preferring the established Adventist pattern of husband/wife teams, she pressed this model: "When it is possible, let the minister and his wife go forth together. The wife can often labor by the side of her husband, accomplishing a noble work. She can visit the homes of the people and help the women in these families in a way that her husband cannot."⁶⁵

Despite preference for couples' ministry, Ellen White sketched a model beyond that of the team approach currently being used where only the husband was licensed and paid when she advised the conferences to take additional action:

Select women who will act an earnest part. The Lord will use intelligent women in the work of teaching. And let none feel that these women, who understand the Word, and who have ability to teach, should not receive remuneration for their labors. They should be paid as verily as are their husbands. There is a great work for women to do in the cause of present truth. Through the exercise of womanly tact and a wise use of their knowledge of Bible truth, they can remove difficulties that our brethren cannot meet. We need women workers to labor in connection with their husbands, and should encourage those who wish to engage in this line of missionary effort.⁶⁶

She outlined a plan whereby even women available for only part-time ministry were ordained for labor. Pressing the variety of paths through which evangelism should be pursued, she said,

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. . . . This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work.⁶⁷

The "grand work" of reaching all with the message of God's redemptive love required the redefinition of ministry and the recognition of the significance of the several arenas of outreach. She saw the need for consecrated women in each of these arenas. As she noted in a 1909 letter on the need to send more missionaries to the cities, "Not merely one or two

⁶⁵Ellen G. White, Letter D-142, 1909, 5; repr., *Evangelism*, 491.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ellen G. White, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," *Review and Herald* 72, no. 28 (July 9, 1895): 433-434.

men are called to do this work, but many men and women who have ability to preach and teach the word.”⁶⁸

It is also noteworthy that despite the fact that the adoption of orphans was encouraged among Adventists at this time, she did not advise women who were actively laboring in ministry to shift their efforts to the home sphere. Instead, she saw their public work as having priority, and she counseled that it must not be abandoned for childrearing. She noted that “the enemy would be pleased to have the women whom God could use to help hundreds, binding up their time and strength on one helpless little mortal, that requires constant care and attention.”⁶⁹ Ellen White was clear: It hurt the cause of the message when women fit for ministry became tied totally to the domestic sphere with the care of children, rendering themselves unavailable for public evangelism. As sacred as the duty of the home sphere was, it was not to be used as an excuse to exclude women from the wider field of ministry.

Official Church Defenses of Women in Ministry

During the final two decades of the nineteenth century, the *Review and Herald* continued to provide periodical education to its readers on the topic of what Elder George Tenney called “woman’s relation to the cause of Christ.” During this time, N. J. Bowers, W. H. Littlejohn, G. W. Morse, George Starr, G. C. Tenney, and two-time General Conference President George I. Butler published articles defending women in evangelism/ministry, as well as republishing James White’s earlier defense published in 1879.⁷⁰ Repeatedly, they answered the supposed biblical objections to women by applying the Adventist hermeneutic. They pointed out that Paul’s letters needed to be understood in their cultural context and that some injunctions were meant for specific circumstances and not to be seen as binding upon Christian actions for all times. They also utilized all the ideas of any biblical writer, thus tending towards internal consistency, possible only when all statements of an author on a particular topic were evaluated together.

The flood of new converts swelling the ranks of Adventism responded with surprise and skepticism when they encountered the leadership roles

⁶⁸Ellen G. White, Letter D-142, 1909, 4.

⁶⁹Ellen G. White, “The Laborer Is Worthy of His Hire,” MS 43a, 1898, 4.

⁷⁰James White, “Women in the Church,” *Review and Herald* 65, no. 9 (February 28, 1888): 139. This article and G. C. Tenney’s “Woman’s Relation to the Cause of Christ,” *Review and Herald* 71, no. 23 (June 5, 1894): 362 were reprinted from earlier publication, and editors frequently referred questioners to these articles as definitive of the Adventist position. G. W. Morse, in his introduction to James White’s article on 1 Cor 14:34-35, wrote that the article “should be sufficiently conclusive to dispel all doubts in the minds of any.” Other articles include N. J. Bowers, “May Women Publicly Labor in the Cause of Christ?” *Review and Herald* 57, no. 24 (June 14, 1881): 372; George B. Starr, “Does Paul Contradict Himself?” *Review and Herald* 56, no. 25 (December 16, 1880): 388; George I. Butler, “Prayer and Social Worship,” *Review and Herald* 71, no. 23 (June 5, 1894): 362-363.

Adventist women played. The *Review* was the mediator between local church practices and the converts' concerns. When *Review* readers sent letters to the editor expressing these concerns, their questions were addressed in a regular section of the paper, often bearing the title, "In the Question Chair" or "To Correspondents," or "Scripture Questions."⁷¹ The issues revolved around the Pauline passages that appear to restrict the role of women in the church. A couple of these inquiries demonstrate the struggle and the way in which the replies were formulated. When "An 'Inquirer'" wrote, "Please give an explanation of 1 Cor. 14: 34, 35. I cannot reconcile Paul's language with the idea of sisters preaching," the respondent answered,

But what about Paul's language in 1 Cor. 11:4, 5? "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head." This prophesying is generally understood to include a public exposition of the prophecies. It certainly denotes some public exercise; for it is to the edification of the Church. 1 Cor. 14:4. Here, then, is instruction in regard to the public speaking of women in the Church. But does Paul contradict himself in chap. 14: 34, 35?—By no means. This latter was to correct some irregularity and disorder which were growing upon the Church.⁷²

The second example of a query over women's role in the church, or "woman's position," as outlined in 1 Cor 11:10, was answered in terms of specific situations and social conventions that are inapplicable in Western culture, and the underscoring of the spiritual equality of all:

Ans. — This verse stands as a conclusion from what has been said before; and in the preceding verses the apostle speaks of certain things which are decorous and becoming in a woman. The things he specifically mentions are, wearing the hair long and having a covering upon the head. In that country, and in that age of the world, for a woman to lay aside either of these, was a badge of infamy. For this reason, in their gatherings for religious worship, which were ordained by the Lord, and were objects of regard by divine beings, and where, of course, the angels would be present (Heb. 1:14), it was important that no impropriety be tolerated, but that all be properly attired.

⁷¹"An 'Inquirer' Writes [1 Cor. 14: 34, 35.]," *Review and Herald* 67, no. 14 (April 8, 1890): 224; "Answers to Correspondents, # 467. — Women in the Church," *Review and Herald* 72, no. 3 (January 15, 1895): 42; S. N. H[askell], "The Supremacy of One Prophet above Another in the Church at Corinth," *Review and Herald* 71, no. 15 (April 10, 1894): 233-234; "In the Question Chair, # 152. — Women Speaking in Meeting, 1 Cor. 14:34, 35," *Review and Herald* 69, no. 8 (February 23, 1892): 118-119; "In The Question Chair, # 256. — Woman's Position. 1 Cor. 11:10," *Review and Herald* 69, no. 42 (October 25, 1892): 664; "Answers to Correspondents, # 445. — Women in the Churches," *Review and Herald* 71, no. 47 (November 27, 1894): 747 [Refers questioner to Tenney's article published June 5, 1894.]; "To Correspondents, #7. — Will you please give a full exposition of 1 Cor. 14:34, 35 and 1 Tim. 2:11, 12. The Bible-workers in this city have these texts to meet. Please turn on the light," *Review and Herald* 73, no. 4 (January 28, 1896): 58.

⁷²"An 'Inquirer' Writes," *Review and Herald* 67, no. 14 (April 8, 1890): 224.

By the word, “power,” is doubtless to be understood the covering upon the woman’s head as a token of her subjection, not to a degrading position of servitude under the hand of her husband, but subjection to that rule which the Lord had ordained as order and propriety in his church. The gospel raised women to a spiritual equality with men; and it seems that some of the Corinthian women took advantage of this, to make undue assumptions and go to disgraceful extremes. This accounts for some of the expressions in this chapter, and that much-mooted instruction in chapter 14: 34, 35. The principle holds good still; but owing to the lapse of centuries, and the difference in customs between the East and the West, it is not now to be carried out by the same observances.⁷³

Similar sentiments appear in the several “Scripture Questions” responses where the writers emphasize that “the restrictions of the apostle would not apply to countries where the speaking of women in public is not regarded as objectionable.”⁷⁴

To summarize, the articles and responses in the *Review* during this period to questions concerning the role of women in the Church remained consistent with the earlier periods. The editors of the paper recognized the growing concern over the issue introduced by the changing membership and attempted to educate their readers in terms of proper hermeneutics, including attention

⁷³“In the Question Chair, #256.—Woman’s Position. 1 Cor. 11:10,” *Review and Herald* 69, no. 42 (October 25, 1892): 664.

⁷⁴“Scripture Questions, #137. – The Speaking of Women in the Churches: Will you please give the meaning of 1 Cor. 14:34? Ans. A difficult thing to do to my own satisfaction. It is certain, however, that the apostle does not mean to prohibit altogether the speaking of women in the public congregation, since in 1 Cor. 11:5 he prescribes certain rules which should govern them in the matter of dress, while thus speaking. There are two explanations which might be given,—first, that the apostle had reference to questioning and disputing with the men publicly, on questions of conscience and doctrine (14:35); secondly, that the apostle prescribed this stringent rule for the Corinthian church because the Greeks permitted none but the lower order of women to speak in their assemblies; consequently, had the Christian women of Corinth departed from the public standard of taste in that matter, they would have prejudiced the interests of Christianity itself. If the latter view be correct, then of course the restrictions of the apostle would not apply to countries where the speaking of women in public is not regarded as objectionable.” *Review and Herald* 60, no. 25 (June 19, 1883): 394. Another example of the “cultural context” answer appears in, “To Correspondents, F. H. Morrison: We think 1 Cor. 11: 5, 6 has reference to the customs of society at the time the language was written. With the Greeks and Romans in those days it was usual for all the women of modest deportment and virtuous characters, to wear a veil. Only those of an opposite character appeared without them. Hence a woman so appearing, dishonored her head, or husband, verse 3. By the law of Moses, a woman suspected of adultery was deprived of her veil. Num. 5:18. And if a woman refused to wear a veil, let her, says Paul, be shorn (of her hair); this being, at that time, a punishment for adultery. If the woman would persist in presenting an immodest appearance, let her wear the badge of infamy by being shaven.” *Review and Herald* 36, no. 7 (August 2, 1870): 53.

to cultural concerns when various passages were written and the inclusive call to mission. At a time when Adventists believed they were seeing the closing events of earth's history, the emphasis was on making a final, worldwide call to humanity. There was a work for all to do, and the church could ill-afford to discriminate against the calls to service given by the Holy Spirit.

Church Practices: Women Preachers and Evangelists

Despite the fact that many new converts were struggling with the role of women, the church increased its grants of licenses to women during this time. Church yearbooks list a number of women with ministerial license, including Anna Fulton, Ellen S. Lane, Julia Owen, Libbie Collins, Hattie Enoch, Libbie Fulton, Lizzie Post, Anna Johnson, Ida W. Ballenger, Helen L. Morse, Ruie Hill, Ida W. Hibben, Mrs. S. E. Pierce, Flora Plummer, Margaret Caro, Mrs. S.A.H. Lindsey,⁷⁵ Sarepta Miranda Irish Henry, Lulu Wightman, Edith Bartlett, Hetty Haskell, Mina Robinson, Carrie V. Hansen, Emma Hawkins, Mrs. E. R. Williams, and, of course, Ellen White. These women were licensed variously in Minnesota, Michigan, Kentucky, Tennessee, Kansas, Illinois, Vermont, Iowa, New Zealand, New York, British Conference, General Conference, and Utah.⁷⁶ Other women, who did not apply for licenses, labored alongside their husbands as full- or part-time ministers. Ellen White mentioned the work of Mrs. Robinson, noting, "Here we found Sister Robinson doing the work of ministering, fully as valuable as any ordained minister."⁷⁷

Yet the hiring and licensing of these women do not show the full picture of either the numbers of women actually doing ministry or the situation of women in ministry during the last decade of the century. The 1890s were a very difficult time for the Adventist Church. Internal tensions and power struggles between Dr. John H. Kellogg and William C. White (speaking both for himself and for Ellen White), theological controversies over pantheism and perfectionism, and tensions between the field and the General Conference over issues of autonomy and control added to the complexity of receiving and educating new converts into Adventist culture. Reeling under the financial impact of a major and long-lasting recession in the 1890s and requests by church members for return of monies lent to the church, administrators struggled to keep faith with church commitments. The church had sent a flood of foreign missionaries during the late 1880s and the 1890s, started new evangelistic efforts in the South, and invested in a burgeoning number of city missions, fledgling schools, and medical institutions. Additionally, efforts to halt the National Sunday Bill and aid Adventists who had been imprisoned by state Sunday laws required serious economic resources. The organization was

⁷⁵Brian E. Strayer. "Sarah A. H. Lindsey: Advent Preacher on the Southern Tier," *Adventist Heritage* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 16-25.

⁷⁶This list is only a partial list, and it was compiled from the church Yearbooks. For a discussion of this list and the women who served during this period, see "Women Licensed as Ministers, 1878-1975," *Spectrum* 16, no. 3 (August, 1985): 60.

⁷⁷Ellen G. White, MS 182, 1898, 7.

overcommitted, overextended, and faced the pressure of the need to give the world its final warning call. As such, it is not surprising that it was more than willing to accept the sacrificial service of women who served as ministers without recognition or pay.

It was Ellen White who spoke to the injustice of the situation. She saw it as part of her role as a prophet and meant to be as true to that part of her calling as every other. She noted, "Disagreeable though the duty may be, I am to reprove the oppressor, and plead for justice. I am to present the necessity of maintaining justice and equity in all our institutions."⁷⁸ She outlined the general principles of the use of tithes generally understood and accepted throughout the denomination and then applied them to women workers: "The tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women."⁷⁹ She spelled out the situation clearly:

The ministers are paid for their work, and this is well. And if the Lord gives the wife as well as the husband the burden of labor, and if she devotes her time and her strength to visiting from family to family, opening the Scriptures to them, although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon her, she is accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry. Should her labors be counted as nought, and her husband's salary be no more than that of the servant of God whose wife does not give herself to the work, but remains at home to care for her family?

While I was in America, I was given light upon this subject. I was instructed that there are matters that need to be considered. *Injustice has been done* to women who labor just as devotedly as their husbands, and who are recognized by God as being as necessary to the work of ministry as their husbands. The method of paying men-laborers and not their wives, is a plan not after the Lord's order. Injustice is thus done. A mistake is made. The Lord does not favor this plan. This arrangement, if carried out in our Conferences, is liable to discourage our sisters from qualifying themselves for the work they should engage in. . . .

Women who work in the cause of God should be given wages proportionate to the time they give to the work. God is a God of justice, and if the ministers receive a salary for their work, their wives, who devote themselves just as interestedly to the work as laborers together with God, should be paid in addition to the wages their husbands receive, notwithstanding that they may not ask this. As the devoted minister and his wife engage in the work, they should be paid wages proportionate to the wages of *two distinct workers*, that they may have means to use as they shall see fit in the cause of God. The Lord has put his spirit upon them both. If the husband should die, and leave his wife, she is fitted to continue her work in the cause of God, and receive wages for the labor she performs.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Ellen G. White, "A Messenger," *Review and Herald* 83, no. 30 (July 26, 1906): 8-9; repr., *Selected Messages from the writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:33.

⁷⁹MS 149, 1899, 8; repr., *Evangelism*, 492.

⁸⁰"The Laborer is Worthy of His Hire," MS 43a, 1898, Manuscript Release No. 267; emphasis added.

She brought out specific cases where the women in the work were being mistreated:

These women [Starr, Robinson, Haskell, and Wilson] give their whole time, and are told that they receive nothing for their labors because their husbands receive their wages. I tell them to go forward and all such decisions will be revised. The Word says, "The laborer is worthy of his hire." *When any such decision as this is made, I will in the name of the Lord, protest. I will feel it my duty to create a fund from my tithe money, to pay these women who are accomplishing just as essential work as the ministers are doing, and this tithe I will reserve for work in the same line as that of the ministers, hunting for souls, fishing for souls.* I know that the faithful women should be paid wages as is considered proportionate to the pay received by ministers. They carry the burden of souls, and should not be treated unjustly. These sisters are giving their time to educating those newly come to the faith and hire their own work done, and pay those who work for them. All these things must be adjusted and set in order, and justice be done to all.⁸¹

Ellen White was not reluctant to clarify misconceptions that arose concerning the roles some women played in the ministry that were regarded as a secondary or lesser part of ministry than pulpit evangelism, therefore less eligible for payment from the tithe set apart for ministers. "Women, as well as men, are needed in the work that must be done. Those women who give themselves to the service of the Lord, who labor for the salvation of others by doing house-to-house work, which is as taxing as, and more taxing, than standing before a congregation, should receive payment for their labor."⁸² As she noted, "If women do the work that is not the most agreeable to many of those who labor in word and doctrine, and if their works testify that they are accomplishing a work that has been manifestly neglected, should not such labor be looked upon as being as rich in results as the work of the ordained ministers? Should it not command the hire of the laborer?" Lest conference leaders feel that they could still exercise their own prerogative on this issue, she continued further, invoking the authority of God:

This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that they are essential to carry the truth into families. Their work is just the work that must be done. In many respects a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot. The cause would suffer great loss without this kind of labor. Again and again the Lord has shown me that women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which he has appointed them as are men."

During this period of recession and economic hardship, it was more than tempting for conference leaders to reduce the financial load that came from supporting ministers by only paying the husbands in the husband-wife teams, especially as they regarded preaching as *the* significant form of ministry. Ellen White spoke to correct this misunderstanding, pointing out that, "A great

⁸¹To Brethren Irwin, Evans, Smith, and Jones, April 21, 1898, Letter J-137, 1898, p. 9 ; emphasis added.

⁸²MS 149, 1899, 8.

work is to be done in our world, and every talent is to be used in accordance with righteous principles. If a woman is appointed by the Lord to do a certain work, her work is to be estimated according to its value. Every laborer is to receive his or her just due.” Not content to rest there, she directly addressed those in charge that felt comfortable accepting the devotion and sacrificial attitudes of women in ministry. She demanded that they remediate their own practices of allowing women to give themselves away to the work, while paying men for the same efforts, labeling such practice as robbery hated by God:

It may be thought to be a good plan to allow persons to give talent and earnest labor to the work of God, while they draw nothing from the treasury. But this is making a difference, and selfishly withholding from such workers their due. God will not put his sanction on any such plan. Those who invented this method may have thought that they were doing God service by not drawing from the treasury to pay these God-fearing, soul-loving laborers. But there will be an account to settle by and by, and then those who now think this exaction, this partiality in dealing, a wise scheme, will be ashamed of their selfishness. God sees these things in a light altogether different from the light in which finite men view them.

Those who work earnestly and unselfishly, be they men or women, bring sheaves to the Master; and the souls converted by their labor will bring their tithes to the treasury. When self-denial is required because of a dearth of means, do not let a few hard-working women do all the sacrificing. Let all share in making the sacrifice. God declares, I hate robbery for burnt offering.⁸³

*Ellen White on Ministry and Women in the
Closing Years of the Nineteenth Century*

Ellen White spent her life in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After the Great Disappointment, she became a messenger, as Adventist ministers were then called, travelling from town to town, encouraging the wavering with a word of hope. With James White, she worked to make the theology of the church more Christ-centered, redefine evangelism from public debate to Christian compassion and care for the suffering, and make the ministry more pastoral. While Ellen White referred to herself as “ordained by God,” and made the point that she did not need any further ordination from the hands of men, she carried regular church credentials identifying her as an ordained minister and received a minister’s salary from the church.⁸⁴

It may also be noted that Ellen White exercised a wide range of ministerial functions. As well as preaching, teaching, and correcting laity, ministers, and church leaders, she examined ministers who applied for

⁸³MS 47, 1898, 8-9; repr., *Evangelism*, 491-492.

⁸⁴A copy of Ellen White’s credentials appears in Pat Habada and Rebecca Brillhart, eds., *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women* (Langley Park, MD: TEAM Press, 1995), 308.

licenses and ordination.⁸⁵ Women were among those whom she examined and variously approved or counseled as to their individual readiness for the licensed ministry. As she would note in the *Review*, it took more than a desire to be recognized as a minister and more than a thorough knowledge of the Advent message. She considered not only patterns of work and indications of solid character, but evidence of the impress of the Holy Spirit. “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.”⁸⁶

Ellen White challenged church ideology and praxis as she worked to establish new ways of understanding the nature of ministry and the work of the ministers. Although James White and other church leaders had stated earlier that men should be in charge of managing the business matters of the church, changing circumstances and evolving understanding led Ellen White to speak emphatically in the opposite direction. By 1879 her counsel on even this point was for appointment to service based on individual gift rather than gender. As she noted,

It is not always men who are best adapted to the successful management of a church. If faithful women have more deep piety and true devotion than men, they could indeed by their prayers and their labors, do more than men who are unconsecrated in heart and in life.⁸⁷

As Ellen White worked to transform Adventist ministry in the later part of the nineteenth century from the earlier pattern of evangelistic efforts in new areas to the nurture and care of established congregations, she became increasingly vocal on the issues that surrounded women in ministry. She made it clear that the church needed the ministrations of women in the pastoral setting as well as in field evangelism:

There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God. Husband and wife may unite in this work, and when it is possible, they should. The way is open for consecrated women.⁸⁸

She repeatedly drew the attention of the brethren to ways in which the spread of the gospel would be hindered until women were full participants in ministry. She believed that women were in fact ideally suited for the new forms of ministries that she was trying to regularize because she saw them as central to success in church mission. Her concerns were not that women were stepping out of their sphere by serving as ministers and evangelists, but

⁸⁵“I was unable to sit up yesterday, for with much writing, reining myself up to meet different ones who put in requests for license, speaking in public, and showing the unfitness of different ones to attempt to teach others the truth, it was too much for my strength.” To Edson and Emma White, written from Salem, OR, June 14, 1880, W-32a, 1880.

⁸⁶Ellen G. White, “Canvassers as Gospel Evangelists,” *Review and Herald* 78, no. 3 (January 15, 1901): 33-34.

⁸⁷Letter J-33, 1879, 2 (undated, to Brother Johnson).

⁸⁸MS 43a, 1898,4; repr., *Evangelism*, 472.

that women's reluctance to go into the ministry was crippling the progress of the cause. In 1898 she wrote, "Christ speaks of women who helped him in presenting the truth before others, and Paul also speaks of women who labored with him in the gospel. But how very limited is the work done by those who could do a large work if they would."⁸⁹ Her encouragement to Sister S.M.I. Henry, an Adventist convert who was a famous evangelist for the Women's Christian Temperance Union, captured her desire for women to use the gifts and talents given to them: "You have many ways opened before you. Address the crowd whenever you can; hold every jot of influence you can by any association that can be made the means of introducing the leaven to the meal. Every man and every woman has a work to do for the Master."⁹⁰

While neither Ellen White nor the other women in ministry provided the public defense of women's right to serve as regularly licensed ministers during the formative years of the Adventist Church, by the final two decades of the century (after James White's death), Ellen White became more proactive on this issue. In the face of the changes in the membership of the church, the strong hold of the Cult of True Womanhood on social conventions and attitudes, and increasing conservatism on gender issues emerging in certain religious circles, Ellen White found it necessary to refute the widely held opinions that women were unfit for ministry in the public arena. Disputing contemporary claims that women would "de-sex" themselves and become "mannish" if they pursued higher education or held positions of authority in the public arena, she answered the charges head-on:

Woman, if she wisely improves her time and her faculties, relying upon God for wisdom and strength, may stand on an equality with her husband as adviser, counselor, companion, and co-worker, and yet lose none of her womanly grace or modesty. She may elevate her own character, and just as she does this she is elevating and ennobling the characters of her family, and exerting a powerful though unconscious influence upon others around her. *Why should not women cultivate the intellect? Why should they not answer the purpose of God in their existence? Why may they not understand their own powers, and realizing that these powers are given of God, strive to make use of them to the fullest extent in doing good to others, in advancing the work of reform, of truth and real goodness, in the world? Satan knows that women have a power of influence for good or for evil; therefore he seeks to enlist them in his cause.*⁹¹

Women in Ministry and Ordination: Conclusion

As do many world-wide churches, the Seventh-day Adventist Church today faces great challenges as we endeavor to maintain a sense of unity in the face of great diversity. Being a global church means that the church is comprised

⁸⁹Letter H-31, 1894, 14; repr., *Evangelism*, 465.

⁹⁰Ellen G. White's letter to S.M.I. Henry containing this quote was published in the "Women's Gospel Work" section of the *Review and Herald*. See "The Excellency of the Soul," *Review and Herald* 76, no. 19 (May 9, 1899): 293.

⁹¹Ellen G. White, "Influence of Woman," *Good Health* 15, no. 6 (June 1880): 174-75 (emphasis supplied).

of individuals with very different experiences who have been socialized to accept varying social arrangements regarding the relationships between races, classes, castes, and genders. Fortunately, when we come to these issues, we are not without guidance from our own church heritage.

From the beginning of Adventism, our leaders and pioneers made it clear that God distributed spiritual gifts among all the faithful according to his own purpose and wisdom. These gifts were to be embraced and utilized for the edification of the church. The faithful utilization of one's gifts for the furtherance of the gospel was part of God's plan for human redemption. It was necessary both for the work and for the individual entrusted with the gift. Additionally, the presence of the gifts of the Spirit, with the sons and daughters prophesying, was viewed as the mark of the Holy Spirit's presence and affirmation of the church. Women speaking, preaching, and assuming spiritual leadership positions alongside their brethren was seen as a significant feature of the church in the end times. The founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church both recognized and celebrated the partnership of men and women in the final days of earth's history. While social and legal factors caused them to hesitate over women's ordination to the pastoral ministry, as did some other Christians, they moved ahead with ordination to the office of deacon, preparing the way for ordination to other offices. They left women's ordination to pastoral ministry to a time and place where it would not create social or legal difficulties when women exercised this function.²²

We can speak with great certainty that the Adventist heritage necessitates that we expect that God will continue to give spiritual gifts to the church. Men and women will both continue to be called to provide important messages from God for our own education, correction, encouragement, and consolation, and sound God's message to the larger world. The whole of Scripture is a sure guide where the diversity of our backgrounds creates uncertainty as to the meaning of individual texts. This gives a very clear vision of the God of love whom we serve, and the inclusive community he is calling into being. We have received a heritage that is rich in instruction on spiritual growth and the necessity to follow the light we have been given. And despite the fact that we have only existed as a church for about a century and a half, the lives and words of Adventist pioneers have left us "surrounded by a cloud of witnesses" to faithful Christian living.

From these faithful pioneers, we have a legacy of meeting challenges, change, and division with prayer, study, and a willingness to move forward on our pilgrim journey. From them we have learned that with our feet firmly planted on the path leading homeward, and our eyes on Jesus, we need not yield to the spirit of fear, even when new light causes controversy and

²²It is important to note that even by the last two decades of the century, when a few churches had made the move to ordain women, that action was neither socially approved nor uniformly legal. In 1885, the *White Pine County News* reported that Massachusetts had passed a law stating that weddings performed by women would not be legally recognized. News Note, *White Pine County News* 19, no. 46 (March 14, 1885): 4.

demands that we move beyond the familiar ground where we have been resting comfortably. As Ellen White showed us, the people of God are “constantly obtaining a clearer understanding”:

Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God’s word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion.

The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God’s people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what.⁹³

While currently there is controversy around the issue creating agitation, that does not mean that inclusive ordination practices must divide us or threaten church unity. We can rely on James White’s 1858 counsel that it is the acceptance of the gifts of the Spirit that brings us into unity.⁹⁴ The reexamination of our current ordination practices is an opportunity to explore the possibility that we need to move forward. While holding to a former practice is interpreted as a sign of conservatism, perhaps, as M. W. Howard noted in 1868, “the conservatism should be in another direction.”⁹⁵ The conservatism we need is one that preserves our identity as a pilgrim people, journeying toward our eternal home. As pilgrims, we abandon many beliefs and attitudes based on the customs and traditions our culture has given us as we press forward. At various points in our journey, we must stop briefly and reappraise our practices in light of biblical truth. We must be certain that we, like the Advent pioneers, follow closely the admonitions given to all Christians: “Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess 5:19-21). Preparation to live in the City

⁹³She also added, “When God’s people are at ease and satisfied with their present enlightenment, we may be sure that He will not favor them. It is His will that they should be ever moving forward to receive the increased and ever-increasing light which is shining for them. The present attitude of the church is not pleasing to God. There has come in a self-confidence that has led them to feel no necessity for more truth and greater light.” “The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration,” *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948 [1889]), 5: 706-9.

⁹⁴James White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4,” *Review and Herald* 11, no. 9 (January 7, 1858): 68-69.

⁹⁵M. W. Howard, “Woman As A Co-Worker,” *Review and Herald* 32, no. 9 (August 18, 1868): 133.

of God requires willingness to shed even our most treasured predispositions and certainties as we conform ourselves to God's way. As Ellen White noted, "We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn."⁹⁶

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⁹⁶Ellen G. White, "Search the Scriptures," *Review and Herald* 69, no. 30 (July 26, 1892): 465-466; repr., *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Assn., 1946): 37.