

**APPENDIX B**  
**ON THE UNIQUE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH**  
**A STATEMENT OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST**  
**THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

*Preamble*

We, the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, affirm that Christ is the only Head of the Church (Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:18). Therefore, while there exists legitimate leadership in the Church, no other human being may rightfully claim a headship role in the Church. As Head of the Church, Christ provides the ultimate manifestation of God’s love (Eph 5:23, 25), demonstrating and vindicating God’s moral government of love (Rom 3:4, 25–26; 5:8), and thus defeating the counterfeit government of the usurping “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 16:11; cf. *DA* 758; *2T* 2:211).

*God’s Moral Government of Love*

Christ’s headship in the Church is inextricably bound up with the love of God and is itself the ultimate explication of God’s love for the world (John 3:16; 15:13; Rom 5:8). As the sole “head of the church,” Christ “loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:23, 25).<sup>1</sup> Christ’s demonstration of divine love as Head of the Church directly reflects God’s moral government of love, within which the law is a transcript of God’s character and, conversely, love is itself the fulfillment of God’s law (Matt 22:37–39; Rom 13:8; cf. *TMK* 366).

Since love requires moral freedom, God does not exercise His headship power or authority to coerce or determine the moral will of His created beings. God permitted rebellion, at the highest cost to Himself, because He desires willing obedience that is motivated by love rather than fear. Such voluntary obedience could not be obtained by the exercise of power or authority, but can only be freely given. In this way, God’s government is based on freely bestowed mutual love wherein God does not deterministically impose His will, but does hold intelligent creatures morally accountable to His perfect law of love.

Accordingly, rather than exercising His infinite power to unilaterally prevent or overturn the rebellion by removing the freedom necessary for a genuine love relationship, God has allowed the enemy’s counterfeit government to manifest itself, while actively demonstrating the nature of His moral government of love in direct and striking contrast. Whereas the enemy grasps for power and domination, Christ, who possesses all power, does not dominate, determine, or coerce but “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant [*doulos*] . . . He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:7–9, NKJV). In this way, Christ, the unique Head of the Church, “demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Consequently, God’s government of unselfish love is clearly and supremely manifested.

46 *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan*

47 The Great Controversy originated with Satan's direct attack against the nature  
48 and role of Christ in heaven, seeking to displace Christ and exalt himself to be  
49 like God (Isa 14:12–14; [Original page 2] Ezek 28:12–19; cf. Rev 12:7–9).  
50 In the history of the Great Controversy, the usurping "ruler of this world"  
51 (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. 2 Cor 4:4), although defeated at the cross,  
52 continues his quest to exalt himself by dominating others. He attempts to  
53 replace God's government of love with an alternative form of government that  
54 grasps for a domineering, self-seeking authority. He seeks to replace Christ  
55 as the Head (2 Thess 2:3–4), injuring both Christ, the sole Head of the true  
56 Church, and Christ's corporate body, His Church.

57 From the second century onward, post-Apostolic Christianity gradually  
58 implemented a system of church government that reflected Rome's conception  
59 of authority as the power to arbitrarily command and coerce obedience and  
60 replaced the headship of Christ with the headship of mere humans. This  
61 counterfeit system of church governance was (1) hierarchical, based on a chain  
62 of command with a monarchical bishop at the "head" of the Church, with  
63 complete and final control over its affairs; (2) sacramental, meaning that the  
64 spiritual life of believers, including their very salvation, depended on ordained  
65 clergymen; (3) elitist (i.e., sacerdotal), meaning that the rite of ordination  
66 (laying on of hands) infused the clergy with special powers; and (4) headship-  
67 oriented, meaning that those who received the rite of ordination were thereby  
68 married to their Church and thus took on "headship" roles in the Church in  
69 place of Christ the Head ("*in persona Christi Capitis*"; cf. *Vicarius Filii Dei*, "in  
70 the place of the Son of God").

71 This system of government has been implemented in various forms,  
72 amounting to the usurpation of Christ's headship in the Church by mere  
73 humans. Indeed, this very system is that of the sea beast of Revelation 13–14  
74 that was granted power and authority by the dragon (13:2, 4), counterfeits  
75 the resurrection of Christ (13:3), accepts the world's worship along with the  
76 dragon (13:4, 8), blasphemes against God and His sanctuary, and exercises  
77 worldwide authority to persecute God's people (13:5–7). This antichrist  
78 power which usurps the role of Christ on earth in keeping with the ancient  
79 attempt by Satan to replace Christ in heaven, seeks to destroy the everlasting  
80 gospel and ultimately commands obedience and enforces false worship. This  
81 culminates in severe persecution of those who refuse to worship the beast and  
82 his image, the remnant who keep the commandments of God and have the  
83 faith of Jesus, those who place no confidence in mere humans with regard to  
84 their salvation (Rev 13:6–8; 14:6–12).

85 The antichrist system of church government sets the stage for the  
86 climactic events of the final conflict in Revelation by, among other things:  
87 (1) asserting authority to appoint humans to Christ-replacing headship  
88 positions in the Church on earth (globally and locally), (2) thereby  
89 claiming to uniquely possess authority to interpret and teach Scripture and  
90 thus have the final word on all matters of doctrine and ecclesial practice

while (3) wielding the spiritual power and authority to command and coerce obedience using both spiritual and civil tools. 91  
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This system of government stands in direct contrast to Christ’s headship and His teaching on the nature of the authority of Church leaders. Christ reflected God’s moral government of love by exemplifying service leadership (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45), including a kind of authority that does not seek to subject the wills of others or enforce obedience. Rather, it leads by the example of service and unselfish love, which draws (rather than compels) [Original page 3] others to willing service in love (Gal 5:13). All authority “in heaven and on earth” was given to Christ (Matt 28:18), but Christ does not remove graciously endowed free will and force His created human beings into obedience, but “loved [us] and gave Himself up for us” (Eph 5:2). The closest the Church comes to acts of enforcement is when it engages in discipline as a corporate body based on very clear teachings of Scripture. Such discipline is not the responsibility of any one person, or even a small group, but must be an action of at least the local congregation. Even then, such discipline does not result in coercion, but in restricting the individual from privileges of membership for a time in order to allow them to come to repentance and restoration (Matt 18:12–17; 1 Cor 5:5). 93  
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Church members (including but not limited to Church leaders) are called to follow Christ’s example of unselfish love (Eph 5:1). They are to have the mind of Christ, which includes the willingness to humble oneself and take on the role of a slave (*doulos*; Phil 2:5–8), or servant (*diakonos*) of Christ (Matt 20:26), even as He humbled Himself to the point of death. Whereas the leaders in the Roman Empire of Christ’s time “lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them” (Matt 20:25), it is not to be so with God’s people but “whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant [*diakonos*], and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave [*doulos*]” (Matt 20:26–27). 110  
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“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Thus, the one who would be great is the one who is the slave [*doulos*] of all (Mark 10:44), and the “greatest among you shall be your servant [*diakonos*]” (Matt 23:11; cf. 9–12). The Bible outlines essential roles of leadership and authority in the Church. However, all leadership within the Church must be servant leadership. First Peter 5:1–3, 5–7 adroitly balances the affirmation of leadership within the Church with the humility that such leadership entails: “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ . . . shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. . . . You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” 120  
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137 (Cf. *AA* 359–60; *DA* 817). Accordingly, Church leaders should be humble  
138 servants. At the same time they should be respected and deeply appreciated  
139 for their diligent labor (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17; cf. Heb 13:7) even as  
140 they also show proper respect to others by demonstrating the mutual love  
141 and regard for others that is to take place among all Christians (1 Pet 2:17).<sup>ii</sup>

142 The authority of those leading the Church is conveyed to them by the  
143 Church. This authority is delegated by Christ to His Church and implemented  
144 through its representative system. Thus appointed leaders become stewards of  
145 a power that should be exercised on behalf of Christ and for the benefit of  
146 those they lead. The functionality of authority does not negate equality among  
147 the members given to the Church by Christ. As the Spirit leads the body of  
148 Christ, not just the few in leadership, those leading out should seek to allow  
149 their decisions to be guided, insofar as possible, by the wisdom and insight  
150 of the group. As [Original page 4] a Church, we thus give decision-making  
151 authority not to any single president or chairperson, but to committees,  
152 where those that lead the group are seeking the wisdom and, where possible,  
153 consensus of the group.

154 God’s remnant, then, will treasure a system of Church government,  
155 authority, and leadership that reflects (as much as is humanly possible) the  
156 ideal of God’s government of love, within which moral freedom is cherished  
157 and leaders are the humble servants of all, even as Christ gave Himself up  
158 for all. This very kind of humble servant leadership, grounded in love, was  
159 perfectly modeled by Christ who, as unique “head of the church . . . loved the  
160 church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:23, 25), supremely exemplifying  
161 God’s character and moral government of love.

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#### *The Unique and Non-Transferable Headship of Christ*

164 Scripture affirms that the Son is eternally equal with the Father and the  
165 Spirit (Col 2:9; Heb 1:3; Matt 28:19; John 1:1; 5:18; 8:58; 14:9; Phil 2:6;  
166 Rom 9:5; Col 1:15–17; *DA* 469, 530; *GC* 495; *7ABC* 437–40; *TM* 252;  
167 *TA* 209; *RH* April 5, 1906). Scripture also affirms the temporary voluntary  
168 functional subordination of Christ the Son in order to accomplish the  
169 salvation of humanity (John 5:19; 8:28, 54; 14:10, 28; 17:5; Phil 2:7–11;  
170 Col 1:18–20; Eph 1:23; Heb 1:8; 1 Cor 15:20–28; Isa 9:6–7; Dan 7:13–14;  
171 Rev 11:15; *PP* 34; *RH*, Oct 29, 1895; *RH*, June 15, 1905; *FLB* 76). The  
172 interpersonal relationships within the Trinity provide the ultimate model of  
173 love and self-sacrifice for us. As such, they do not furnish a model for a top-  
174 down governmental structure for human leadership within the Church.

175 According to Scripture, Christ is the only Head of the Church and the  
176 human members of Christ’s Church collectively (male and female) make  
177 up the body of Christ (Eph 1:22–23; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:19; cf. 1 Cor 11:3;  
178 Col 2:10). Likewise, Ellen White counsels: “Christ, not the minister, is the  
179 head of the church” (*ST* Jan. 27, 1890), and “Christ is the only Head of the  
180 church” (21*MR* 274; cf. *DA* 817, *GC* 51). Neither Scripture nor the writings  
181 of Ellen White apply the language of headship in the Church to anyone other

than Christ. Further, neither Scripture nor the writings of Ellen White endorse any transfer of the role of head in the home to roles within the Church body.

Since Christ is the only Head of the Church, no other can be head of the Church. That is, headship in the Church is unique to Christ and is non-transferable. All those who would follow Christ's method of ministry cannot do so by taking on His role of headship in the Church but by serving others in accordance with the "mind of Christ" (cf. Phil 2:5) and God's moral government of love. Deviation from the unique headship of Christ in the Church follows the enemy's practice of domination and counterfeit government, which directly contradicts and opposes God's moral government of love.

Accordingly, the role of "head" in the home (Eph 5:23) is not transferable to the realm of the Church. Indeed, the idea that the role of "head" in the home would or should transfer to other realms is a fallacious *non sequitur* (that is, the transfer from one realm to another does not follow logically). For example, one's role in the home obviously does not translate into a similar or analogous role in one's workplace.

**[Original page 5]** Beyond the logical problems inherent in the move from head of the home to headship in the Church, two demonstrably biblical rationales exclude such a transfer. First, as already noted, Christ is the *only* Head of the Church. Any attempt at proliferation of "heads" in the Church is thus unacceptable for it is a step toward usurping the unique headship role of Christ, who is the only mediator between God and humans. It is unscriptural to speak of any kind of headship in the Church apart from that of Christ.

No inspired writer teaches the headship of man over woman at the Creation. Rather, Genesis 1 teaches us that male and female participate equally in the image of God, with no hint of pre-fall subordination of one to the other (Gen 1:27). Genesis 2 reinforces Genesis 1 in this regard. Eve's creation from Adam's side shows that she is "to stand by his side as an equal" (Gen 2:21–22; *PP* 46). Although various interpretations of Gen 3:16 have recognized some kind of post-fall disruption of this pre-fall egalitarian ideal, the Bible consistently calls us back to God's original plan for full equality without hierarchy (Song 7:10; Isa 65:17, 25; cf. Gen 1:29–30). Paul's writings, though often misunderstood (2 Pet 3:16), maintain this Eden model (Eph 5:21–23), affirming with the rest of Scripture the Gospel ideal of the ultimate restoration of the Eden model (cf. Matt 19:8; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:28). Ellen White also underlines this redemptive paradigm: "Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband's equal" (*AH* 231). "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" (18*MR* 380). "Infinite wisdom devised the plan of redemption, which places the race on a second probation by giving them another trial" (3*T* 484; cf. *PP* 58–59, and 1*T* 307–308).

Second, every member of the Church is part of the body of Christ, who is the One Head. Since each member of the Church (male or female) is a part of the body of Christ, a member cannot at the same time exercise headship in the Church. In the same way, since Christ is the unique Husband of the Church

228 (Christ's metaphorical bride), the members of the Church cannot themselves  
229 be husbands of the Church but collectively, men and women together, are  
230 the bride of Christ. That the Church as family of God is analogous to human  
231 families only serves to suggest that humans should manifest the love of God  
232 in their family relationships even as Christ does in relationship to His bride.

233 Within the body of Christ, the only Head of the Church, every member  
234 of the Church body receives spiritual gifts: the Spirit gives to "each one  
235 [*hekastos*] individually just as He wills" (1 Cor 12:11). The Holy Spirit is  
236 given to all believers at the time of the end: "And afterwards, I will pour  
237 out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your  
238 old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my  
239 servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days"  
240 (Joel 2:28–30 NIV). Within this very context, Scripture emphatically  
241 excludes the notion of elitism within the Church body of Christ, proclaiming  
242 that "we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether  
243 slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body  
244 is not one member, but many" (1 Cor 12:13–14; cf. Gal 3:28). Thus, no  
245 member of the body is "any the less *a part* of the body" regardless of one's role  
246 (1 Cor 12:15–16) and, indeed, those that are deemed "less honorable, on these  
247 we bestow more abundant honor" (1 Cor 12:23). [Original page 6] In all this,  
248 every gift and ministry is nothing without love, for "the greatest of these is love"  
249 (1 Cor 13:13; cf. all of chapter 13; cf. Rom 12:3–10; Eph 4:11–16). Here again,  
250 the unselfish love that is central to God's moral government should be reflected  
251 in humble service to one another within Christ's body and bride, the Church.

252 This is reflected in Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief No. 14,  
253 "Unity in the Body of Christ," which reads in part: "The church is one body  
254 with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.  
255 In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and  
256 nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and  
257 female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one  
258 Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we  
259 are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation."

260 There is no third category between the Head and body of Christ, or  
261 between the corresponding bridegroom (Christ) and bride (the Church). The  
262 minister is not to be separate from the body of Christ, but is likewise a member  
263 of Christ's body and thus plays a non-elitist role in service to and alongside  
264 the other members that corresponds to the individual's Spirit-bestowed gifts  
265 and accords with the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5–9; Rev 1:6; 5:10;  
266 cf. Ex 19:5–6). Because it is the Spirit who gives gifts to each one (male  
267 and female) as He wills (1 Cor 12:11; cf. 12, 18, 19, 27–31; Joel 2:28–29;  
268 Acts 2:18; Rom 12:4–8; Eph 4:11–12; 1 Pet 4:10), the Church confers no  
269 spiritual powers or gifts on anyone but merely recognizes the gifts that God has  
270 granted and facilitates corresponding opportunities for ministry within the body  
271 of Christ. Leadership ministries within the Church are facilitated by the Church  
272 body as a recognition of the particular Spirit-given gifts and characteristics  
273 of servant leadership that reflect God's moral government of unselfish love



(cf. Phil 2:5–8). In this way, both individually and collectively the Church is to complete its mission of proclaiming the Three Angels’ Messages and revealing God’s character of love, the last revelation of God’s mercy to the world (COL 415).

In sum, any form of headship claimed by a mere human, whether male or female, usurps the sole headship of Christ over the Church. Christian service, including Church leadership, is to reflect but never usurp Christ’s leadership. Thus, while Christ’s *manner of leadership* is to be reflected by believers, Christ’s *particular role of leadership* is unique and not to be encroached upon by any mere human. Christ alone is the Head of the Church body, of which all Christians are members and submitted to Him.

No human leader, then, may rightfully assume a headship role within the Church; the highest level to which any leaders can “ascend” corresponds directly to the depths to which they are willing to descend in loving and humble service, giving themselves for Christ’s body even as Christ gave himself for his body and bride, his beloved Church, the object of “His supreme regard” (2SAT 215).

#### *Affirmations and Denials*

1. We affirm that there is only one Head of the Church, Christ, and this headship in the Church is non-transferable and inimitable. Thus, Christ’s particular role of [Original page 7] leadership is unique.
2. We deny that any human can rightly assume a headship role within the Church.
3. We affirm that leadership in the Church should be modeled after Christ’s servant leadership and grounded in love, with the recognition that Christ’s manner of leadership is to be reflected by Christian leaders.
4. We deny any Church government that results in sacramental, elitist, and headship-oriented leadership, which are counterfeits of Christ’s moral government of love and usurp His unique role and authority as Head of the Church (His body) and husband of the Church (His wife).
5. We affirm that Church leaders possess stewardship responsibilities of the affairs of the Church, carrying out the decisions of the Church made in committee and business sessions.
6. We deny that any mere human is invested with final decision-making authority in regards to Church teaching, ritual, or doctrine.
7. We affirm the priesthood of all believers along with the high priesthood of Christ and that no other mediator is needed between God and humans.
8. We deny any elevation of Church leaders as mediators between God and humans or as head of or in the Church.

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<sup>i</sup>Unless indicated otherwise, the biblical text is quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1995).

<sup>ii</sup>It is worth noting that some statements that refer to leadership roles within the Church use language that many English versions translate as “rule.” For example, 1 Tim 5:17 states: “The elders who rule [*proestōtes* from the root *proistemi*] well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and

- 321 teaching” (cf. the similar use of this root in Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4–5, 12).  
322 The root *proistemi*, here translated “rule,” literally refers to those who “stand before,”  
323 beneficially leading and ministering to the community, and should not be confused with  
324 some kind of monarchical rulership or sovereignty. In the LXX it refers to the household  
325 “ministry” of a servant of the prince (2 Sam 13:17; cf. 1 Tim 3:4–5, 12) and the noun  
326 form of this root, *prostatis*, refers to Phoebe’s ministry as *diakonos* (Rom 16:1–2).