

EQUALITY IN MINISTRY: Women in Pastoral Ministries And Ordination

By Charles E. Bradford, past president of the NAD

By this time it should be patently clear that this vital issue (and it must be a vital issue for us to have spent so much time and energy on it) will not be settled by the exegesis of limited and selected scriptural passages, or inferences drawn from a few of the Biblical narratives (the anecdotal approach). Further, the testimony of and from silence is not overwhelmingly convincing, even in the minds of those who use it. (i.e., Jesus did not ordain women, there is no text that is explicit on the matter, either positive or negative, etc).

The above approaches to the problem have left us divided and polarized. As a church, we do not have it together as yet. Having been involved in the discussion all these years, I have come to the conviction that we need to view the subject from a wider perspective. We need the wide angle lens rather than the microscope. This is a good Seventh-day Adventist approach to Bible study. The emphasis must be on scripture in its totality. "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." II Timothy 3:16 (NIV).

To change the figure a little, we need a bird's-eye view of God's plans and purposes. His intended outcomes. Every subject should be studied in the total sweep of salvation history. The context is the whole field of revelation. We need to study at fountainheads (P.T. Forsythe). In this instance, what are the fountainheads? They are: the doctrine of salvation (soteriology); the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology); and the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology). And all of this must come together in an end time frame of reference. Seventh-day Adventists are teleologically oriented, that is, toward the goal, the end, the consummation. And we firmly believe that before the consummation, truth will be restored to this people in totality, not only as a concept, but as an experience.

The Doctrine of Salvation

We learn here that justification places all of the believers on the same footing (Galatians 3:26-28, Ephesians 2:14-18 and 5:17). I, therefore, conclude that dignity and status is conferred upon every believer. There is an equality here that transcends the triple distinctions that Jews imposed on all the rest. Our expanded view of the doctrine of salvation leads us to reject the idea of racial superiority, one ethnic group versus the other, and of involuntary servitude-something that could take place within the race or tribe, and also of superiority in any way of one sex over the other. It has taken the church quite a while to come to this understanding. Thomas C. Oden observes "that there is a depositum of faith given in the Christ event that is the same always, yesterday, today and forever, and yet we see historical development that bestows ever-new meaning on this complex depositum. There are many laborious developments in the history of the Christian tradition that, in effect, have awaited a slowly unfolding historical process in order for hidden meaning to be fully revealed... The ideas of equal dignity of persons

before God under law, representative democracy, and human rights, which are implicit in key threads of scripture and tradition nonetheless had to wait tedious historical development before their deeper original intention was properly understood." Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, p. 37.

Under the new covenant there is a radical departure from the old. The priesthood of the believers inherent in Old Testament times becomes a reality. There is equal access to all: Gentiles, slaves, women. Peter concluded, "God has shown me that I should call any man impure, unclean." Acts 10:28. Agape love, the love that is bestowed upon the humblest believer, creates value. The doctrine of salvation in its fullest unfolding leads me to conclude that it is simply unacceptable to assume that women, because of their sex, are incapable of being empowered for full participation in ministry. We need clear views on the doctrine of salvation. We're all brought together at the foot of the Cross. The gospel. God's power to save, means new relationships between races, classes, and even men and women. The gospel does not make black people into white people; nor does it change the biological functions of men and women, but it brings us all into a "full relationship of mutuality, complementarity, covenant love, and self-sacrificing giving that is not well-represented by the super- and sub-ordination motifs." Oden, *Women in Pastoral Office*, p. 45.

These cultural-historical antipathies are now outmoded. As the Epistle to the Hebrews has it, chapter 8, verse 13—and very strong language is used here—with the coming of Christ, and His death upon the Cross the old order is "obsolete," "senile," "vanishing." The nearer we approach the day of Christ's coming, the clearer views we will have on what salvation really means.

The Doctrine of The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit comes to empower every baptized believer to participate fully in the church's ministry. All believers by virtue of their baptism are to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the chief administrator of the church. He gives the gifts, makes the appointments of special ministries, and leads the people of God into a clearer understanding of truth. More attention is being given these days to spiritual gifts. These, too, are given as salvation is, to baptized believers without reference to status or sex. All the gifts are to be restored and become operative in the end time. And there will be a final outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people. This, too, is given without distinction. "Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days." Joel 2:28,29.

It may seem that the "meandering stream of historical development" has brought us to our present discussion. To the contrary, I believe that all of these movements are under the control of the Holy Spirit. His office and work is to lead and guide. We use the phrase "present truth" to identify emphasis on that part of God's revealed will that He urges upon His people at a particular time. Let's not give credit to women's lib, historical development, sociological movements, or whatever, for what is really the leading of the Spirit. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelations

2:7. We must be more sensitive to the voice of the Spirit than to the clamor of the majority or the minority. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth." I John 2:20. In this instance, humility becomes a great virtue. We want to give God the Holy Spirit the reins of administration. We want to acknowledge that He is absolutely sovereign, and creative. "You should not be surprised by my saying (the wind blows wherever it pleases)." He leads us into new and sometimes unexpected paths and places. "See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks." Hebrews 12:25. We must be open, ever listening, straining to hear. "And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you." Philippians 3:15.

The Doctrine of the Church And Women's Ordination

What does our understanding of the doctrine of the church tell us? How are we informed by this tremendous reality? The Lutheran scholar/theologian, Carl Braaten, challenged me years ago when he stated that it remains with the modern church to plumb the depths of ecclesiology. The early church settle the Arian question, and the reformation church address the soteriological problem, at least on the personal level. Ecclesiology could well be the final frontier of theology. But we need not be advanced scholars to grasp the essential truth that God intends to do something in and through the community of those who are being saved that even angels desire to look into. There is a cosmic purpose here. "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made know to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." Ephesians 3:10.

The streams of these fountainhead doctrines that we've been discussing, the doctrine of salvation, of the spirit (and others could be included) seem to join in the doctrine of the church. There is a confluence, a coming together here. Those who are being saved are brought together in a community which could be termed a colony of the kingdom of heaven where His will is done. The worshiping, witnessing community on earth is a branch of the worshiping community in heaven, and is a witness to the world, a theater, a showcase of the ideal community. There can be no doubt about it, God intends to do a marvelous thing in and through His church. What I want to emphasize here, however, is the church as ministry. It is all about ministry, and that ministry/service belongs to every member. The Anchor Bible Commentary helps me here a great deal. The following is not necessarily exact quotes, but is in substance the thrust of the commentary:

All the saints, in the plan and purpose of God, are to be equipped to fulfill the ministry given to them so that the whole church becomes a ministering community. In this community, the traditional distinctions between clergy and laity do not belong. The total community is the clergy, appointed by God for ministry to and for the world. The one and same spiritual armor is available to all the saints. The New Testament points out that all "clerical" titles carried over from Israel's history and literature have been conferred upon Jesus Christ, and comprehended in Him. The Old Testament distinction between priests and people, between Levites and other tribes, is absent. In the Kingdom

of Christ, the Priest King, there are only citizens of equal rank, not people of higher and lower orders, distinct classes. They are all laymen. And they are all given a priestly function (see Anchor Bible Commentary, Ephesians, pages 478-482).

This brings us to the matter of ordination. Are not some set apart for a special representative ministry? Indeed. The question, then is, upon what basis, and also what is involved in ordination? What is the meaning of ordination in the New Testament? I am convinced that we have made too much of the act of ordination. There are vestiges, remains of sacerdotalism, even in Adventism—a carry-over from the Apostasy. Cardinal Newman said, "A sacerdotal order is historically the essence of the Church of Rome." And sacerdotalism is defined as, 1) the priesthood, 2) elaborate devotion of the ceremonies and forms of the priesthood, 3) belief in ordination as the channel of special priestly powers.

Seventh-day Adventists are true Protestants, neither sacerdotal nor sacramentarian. For us there is no virtue imparted either by ordination or in the ordinances. Please not, we do not call the Lord's Supper a sacrament; it is an ordinance. We are closer to Zwingli here than to Luther. We also do not believe in clericalism, that is, the radical separation and cleavage between laity and clergy, our idea of ministry and of ordination are inextricably bound up together. We must be sure that our concept of ministry is Biblical.

Ministry is not a matter of intrinsic authority. Ministry is service. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them, and their high officials over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave..." Matthew 20:25-27 (NIV).

Beware of the Papal leaven-sacerdotalism. Under this system unwarranted importance becomes attached to the rite, and therefore, elevates the human being above his or her brothers and sisters. The priesthood of all believers is against this concept. Ellen White had clear views on this (see Acts of the Apostles, pp. 160-163). Paul and Barnabas had done their internship, but had not been formally ordained to the gospel ministry. "They had now reached a point in their Christian experience when God was about to entrust them with the carrying forward of a difficult missionary enterprise, in the prosecution of which they would need every advantage that could be obtained through the agency of the church... Before being sent forth as missionaries to the heathen world, these apostles were solemnly dedicated to God by fasting and prayer and the laying on of hands. Thus they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, being invested with full ecclesiastical authority... He (God) instructed the church by revelation to set them apart publicly to the work of the ministry. Their ordination was a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of the gospel.

"Both Paul and Barnabas had already received their commission from God Himself, and the ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtue qualification. It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office and a

recognition of one's authority in that office. By it the seal of the church was set upon the work of God... And when the ministers of the church of believers in Antioch laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, they, but that action, asked God to bestow his blessing upon the chosen apostles in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed.

"At a later date the rite of ordination by the laying on of hands was greatly abused; unwarranted importance was attached to the act, as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work. But in the setting apart of these two apostles, there is no record indicating that any virtues were imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands. There is only the simple record of their ordination and of the bearing that it had on their future work." Acts of the Apostles, pp. 161,162.

The appointment to special ministry, a representative ministry, on behalf of the total church rests on the selection of the Holy Spirit and the call of God, and the gifts which empower the minister for service. The church carefully and prayerfully becomes a part of the process as it observes in the one called the development and exercise of the gifts and the results of his or her labors. There must be no rush to baptize in the first instance, and there must be no rush to ordain in the second instance. It takes time to hear clearly and distinctly the voice of the Spirit in a matter that is so important to the ongoing ministry of the church. The exercise of representative ministry is therefore not a right. The Christian ministry is not a new priestcraft. Anything that smacks of a privileged ruling class who have received perks by their initiation into the club (ordination) must be demolished with the realities of the gospel.

This is not, therefore, a bandwagon issue, a crusade. This does not mean that every woman will be chosen for representative ministry, nor does it mean every man will be chosen for representative ministry. This does not mean that every person who finished the theological course and receives a degree has a right to ordination. The church has been remiss in making ordination a reward. The church cannot afford to ordain on any basis than the Biblical basis. Without the Holy Spirit's guidance we are bound to make mistakes, but we can be assured that the Holy Spirit is wiser than we, and knows whom to call. He makes no mistakes. His administration is impeccable.

Finally, there will be, in time, and history, a demonstration of the ideal community. The Spirit's rule will be unchallenged. Every member of the community will be affirmed and participate in ministry. It cannot be a racial community, permitting racial discrimination and separation within its own fellowship. Class and caste will be unknown. It will not be a male church, tolerating male dominance; nor a national church, tolerating national arrogance. As it nears the end, the community will conform more and more to the liberating rule of Christ. Its watchword will be, "here there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28 (see also Romans 10:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:13). It begins to look more and more like people whom John describes in the Revelation. "The saints who keep God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." Revelation 14:12

(NIV). Freedom and justice will prevail. Understanding and acceptance will permeate the fellowship. Every potential will be maximized. The gifts of the spirit will burst into flower. For the first time in human history, the people of God will come into their possessions fully, and reach the maximum of their potential. This is the challenge to Adventism—a pilgrim people "between the already and the not yet," always in transition on their way to the Kingdom of God.

WALLA WALLA COLLEGE CHURCH OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

Dear Friend:

This study by Charles Bradford, past president of the NAD, is the fourth in a series being published by the Equality in Ministry Committee of the Walla Walla College SDA Church. The series includes some of the studies presented in our church and some other studies of note.

The next study, by Bob Boggess, documents his personal journey toward a belief in equality in ministry for women. We are grateful to him for sharing with us.

If you did not receive the first three studies and would like copies, please let us know. Or if you would like additional copies of any of the studies you have received, we will be glad to supply them as far as possible.

We ask that you give prayerful consideration to these presentations, and we invite your response. You can reach us at Equality in Ministry, PO Box 5, College Place, WA 99324; 509 527 2800; FAX 509 527 2873; e-mail wwcchu@bmi.net.

Cordially,

Equality in Ministry Committee

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