

**WOMEN'S
ORDINATION
AND
THE SAN ANTONIO
COMPROMISE**



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TEACH Services, Inc.

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Introduction

Why write a book on women’s ordination—especially after all the studies that have been presented by the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC), the Biblical Research Committees (BRCs), and various authors? There are other issues that seem to be more pivotal to the health and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church than the question of whether or not women should be ordained as pastors, so why spend more time discussing and explicating this topic?

First of all, in spite of the rejection of women’s ordination in the 2015 San Antonio General Conference Session, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is still very divided on the issue. In view of our lack of cohesion on this issue, the average church member is looking for a user-friendly resource to help them understand what the Bible teaches on this subject. In response to this need, the present book provides biblically based answers to important questions on women’s ordination in a clear and simple format.

Second, the women’s ordination debate has exposed some closely related issues of paramount importance to the unity and viability of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For example, almost in tandem with other Protestant churches that have either endorsed women’s ordination or have given mixed signals concerning it, there is a growing attitude of accommodation toward homosexuality and the LGBT community in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At the same time, the authority of the Bible is being undermined by an increasing tendency among many Adventists to assert

that certain passages of Scripture, which do not support their ideological viewpoint, are culturally conditioned. The issues surrounding the authority of the Bible and proper methods of interpretation are the most crucial of existential matters that the denomination currently faces. Therefore, in addition to women's ordination, this book will provide brief discussions on the authority of Scripture and hermeneutics (methods of interpreting the Bible). It will also apply biblical principles to two relevant contemporary issues: homosexuality and abortion.

Third, notwithstanding previous attempts to address the women's ordination conflict, the world church is now so ideologically divided that separation of some divisions and unions from the denomination seem probable. This book offers a biblically based solution to our denomination's present predicament. However, before presenting this solution, I argue that the 2015 San Antonio General Conference Session was a missed opportunity to address women's ordination and related issues in a manner that could bring about lasting change in the world church. In this regard, the San Antonio session was a lukewarm compromise—a compromise with such grave consequences that it is analogous to the Missouri Compromise on slavery in the United States. The Missouri Compromise represented a period of history prior to the Civil War in which slavery remained the status quo in most of the southern states, was prohibited in most of the northern states, but was tolerated in a portion of the mid-western states. This immoral and impractical compromise would inevitably lead to schisms, skirmishes, and the American Civil War. The world church is now in a similar compromise that will likely lead to a major fragmentation.

Fourth, context is very important to the Seventh-day Adventist Church's debate on women's ordination and the other related issues cited above. Thus, before commencing a biblical study on these topics, I tell my story, which provides a context that is germane to our reflection and resolution of these issues. As with all personal accounts, my story will inevitably have a level of subjectivity. Nevertheless, fact and truth emerge out of my story in a manner that justifies the need for this present discourse.

The content of this book is organized into six chapters. **Chapter 1** provides a story of my experience and reflections on women's ordination and related issues from my perspective as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor for nearly thirty years in the New York metropolitan region of the United States of America. This chapter gives a significant context for understanding the rest of the book. The second, third, and fourth chapters of the book

discuss the topic of women's ordination from a biblical perspective in a simple user-friendly question-and-answer format. Accordingly, **Chapter 2** focuses on spiritual leadership in the New Testament; it explains the reason for the absence of women in the leadership roles of apostles, elders, and deacons. **Chapter 3** addresses important questions regarding equality, voluntary submission, and gender distinction in the Bible. **Chapter 4** responds to popular claims about women's ordination. **Chapter 5** presents a brief discourse on how the authority of Scripture and hermeneutics are crucial in addressing major contemporary issues such as women's ordination, homosexuality, and abortion. The final chapter, entitled, "A Way Forward," recommends a biblically based solution to the dilemma that the Seventh-day Adventist Church finds itself with respect to the women's ordination controversy and the likelihood of organizational and regional fragmentation.

It is hoped that the reader will find in this book clear biblically based answers to important questions concerning women's ordination and related issues. This hope has a greater chance of being realized if the reader completes the entire book before coming to a final conclusion about the issues it addresses.

Chapter 1

My Story

Before and after Utrecht

As a Seventh-day Adventist pastor for nearly thirty years in the New York metropolitan region, I have been on both sides of the women's ordination issue. In the early 1990s, prior to the 1995 General Conference Session in Utrecht, The Netherlands, I was a supporter of women's ordination. My position at that time was not solidly formed from a study of Scripture. Rather, I gravitated towards some plausible perspectives that I had heard from a few of the esteemed leaders in our denomination. For example, I accepted the argument that, although the Bible does not present a pattern for women as primary spiritual overseers in the church, the promise of Joel 2:28—that God will pour out His spirit on all flesh in the last days—is an indication that God will use women as pastors in the time of the end.

Although my support of women's ordination during this period was not well formed, I never doubted that the issue of women's ordination should be resolved on the basis of *Sola Scriptura*—the Bible and the Bible only. Society's understanding of equality and civil rights should not be a criterion in the church's study and deliberations of the question of women's ordination because the Bible is the ultimate authority in the church.

At some point prior to the Utrecht General Conference Session, I began a biblical study on the topic of women's ordination and concluded that both the Old and New Testaments present a clear pattern for men as primary spiritual overseers—a pattern that Jesus did not overturn even though he could have chosen dedicated female disciples to be among His apostles, such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (Luke 8:2, 3). I further recognized that, even though the prophecy of Joel 2:28 had its first fulfillment at Pentecost after the outpouring of the Spirit on both male and female disciples, none of the apostles appointed any woman as an apostle, elder, or deacon. This consistent pattern in Scripture led me to search for biblical principles to explain this interesting motif as well as to understand difficult passages that are laden with cultural elements.

Adventists' interpretation of the seventh-day Sabbath became a model of how to properly apply hermeneutics in analyzing passages with cultural elements. Although the Sabbath is often surrounded by cultural and historically local elements, such as references to servants, cattle, and Jewish synagogues (Exod. 20:11; Luke 4:16), Adventists argue that the Sabbath is nevertheless universal and timeless—not limited to the Jews or to ancient times—because it was established at Creation and enjoined in the Ten Commandments. Likewise, I observed that, although there are cultural elements in some of the passages in which Paul restricts the authority of women, these cultural elements do not undermine the principle of male headship because Paul based his argument for the primacy of male spiritual leadership on the order of Creation. For example, in 1 Timothy 2:11, 12, Paul wrote: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man but to be in silence.” Many people claim that this passage is culturally conditioned and, therefore, cannot be applied to the church today. Yet, in verses 13 and 14 of the same chapter, Paul makes it clear that his argument for not permitting women to have spiritual leadership authority over men is based on the Creation order. Notice Paul's words: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim. 2:13, 14). This passage of Scripture cannot be ignored; it should not be relegated to being culturally conditioned. Why? Because the apostle Paul appeals to the Creation for the principle of male headship.

Thus, prior to Utrecht, on the basis of a careful study of Scripture, I concluded that the primacy of male spiritual leadership in the church is rooted in the order that God established at the Creation and is highlighted in both

the Old and New Testaments. In similar manner to the popular misconception of the Sabbath as a Jewish norm because of its cultural elements, the passages of Scripture concerning the leadership of women, which appear to be culturally conditioned, are in reality undergirded by the timeless and universal principle of male headship established at the Creation.

Not long after the delegates at Utrecht voted down the proposal from the North American Division (NAD) to allow each division to ordain whom it chose without regard for gender, I had an opportunity to talk with one of the two professors from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University who made presentations at the session prior to the vote. It appeared that this professor's cogent presentation helped to convince the majority of the delegates to not approve the proposal brought by the NAD to let divisions decide the question of women's ordination within their territories. In any event, this professor shared with me that his conscientious and scholarly presentation aroused the ire of several of his colleagues and other Adventist leaders; they were demonstrably upset with him. In return for his courageous stance, he received the sting of ostracism in an academic community where conscientiousness in theological scholarship is supposed to be valued.

San Antonio and its aftermath

Twenty years later and just a few weeks prior to the 60th General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, I began to prepare an open letter to the leadership of the NAD concerning women's ordination. It is important to mention at this juncture that I respect the NAD and I have benefited professionally from their leadership. Therefore, my forthcoming critique of certain aspects of the NAD's leadership should not be construed as an indication of ill will towards the organization. In any event, my open letter was partly in response to a letter that I had received from the NAD, dated January 5, 2015, in which was enclosed a copy of a brochure entitled, "Q&A Theology of Ordination," designed to be shared with local Adventist churches within the NAD's territory. The NAD's letter stated that the brochure "addresses common questions about the topic of ordination." However, after perusing the brochure, I could not in good conscience share it with my congregation because the Seventh-day Adventist denomination had clear protocols in place to address the issue of women's ordination, and the NAD's brochure seemed to preemptively propagandize the issue far beyond the scope of these procedures.

After the delegates at the 60th General Conference Session voted on the evening of July 8, 2015, not to allow each division to decide the question of ordaining women to serve as pastors, I decided that my open letter was no longer necessary because such a vote implied that the world church believes that the Bible does not approve of women serving as primary spiritual overseers in the church. However, when on the morning of July 9, 2015, I read a response by the president of the NAD in the *Adventist Review* to the vote of the General Conference, I concluded that my open letter was more relevant than ever before.

In his response to the General Conference vote, the president of the NAD, Pastor Dan Jackson, claimed to respect the decision of the 60th session and pledged to cooperate with the denomination's actions; however, at the same time, he vitiated and contradicted the obvious sense of his initial statement by further stating, "We will continue with our intention of placing as many women into pastoral ministry as possible."¹ This statement sadly reflects what seems to be the real intention of the leadership of the NAD: to defy the expressed will of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on women's ordination.

The administrators of the NAD have encouraged many dedicated and gifted women to assume the role of pastor with the tantalizing hope that, when leaders and members of the church see that women pastors have already been deployed (and in some cases ordained), the General Conference would be obliged to recognize this as *a fait accompli*. However, this could very well be wishful thinking; it could lead to disappointment for many women pastors. I sympathize with numerous committed women (some of whom I know personally) who have spent years in preparation and service in pastoral ministry but cannot legitimately be ordained. Nevertheless, I also recognize that the leaders who have encouraged these women down this road bear enormous responsibility for their suffering.

For the past five years since the 2015 General Conference Session, the leadership of the NAD continued with its "intention of placing as many women into pastoral ministry as possible." The NAD has also tacitly endorsed all previous actions taken by union conferences in its territory to ordain women as pastors. Furthermore, the NAD's strategy to place as many women as possible into pastoral ministry will likely set the stage for a move toward individualism and congregationalism within its own territory. Local congregations and local leaders might gradually follow the

¹Daniel Jackson, *Adventist Review*, July 9, 2015.

NAD's example in rendering lip service to the decision of the 60th General Conference Session while, at the same time, strategically circumnavigating the expressed will of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Once the precedence of defying legitimate authority is set in motion then the gate will be wide open for churches, conferences, unions, and divisions to follow their own agendas at the expense of unity and truth.

There are several examples of unions that have followed the NAD's lead in resisting the will of the General Conference in the aftermath of the San Antonio session. The propensity to act independently may be seen in the actions revolving around

the North Pacific Union Conference's (NPUC) scheduling of a constituency meeting on women's ordination in the aftermath of the San Antonio session. A few union conference leaders and top officials in the NAD had misconstrued a clause in the General Conference Working Policy in a way that supposedly gives license for unions to have jurisdiction over the issue of women's ordination. When the General Conference administration clarified the aforementioned clause, NPUC realized that its attempts to act on women's ordination would represent a departure from both the San Antonio vote and the General Conference Working Policy. Therefore, on August 19, 2015, NPUC voted to rescind its previous decision to hold a constituency meeting on women's ordination. However, NPUC voted on the same day to increase opportunities for women in pastoral ministry and leadership in its territory.² NPUC clearly followed the NAD's lead in paying lip service to the 60th General Conference Session's decision on women's ordination.

One month after NPUC's actions, the executive committee of the Norwegian Union voted on September 20, 2015, to discontinue the practice of ordination altogether. Obviously, this was done in order to circumnavigate the 60th General Conference decision on women's ordination. Union conferences in Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands have all

The NAD's strategy to place as many women as possible into pastoral ministry will likely set the stage for a move toward individualism and congregationalism within its own territory.

²"U.S. Union Conference Rescinds Special Meeting on Women's Ordination," *Adventist Review*, online edition, August 20, 2015.

voted similar policies around the same time as Norway. Although their actions undermine the will of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, these unions believe that they have circumvented the issue of women's ordination. However, unions do not have the authority to unilaterally take such actions with respect to ordination. These actions clearly undermine the expressed will of the denomination in the San Antonio General Conference Session.

Based on my observation and interactions with several of our leaders in NAD territory, the 60th General Conference vote seems to be an obstacle that some of our administrators are prepared to surmount, ignore, or defy in order to achieve the goal of women's ordination. The momentum for defying the vote of the 60th General Conference Session has picked up pace in recent years, sometimes in reverberating ways, such as the appointment in February 2020 of a female as the Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

The core of the San Antonio compromise

As I was preparing my open letter in the days following the 60th General Conference Session, I became more and more convinced that this document should not only be addressed to the North American Division but also to the leadership of the General Conference. My reason for this was that top administrators of our denomination had an opportunity to lead our world church to deal with the whole question of whether or not the Bible permits the ordination of women as primary spiritual overseers in the offices of pastor, elder, and deacon. However, after facilitating more than two years of a process that entailed a biblical study and deliberation on the theology of ordination, our administrators chose not to put forth the women's ordination question as a biblical issue in the San Antonio General Conference Session. They merely construed the question in a way that emphasized political and cultural expedience.

The task of leading our world church is certainly not easy. Our leaders often face harsh criticisms. Sometimes the politicization of our democratic process tends to prevent a biblical matter from being settled on the basis of Scriptural principles. The leaders of the General Conference should be commended for facilitating a fair and biblically grounded process for the study and deliberation of women's ordination in the years leading up to the 60th session. However, considering the fact that both delegates and

non-delegates gathered in San Antonio to deal with a theological/biblical question, for which the denomination had spent more than two years preparing to address, it has baffled me why our administrators permitted a proposal to be put forth at the 60th session that had only a tangential relation to a theological/biblical question. This seems to represent an insidious failure in leadership, especially when one considers that the question of whether or not divisions should be permitted to ordain women in their territories had already been settled at the General Conference Session in Utrecht in 1995.

Let us examine the proposition that was presented to the delegates at the 60th General Conference Session. Here it is:

Is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No.

The above proposition was preceded by another clause which suggested that the delegates should base their decision on a prayerful study of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. However, the wording of the above proposition itself focuses on the appropriateness of the divisions of the world church to provide for women's ordination, rather than on whether or not on the basis of Scripture women can be ordained as pastors, elders, and deacons. Again, the proposition itself ironically deals with a political question, while the process that was used to facilitate the study of women's ordination attempted to address the issue from a biblical standpoint. There is only a tangential connection between the proposition and the process used to address the issue.

Let us assume, based on the information gathered by the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, that both proponents and the opponents of women's ordination on TOSC agreed that there is no substantive biblical distinction between the office of pastor and elder. If this be the case, it is reasonable to contend that the leadership of the 60th session should have brought this issue to the floor. In our denomination, a pastor is essentially a supervising elder. Both the pastor and the local elder are ordained to fulfill virtually the same job description. The main difference between the two is in authority and scope—namely, pastors are not elected by the local church, as is the case of elders, and pastors have greater authority and a wider field of governance than local elders. Given the theological equivalence of pastors and elders, why did our world church administrators neglect to deal with the question of whether or not, on the basis of

Scripture, women may be ordained as elders? This question is inextricably connected to the main question concerning ordaining women.

It bears mentioning that the decision to ordain women as elders was not approved by a vote at a quinquennium General Conference session. Rather, it was sanctioned by a vote at the Spring Council in 1975 and then reaffirmed at the Annual Council in 1984. This watershed decision was made “under the radar” of the watchful eyes of the larger body of believers who usually attend the quinquennium sessions of the General Conference. Such an important and momentous change in ministerial and ecclesiastical practice should have been reserved for a General Conference session, not an Annual Council meeting.

At San Antonio, our administrators, by depriving us of a discussion of the offices of elders and deacons in the women's ordination proposal, missed an opportunity to allow God to stretch the mind, faith, and courage of His people. Our leaders seem to have settled for a smoother path, yet one that brings us back to the same place as we were in 1995 at Utrecht. We as a church made no meaningful progress, for, although many members sincerely approached the women's ordination question with earnest prayer and study, the denomination barely stretched beyond where it was in 1995 because of its neglect to comprehensively deal with the women's ordination question, especially as it relates to the overseer roles of elders and deacons.

One of the things that could have come from a comprehensive discussion of ordination as it relates to pastors, elders, and deacons is a new appreciation for, and an emphasis on, the administrative role of a deacon. As I will argue later, in the New Testament, the deacon is an administrator in charge of caring for people's physical, material, and spiritual needs. Deacons shared in the administrative work of the apostles and elders in the early New Testament church. However, in many of our churches today, deacons are viewed merely as caretakers of the physical plant and as a team of workers to assist in communion, baptism, and visitation. They are rarely placed in administrative roles such as leaders of community outreach, finance, and music in the church.

Another important part of such a discussion might have been the way in which women church leaders can collaborate with men who are serving in the spiritual overseer roles of pastors, elders, and deacons. Such a discussion would have naturally led to the following question: How did prophetesses work with the primary spiritual leaders of the church in biblical times?

The General Conference administration's failure to lead the church in addressing women's ordination in a comprehensive way leaves the door ajar for this issue to come back. When the early New Testament church called a general council in Jerusalem to deal with the question of whether or not Gentile converts were required to be circumcised, the leaders dealt with the issue on the basis of the harmony between Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit. The matter was handled in a comprehensive way. The question was settled, and the church moved on. By contrast, at the 60th General Conference Session, our leaders chose a compromised proposition that only tangentially addressed the theological and biblical question. Can anyone doubt that this matter will return to the world church again? Should we not have dealt with the issue as thoroughly as possible, no matter how long it took, patiently waiting upon God for guidance? This would have been better than what now exists: namely, a compromised status quo that only forestalls the women's ordination issue and robbed the denomination of a golden opportunity to depend wholly upon God for direction.

Let us remember that essentially the same kind of proposal that was voted on at the 60th session had been presented to the delegates in 1995 at Utrecht. As mentioned, at Utrecht, the debate on women's ordination came as a result of a request by the North American Division that each division be given the latitude to ordain without regard to gender. This proposal was voted down. Twenty years later, virtually the same proposal was presented to the delegates in San Antonio and once again it was voted down. What is going to keep this issue from coming back?

Interestingly, the statement of the president of the General Conference concerning the meaning of the San Antonio vote is tantamount to a virtual concession to the fact that we, as a world church, have not made any progress on the women's ordination issue. The General Conference president represented the 60th session's decision as a mere return to our dubious policy in which we do not ordain women as pastors, but we do ordain them as local elders. Hence, after at least four years of preparation and deliberation on the women's ordination issue, we came back to the same unenlightened, impractical, and compromised position that we settled for at Utrecht in 1995.

It is clear to me, from my personal observation of the debate and the vote on women's ordination on July 8, 2015, that the will of the majority of the delegates was to not approve women's ordination. However, due to what appears to be a mismanagement by our top administrators, the

only proposition that was permitted to be voted on was whether or not we should allow divisions to have the authority to decide the question of women's ordination in their respective territories. The will of the majority was muffled. Consequently, we are currently in such a compromised position that some of us will see in the 60th General Conference decision the expressed will of the denomination against women's ordination while others will see in it a mere return to our dubious policy of permitting women to serve as pastors but not allowing them to be ordained. This is the epitome of confusion. It is leading to fragmentation and unilateral actions in various corners of our world church.

As an example of some of the schisms emanating from the 2015 General Conference Session, an article dated August 17, 2015, in *Spectrum* magazine reported an incident under the caption, "Florida Conference Calls Doug Batchelor a 'Polarizing Influence,' Discourages Speaking Appointment." The article describes how Pastor Mike Cauley, the then president of the Florida Conference, discouraged the Spring Meadow Church in Sanford, Florida, from following through with inviting Pastor Doug Batchelor, Speaker/Director of Amazing Facts Ministries, to come for a scheduled week-long series of meetings in October 2–10, 2015. The reason given for such a call to disinvite a well-respected pastor and evangelist, was that, according to Cauley and the Florida Conference Administration, "Pastor Batchelor" is "a polarizing influence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church" because he has taught against ordaining women as pastors and local elders for several years.³ Cauley and the Florida Conference Administration claimed that Bachelor's position "is not in harmony with the policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," which encourages "women to use the gifts God has given them for ministry, both as local elders and in pastoral leadership and ministry."⁴

While there may be valid reasons on both sides for disagreement in the above controversy, the fact that a bona fide Adventist pastor can be disinvited from doing a series of evangelistic meetings because of his convictions about women's ordination is a travesty. But what further compounds this conflict is that a conference president in the North American Division justified this egregious action by appealing to the policies of the General Conference. This incident has the makings of ideological bias

³Mike Cauley quoted in, "Florida Conference Calls Doug Batchelor a 'Polarizing Influence,' Discourages Speaking Appointment," *Spectrum Magazine*, Aug. 17, 2015.

⁴Cauley, *Spectrum Magazine*, Aug. 17, 2015.

and strategic use of the inconsistent practices and policies of the world church to further one's narrow agenda. After a series of actions in the NAD prior to the 2015 General Conference Session—such as the unilateral decisions of the Columbia Union Conference and the Pacific Union Conference to ordain women pastors even while the world church was in the process of studying the issue, the improper election of the president of the Southeastern California Conference, and the stated intention of the president of the North American Division to encourage as many women as possible to become pastors—no one should be surprised by incidents such as what occurred between the Florida Conference administration and Pastor Batchelor. We might as well expect that such incidents will increase unless the leaders of our denomination act decisively.

The numerous public incidents of independent and sometimes rebellious actions by leaders of divisions, unions, local conferences, and local churches that have taken place in the wake of the San Antonio General Conference Session reinforce a conclusion that I arrived at in the closing days of the 60th General Conference Session: namely, that in San Antonio our leaders made a compromise that is as consequential for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the Missouri Compromise was for the Civil War in the United States. As has been mentioned, the Missouri Compromise was an immoral and impractical solution for the issue of slavery. In the Missouri Compromise, slavery would remain the status quo in most of the southern states, it would be excluded in most of the northern states, and it would be tolerated in some mid-western states. Such an unscrupulous and shortsighted remedy to the issue of slavery spawned dissimulations, clandestine operations, and outright civil war. Likewise, the San Antonio Compromise on women's ordination has already generated schisms and skirmishes that might also explode into permanent fragmentation of the denomination.

The progressive deconstructionist movement

While some proponents of women's ordination are sincerely focused on addressing that particular issue alone, there are other leaders in various echelons of the church for whom women's ordination is only one component of a broader project. Their project involves deconstructing historic/traditional Adventism and reconstructing it into a new image that is more consistent with a social justice, ecumenical, charismatic, and progressive direction. This project espouses some things that seem very positive, such

as “social justice.” Given the shameful discriminatory practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church toward Blacks in the past—especially during

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the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States—racial equality and justice is something that our world church definitely needs to be passionate about. But the problem with the social justice platform of the progressive wing of Adventism is that it is more beholden to the philosophies and ideologies of contemporary society than it is to the authority of Scripture.

In order to be in alignment with contemporary sentiments and ideologies, many of our leaders are ready to undermine principles of hermeneutics that Adventist scholars and lay people have relied on for approximately 170 years. These leaders have chosen to espouse a cultural and relativistic interpretation of several biblical passages that deal with the primacy of male spiritual leadership in the home and the church. They have reduced the authority of Scripture to be able to accommodate a gender equality platform that ignores fundamental biblical principles concerning leadership that were established at Creation.

As an example, during the intensives for my Doctor of Ministry program at Andrews University (2014–2017), I witnessed on different occasions more than one professor attempting to shift the class away from Adventism’s emphasis on discovering the truth through a diligent study of Scripture, proper hermeneutics, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. These professors subtly advocated subjective interpretations, cultural relativism, and an excessive dependence on the “Spirit” rather than on the Bible.

The progressive deconstructionist movement in Adventism seems to have its epicenter in the North American Division, and it has been this way for nearly fifty years. However, its ideology now reverberates loudly in most of the unions and divisions in Western Europe. In order for the progressive deconstructionists to gain support for women’s ordination, they have to weaken the authority of Scripture with claims that certain passages are culturally conditioned and that we need to lean more on the Spirit than on a literal interpretation of Scripture. However, these very

claims have also opened the door for an accommodationist approach toward homosexuality and the LGBT community within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

The accommodationist approach toward homosexuality emphasizes that the church needs to be more accepting, understanding, and gracious toward those with homosexual, bisexual, and transgender tendencies. They call on the church to provide support groups for the LGBT community and to not ostracize them from its fellowship. While I agree that the church should be more understanding and gracious toward people who are struggling with homosexual, bisexual, and transgender proclivities, the church is not called to be an accepting community of the homosexual lifestyle. Moreover, there is a world of difference between a person who is struggling with homosexual tendencies but is seeking divine deliverance and a gay person who is looking for acceptance from the church rather than conversion.

Two subtexts emanate from the accommodationist approach toward homosexuality. The first subtext is that sensitivity towards gay and transgendered people means that we should not preach a sermon, make a remark, or write an essay against the sin of homosexuality because this could be very offensive to the LGBT community. According to this approach, pastors should not preach Paul's powerfully convicting message in the first chapter of Romans, which explicitly states that the judgment of God will fall on unrepentant human beings who sexually cohabit with another person of the same gender. Homosexuality is depicted as unnatural and vile in Romans 1. There are people who are tempted to engage in the gay lifestyle out of mere curiosity because it is in vogue; Paul's message in Romans 1 might very well prevent them from going down such a path. However, the accommodationist approach does not offer "prevention" as an option. It merely offers a dubious acceptance.

The second subtext is that conversion or transformation is not a realistic option for the LGBT community and that we should, therefore, simply accept this community and be willing to let them serve as officers in the church as long as they do not *publicly* engage in homosexuality. One example of the practical impact of this subtext may be seen in the activities of Intercollegiate Adventist Gay-Straight Coalition (IAGC), an organization that has been created since 2012 to support members of the LGBTQ community within Seventh-day Adventist institutions of higher learning. Although IAGC is not an official entity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it has a presence on several Adventist campuses,

including Andrews University, La Sierra University, Pacific Union College, Southern Adventist University, Union College, Walla Walla University, and Washington Adventist University. Although Andrews University has had an official LGBT support group since October 2017, this support group is also affiliated with IACC.⁵ One of my colleagues attended a meeting of the LGBT support group on the campus of Andrews University in early 2020. This meeting was advertised specifically as a forum to converse with parents of LGBTQ students. However, my colleague was surprised to discover that the leaders of this support group were intentionally advocating that LGBTQ orientations were a natural biological condition that LGBTQ members should accept rather than seek to be converted from. My colleague also reported that the leaders in this meeting told the audience not to offer prayer for transformation of the LGBTQ community, but, rather, that they should accept the members of that community. It is also noteworthy that, in its promotional media, IAGC does not mention, as one of its objectives, anything about conversion or transformation from a same-sex orientation.⁶

The rhetorical catalyst for the accommodationist view of homosexuality seems to have come from a conference held in January 2006 in Ontario, California, which was co-sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International Advisory Council and the Association of Adventist Forums. This conference resulted in a book that posited a revisionist view of homosexuality—one that is in stark contrast to the mainstream perspective of Seventh-day Adventists on the topic. The book, published in 2008, is entitled *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*.⁷ Partly in response to the conference in California and the subsequent book, a new conference was held by a variety of Christian scholars and professionals at Andrews University in 2009. This conference sought to evaluate the merits of the new revisionist perspective of homosexuality and to discuss the implications of the standard Adventist position on the topic with respect to social developments and public policy. The

⁵Alisa Williams, "Andrews University Approves Creation of Official LGBT Student Support Group," *Spectrum Magazine*, Nov. 9, 2017, retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1cm>, accessed 8/20/20.

⁶See the following: Eliel Cruz, "Seventh-day Adventist Students Sharing Stories," retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1cn>, accessed 8/20/20; Richard Logan, "Southern Adventist University Student Now Leads LGBT Collegiate Coalition," *Spectrum Magazine*, Oct. 23, 2014, retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1co>, accessed 8/20/20; Andy Roman, "The LGBT+ is Making More Inroads into the Seventh-day Adventist Educational Institutions," *Advent Messenger*, Dec. 7, 2018, retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1cp>, accessed 8/20/20.

⁷David Ferguson, Fritz Guy, David Larson, eds., *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives* (Adventist Forum, 2008).

participants of this conference provided strong biblical support for the historic Adventist position on homosexuality. They also discussed ways for the church to minister more effectively to the LGBT community. The papers and presentations of the 2009 conference at Andrews University formed the content for a solid and perspicacious book that was published in 2012, entitled *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church*.⁸

In October 2015, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University published a position paper entitled, “An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care: Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Position Paper.” More than three-fourths of the paper supports the historic Adventist position on homosexuality. However, toward the end of the paper, there is a major departure from the standard Adventist perspective. The paper asserts that homosexual persons should be allowed to have membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church if that is what they desired even if they struggle with same-sex temptations. In addition, it asserts that gay and lesbian members should be permitted to serve as officers of the church if they will choose to remain abstinent from engaging in same-sex cohabitation.⁹

The apostle Paul clearly declared that God’s power transformed people who were formerly homosexuals into committed heterosexual members of the church in Corinth. Paul stated, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10: “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” Then he emphasized in verse 11 that some of the current believers of the church in Corinth were once engaged in these immoral lifestyles but that they had since been cleansed, converted, and sanctified. Notice Paul’s words: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God.” Divine transformation is not merely possible for homosexuals, adulterers, and idolaters—it is the only option for those who intend to inherit the kingdom of God.

The problem with the position paper from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University is that it blurs the line

⁸Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, H. Peter Swanson, eds., *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling and Religious Liberty Issues* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012).

⁹“An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care: Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Position Paper” (Berrien Springs, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, October 9, 2015), retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1cq>, accessed 8/20/20.

between the person who was once a homosexual but has been transformed by the power of God and the person who believes that he or she can be a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and yet have a same-sex orientation. A person who was formerly a homosexual and has been transformed is no longer a homosexual. The common notion in society that can be expressed as, "Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic," is not a biblical principle. Moreover, if a person has been converted and he or she still genuinely struggles with feelings of same-sex attraction, this is no indication that the person is a homosexual; it is an indication that converted people still have to struggle with the carnal nature. Numerous passages of Scripture speak about the daily battle of believers to crucify the flesh and walk in the Spirit with the assurance that we can be successful through the power of Christ and the Spirit (see Matt. 5:27–30; Rom. 6:1–23; 8:5–13; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 2 Cor. 10:3–5; Gal. 2:20; 5:1–21; 6:7, 8; James 1:14, 15; Phil. 2:12, 13; 4:11–13; 1 Peter 4:1, 2). Thus, the conclusion of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary position paper is essentially a concession to the power of the flesh rather than of the Spirit.

What the NAD and its constituent unions, conferences, and institutions believe about homosexuality will impact how they allocate funds and deploy resources. For example, if the leadership of a particular conference or union believes that the LGBT community cannot be converted and that the church would be better-off to not preach about the sin of homosexuality but to accept the LGBT community as a biological *fait accompli*, then it will not utilize or allocate funds to any kind of conversion program such as Coming Out Ministries or a conversion based support group; rather, it will focus its resources on programs that teach acceptance of the LGBT community. Moreover, employees who are not in support of a conference, union, or constituent institution's accommodationist approach toward homosexuality will likely experience undue pressure to conform or be ostracized.

The gradual erosion of biblical authority that has been unleashed by the progressive deconstructionist movement in Adventism is virtually aiding and abetting a state of affairs in which leaders and members do what they believe is right in their own eyes with little regard for the principles of Scripture and guidance from the writings of Ellen G. White. For example, the practice of abortion on demand has been facilitated as a matter of routine in several Adventist hospitals in the United States within the past four decades. However, popular indignation from vocal Adventists, especially

in 2018 and 2019, have aroused the leaders of the denomination to take steps to curtail this practice.¹⁰

Another example of the liberal pluralism unleashed by the progressive deconstructionists is that a growing segment of Adventists are imitating unbiblical practices derived from the Charismatic Movement, Eastern religions, and popular music in their worship services. Whooping accompanied by organ rifts, mindless meditation, prolonged and heavily rhythmic music with sustained loud sounding instruments, and a variety of frenzied outbursts are some of the elements that are now present in numerous Adventist worship services.

Some of the new churches that have recently been established in the NAD's territory have been planted by leaders who are intentionally deconstructing Adventism and reconstructing new local churches according to progressive ideology. In some of these churches, the criteria for membership fall far below the standards that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination has clearly explained in the church manual and in the book containing its fundamental beliefs, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.

I did not imagine in 1983, when as a teenager I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ and became a Seventh-day Adventist, that the "remnant" church would be so tempted to veer from its faithful adherence to the full

authority of Scripture and the historical-grammatical method of Bible interpretation. I could not then foresee that numerous pastors and leaders would be so accommodative towards popular practices and ideologies that cannot be supported by Scripture. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is now at a crossroads as it prepares to convene the 61st General Conference Session. The actions voted at the San Antonio General

***Unless bold decisive
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the denomination
will follow the
path of several
mainline Protestant
denominations
that have bartered
faithfulness to Scripture
for favor with the world.***

¹⁰See George B. Gainer, "Abortion: history of Adventist guidelines," *Ministry*, Aug. 1991, retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1cr>, accessed 8/20/20; Michael Peabody, "Amidst Growing Criticism Adventist Church Is Revisiting Abortion Position," *Spectrum*, Sept 23, 2019, retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1cs>, accessed 8/20/20; Dylan Wagoner, "The Day I Found Out About Abortions in SDA Hospitals (Part 1)," *fulcrum7.com*, blogpost, Aug. 23, 2019, retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1ct>, accessed 8/20/20; "Statement on the Biblical View of Unborn Life and its Implications of Abortion," General Conference, Oct. 2019, retrieved from <https://1ref.us/1cu>, accessed 8/20/20.

Conference Session were grossly inadequate to stem the tidal wave that is now beating ferociously on the banks of this denomination. Unless bold decisive actions are soon taken the denomination will follow the path of several mainline Protestant denominations that have bartered faithfulness to Scripture for favor with the world.

Three decades ago, the late C. Raymond Holmes, former Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and Professor of Worship and Preaching in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, presciently cautioned the Seventh-day Adventist Church against devaluing the authority of Scripture in order to win support for women's ordination. In his book, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, Holmes shared how, as a former pastor in the Lutheran Church in America, his denomination's espousal of the skeptical historical-critical method of Bible interpretation led it to embrace women's ordination in the 1970s; conversely, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's strong rejection of the historical-critical method influenced its rejection of women's ordination.¹¹

What is even more interesting is that all the liberal branches of the Lutheran denomination in America that embraced the historical-critical method and women's ordination in the 1960s and 70s currently endorse homosexual clergy. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (now the largest body of Lutherans in the USA, which was formed in 1988 as the result of the merging of the three most liberal Lutheran branches in North America), began accepting gay clergy in 2009 and elected its first openly gay bishop in 2013. However, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which is the second largest Lutheran body in the United States, still rejects the historical-critical method, women's ordination, and homosexuality.

The progression from the adoption of a limited view of biblical authority to the ordination of women and then to approving same-sex marriage has also occurred within the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the United Church of Christ, and the Unitarian Universalist Association of Churches. If we do not take decisive steps to "contend for the faith" by rejecting specious notions that undermine the authority of Scripture, such as the culturally conditioned argument, it is very probable that the Seventh-day Adventist Church will follow in a similar direction as these churches.

¹¹C. Raymond Holmes, *The Tip of an Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry* (Wakefield, Michigan: Pointer Publications, 1994).

One glaring example of the downward slope of the progressive deconstructionist/accommodationist approach in Adventism is that Adventist Health System/West, a corporation of Seventh-day Adventist healthcare institutions on the west coast of the United States, has authorized and conducted gender transition services at its facilities. Physicians governed by Adventist Health System/West can provide hormone therapy to facilitate changes in gender, perform gender affirming surgery, and make referrals for gender reconstruction surgery. In other words, this large Seventh-day Adventist affiliated healthcare corporation is helping males to acquire hormones and physical alterations in order to function as females, and helping females to transition into what appear to be males. This information was exhibited on November 22, 2019 in a set of documents prepared by the California Attorney General office and Adventist Health System/West, as Adventist Health System/West prepared to acquire Delano Regional Medical Center.¹²

After prayerful reflection on the most prudent and respectful way to address the concerns that I have highlighted above, I decided to change my intended open letter into a brief book that is designed to do the following four things: (1) provide a biblical study on the topic of women's ordination, (2) show how the question of women's ordination is related to other vitally important contemporary issues in the church, (3) recommend a possible solution to the dilemma that Adventism finds itself in, (4) tell my story. Having told my story in this chapter, the rest of the book will cover the first three objectives.

¹²Xavier Becerra, Attorney General, State of California Department of Justice, letter to Mark Schieble, Nov 22, 2019, RE: "Proposed change in control and governance of Central California Foundation for Health," <https://1ref.us/1ja> (accessed January 25, 2021). See also Andy Roman, "Adventist Health Allows its Physicians to Perform 'Gender Transition' Services at it Facilities." *Advent Messenger*, December 26, 2020, <https://1ref.us/1jb> (accessed January 25, 2021).

Chapter 2

Spiritual Leadership in the New Testament

Is the example of Jesus and the apostles in setting apart only men as apostles, elders, and deacons based on biblical principles or the culture of the period?

The narratives of the four gospels show that Jesus Christ chose and mentored twelve men as apostles for the purpose of leading the New Testament church. They also show that these twelve apostles were chosen out of a larger body of disciples that included both males and females. Accordingly, Luke 6:13 states thus, “And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.”

We know that both Jesus and John the Baptist had disciples, but, of the two, it is said only of Jesus that he chose twelve of his disciples out of a larger body to be His apostles. John the Baptist’s disciples were to collaborate with him in preparing the way for the Messiah, and it was the Messiah’s mission not only to save humanity but also to forge the principle



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WOMEN'S ORDINATION AND THE SAN ANTONIO COMPROMISE

Compromise is necessary within society when there are competing interests at play. However, certain concessions simply delay the inevitable. When the United States lawmakers attempted to stave off conflict over the subject of slavery with the Missouri compromise, the effect was only temporary. The Seventh-day Adventist Church may be facing a similar situation over a compromise that was intended to respond to competing interests in the church regarding women's ordination.

Guided by the principles of biblical interpretation that helped to found the Seventh-day Adventist Church, veteran New York pastor, Dr. Michael G. Coleman, finds in Scripture the basis for resolving the standoff that exists within Seventh-day Adventism over women's ordination. He proposes a biblical solution to avoid the trend that has overtaken other Protestant churches. His response is a thoughtful, biblically faithful, and user-friendly resource. He encourages administrators, pastors, and laypersons to consider the evidence prayerfully and thoughtfully.

As a pastor for 30 years in New York, **Dr. Michael G. Coleman** has had the privilege of leading many people to Christ and equipping them to become mature disciples. He is passionate about serving God, and he loves people of all ages and ethnicities. His academic background includes a Ph.D in business administration from Montemorelos University in Mexico and a Doctor of Ministry degree in leadership and discipleship from Andrews University. He also holds a MA in history. He is the author of *Reflections on Issues in Music and Worship* (2019).




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