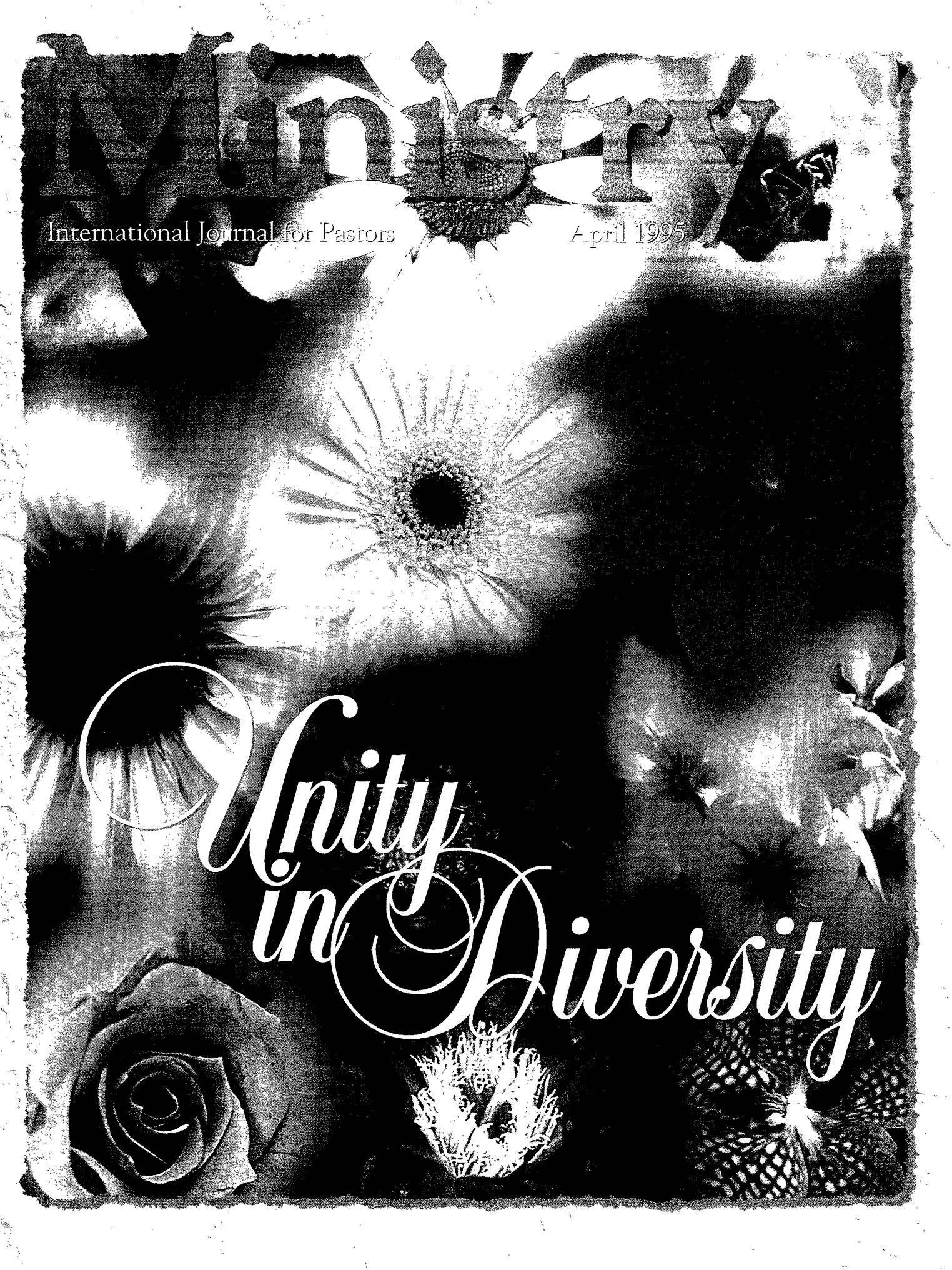


Ministry



International Journal for Pastors

April 1995

Unity in Diversity

In all the Lord's arrangements, there is nothing more beautiful than His plan of giving to men and women a diversity of gifts. The church is His garden, adorned with a variety of trees, plants, and flowers. He does not expect the hyssop to assume the proportions of the cedar, nor the olive to reach the height of the stately palm. Many have received but a limited religious and intellectual training, but God has a work for this class to do if they will labor in humility, trusting in Him.

Unity in Diversity

From

the endless
variety of

plants and flowers,

we may learn an important lesson. All blossoms are not the same in form or color. Some possess healing virtues. Some are always fragrant.

There are professing Christians who think it their duty to make every other Christian like themselves. This is man's plan, not the plan of God. In the church of God there is room for characters as varied as are the flowers in a garden. In His spiritual garden there are many varieties of flowers.

Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 98, 99.



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Cover Illustration: Greg Fox

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Another look at ordination

"From the endless variety of plants and flowers," says Ellen White, "we may learn an important lesson. All blossoms are not the same in form or color. . . . There are professing Christians who think it their duty to make every other Christian like themselves."

This counsel is particularly applicable to the current debate on ordination of women to the gospel ministry, a subject that most people have a definite opinion on. People on both sides speak passionately to the issue. Thus it was that the delegates to the 1994 Annual Council awaited with eager anticipation the speech of Alfred C. McClure, president of the North American Division (NAD).

NAD in a special session just prior to the Annual Council voted the following recommendation: "To request the Annual Council to refer the following action to the General Conference session for consideration: The General Conference vests in each division the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender. In divisions where the division executive committees take specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions."

Church loyalty

McClure rose to introduce the North American Division recommendation. McClure made it clear that their request came out of support of the world church, not defiance. He said: "The North American Division is very much a loyal part of the world church. We believe in and are committed to unity. We are every bit as committed

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COVER DESIGN: Trent Truman

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MARKETING: Mark Thomas

ADVERTISING SALES: Melynie Tooley

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES: Larry Burnnett

Ministry, (ISSN 0026-5314), the international journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association © 1995, is published monthly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and printed by the Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740, U.S.A. Subscriptions: US\$25.00 for 12 issues worldwide, air mail US\$39.85. Single copy US\$2.25. Member Associated Church Press. Second-class postage paid at Hagerstown, MD. This publication is available in microfilm from University Microfilms International. Call toll-free 1-800-521-3044. Or mail inquiry to: University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. PRINTED IN USA.

Editorial Office: 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904. Stamped, self-addressed envelope should accompany unsolicited manuscripts. Office telephone: 301-680-6510.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Ministry*, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740.

Volume 68 Number 4

to the *mission* and *unity* of this church as we are pleased to see evidenced in other parts of the globe. We do not wish to cause a problem or embarrass or divide the body of Christ. We abhor that which would bring dishonor upon this church that we love.

"We are not, in any way, trying to throw our weight around—after all, 10 percent of the world membership could hardly be considered a heavyweight. We are in no way a bully and do not wish to be perceived as one. We are not suggesting that our support of the world church is hostage to a positive decision on this issue. We do not believe that it is proper conduct for a part of the family. If we are denied this request, we will do our best to continue to be a responsible part of the world family and carry our share of the financial load that we have been blessed by the Lord to provide."

The NAD president then made it clear that NAD was not planning any kind of unilateral action. "We are not about to rebel or do our own thing and defy the will of the body. I assure you that I am a servant of this church and will do all in my power to keep us together. If we were determined to have our own way regardless of the consequences, we would not be here with a request. We would simply be informing you of our decision. But that is not our position.

"This is not an ultimatum, but rather a heartfelt appeal for understanding and recognition of what we see as a peculiar need."

Church diversity

McClure then went on to point out the diversity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—that it is made up of many different cultures. He stressed that the core doctrines of the church and the fundamentals are nonnegotiable and universal. However, church practice—the ecclesiastical areas—can differ from country to country. There are universal principles given Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, but their application can differ from place to place. There must be unity, but that need not necessarily mean uniformity.

Why this request

McClure stated that an ordination precedent had already been voted by the

Annual Council 10 years previously. The 1984 Annual Council voted that in divisions, in which it was acceptable, women could be ordained as local elders. "Voted,

1. To reaffirm the Spring Meeting action on the General Conference of 1975 Role of Women in the Church (GCC75-153).

2. To advise each division that it is free to make provision as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local church elders" (Annual Council Minutes, [1984], p. 48).

This was not the first time that the issue had been addressed. The 1974 Annual Council voted "to request the President's Executive Advisory to also arrange for further study of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination and that division committees exercise discretion in any special cases that may arise before a definitive position has been adopted" (Annual Council Minutes, [1974], p. 14).

Since that time hundreds of churches in the North American Division have elected and ordained more than 1,000 women as local elders. McClure then drew four lessons from this experience:

1. A precedent had been set.
2. It has not caused a significant problem for those parts of the world in which the practice is not followed.
3. It has allowed North America and some other countries to address serious needs for the accomplishment of their mission in their territory.
4. There is no turning back. One cannot unordain 1,000 women and tell them they can no longer serve as local church elders. It would stretch credibility and a sense of fairness.

Theological concerns

McClure then dealt with theological issues. He candidly admitted that this had troubled him for some time. It troubled him even more that the church theologians could not agree on this issue. More than 20 years have passed since the subject was first studied, and theologians still cannot agree. However, the church crossed the theological bridge when it allowed women to be ordained as local elders. It seems illogical to allow women to be ordained as local elders, calling it scriptural, and at the same time deny them pastoral ordination and cite scrip-

ture against it.

For more than 20 years the church has been encouraging women to accept calls into pastoral ministry and attend seminaries for further training. McClure went on: "What kind of message do we send to young women who wish to respond to the call of God when we welcome them to professional training where they sit in classes with male peers who in a few years are afforded full recognition of their calling while they [the young women] are made to feel inferior by less than full approbation by their church?"

There are now at least 25 women serving in pastoral positions in North America, with another 25 serving as chaplains in health-care institutions. Women have been granted all the privileges of ordained ministry except the organizing of churches and the ordaining of others. The church even recognized them further by creating a new set of credentials especially for them.

The future

McClure made it clear that it was time to go either forward or backward. It was untenable to remain as they were. North America has not taken any action out of harmony with the world church. It has applied all the actions of the Annual Councils consistent with policy. Because it has done this, it now finds itself in a position many see as discriminatory, unethical, and even immoral. People ask why women and men performing the same functions cannot receive the same ordination. There is no defensible answer to that question. McClure then concluded with this powerful appeal:

"We, therefore, come to you with a request for your understanding and help. We appeal to you, our brothers and sisters of the world church, to try to listen, to put yourselves in our place, and to see why we are making this request as we seek, not to bring divisiveness and disunity, (is the Adventist Church really so fragile as to be shattered by this issue?), but to empower people for mission.

"Ellen White put it well when she said: 'Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor privately, or publicly, to help forward this grand work,' [Review and Herald, July 9, 1895]."

This request of the North American Division was then voted by the Annual Council for consideration at the General Conference session at Utrecht.

This special issue of *Ministry*

What is ordination, anyway? Dr. V. Noskov Olsen, former president of Loma Linda University, traces the theology and history of ordination from the Old Testament to the Reformation. He clearly shows that separation between clergy and laity is foreign to the New Testament. The Reformation gave us salvation by grace alone, and made a start on the priesthood of all believers. Many believe that a new reformation is needed that will abolish the artificial distinction between ordained and unordained and show that all of us are called to minister, all are called to witness, all are called to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the church today God has placed different spiritual gifts, of which pastoring is one gift. Each person is to exercise their spiritual gifts for the building up of the body without reference to rank. Read "Called to be a Minister" on page 11.

Kit Watts, assistant editor of the *Adventist Review*, traces the rise and fall of Adventist women in leadership on page 6. Did you know that at one time 20 out of 60 conference treasurers were women? In 1915 approximately two thirds of the 60 educational leaders and more than 50 of the 60 Sabbath school leaders were women. Before the turn of the century three of the General Conference treasurers were women. One woman even served for a time as acting conference president. Hers is a fascinating article.

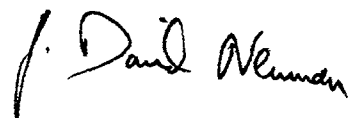
The big question is How do we arrive at unity without requiring conformity? How do we make decisions when there are strong differences of opinion? "The Jerusalem Council: A Model for Utrecht?" by Andrew Bates (page 18), provides a compelling case study on how the early church grappled with and resolved similar thorny issues. Graeme S. Bradford then illustrates from Scripture and early church and Adventist history how change has occurred and how, to paraphrase Ellen White, what was not present truth at one time may be present truth at this time.

James Cress, General Conference Ministerial Association secretary, discusses the pain of change in his Pastor's

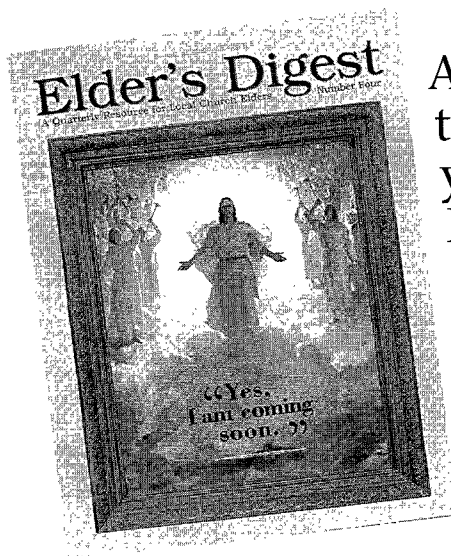
Pastor. J. David Newman, editor of *Ministry*, then describes some principles of how to act when you don't get what you want. How do you accept decisions voted democratically that you might not agree with?

In all this discussion we must never lose sight of one great truth—Jesus Christ. He is the truth, the way, and the life. Without Him we are nothing. We are here to share Jesus and to win everyone that we can to Him. The church

exists for only one purpose, to lift up the cross of Christ, and to cooperate with God in evangelizing the world. The best decision that we can make at Utrecht should be the decision that will help evangelize the world more effectively.



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The rise and fall of Adventist women in leadership

Kit Watts

Historical factors affecting the number, influence, and status of women leaders in the past 150 years



Kit Watts is an assistant editor of the Adventist Review.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century in the United States, women held approximately the same legal status as children and slaves. Married women generally could not own property independent of their husbands. If they were employed, their wages could be appropriated by their husbands. Legal say about children resided entirely in the father's hands.¹ Women were not admitted to colleges or universities. They were not allowed to enter professions. They could not vote or hold an office. And they were not permitted to speak in public.²

Whenever these customs and laws were tested by proposals to change or enlarge women's role in the home, church, or society, emotional debate was likely to ensue.

Given the constraints on nineteenth-century women in general, what were the attitudes in the early Adventist Church toward women? How does this compare with what was happening to women in other Christian groups? Was Ellen White an exception in our ranks, or did a significant number of Adventist women serve as elected leaders and public figures? What trends have emerged over the past 150 years?

This article will briefly examine these questions and give evidence of the waxing and waning of Adventist women in leadership and ministerial positions.

Separate and unequal

The reasons offered in the early

1800s for the low social status of women were not new, harking back to Greek and Roman times. Women were thought of as physically weak, intellectually feeble, and emotionally unstable. Therefore, they were assigned a separate sphere from men in human affairs.

The moral worth of women was also debated through the centuries. Aristotle theorized that females were "misbegotten" males. They are "weaker and colder in nature," he said, "and we must look upon the female character as being a sort of natural deficiency."³

Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) thought Aristotle went rather far. He reasoned that anything "misbegotten" would not have been made at creation. Still, the only work Aquinas could imagine woman helping man with was procreation. In everything else, a "man can be more efficiently helped by another man."⁴

Such views persisted in the nineteenth century. In 1840 a writer for *Godey's Lady's Book*, one of the earliest magazines for women in the U.S., defined woman as "the connecting link . . . between man and the inferior animals, possessing a central rank between the mysterious instinct of the latter and the unattainable energies of the former."⁵

Gospel soil

Christian teachings were often used to confine women. Yet the seeds of change that came to modify the role of

women in society sprang not from secular sources but from gospel soil.

Hints of this came in the 1740s as the first Great Awakening swept England and the American colonies. Religion propelled women out of the shadows. "The conversion experience itself, for example, became a *public ritual* in which women were encouraged to join."

John Wesley, founder of Methodism in England, took another step by giving women *public* responsibilities, at first in small groups of other women. Next, he "welcomed their public speaking as it took the forms of prayer, personal testimony, exhortation, and exposition on religious literature."⁶

While mainline churches such as Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians lagged behind in expanding women's roles, the new evangelical groups quickly gave women a voice.⁷ In England George Fox argued from Scripture that women's equality and their speaking in public could be justified. Emboldened by this vision, women preachers crossed the Atlantic and endured enormous hardship—even torture and death—to share Quaker ideals in America.⁸

If such ideas blossomed in the Great Awakening, what occurred in the Second Great Awakening (1787-1825)? Once again the convicting power of the gospel spurred many women out of traditional roles.⁹

Among the earliest reforms in which American women participated publicly was the anti-slavery movement. Awakened and energized by Christian principles, women soon began to spearhead other social reforms. They rallied tens of thousands to join the Women's Christian Temperance Union. They worked tirelessly to improve conditions in mental asylums, prisons, hospitals, and schools. Through diligence and self-sacrifice they organized and funded great missionary societies that reached India, Africa, China, and the islands of the sea.

Ellen's world

In 1827 Ellen Harmon was born into a Methodist home in Maine. Hope

and excitement seized her, her parents, and siblings as William Miller preached that Christ would come in 1843 or 1844. Although the Harmons were disfellowshipped by their local congregation for their fervent Adventist belief, it seems likely that they retained many Methodist views and worship practices.

The occasion of Ellen's first vision should be noted here. After the Great Disappointment, she was in a small group of *other young women* to study and pray—a setting considered appropriate for evangelical women of the day.

It was these young women, along with the Harmon family and others, who encouraged Ellen to accept what she considered a startling and overwhelming call—the call to speak publicly, and to mixed audiences, about

Ellen White encouraged women to make full use of their talents in both traditional and untraditional roles.

her unusual personal religious experience. Some of her reluctance to do this stemmed from her youth, shyness, and poor health. But for a woman to pray or speak publicly to both men and women was a daring thing in those days, even in religious circles.

In 1889 Ellen recalled that her own brother had begged her not to go public. "I beg of you do not disgrace the family. I will do anything for you if you will not go out as a preacher," he wrote to her.

Ellen replied, "Can it disgrace the family for me to preach Christ and him crucified! If you would give me all the gold your house could hold, I would not cease giving my testimony for God."¹⁰

When revivalist Charles Finney began to allow women to assume public roles in 1827, fellow revivalists accused him of supporting a cause that

would split churches.¹¹ Phoebe Palmer, a Methodist preacher, was frequently challenged about the appropriateness of her public work. In 1859 she published a 429-page book in defense of women who spoke in church, launching her biblical arguments from Joel 2:28.¹²

Early Adventist views

Joel 2 was familiar ground for early Seventh-day Adventists for similar reasons. To deflect criticism about the public and prophetic ministry of a *specific* woman (Ellen Harmon White, who had married James in 1846), they sometimes addressed the role of women in *general*.

As early as July 30, 1861, Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review*, reprinted an article from the *Portadown News*, with these words of approval: "We consider the following a triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters to take part in the public worship of God. The writer applies the prophecy of Joel—'Your daughters shall prophesy,' etc.—to female preaching; but while it must embrace public speaking of some kind, this we think is but half of its meaning."

In the August 18, 1868, *Review*, M. W. Howard spoke of "that conservatism which so readily takes fright at the prominence accorded to a woman."

The topic of women's public role in the Adventist Church resurfaced many times. In 1879 J. N. Andrews and James White wrote articles supporting it, as did G. C. Tenney in an editorial published first in 1892 and reprinted in 1894.¹³

An advocate for women

Ellen White became a model and spokesperson for her Adventist women contemporaries. She encouraged women to make full use of their talents in both traditional and untraditional (public) roles. She also asked men to support them. The following three statements illustrate her growing conviction that women should engage in public ministry.

In 1878: "Sisters, God calls you to

work in the harvest field and help gather in the sheaves.”¹⁴

In 1886: “It was Mary who first *preached* a risen Jesus; and the refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth now.”¹⁵

In 1898: “There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God.”¹⁶

Ellen White ever upheld the importance of a mother’s role in rearing children. Like Christians around her she saw the home as a high-priority mission.¹⁷ Research, however, leads me to conclude that the older Ellen White grew the more emphatic she became about women’s place in public ministry.¹⁸

Ellen White was also an outspoken advocate for fair wages and policies affecting women. In 1898, for example, she stated:

“If a woman is appointed by the Lord to do a certain work, her work is to be estimated according to its value. . . . It may be thought to be a good plan to allow persons to give talent and earnest labor to the work of God, while they draw nothing from the treasury. . . . God will not put His sanction on any such plan.”¹⁹

Women decision-makers

What impact did White’s advocacy have upon women and the church? One measure may be the number of women whom the church employed in key leadership roles.

Bertha Dasher has tabulated the number of women leaders listed in the *SDA Yearbook* for various years. (See graphs.) This study shows that whereas scores of women were once elected to key decision-making roles, today there are almost none. In 1905, for example, women held 20 out of 60 conference treasurer positions. The number of women heading conference departments was even more remarkable. In 1915 approximately two thirds of the 60 educational department leaders and more than 50 of the 60 Sabbath school department leaders were women.

As the graphs show, women’s influence as decision-makers in the Seventh-

day Adventist Church peaked between 1900 and 1915.

Some of these women held high offices very early in our church history. Three were elected as General Conference treasurer before the turn of the century: Adelia Patten Van Horn (1871-1873), Fredricka House Sisley (1875-1876), and Minerva Jane Loughborough Chapman (1877-1883).

Fewer gained prominence after Ellen White’s death in 1915. One was Flora Plummer, whose career began *during* White’s lifetime when she was elected secretary of the Iowa Conference in 1897. Plummer is also the first woman known to have been an *acting conference president* (when Clarence Santee was called to California in 1900).²⁰ Plummer’s most remembered contribution came during the 23 years she led the General Conference Sabbath School Department (1913-1936). No GC Sabbath school leader since has exceeded her record.

Women evangelists and preachers

Another measure of the impact of White’s advocacy for women may be shown by the number of Adventist women who have carried *ministerial licenses*.

Using lists found in old *SDA Yearbooks* (which were first published in 1883/1884), Josephine Benton discovered at least 53 women licensed as ministers between 1884 and 1975. Most worked in the United States, but some were licensed in Finland, New Zealand, China, and South Africa.

Twenty-eight of these women were granted licenses in the 30 years between 1884 and 1915. From that point on, the numbers decrease steadily. In the 60-year period between 1915 and 1975, only 25 women’s names appear on the list. (The cutoff in the late seventies came when the question of women’s ordination arose. The church then halted its 100-year practice of issuing ministerial licenses to women.)

Actually, *more* than 53 women have carried a ministerial license in Adventist history;

the *SDA Yearbook*, like any record, has inaccuracies. Sarah A. Hallock Lindsey’s record reflects one such inaccuracy. As a pioneer evangelist among churches in New York during a period marked by apostasy and disarray, she was licensed in 1872.²¹ However, her name does not appear in the *SDA Yearbook* until 23 years *later*, in 1895.²²

Records can also be misplaced or overlooked. Helen Stanton Williams (Mrs. E. R. Williams) attended Battle Creek College, became a Bible instructor, a popular camp meeting speaker, and an effective evangelist. According to the *SDA Yearbook*, she was first licensed in 1897. In 1906 she and her husband became pastors in Chicago, each leading separate churches. Later they were missionaries in South Africa. Late in life Williams was grieved to be accused of lying about having once held a minister’s license. A church leader assumed her to be dishonest when he failed to locate the record.²³

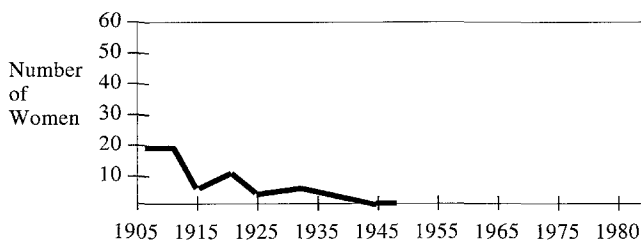
Subsequent to Benton’s discovery, Bert Haloviak has found names of a *dozen* women who were issued ministerial licenses by six conferences *before* 1884. The names of at least two of them, Helen Morse and Ida Ballenger, do not appear in the *SDA Yearbooks* at all.²⁴ Thus, the total number of Adventist women who have carried a ministerial license is definitely greater than 53.

The importance of ministerial licenses

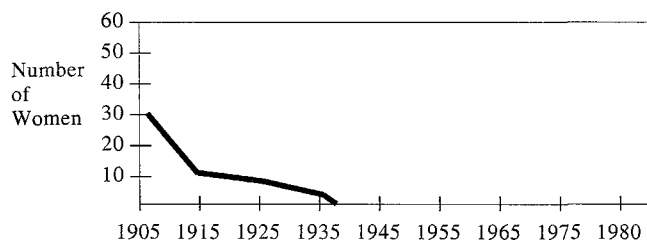
How important were ministerial licenses to early Adventists? Did women and men receive them on the same basis?

Licenses were taken very seriously in the nineteenth century. For example, Haloviak points out that the Michigan Conference adopted a resolution in 1881 asking churches *not* to “encourage indi-

Conference Treasurers



Conference Secretaries



viduals to preach who have not been licensed.”²⁵ For a time, licentiatees were tested—each year.

Women “followed the same path to the ministry as that followed by men.”²⁶ They took the same training that men did and passed the same tests. They were paid by local conferences or the General Conference from tithe funds.

Although the emphasis of Adventist ministry did change over time, women were as effective as men in all of these roles—as evangelists, resident ministers, and local pastors.²⁷

Why the decline?

Several factors contributed to the dramatic decline of both Adventist women leaders and licensed ministers. In 1923, for example, church leaders enacted new policies at Autumn Council intended to ensure that departmental leaders would be soulwinners. They recommended that “in the future, home missionary and Missionary Volunteer secretaries be selected who have had successful experience in evangelistic work, *preferably ordained ministers*.” Women had held many departmental positions up until then. These new policies became a key factor in bringing about their demise in church administrative positions, for women were not ordained.²⁸

Socioeconomic trends in the United States made an impact on the church.²⁹ During the Great Depression Adventist leaders enacted policies designed to save the church from financial ruin. Some of these impacted more negatively upon women than men, including wage cuts, mergers of conferences, and term limits for conference positions.³⁰

As budgets constricted, ordained ministers were often the last to lose jobs. Lacking this credential, women were vulnerable.

There were other issues. The number

of professionally trained male ministers increased. As men returned home at the close of World War II, U.S. society gave renewed emphasis to home and motherhood.³¹

Ellen White’s death

in 1915 must not be underestimated as a factor in women’s declining visibility in the church. When an advocate’s voice becomes silent, there is less incentive to maintain inclusive policies, especially if leaders have had doubts about them to begin with.

Some had these doubts. If all had agreed with White’s view, she would have had no occasion to write the pointed counsel on fair pay noted above.

More women, lesser credentials

Another element contributed to the decline in the number of women issued ministerial licenses since 1915: the subjective judgment of church administrators. Leaders have not always been willing, or have not always received permission, to measure women’s ministry by the same criteria used to measure men’s.

In all likelihood, the actual number of Adventist women *doing* evangelistic and ministerial work has *increased* since 1915. But the number of administrators who have issued appropriate credentials recognizing the content and quality of these women’s work has *decreased*.

Case study

The history of credentialing women in Finland illustrates a trend to give ministerial licenses only to men. The first native Finnish ministerial worker, male or female, in Finland was Alma Bjugg. A former captain in the Salvation Army, she was equipped to be a leader and was so recognized.³²

The *SDA Yearbook* shows Bjugg (alternatively spelled “Bjdigg”) as carrying a minister’s license in both 1904 and 1905. Bjugg would then have been 40; she continued in ministry. By

1909 she was receiving a Bible instructor’s license. Why wasn’t the minister’s license renewed? Did the nature of her work actually change or did union or division leaders view it differently?

In fact, as time passed ministerial licenses came to be granted throughout the Adventist Church not on the basis of work but on that of gender.

The statistics for 1949 in Finland is one illustration of this trend. The church there lists 12 ordained ministers. It also lists 12 licensed ministers—all men; and 36 licensed missionaries of whom 25 were women. Among these 25 women, 11 were institutional workers. Of the other 14, nine were *considered* by people who knew them to be holding “ministerial positions.”³³

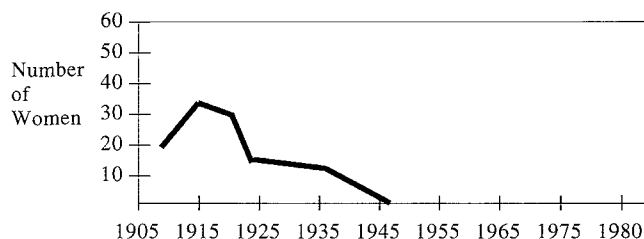
This estimation is amply backed up by articles describing the women evangelists’ crusades in the *Northern Light*,³⁴ an Adventist newsletter for Europe. In other words, in 1949 at least nine women were not issued credentials that represented the true ministerial nature of their work.

Since the turn of the century between 20 and 40 women in Finland are *considered* to have done ministerial work.³⁵ Yet Alma Bjugg is the only one known to have carried a minister’s license.

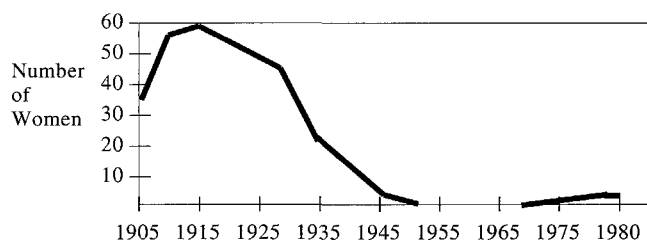
Given that this dichotomy had existed for several decades, the Finnish Union in 1968 surprised both the Northern European Division and the General Conference by asking to rectify the situation. What they asked for, however, was not ministerial licenses for women.

Finland wanted to *ordain* women.³⁶ W. Duncan Eva, president of the Northern European Division, conveyed Finland’s question and sought counsel from W. R. Beach, GC secretary.³⁷ Beach replied that Adventists had not ordained women in the past. He suggested that GC and division officers should look “at

Educational Department Leaders



Sabbath School Department Leaders



the problem" during the 1968 Biennial Council.³⁸

These two letters began a 27-year discussion that is still under way.³⁹ Women's ordination remains an issue.

In conclusion

By 1915 scores of Adventist women held decision-making posts. Because the church was relatively small at the time (fewer than 137,000 members worldwide), women made up a noticeable proportion of the church's leaders.

But their numbers declined dramatically. By the time World War II ended, Adventist women lost all the ground they had gained in the previous 100 years. They completely vanished from conference leadership. Now, 50 years later, it has become more and more difficult to recall women's former prominence and effectiveness.

In a similar trend, the number of women holding ministerial licenses has also dwindled. During the late 1970s the church halted its 100-year practice of granting ministerial licenses to women.

Despite these tremendous setbacks, there are Adventist women who have kept the faith. Stories of their courage and accomplishments persist. They preach, evangelize, and minister throughout the world, although their work is not appropriately evaluated or recognized.

Is it possible that many Seventh-day Adventists today have forgotten—or never had the chance to learn—about the church's rich and innovative history when Adventist women were welcomed as more equal partners in the church's life, decision-making posts, and gospel mission? ■

Religion Teacher's Conference, May 2-4, 1985), pp. 2-6.

² See, for example, Sheila Ruth, *Issues in Feminism, a First Course in Women's Studies* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1980), pp. 322-326.

³ In Ruth, p. 98.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵ *Godey's Lady's Book* 20 (1840): 273. Cited in

Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon Books/Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 67.

⁶ Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 84. (Italics supplied.)

⁷ Barbara Brown Zikmund, "The Feminine Thrust of Sectarian Christianity," in *Women of Spirit*, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 206-209.

⁸ MacHaffie, pp. 90, 91.

⁹ Dorothy C. Bass, "'Their Prodigious Influence': Women, Religion and Reform in Antebellum America," in Ruether and McLaughlin, p. 281.

¹⁰ From "Looking for That Blessed Hope," a sermon Ellen White preached in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 26, 1889. In *Signs of the Times*, June 24, 1889.

¹¹ Nancy Hardesty, Lucille Sider Dayton, and Donald W. Dayton, "Women in the Holiness Movement: Feminism in the Evangelical Tradition," in Ruether and McLaughlin, p. 230.

¹² Charles Edward White, *The Beauty of Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), pp. 187-193.

¹³ J. N. Andrews, "May Women Speak in Meeting?" *Review and Herald*, Jan 2, 1879; James White, "Women in the Church," *Review and Herald*, May 29, 1879; G. C. Tenney, "Woman's Relation to the Cause of Christ," *Review and Herald*, May 24, 1892. (Reprinted June 5, 1894.)

¹⁴ *Review and Herald*, Dec. 19, 1878. Cited in Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), pp. 477, 478.

¹⁵ *Signs of the Times*, Sept. 16, 1886. Cited in Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952) p. 146. (Italics supplied.)

¹⁶ Manuscript 43a, 1898. Cited in *Evangelism*, p. 472.

¹⁷ See Michael Pearson, "Early Adventist Women: In the Shadow of the Prophetess," *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 134-151.

¹⁸ See Kit Watts, "The Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," pp. 21-46. This unpublished manuscript was completed in February 1972 and was among the papers studied by the Camp Mohaven Council on the Role of Women in September 1973.

¹⁹ White, *Evangelism*, p. 491.

²⁰ The only other Adventist woman presently known to have been an acting conference president since 1900 is Phyllis Mosley Ware. See

Wanda Grimes Davis, "Woman Becomes Acting President as Conference Weathers Crisis," *Adventist Woman*, June/July 1994, p. 1.

²¹ Brian Strayer, in *Adventist Heritage* 11, No. 2 (fall 1986): 18-24.

²² Josephine Benton, *Called by God* (Smithsburg, Md.: Blackberry Hill Publishers, 1990), p. 229.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 25.

²⁴ Bert Haloviak, "Longing for the Pastorate: Ministry in the 19th Century" (unpublished manuscript), p. 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.

²⁸ *Actions of the Autumn Council*, Oct. 9-17, 1923, p. 21. See also Bert Haloviak, "Adventism's Lost Generations: The Decline of Leadership Positions for SDA Women" (unpublished paper, May 12, 1990).

²⁹ See Pearson, pp. 152-155.

³⁰ Patrick L. Allen, "Effects of the Depression on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (unpublished honors paper presented at Andrews University in May 1985). Cited in "Women in SDA Leadership Lost Ground During Depression," *Adventist Woman*, July/August 1985, p. 4.

³¹ See Bertha Dasher, "Women's Leadership, 1915-1970: The Waning Years," in *A Woman's Place: Seventh-day Adventist Women in Church and Society*, ed. by Rosa Taylor Banks (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1992), p. 76.

³² Letter to the author from Anna-Liisa Halonen, treasurer, Finland Union Conference, Nov. 18, 1994.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ The success of women evangelists in the 1950s as reported in the *Northern Light* includes these examples: E. L. Minchin, "Itinerating in Sweden and Finland," March 1951, p. 10; photo of six lady evangelists published in October 1952, p. 5; Hanna Vaananen, "Women Evangelists in Finland," November 1952, p. 7; Ida Matilainen, "Jesus Christ, the Same Today," January 1953, p. 7; C. Gidlund, "East Nordic Union [news notes]," January 1954, p. 8; C. Gidlund, "An Evening With the Northern European Division [June 1, 1954]," July/August 1954, p. 5; A. F. Tarr, "Northern European Division," July/August 1954, p. 11; Onni Peltonen, "Greetings From Finland," April 1957, p. 7.

³⁵ Letter from Anna-Liisa Halonen.

³⁶ This is not the first time Adventists have discussed women's ordination. In 1881 the General Conference passed this resolution: "Resolved: That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry" (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1881).

³⁷ Mar. 28, 1968, GC Archives.

³⁸ Apr. 15, 1968, GC Archives.

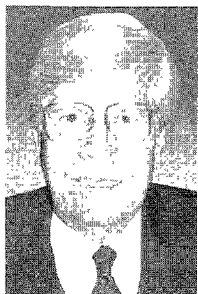
³⁹ Haloviak sees Eva's letter about Finnish women evangelists as a factor that eventually resulted in calling the Council on the Role of Women in the Church in September 1973, Camp Mohaven, Ohio. See "The Long Road to Mohaven," *Adventist Woman*, September/October 1993, p. 1.

¹ Lorna Tobler, "A More Faithful Witness." (Unpublished paper presented at the West Coast

Called to be a minister

V. Norskov Olsen

A biblical, theological, historical inquiry of ordination and its relevance to ministry



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The meaning of ordination must be sought in the Bible. But the task is not easy. The King James Version, which has influenced the church in the English-speaking world for three centuries, uses “ordain” to translate more than 20 different Hebrew and Greek words. We will consider here the Greek usage of the word in the New Testament only where it relates to appointment to an official ministry.

We begin with the only usage found in the Gospels: “And he *ordained* twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:14, KJV).^{*} The Greek *poieo* literally means “made twelve.” Modern versions translate the word as “appointed” (for example, RSV, NIV, NKJV). *The Living Bible* says: “He selected twelve.”

Another reference to “ordain” is the KJV rendition of Acts 1:22 that deals with replacing Judas. “Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be *ordained* to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” The Greek here is *ginomai*, meaning “to become.” Other translations use “select,” “join us,” “become one with us,” etc.

A third mention of “ordain” in the KJV is Paul’s reference to himself: “Whereunto I am *ordained* a preacher, and an apostle” (1 Tim. 2:7). Here the Greek is *tithemi*, which means to “place,” “set,” “assign.” The word is also translated as “appointed” (RSV, NIV), “chosen” (TLB), and “been named” (Jerusalem).

A fourth reference is Titus 1:5,

which states that Titus should “ordain elders in every city.” The Greek here is *kathistemi*, meaning “cause to be” or “arrange.” Other translations employ “appoint,” “put in charge,” but never “ordain.”

A fifth reference is Acts 14:23: “And when they had *ordained* them elders in every church.” The Greek is *cheirotoneo*, a word that appears also in 2 Cor. 8:19, where the KJV translates as “chosen.” *Cheirotoneo* comes from *cheiros*, “hand,” and *toneo*, “to stretch,” meaning “to stretch out the hand.” Technically, the word expresses appointment or agreement by lifting of the hand as in voting.

Such, briefly, is the KJV translation as “ordain” from different Greek words. But “ordain” has a Latin root as well. The Latin *ordinare* means “to set in order,” “arrange,” or “regulate.” The Greek and Latin words have different connotations: “It is evident that there is a certain difference between the unspoken cultural setting of the Greek *cheirotonein* and that of the Latin *ordo* or *ordinare*. The New Testament use of the former term borrows its basic secular meaning of “appointment” (Acts 14:23; 2 Cor. 8:19), which is, in turn, derived from the original meaning of extending the hand, either to designate a person or to cast a vote. . . . *Ordo* and *ordinare*, on the other hand, are terms derived from Roman law where they convey the notion of the special status of a group distinct from the plebs, as in the term *ordo clarissimus* for the Roman senate.”¹

With Latin becoming the language of the church in the West, and with the consolidation of monarchical episco-

pacy, it is not difficult to see how the church's organizational structure gradually followed that of the empire. Words such as *ordo* and *ordinare*, already in use in the Roman society, enhanced the power of the church hierarchy, and in time the concept of priesthood of believers and of spiritual gifts became obsolete. Eventually a hierarchy of priests and bishops and the concept of ordination to make them so came to be in vogue.

Thus to build a case for ordination on the basis of KJV usage of the word "ordain" is rather shaky. Moreover, "ordination" is not once mentioned in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, the three main chapters that speak of the special gifts given to the church "for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12, KJV). Paul lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (verse 11), but makes no reference to ordination.

Laying on of hands in the Old Testament

In the rite of ordination the laying on of hands is an important ritual. Is there a scriptural basis for this?

The first biblical reference to laying on of hands is found in Genesis 48:14: Jacob "stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head." Here the laying of hands represented a special blessing. Then there is laying of hands in connection with the sacrificial system, where the act meant that guilt, sin, and punishment were transferred from the sinner to the sacrificial animal. The Old Testament also refers to two cases where hands were laid in relation to a particular ministry: on Joshua and on the Levites.

The appointment of Joshua. Moses "laid his hands on him [Joshua] and commissioned him, just as the Lord had spoken" (Num. 27:23). Several points should be noticed here. Joshua's experience made him an obvious choice. He was a close associate of Moses. He was richly endowed by the Holy Spirit. Urim and Thummim confirmed his call from God. His commissioning should be public in the sight of the congregation. So Moses placed his hands on him. It was a onetime occurrence for a specific and unique historical event—for leading Is-

rael into the Promised Land—and it was not repeated in other installations of priests, kings, or prophets.

Hands placed on the Levites. How were the Levites consecrated and installed? Moses was asked to "present the Levites before the tent of meeting. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, and present the Levites before the Lord; and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites" (Num. 8:9, 10). The Levites' role as representatives of the people was confirmed by hands being laid upon them by the people.

As in the case of priests and high priests, the Levites inherited their functions by birth, and the laying on of hands was not repeated.

Usage of Hebrew words. "Laying on" is a translation of three different Hebrew words.² Where a special blessing is involved as in the story of Jacob, *s'im* or *shith* (synonymous) are used. An act of healing would also fall into this category. Where we have consecration and offering, the Hebrew is *samakh*, as when Moses consecrated Joshua or when the people placed their hands on the Levites. *S'im* and *shith* express a light touch, but *samakh* suggests a heavy touch, as in the sense of "to lean upon." *Samakh* also hints that a person transfers "something" to another person (or sacrificial animal), who/which then became the representative or substitute.

When lifting of hands is related to priestly blessing, *nasa* is used, as when "Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them" (Lev. 9:22). Much confusion could be avoided if this difference in meaning and usage is kept in mind.

The installation of priest, king, and prophet

Consecration of the priest. God said to Moses: "Invest your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint them, install them and consecrate them; so shall they serve me as priests" (Ex. 28:41, NEB).

What the NEB translates as "install," the KJV renders as "consecrate," and the NASB and RSV as "ordain." The Hebrew word *mille'yadh* means literally "to fill the hands." The most likely meaning is that the hands should be filled with those objects they were to

offer up in the temple as part of the sacrifice. "In Eastern lands installation into office was usually accomplished by putting into the hand of the official the insignia marking his functions. Here certain portions of the offerings were used for that purpose."³

The words "fill the hands" clearly emphasize that the installation is to a service connected with the rites of the temple (see Ex. 29:20-28).

Anointing the king. The anointing of a king symbolized the endowment of "the Spirit of the Lord" (see 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13). The king, as custodian of the Book of the Law, was supposed to copy it with his own hand (Deut. 17:18-20). The covenant was renewed as a covenant between God, the king, and the people. While the high priest's hands were filled with oblations, the king's hands were "filled" with the law. He was also crowned and enthroned (see 1 Kings 1:33ff.; 2 Kings 11:12; 1 Chron. 29:22ff.).

Anointing the prophet. We have only the instance of anointing the prophet: Elijah anointing Elisha (1 Kings 19:16, 19). It appears that the "anointed ones" and the "prophets" in Psalm 105:15 are the same. The Lord's servant (Isa. 61:1) speaks of himself as anointed "to bring good news."

Rabbinical ordination⁴

We now turn to rabbinical ordination and its relationship, if any, to the primitive church. According to Jewish tradition, the steps of succession descended "in a direct line from Moses to Joshua, from Joshua to the elders, from the elders to the prophets, from the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly [Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Sanhedrin created after the return from captivity], and so on, until it reached the patriarchs [the heads of the Sanhedrin after the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70] and the other heads of the Rabbinical schools."⁵

The codified tradition. The Mishnah and Talmud became representative of Judaism after A.D. 70. The Mishnah codified rabbinical oral tradition and supplies us with information from the first century. The rabbis may have read their own theological concepts into the biblical texts, but this was no different from what Christian theologians did

later. In fact, a close parallel exists between Catholic argument for apostolic succession of the monarchical bishop and the pope as the successor of Peter, and the Talmudic "proof" for rabbinical succession from the time of Moses. This parallel also includes the subject of ordination.

The rabbinic case for ordination was based on the laying of hands on Joshua by Moses (Num. 27:22, 23) and the choosing of the 70 elders (Num. 11:16, 17, 24, 25). Even though there was no mention of the laying of hands on the 70, rabbinical exegesis applied a hermeneutical principle that "in two analogous texts, a particular consideration in one may be extended to the other as a general principle,"⁶ and took for granted that hands were placed on the 70 elders.

Mishnaic ordination. Based on the Mishnah, "ordination was required both for membership in the Great Sanhedrin, and the smaller Sanhedrins and regular colleges of judges empowered to decide legal cases." The "lowest degree of ordination entitled the rabbi to decide only religious questions, while the highest degree entitled him to inspect firstlings, in addition to deciding religious questions and judging criminal cases."⁷ Thus the "ordained person" became important in not only the religious but also the civil life of the people.

But the Emperor Hadrian, during the Jewish revolt of A.D. 132-135, sought to curtail the influence of the new Sanhedrin by forbidding ordination. By the third century the laying on of hands ceased, and the rabbi was appointed and dedicated by his name being pronounced. The authority for the appointment rested with the patriarch and not, as earlier, when a teacher would place his hand on his pupil; further, any ceremony of installment performed by the council or college of judges "without the consent of the patriarch was invalid, while the patriarch received the privilege of performing the ceremony without the consent of the college."⁸

Another reason for not laying hands was "the increasing role played by the imposition of hands in the Christian religion." The name of the Jewish ordination service was also changed from

semikah or *semikuta*, meaning laying on of hands, to *minnuv*, meaning appointment.⁹

Mishnaic influence on the primitive church. Scholars hold three main opinions on how mishnaic ordination may have influenced the primitive church. Hugo Mantel distinguishes two separate ordinations during the Second Temple period: "First, they ordained the student (the scholar sitting at the top of the front row was given the official title of *Hakam* [sage]), and then they appointed him judge and sat him in the High Court."¹⁰

Mantel believes that "the early Jewish Christians, especially in Jerusalem, borrowed their customs from Judaism. They regarded themselves as a Jewish sect separated from the Pharisees only by their belief in Jesus. It is clear that the early Christians did not invent this lay-

Of the numerous texts in the New Testament that deal with the laying on of hands, only six are related to ministry.

ing on of hands, nor could they have borrowed it from the Hellenistic world."¹¹

Another view is that of Arnold Ehrhardt who argues that the Mishnah is not historically reliable and does not prove rabbinical ordination in New Testament times. On "rabbi" as a title for an ordained Jewish scholar, Ehrhardt states: "There can be no question that in Talmudic times it was 'Rabbi,' but in the period before A.D. 70 this title was freely given to nonordained Jewish scholars—a fact which is borne out by the evidence of the New Testament."¹²

Ehrhardt also points out that the title given to the members of the Sanhedrin was "presbyter," and that was not synonymous with "scribe" or "rabbi." In the New Testament "the elders and scribes are mentioned side by side as separate groups in Matthew 26:57 and Acts 6:12, which suggests that the elders were not necessarily scribes."¹³

Ehrhardt draws three conclusions: "The first and best founded is that the development of Jewish ordination confirms our assertion that the Christian description of ministers as presbyters was derived from the title of the members of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. The second is that in the matter of ordination the church and the synagogue appear not in the relation of son and mother, but as half-brothers, like Isaac and Ishmael (Gal. 4:22f.), both in their way appropriating the Old Testament example. The third is that it may be wise, especially with regard to the rites of imposition of hands and enthronement of bishops, to allow for a period of development extending right down to the middle of the second century."¹⁴

A third view proposes an origin that is purely Christian, a distinct New Testamental invention. Everett Ferguson associates the laying on of hands, not with the Hebrew *samakh*, but with *s'im*, which expressed the transfer of a blessing. He agrees that "on the surface there appears to be good reason to connect Christian usage with *samakh*. It was used for appointment to office in the Old Testament and became the technical term for ordination in Judaism."¹⁵ But the deciding issue is "the question of the

category to which Christian ordination belongs." "The basic idea in early Christian ordination was not creating a substitute or transferring authority, but conferring a blessing and petitioning for the divine favor."¹⁶

Further, Ferguson finds "confirmation that Christian ordination is rooted in *s'im* and not in *samakh* . . . [in] the fact that laying on of hands in the church occurs only as an accompaniment to prayer. There is no indication that prayer was a part of Jewish ordinations."¹⁷

The laying on of hands in the NT

Of the numerous texts in the New Testament that deal with the laying on of hands, only six are related to ministry: two in Acts (6:6; 13:3) and three relating to Timothy.

The two accounts in Acts are found within the same context. According to Marjorie Warkentin, the significance of the two events are found in the evidence

that God has renewed His covenant. The Moses-Joshua and people-Levites *samakh* experiences are now repeated. In Acts 6:6 the apostles laid their hands on the seven, even as Moses laid his on Joshua. In Acts 13:3 the people laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas, as in the case of the Levites. Warkentin underscores the once-and-for-all significance of these events and rests the case there.¹⁸

The laying of hands upon the seven. Who placed their hands upon the seven and why? The first question is easily answered: "These they presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6, NEB). In the Greek, the construction is such that those who "laid their hands on" could equally well be the ones who presented them. The only Greek manuscript that has a reading that makes it definite that it was the apostles is Codex Bezae, also named Codex D, a late manuscript from the fifth or sixth century, and according to scholars, marked by variations from others.

The change in Acts 6:6 of Codex Bezae reflects a historical development beginning in the third century, when only the bishop in apostolic succession could ordain, followed by the assertion that bishops are the vicars of Christ—a claim later applied to the pope.¹⁹ This does not necessarily mean that the apostles could not have placed their hands on the seven, for the text can be interpreted both ways. Eduard Schweizer asserts that the laying on of hands, both on Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3) and on the seven, was for special service and "blessing." He therefore states: "It is not a matter of ordination, as both already belonged to the company of 'prophets and teachers.' It is therefore an 'installation,' i.e., a placing in a particular sphere of service which differs in some respects from that previously occupied."²⁰

The commission of Paul and Barnabas. The laying on of hands upon Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3) is clearly a consecration service for a special missionary task. They were themselves among the group of prophets and teachers in Antioch, but while the group was praying and fasting, the Holy Spirit impressed them to set apart

Barnabas and Paul for a missionary work.

The language used here corresponds to the consecration of the Levites (who by the *samakh* represented the people). God told Moses: "You shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel" (Num. 8:6, 14). In Acts the Holy Spirit directed the Antioch church: "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). The Levites were also set apart for a special work (Num. 8:11, 15; the Septuagint has the same word for "work"—*ergon*—as the New Testament).

Torrance suggests that Paul and Barnabas "were not ordained as 'rabbinic' pupils or disciples, but rather sent out as 'apostles' or authorized messengers of the community on a limited mission. . . . It does not seem to refer to ordination in the proper sense."²¹

The laying of hands in Epistles to Timothy. In the two Epistles to Timothy we find three references to the laying on of hands. Two speak of laying of hands on Timothy: "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14); "I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6).

The third one is a counsel to Timothy: "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others: keep yourself free from sin" (1 Tim. 5:22).

The obvious meaning of the first is that the presbytery placed their hands upon Timothy; in the second it was Paul. Another plausible explanation for the first is that the presbytery ordained Timothy, while Paul presided over the occasion. Timothy was not only a convert of Paul, but a close ministerial associate for nearly 20 years.

The act of laying of hands on Timothy no doubt took place early in his service. His career followed that of Paul and was not that of a local elder or overseer (bishop). The latter was "ap-

pointed"; no mention is made of hands being placed upon a local elder. That Paul should have ordained Timothy, who as a bishop in later years would ordain another, thus establishing apostolic succession, cannot be true to the historical situation.

In the unique historical situation and work of Paul in the early church, in which Timothy was closely related and often represented Paul personally, Paul may have laid his hands upon Timothy, even as a rabbi does on his pupil (if that was the custom in Paul's time). One thing is certain: Timothy represented Paul and the church universal; the presbytery as a whole had placed their hands upon him, and with Paul no doubt among them and possibly presiding over the rite. That's the background to 1 Timothy 4:14. Second Timothy 1:6 may refer to the same event. Whether there were one or two occasions of the laying on of hands is of minor importance; the significant fact is that Timothy was chosen by the Holy Spirit, commissioned by Paul, and sent as an emissary (apostle) by the people.

The injunction of 1 Timothy 5:22. Among the many injunctions Paul gave to Timothy, one is this: "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin" (1 Tim. 5:22). This passage is often interpreted to mean that Timothy could ordain another bishop. In fact, the church in later years based its case of ordination on the basis of this and other passages in Timothy and Acts.

Some translations do not help clear the confusion. The *New English Bible* reads: "Do not be over-hasty in laying on hands in ordination"; *The Living Bible*: "Never be in a hurry about choosing a pastor; you may overlook his sins and it will look as if you approve of them"; and Philips: "Never be in a hurry to ordain a man by laying your hands upon him."

But the context makes the meaning clear. Paul is speaking about a person who has been under church discipline. Kenneth S. Wuest writes: "The words 'Lay hands suddenly' have to do with the restoration of a sinning church member back into the fellowship of

the local church. . . . In verse 19, we see the accusation, in verse 20, the conviction and sentence, and in verse 22, the restoration to church fellowship. Expositors say: 'Timothy is bidden to restrain by deliberate prudence the impulses of mere pity. A hasty reconciliation tempts the offender to suppose that his offence cannot have been so very serious after all; and smooths the way to a repetition of the sin. . . . Those who give letters of recommendation with too great facility fall under the apostolic condemnation.'"²²

Thus the Timothy and Acts passages do not deal with church ordination as generally perceived. We cannot use them as a precedent for a concept that developed in the third century establishing a monarchical bishop and his role in performing the rite of ordination. As Birger A. Pearson notes: "The ecclesiological situation in Paul's churches . . . seems to be one of free, charismatic expression, and we find no concrete evidence of hierarchical organization, nor anything at all about 'ordination' to church offices."²³

Early historical sequel

The earliest description of an ordination service can be traced back to the third century, and is recorded in *The Apostolic Tradition*, by Hippolytus (d. A.D. 236), a presbyter in the church of Rome. His description of ordination confirms the changed concept of ministry that took place by the third century and expressed in the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian.

A distinction between the bishop and the presbyter is clearly drawn. A new bishop can be ordained only by other bishops, who alone "lay their hands on him, and the presbytery shall stand by in silence." In the ordination prayer the bishop is called God's "high priest"; the ordination granted him "the Spirit of high-priesthood" by which he had "authority to remit sins."

The distinction between the bishop and the presbyter was further widened by the fact that only the bishop could ordain the latter. "But when a presbyter is ordained, the bishop shall lay his hand upon his head, while the presbyters touch him."²⁴

In the case of the ordination of a deacon, only the bishop places his hand upon him, for "he is not ordained to the priesthood, but to serve the bishop and to carry out the bishop's commands. He does not take part in the council of the clergy; he is to attend to his own duties and to make known to the bishop such things as are needful. He does not receive that Spirit that is possessed by the presbytery, in which the presbyters share; he receives only what is confided in him under the bishop's authority. For this cause the bishop alone shall make a deacon."²⁵

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles. The fourth century saw the appearance of a church manual, the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*,²⁶ which claims to tell us what the apostles supposedly said and did. "But being

after God, he is your father, who has begotten you again to the adoption of sons by water and the Spirit. He is your ruler and governor; he is your king and potentate; he is, next after God, your earthly god, who has a right to be honoured by you. . . . For let the bishop preside over you as one honoured with the authority of God, which he is to exercise over the clergy, and by which he is to govern all the people."²⁹

The bishop is ordained "by three bishops" in the presence of presbyters, deacons, and the people who "give their consent." When it comes to a presbyter and deacon, they are "ordained by one bishop."³⁰ Provision is also made for ordination of deaconesses. The deacon and deaconess serve the bishop.³¹

Augustine of Hippo. Augustine (A.D. 396-430) followed the main tenets of Cyprian's ecclesiology, but furthered the development of the so-called Christian priesthood by "his sacramental concept of the ministry whereby the validity of a cleric's sacramental action was seen to be independent of his personal character." Roman Catholics adhere to this principle when asserting that by the sacrament of ordination the priest is marked by an indelible character. Regarding ordination, Augustine made it "wholly a permanent possession of the individual apart from the community in which and through which it was conferred."³²

The sacerdotal aspect of the new Christian high priest changed the New Testament concept of the ministry and appointment to it. Eric G. Jay expresses it well: "This view of the ministry, as it gained acceptance, doubtless aided by the common use of sacerdotal terminology, inevitably led to a new ecclesiology which sees the church as essentially a hierarchical body. The concept of the church as the whole people of God lost ground, and the distinction between clergy and laity was highly sharpened as the latter were relegated to the role of passive dependents. This ecclesiology was to come under formidable attack in the sixteenth century."³³

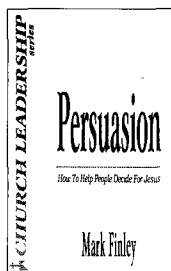
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The concept of the church as the whole people of God lost ground.

taught by the Lord the series of things, we distributed the functions of the high-priesthood to the bishops, those of the priesthood to the presbyters, and the ministration under them both to the deacons; that the divine worship might be performed in purity. For it is not lawful for a deacon to offer the sacrifice, or to baptize, or to give either the greater or the lesser blessing. Nor may a presbyter perform ordination."²⁷

Constitutions emphasizes the distinction between the laity and the priesthood: "Let the layperson honour him [bishop], love him, reverence him as his lord, as his master, as the high priest of God, as a teacher of piety. For he that heareth him, heareth Christ; and he that rejecteth him, rejecteth Christ."²⁸ Further, the bishop is "the mediator between God and you in the several parts of your divine worship. He is the teacher of piety; and, next

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Luther and Calvin's concept of ordination

Luther's early attack on the Roman sacramental system includes his criticism of ordination as a sacrament. Luther states: "The church of Christ knows nothing [of ordination as a sacrament]; it is an invention of the church of the pope. Not only is there nowhere any promise of grace attached to it, but there is not a single word said about it in the whole New Testament. Now it is ridiculous to put forth as a sacrament of God something that cannot be proved to have been instituted by God."³⁴ Accordingly, for Luther, "ordination, if it is anything at all, is nothing else than a certain rite whereby one is called to the ministry of the church."³⁵ To Luther the "indelible character" of ordination is a "fiction." Ministers can either be "suspended temporarily, or permanently deprived of their office."³⁶

Calvin likewise attacks the Roman Catholic sacramental idea of ordination, which is supposed to confer upon the recipient the power of "offering sacrifice to appease God." Accordingly "all are injurious to Christ who call themselves priests in the sense of offering expiatory victims."³⁷

Ordination and the priesthood of believers. The call to the ministry is connected with the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. Through baptism and faith "every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest"³⁸ wrote Luther in 1523, and that concept he never changed. In 1535 he introduced ceremonial ordination in Wittenberg, but even after that he wrote (1539): "It is enough that you are consecrated and anointed with the sublime and holy chrism of God, with the Word of God, with baptism, . . . then you are anointed highly and gloriously enough and sufficiently vested with priestly garments."³⁹

Every Christian through baptism is assured "that we are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments." Yet no one should use that "power" on his own initiative, for "what is the common property of all no individual may arrogate to himself,

unless he is called."⁴⁰ Here is Luther's bridge to an official or public ministry.

Luther's concept of the priesthood of believers grew out of his Christology and soteriology: "Because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people."⁴¹ In turn, because of the *ekklesia* being the priesthood of believers, the official ministry is a representative ministry, also referred to as the delegated or transferral ministry.

The Reformers' common view of the priesthood believers was brought into practice in a special way by Calvin in his presbyterian form of church organization. Calvin emphasized that as believers in Christ "we are all priests." Here the pastors and the elders (who outnumbered the pastors) exercised paternal criticism, counsel, and discipline. The appointment of a new minister came from a suggestion of the ministers who had their own council, but the consent had to be obtained from the body of believers and finally from the city authorities. The pastor was installed or commissioned by the people, their church councils, and the civil government.⁴²

Importance of the call and the commission. To Luther, the call, rather than the ceremony of laying on of hands, is decisive in ministry. Schoenleber comments: "Luther denied the idea that ritual ordination at the hands of a bishop is a necessary prerequisite for holding and exercising the office of the ministry. A call, not ritual ordination, is the only theological prerequisite for holding the office of the ministry. A ceremony using prayer and the imposition of hands may be used to install ministers in their congregations (as a public affirmation of their call), but it is optional and repeatable each time the ministers change congregations."⁴³

For Calvin too the call is important, not the rite of ordination: "Therefore, if any one would be deemed a true minister of the church, he *must first* be duly called." Together with "the external and formal call which relates to the public order of the

church," we also have "that secret call of which every minister is conscious to himself before God."⁴⁴

Calvin continues: "We see, then, that ministers are legitimately called according to the Word of God, when those who may have seemed fit are elected on the consent and approbation of the people. Other pastors, however, ought to preside over the election, lest any error should be committed by the general body either through levity, or bad passion, or tumult."⁴⁵

Ritual ordination. In Luther's endeavors to establish an evangelical church prior to 1535 "ritual ordination was not required for holding the office of ministry, and no regular method of ordination for the new church was introduced until 1535."⁴⁶ Even when that happened there "is no evidence to indicate that before 1535 Luther either tried to persuade the elector to authorize ordinations or ever claimed that ordination is necessary for holding the office of the ministry."⁴⁷ Indeed, Melancthon, the systematizer of Protestant theology, was a lay theologian.

Calvin found biblical support for the laying on of hands in installing a minister. Luther did the same. However, Calvin, like Luther, looked at it as a mere rite or ceremony, "agreeing unto order and comeliness," but having "of itself no force or power."⁴⁸

Formal ordination. In the spring of 1535 the elector of Saxony mandated that formal ordination was to be a prerequisite for holding ministerial office in his territory. Candidates for the ministry were to be examined and ordained by the theological faculty in Wittenberg. "It seems that the elector doubted that unordained people were truly able to hold and exercise the office of the ministry. He evidently saw a theological necessity for ritual ordination and so finally mandated ritual ordination as a legal precondition for holding the office of the ministry."⁴⁹

Luther accepted the elector's mandate without changing his theological concept of ritual ordination as long as the preaching of the Word could be enhanced. Pragmatism seemed to have been Luther's motive. He saw the mandate as an opportunity by which a

needed ministry could be developed with higher morality, better education, and reasonable salary, and a recognized and respected professional and social status in society; a worthy goal—but achieved with the assistance of secular powers. In the autumn of 1535 Luther delivered an ordination sermon in which he explained the new ordination arrangement. "Luther noted that Saxony faced a major threat from false teaching in its parishes and that the ordination mandate was a proper step towards rooting out false teaching since it gave Wittenberg control over the quality of new pastors."⁵⁰

Meanwhile in Geneva Calvin found it best to abstain from laying on of hands. When Calvin returned to Geneva from Strassburg in 1541, the city council had promised to cooperate with him, but as Francois Wendel has pointed out, only "on condition that this did not infringe any of the prerogatives of the civil power, or affect certain customs that the Genevan church observed in common with the Bernese churches, and which had to be maintained for political reasons." One of these conditions was that "the installation of new pastors could not be accompanied by the laying on of hands according to the example of Strassburg; they had to be inducted simply by a prayer, and with a sermon upon the pastoral functions. These were, after all, details of minor importance, and Calvin gave way."⁵¹

Thus Luther introduced the rite of laying on of hands under the influence of civil power, while Calvin withheld it because of civil power. But Calvin returned to the issue again. In the last edition of the *Institutes* (Latin, 1559, and French, 1560) Calvin endorsed the laying on of hands by referring to the New Testament. He says that pastors, teachers, and deacons were consecrated in this way. He admits that "there is no fixed precept concerning the laying on of hands," but he considered it a useful symbol by which "the dignity of the ministry should be commended to the people, and he who is ordained, reminded that he is no longer his own, but is bound in service to God and the church. Besides, it will not prove an empty sign, if it be restored to

its genuine origin. For if the Spirit of God has not instituted anything in the church in vain, this ceremony of his appointment we shall feel not to be useless, provided it be not superstitiously abused."⁵²

Early development in the Reformed Churches. J. L. Ainslie, in his extensive study of the ministry in the Reformed churches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, says: "Opinions have differed in most of the churches, both Reformed and others, as to the rite [of laying of hands] being essential in ordination or otherwise. Some have held it to be an absolute essential, while others have considered it better omitted, or, at the most, not essential, but only to be used as a helpful outward indication of ordination."⁵³

Ainslie cites a number of examples to illustrate the different concepts. The *Scottish First Book of Discipline* speaks against the imposition of hands.⁵⁴ In 1581 the *Second Book of Discipline* "definitely authorized the rite, though . . . the wording does not indicate any enforcing of it in ordinations. And it was not enforced. Ministers were admitted freely."⁵⁵

The Reformed Church in Holland also found the rite unnecessary. In its Canons of 1577 "the omission of laying on of hands in ordinations" was decreed, but at the Synod of Dort in 1619 the imposition of hands was stipulated.⁵⁶

Where the imposition of hands was practiced there were variations regarding who should lay on the hands: one minister, several ministers, or ministers and laymen.⁵⁷

These examples may tell us two things: first, that the call and the appointment, not the ceremonial rite, are of basic significance, and second, that God, under specific circumstances, calls people to unique tasks through the Holy Spirit (like Melancthon and Calvin, who were never ordained).

History tells us that ordination has been performed with diverse concepts of church-society relationships in mind. As Warkentin writes: "The church of Jesus Christ has continued to seek its patterns for church office in the society in which it is placed, in

(continued on page 28)

The Jerusalem Council: a model for Utrecht?

Andrew Bates

By God's grace, the miracle of Jerusalem could become the miracle of Utrecht in handling the ordination issue.

The circumstances facing the 1995 General Conference session are strikingly similar to those facing the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 49. That first “general conference,” I believe, could show us how to handle the ordination issue in a way that will unite instead of fragment the church. It’s a goal worth praying for.

In considering possible parallels, we can fully describe the biblical model. It is already history, recorded in Acts 14 and 15. The extent to which Utrecht might follow that model, however, is a matter of hope, not history—a bright hope, to be sure—and the analysis that follows is written by a “prisoner of hope” (cf. Zech. 9:12). Let’s look at the parallels, both real and potential.

1. A churchwide issue

At Jerusalem the whole church addressed the circumcision issue. A churchwide decision is necessary only if believers want to preserve the unity of the body of Christ. Paul and Barnabas could have led a splinter group of Gentile Christians, dividing the church along Gentile-Jewish lines. But delegates to the Jerusalem Council came together to resolve the issue because they believed in the unity of the church.

Similarly, for Adventists today the ordination of women is a churchwide issue. That is why it is on the agenda at

Utrecht. Though other Christian bodies have split over the issue, God calls us to address it as Christians, following the guidance of the Spirit so that the unity of His remnant body might be preserved. And the issue affects us all, regardless of our personal convictions on the matter.

2. A mission-driven issue

Acts 14:21-28 describes the growth of the church with a certain exuberance. Paul and Barnabas went from town to town in Asia Minor, winning many disciples to the Lord. They appointed elders for each group of believers, praying with them, and entrusting them to the Lord.

When they returned to Antioch, the missionaries called the church together and told of God’s blessing on their efforts. In particular, they told how God had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). Apparently circumcision was not an issue for these Gentiles—until some believers came from Judea and declared: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).*

Paul and Barnabas were alarmed, fearing that their mission to the Gentiles could be at risk. Unwilling to link circumcision with salvation, they had “no small dissension and dispute” with their Judean brethren. It soon became clear to the believers in Antioch that

Andrew Bates is a pseudonym.

the larger church must address this issue that went right to the heart of the church's mission. They sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the brethren.

Dissension couldn't cool the ardor of the missionaries. En route to Jerusalem, they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, "describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren" (verse 3). And in Jerusalem they "reported all things that God had done with them" (verse 4).

But discord broke out once again as certain believers from the sect of the Pharisees expressed their convictions about the new Gentile believers: "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (verse 5). The conference had its agenda, all right, but note that it was a mission-driven agenda, erupting as a direct result of explosive church growth among the Gentiles.

Similarly, the women's ordination issue is mission-driven, especially in North America. Adventist campuses across North America are alive with young women whose hearts have been gripped by the conviction that God wants them to serve Him in a special way.

All that means an acute dilemma for the church. As North American Division president Alfred McClure said in his appeal to the 1994 Annual Council: "By invitation of their church, women have attended seminary for two decades. What kind of message do we send" to them if "they are made to feel inferior by a less-than-full approbation by their church?"¹

And a ripple effect moves beyond those who feel called to ministry. Many, especially women, see the church's stance on ordination as symbolic of its attitude toward all matters of equality, including gender and race. As the doors signifying equality have gradually opened, one hears echoes from the book of Acts—the good news spreading with great joy through Phoenicia and Samaria, all the way from Antioch to Jerusalem.

But opinions are still divided. The decision at Utrecht will be crucial, the implications for mission far-reaching.

3. An issue shaped by culture and geography

The account in Acts suggests that Jewish Christians of the Diaspora (Jews living outside of Palestine) were quite willing to let circumcision be a nonissue for the non-Jew. Close contact with Gentiles had nurtured positive feelings among the Jewish Christians and they responded with joy when the Gentiles came flooding into the church.

In Judea, however, a more critical spirit prevailed, especially among Christians from a Pharisaic background. It was hard for them to imagine anyone worshipping the true God without first becoming a Jew. But conversations, even dissensions and arguments, began to build the bridges that would keep the church together.

In our day the issue of women's ordination is also shaped by culture and geography. The democratic tradi-

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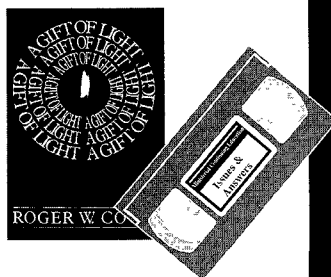
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tions of the West have given impetus to the idea of equality for women, though even in the West the struggle has not been easy. Other cultures, however, see the issue of equality quite differently. I have listened in, for example, on lively debates between Middle Eastern Muslims and Western Christians on the role of women. The Muslims were repulsed by the idea of "forcing" freedom on their women. "We protect them," they declared bluntly.

In contrast with previous proposals on ordination, the one coming to the Utrecht General Conference session respects geographical and cultural differences, proposing that decisions on ordination be made division by division. That is faithful to the model established by the Jerusalem Council. Just as circumcision was neither abandoned by all nor forced on all, so the church should not attempt to force a lockstep unity on the question of ordination, disregarding

deep convictions and cultural patterns. The church can, however, support a unity that allows for cultural diversity. Indeed, allowing for such diversity would be a powerful impulse toward unity.

4. An issue forced to a head by changing circumstances and the passage of time

It is instructive to note that the church did not formally address the issue of circumcision until some 15 years after the resurrection of Jesus. In other words, it was not at all clear to the early Christians that Jesus' death on the cross had brought the law of Moses to an end. Only when evangelism exploded among the Gentiles did the believers finally realize that some elements of Judaism might pass away.

The list of four "necessary things" that the Jerusalem Council asked of the Gentile believers—abstaining from "things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:29)—represent a remarkable halfway house between traditional Jewish requirements and the Christian freedom for which Paul argues so forcefully in passages like Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. And Paul himself, by carefully addressing the issue of the "weaker brother" (1 Cor. 8:7-13; 10:23-30), reveals a keen awareness of how difficult it is to live in a time of transition.

The decision to drop circumcision as a requirement while affirming a prohibition against food offered to idols is particularly interesting in light of the Old Testament stance on both issues, for no clear "thus saith the Lord" can be found for either position. Nowhere does the Old Testament even hint that circumcision could be laid aside; and nowhere does it clearly address the issue of food offered to idols. Yet in the name of the Holy Spirit the Jerusalem Council endorsed both positions because they believed circumstances in the church and world demanded it.

Actually, the Old Testament itself shows that such adaptability had long been a part of God's way with His people. In Deuteronomy 23, for example, eunuchs, illegitimate children, Ammonites and Moabites are all forbidden a place within the Lord's congregation. Yet

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Isaiah 56:4, 5 opens the door to the eunuchs, Judges 11 blesses the illegitimate Jephthah, and the royal Davidic lineage (of which Jesus was a part) includes both Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 4:17-22; Matt. 1:5) and Naamah the Ammonite (1 Kings 14:21). Yet when the postexilic community was at risk, Ezra and Nehemiah again “enforced” the Mosaic mandate by insisting that the Jews send away their wives of Moabite and Ammonite descent (Ezra 9, 10; Neh. 13:23-27). In other words, the principle of adaptation expressed so aptly by Paul as “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV) describes God’s consistent way of dealing with His people.

As for the issue of ordination in our day, changing circumstances may have finally prepared the way to grant equal treatment to all God’s children, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female (cf. Gal. 3:28). Historically, the willingness of Christians to grant such equality has come gradually and—ironically—step-by-step in the very order given in Galatians 3:28. The New Testament itself affirms the equality of Jew and Gentile. But the abolition of slavery did not come until some 19 centuries later and in America, at least, at the cost of civil war.

Now, at the end of the twentieth century, the issue of male and female equality finally has come to the fore. Maybe Christians, maybe Adventists, are now ready to hear God’s call to return to the glorious ideal of Genesis 1—a humankind in which male and female are both created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). If it took a Jerusalem Council to declare that God makes “no distinction” between Jew and Gentile as far as salvation is concerned (Acts 15:9), maybe the Utrecht Conference can declare that God makes “no distinction” between male and female when it comes to ministry and service.

Can Adventists conscientiously vote a position that differs from one we have accepted in the past? Acts 15 tells us that when the time is right, changes do come. Adventism has a classic description for such changes: “present truth,” illustrated well by Ellen White’s words to the 1888 General Conference session: “That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been

present truth twenty years ago, but it is God’s message for this time.”²

5. The powerful as advocates for the powerless

At the Jerusalem Council, since all the delegates were circumcised, they were the ones who had to speak for the uncircumcised. In other words, those in power and with power were the advocates for the powerless. Both Peter and James forcefully supported the position proposed by Paul and Barnabas. And all four men were circumcised Jews.

It was that kind of advocacy that insured the unity of the church and enabled the Jerusalem Council to work together toward a common goal. Furthermore, when the powerful speak and act on behalf of the powerless, it shields the powerless from the spiritual danger of having to advocate their own cause and defend their own rights.

And so it must be with the issue of ordination. Ordained men who hold privilege and power must be the advocates for the powerless. If it is right for women to serve in ministry, the church dare not force them to be their own advocates. The spiritual risks are too high. At Utrecht the vast majority of delegates will be ordained males. It will be up to men of privilege and power to speak and vote on behalf of the powerless. It happened at Jerusalem; it can happen at Utrecht too.

6. A solution argued on the basis of equality, not exegesis

While the record of the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15 is much abbreviated, it is instructive to note the kinds of arguments included in the biblical account. Peter, taking the floor after “much discussion” (verse 7, NIV), did no exegesis of Scripture. He simply told the story of how God had demonstrated the equality of Jew and Gentile, giving the Holy Spirit to both (verse 8) and without “distinction” purifying the hearts of both by faith (verse 9). Then, after referring to the “yoke” which neither “our fathers nor we were able to bear” (verse 10), Peter openly expressed his own conviction: “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved

in the same manner as they” (verse 11).

Without quoting Jesus directly, Peter emphasizes the truth of Matthew 7:12: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (NRSV). Presumably, all the exegetical arguments based on specific Old Testament passages had been thoroughly aired in the “much discussion” preceding Peter’s speech. And the traditionalists would have had much on their side. Where in the Old Testament—which was their only Bible—can one find a “thus saith the Lord” for setting aside circumcision and the law of Moses? At the level of individual passages, the traditionalists would seem to have had ironclad arguments. One could easily imagine the first century equivalents of “I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal. 3:6, KJV) and “Once true always true.”

But all that is only a matter of conjecture, for Acts 15 records only how Peter transcended the specifics of the law, moving to the higher principle of equality that undergirds all law. Like Jesus, who declared that He had not come to “destroy” the law but to “fulfill” (Matt. 5:17), Peter sees the law embodied and filled full in the principle of equality before God.

He does not explain his striking statement about the unbearable “yoke” (Acts 15:10), though his language echoes Jesus’ statement about “heavy burdens, hard to bear” laid on human shoulders by the Pharisees (Matt. 23:4). Peter’s emphasis on equality implies that requirements become burdensome when they do not enhance our love for God and each other. Jesus said that all the law and the prophets “hang” on the two great commandments (Matt. 22:35-40). When the specifics are no longer bound to those two great principles, they appear arbitrary and become an unbearable “yoke.” As Ellen White put it: “Arbitrary words and actions stir up the worst passions of the human heart.”³ Or expressed in terms of theology: “The errors of popular theology have driven many a soul to skepticism who might otherwise have been a believer in the Scriptures.”⁴

As recorded in Acts, James follows

Peter's speech with a summary and a conclusion. He, like Peter, avoids any exegetical arguments, though he does quote Amos 9:11-12 in a version that resembles the Greek Bible rather than the Hebrew. The point of quote and the speech is that God has prepared the way so that the Gentiles may seek him. "Therefore," concludes James, "I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19). James does list the four "necessary things" that should still be important to the Gentiles (verses 20, 29). Abstention from food offered to idols would be an important symbol to the larger pagan culture; avoiding blood and things strangled would facilitate table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles; the statement against sexual immorality affirmed basic moral standards. But the main battle was over: circumcision was no longer required.

Turning to the issue of ordination of women, we must ask if the speeches of Peter and James are appropriate models. Can we base our solution on the larger

principle of equality rather than on the exegesis of individual passages? Whether one interprets the "curse" of Genesis 3 in penal terms or as the "natural" result of sin, the chapter does explain why the whole Bible is dominated by the male perspective: "He shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). How true. In a sinful world the more powerful will always rule the weaker.

On the basis of individual passages, a strong case can be made for male dominance, even in the New Testament: "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak" (1 Cor. 14:34). "If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church" (verse 35). "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" (1 Tim. 2:11, 12).

If one overlooks the powerful evidence that God constantly adapts to sinful human conditions, and if one grants absolute value to specific passages ad-

dressed to specific cultural situations, then one can also argue for male dominance and female submission. The specific texts are very clear. But that was precisely the position of the Judean brethren who argued for circumcision at the Jerusalem Council.

If, however, we follow Peter and James in the position that was adopted by that conference, then, with Peter, we can argue for equality: the Lord has made no "distinction" (Acts 15:9). And with James, we can recognize that the Lord has opened a door to service and ministry for our sisters in Christ. Do we dare "trouble" (verse 19) them with burdensome restrictions?

The exegesis of individual passages is still important, however, revealing how God has adapted His truth to our world, speaking "at various times and in different ways" through the prophets (Heb. 1:1). Careful exegesis will also reveal how God "in these last days" has "spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (verse

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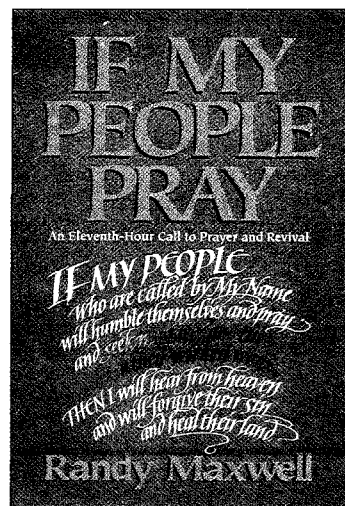
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2). But Christian witness involves more than careful exegesis. We are called to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). That should inform our actions at Utrecht.

This may also be the place to note that when one moves from the issue of male and female equality to the narrower question of ordination, the issues are not at all clear. In a survey article on the topic of ordination, David F. Wright cites one scholar as saying that “almost every issue related to the subject remains unresolved.”⁵ Wright himself argues that Scripture points toward ordination by the local congregation; the laying on of hands by “ordinary” members affirms the biblical and Protestant teaching that all believers constitute “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9).⁶ And the book of Revelation declares that during the millennium, God’s people will be “priests of God and of Christ” and will reign with Him (Rev. 20:6). Is it only males who will be “priests” of God, or is it a privilege extended to all God’s children?

7. A solution that seemed good to the Spirit and to us

One of the most exciting and miraculous features of the Jerusalem Council was the way in which the Spirit brought the church together. In the letter sent to the believers James wrote that the solution “seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts 15:28). Given the sharp contentions leading up to the conference, any merely human observer would have despaired of unity. A split seemed inevitable. But good things did happen, because the church was open to the guidance of the Spirit.

When we are led by the Spirit, our words and works will reflect the spirit of Jesus. At the 1888 General Conference session Ellen White saw the “spirit” of the participants as indicating, not only whether the Spirit was present, but even whether the participants were teaching the truth. In one of her more striking statements, she exclaimed, after listening to the heated debate on the law in Galatians: “For the first time I began to think it might be we did not hold correct views after all upon the law in Galatians, for the truth required no such spirit to sustain it.”⁷

Can the right spirit prevail at Utrecht? Yes, by God’s grace.

8. Unity in diversity, even afterwards

Part of the genius of the Jerusalem Council lay in the willingness of the believers to allow for diversity while affirming unity. On the one hand, it did not insist on circumcision for all; but on the other, it did not forbid circumcision. And in that connection we must not be misled by Paul’s vivid rhetoric to the Galatians: “If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing” (Gal. 5:2). Paul was addressing a specific situation that required strong words. His own example offers a balancing element, for immediately following the Jerusalem council Paul circumcised his coworker Timothy “because of the Jews” (Acts 16:3). In actual practice, then, Paul could be more conservative than the council, circumcising Timothy even though it was no longer “required.” But he could also be more liberal than the Jerusalem Council, as indicated by his counsel on food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. In short, the unity of the church is preserved when we allow a certain freedom for individuals or local congregations to respond to specific situations as the Lord gives wisdom.

Applied to the ordination of women, it would appear that the church finally

has in hand a proposal that follows the model of Acts 15, one that does not mandate ordination of women, but allows it where it can be helpful. Previous proposals on ordination assumed a lockstep unity that could force the conscience and practice in ways that could be destructive. The church is best served when God’s people live out the principles of equality at every level, treating each other as we would want to be treated. That was Peter’s conviction at the Jerusalem Council. And by God’s grace, it can be ours as we face important issues at Utrecht in the summer of 1995. ■

* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture texts in this article are from The New King James Version.

¹ Cited in *Adventist Review*, Oct. 20, 1994, p. 8.

² Manuscript 8a, 1888, cited in A. V. Olson, *Thirteen Crisis Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), p. 282; cf. *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), vol. 1, p. 133.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 6, p. 134.

⁴ ———, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 525.

⁵ E. J. Kilmartin, *Studia Liturgica* 13 (1979): 45, in David F. Wright, “Ordination,” *Themelios* 10:3 (April 1985): 5.

⁶ Wright, p. 9.

⁷ Manuscript 24, 1888, in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* V. 1.1, p. 221.

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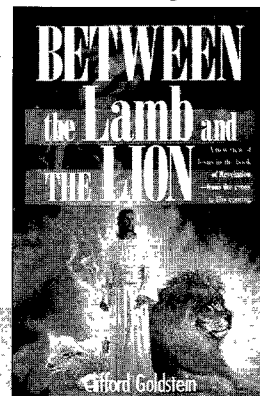
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Advancing in the light

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“Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His Word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths.”

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Graeme S. Bradford is the Ministerial Association secretary of the Trans-Tasman Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, New South Wales, Australia.

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt. 16:18).^{*} Here Jesus used a figure of speech familiar to His listeners. From the gates of a city, an army went out to conquer its foes. Jesus knew that throughout history the powers of hell would be arrayed against His church.

Soon after His resurrection, the prediction of Jesus came to pass in two ways. First came persecution. His followers were taken before councils, beaten, and martyred. Second came the threat to the gospel. Pagan ideas crept in to the church, causing doctrinal differences and divisions. Many Christians gave up their faith, and at times the church seemed to be moving in reverse.

Yet this was as Jesus said it would be. But the church has survived. While many religious systems and schools of philosophy have come and gone, the church survives. Jesus the Master Builder is still at work, and in the end His church, which comprises all those who have genuinely trusted in Him, will triumph.

Today when we face so many problems in our church—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—it would be helpful to look back and see what we can learn from the past. The difficulties we face are not peculiar to us alone.

Problems are not new

Let us begin with the apostolic church. “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). This text speaks about their unity. They were not nec-

essarily united in all doctrinal ideas. They were together physically in one place, following their Lord’s command. A beautiful harmony of spirit was present, but if someone had asked them that day what they as individuals thought about many of the theological issues that we consider important today, their answers might have come as a surprise. “To tell you the truth,” they would probably have answered, “we have not even thought about those points.” The apostolic church at that stage of history was obsessed with one overriding truth: “Christ is risen, He is alive, and we have seen Him. Because He lives, we shall also.” Equipped with this great truth, they went out to preach and teach.

It was only as time passed that the church began to grapple more deeply with other related concepts. As the church learned new truths, it also meant that it had other things to unlearn. Truth itself never changes, but the church’s understanding of it is only partial and ongoing. For example, for the first decade of its existence, the church had what could be called a “shut door” concept: the “good news” of Jesus was meant only for the Jewish people.

But the apostolic church had to learn that the good news had no racial limitation. Through a vision (Acts 10:9-17) God led Peter away from this narrow-mindedness. Peter did not comprehend at once what the vision meant. His experience with Cornelius, a Gentile, helped him understand.

We see this idea of progressive understanding in the case of the Old Testament prophets as well. They did

not fully understand what their visions were meant to convey. For example, Peter points out that these prophets could not comprehend what God was revealing through His Spirit regarding the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 1:10, 11). This inability to understand everything at one time was true also of Ellen White. She admits: "Often representations are given me which at first I do not understand, but after a time they are made plain by a repeated presentation."¹ Prophets are not omniscient; they do not possess all knowledge. Like the rest of us, they have many things to learn and unlearn. Only Christ possesses all the truth, because He is truly God as well as truly man.

Now, back to the apostolic church. If the Gentiles were to be accepted into the church, the next natural question was on what basis? Did they have to become Jews first in order to come to Christ? Some evidently thought so: "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas disagreed with that position, and a sharp dispute arose in Antioch.

We can see how this incident could easily have split the church. It doesn't take much to divide a church. But the Antioch church was determined to work its way through the problem as a body, and they sent delegates to Jerusalem to discuss the matter. The Jerusalem Council debated the issue, made its decision, and conveyed it to all the churches. The Gentile converts need not go through Jewish ceremonies. They were only "to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality" (verse 29).

A little later the issue of eating food offered to idols became a great concern at Corinth. Priests in pagan temples offered sacrifices of animals and sold the carcasses in the marketplace to raise revenue for their temples. Some mature Christians believed they could eat the food with a clear conscience, as they knew that the idols were only wood and stone, and not true gods at all; others worried that to

eat the food offered to pagan gods was to acknowledge those false gods. Paul discusses the whole issue in 1 Corinthians 8. It appears as though the church at Corinth was seriously divided over this problem. To us the issue may seem to be of little consequence.

History teaches us that every generation seems to have some issues that are important to them but seem trivial to later generations. For example, for many years we argued over the "daily" in Daniel 8, the law in Galatians, and the battle of Armageddon. Today's Adventists, for the most part, wonder why their predecessors felt so strongly on these issues. Could it be that in the future some may even look back on us and marvel at some of the issues we in the 1990s think so important as to fight over them?

The gospel focus

Speaking of theological contention, is there any issue worth contending for? Yes, says the apostle Paul. He affirmed this in his letter to the Galatians: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned" (Gal. 1:8). Paul was fighting legalism that held that a person could be right with God by keeping the law. "Consider Abraham," Paul argued. "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gal. 3:6). Since then the issue of faith versus works has been with the Christian church. It was a central issue of the Reformation. It emerged as a major concern of early Adventism and remains so with some today.

Apart from this, there were other issues facing the apostolic church, regarding which Paul appears not to be so concerned about having conformity. As an example, consider Romans 14:5, 6: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." The context shows that Paul is talking about fast days. Apparently some were taking sides on which were the correct days for fasting. Some were observing some or all the fast days; others were not concerned about any fasting day.

Paul's position is freedom of choice and tolerance for one another.

This same attitude surfaces again in Colossians 2:16, in connection with some Jewish/pagan practices still lingering in the church. Paul's counsel was "Don't go judging each other."

Paul even set a personal example by observing some purification rites (Acts 21:17-26) even though he knew they were outdated. He taught that circumcision was not necessary (Gal. 5) and yet let Timothy be circumcised in order to keep the brethren happy (Acts 16:1-3). He did all this even though he knew these ceremonies had no meaning, now that Christ had come. Some may have labeled him a compromiser because he said, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:22, 23).

While recognizing the importance of keeping the gospel pure, Paul recognized other issues not worth fighting over. There was room in the church for differences of opinion and practice.

Free, but not to wound

Consider again the example of food. Although Paul was a party to the Jerusalem consensus of Acts 15 regarding not eating food offered to idols, he wrote to the Corinthian church: "But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do" (1 Cor. 8:8). However, Paul recognized that there may be a good reason that someone may choose not to eat such food. He warned, "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (verse 9). The principle is simple: we are responsible for how our conduct affects others in the church. Church members may feel absolutely sure that they are right in their ideas, but may act in such a way as to damage the weak conscience of another member who does not see things exactly as they do.

Like the early church we all have a lot of growing to do, and none of us is growing at the same pace. Certainly not one of us has yet arrived; therefore, we

need to be patient with one another so that we do not become a stumbling block and cause someone else to lose their hold upon Christ.

Holding on to the Scripture

As the church began to grow, the nature of Christ became a divisive issue. Gnostic influence in some churches threatened the divinity of Christ and sought to make Him as one of God's creation instead of being the Creator. John's Gospel and Paul's Epistle to the Colossians were written in part to offset those Gnostic ideas and show that Jesus is the Creator and not a mere creature (see John 1:1-14; Col. 1:15-20).

For many centuries after the apostolic era, the church struggled to try and understand the nature of Christ. The subject dominated the agenda at many church councils. Some tried to go beyond the biblical data in their definition of Christ's nature. A few even tried to settle the differences by going to war. But who can really understand fully the nature of Christ? John 3:16 states that He is God's "only" Son. He is the *monogenes*: the "unique, only one of His kind." We must simply take the statements of Scripture and not try to add to them.

Sometimes the church is helped when heretics attack her. Such attacks force her to do serious study and determine truth. Such was the case in the second century when Marcion the heretic decided he would provide a collection of the books of the Bible that he felt were authoritative. He rejected the Old Testament and focused on Paul as the only true apostle. His canon included only the abbreviated version of Luke's Gospel and 10 edited Epistles of Paul. Marcion's challenge accelerated the church's recognition of a New Testament canon.

Keeping an open mind

History shows that churches go wrong when they fail to keep open minds for more light and growth. Such was the case with the Papacy during the long Dark Ages. Creeds were set, and tradition, not the Bible, dominated the belief system.

Christ warned that His teachings

could not be put into old wineskins of Jewish traditions. The gospel had to burst forth through the newly formed Christian community. But within a few centuries the church got itself trapped in traditions, and by the sixteenth century the need for reformation was clear.

The Protestant Reformation brought out two principal issues: (1) salvation is possible only through faith in the merits of Jesus, and (2) believers are free to study the Bible and be guided by the Holy Spirit to discover truth for themselves. In different lands churches arose as they broke with human traditions. But history soon repeated itself in these same Reformation churches after the deaths of their founders. They too set up their creeds and locked themselves into positions where there was no room for further growth. In *The Great Contro-*

The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe.

versy, under the chapter "The Pilgrim Fathers," Ellen White refers to a covenant the Puritans made for themselves "to walk together in all His ways made known or to be made known to them." She describes this as "the true spirit of reform, the vital principle of Protestantism." Then she quotes from a speech made by John Robinson, the Puritan pastor, as he bade goodbye to the pilgrims on their way to the New World: "I charge you before God and His blessed angels to follow me no farther than I have followed Christ. If God should reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth of my ministry; for I am very confident the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy word."²

As an evangelist I have (as have many others) often preached on the subject "Why So Many Churches?" I show

the falling away from the "pure apostolic church" and the setting up of the Papacy during the Dark Ages. Then I point to the work of the great Protestant Reformation and how God was seeking to restore what was lost. Different churches were raised up stressing some vital truth that the Christian church needed to heed: Luther with his doctrine of justification by faith, Wesley with his stress on holy living, the Baptists with their emphasis on believers' baptism by immersion, etc. Then I pose the question: "Where did these churches go wrong? Was it not because they took what their founders had said and would not advance beyond?"

The Jews made the same mistake in Christ's day; the papacy followed the same path at the time of the Protestant Reformation, as did later the Protestant churches. They all allowed themselves to be locked into traditional teachings of the founders, without providing for the possibility for growth and new light.

No creed but the Bible

When the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formed in the mid-nineteenth century, the founders were determined that this church would be different from other churches.

When the first steps toward organization were taken in 1861 with the formation of the Michigan Conference, it was carefully spelled out that there was to be no creed but the Bible.³ Those present at this historic meeting signed a covenant that read: "We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ."⁴

In the discussion that followed, J. N. Loughborough spoke of the danger of creeds: "The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is, to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such."

James White agreed: "Making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement.

... The Bible is our creed. We reject everything in the form of a human creed."⁵

For this position, the young church received strong support from Ellen White who shared her thoughts on growth and understanding of truth: "We must not think, 'Well, we have all the truth, we understand the main pillars of our faith, and we may rest on this knowledge.' The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light. ...

"The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation. ...

"Long-cherished opinions must not be regarded as infallible. It was the unwillingness of the Jews to give up their long-established traditions that proved their ruin ...

"We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. ...

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

"If the pillars of our faith will not stand the test of investigation, it is time that we knew it."⁶

The "old landmarks"

It is instructive to note how Ellen White faced "much talk about standing by the old landmarks" in the light of new perspectives given at the 1888 Minneapolis conference. When new understandings of righteousness by faith and the law in Galatians was presented at

the conference, some felt that the old landmarks were being removed. One year later White wrote:

"The minds of men were fixed, sealed against the entrance of light, because they had decided it was a dangerous error removing the 'old landmarks' when it was not moving a peg of the old landmarks, but they had perverted ideas of what constituted the old landmarks.

"The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God's people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angel's messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, 'The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.' One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God's law. The nonimmortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. All this cry about changing the old landmarks is imaginary."⁷

Note what Ellen White specifies as the landmarks. As our church grew in many significant areas, on several occasions the cry has been heard (as in 1888) that the landmarks are being removed. Frequently some would like to add their own ideas of what constitute the landmarks. Others would like to hold to the traditions of the past and not see any need for new insights or perspectives. To do this is to fall into the same trap as the Jews in Christ's day, the papacy at the time of the Reformation, and the churches that our founders left behind.

Growing in truth

Growing in the truth and its understanding is a significant characteristic of Adventism. Robert Johnston points this out forcefully: "So the young faith continually advanced, not only in numbers but also in understanding. It changed its ideas about organization and the ministry, deepened its understanding of the third angel's message of Revelation 14, and revised its interpretations of proph-

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ecy. It corrected its understanding of Christ and the Trinity, reclaimed the great truth of salvation by grace through faith, and found much else to learn or to unlearn. But while it corrected, amplified, and reclaimed, it never lost touch with its roots, the 'waymarks.'

"This is the most striking characteristic of Adventism. Without repudiating the past leading of the Lord, it seeks ever to understand better what that leading was. It is always open to better insights and willing to learn—to seek for truth as for hid treasure."⁸

Therefore, our church showed wisdom when it voted for the first time a set of fundamental beliefs with the following preface: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word."⁹

Once Ellen White was challenged as to how she could appear to support Jones and Waggoner at the 1888 Minneapolis conference when she rejected years earlier a similar position held by Waggoner's father. Ellen White answered: "That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God's message for this time."¹⁰

This statement is an indicator that when certain truths become relevant for God's people to understand, the Holy Spirit reveals it to the church at that time. He leads them gently, no faster than they can understand and act. Each generation will then be able to stand on the shoulders of their forebearers and be free to grow in understanding. That means maintaining a sense of continuity and a sense of freedom to be a first generation of their own. As the new generation faces fresh issues in a world so different from that of the pioneers, it will be able to maintain a zeal and relevance for the message as did the founders for the world they lived in. ■

* All Scripture passages in this article are from the New International Version.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), book 3, p. 56.

² ———, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1950), pp. 291, 292.

³ R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1979), p. 96.

⁴ *Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1861, p. 148.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), pp. 33-40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31.

⁸ Robert M. Johnston, "A Search for Truth," *Adventist Review*, undated history edition, 1983, p. 8; see also the chapter "Doctrinal Developments, 1849-1888," in Schwarz, pp. 166-182.

⁹ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990), p. 23.

¹⁰ Manuscript 8a, 1888, in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), vol. 1, p. 133.

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spite of our Lord's warnings that He is initiating a new society with its own unique authority structure." Further, "if we are convinced that the individual believer can be or is being transformed by the Spirit of God, then the church too must demonstrate to the world that it is the community of the redeemed. Its political structures must reflect the transformed character of the community as a whole if the world is to take its gospel seriously."⁵⁸ ■

Adapted from V. Norskov Olsen, *Myth and Truth About Church, Priesthood and Ordination* (Riverside, Calif.: Loma Linda University Press, 1990).

* Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture passages in this article are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

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² David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: University of London, 1956), pp. 224-246.

³ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1953), vol. 1, pp. 653, 654.

⁴ See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14 (1972 ed.), pp. 1139-1147, s.v. "Semikhah"; *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (1905 ed.), pp. 428-430; s.v. "Ordination"; *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (1960 ed.), pp. 552-554, s.v. "Ordination (Jewish)."

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⁶ Marjorie Warkentin, *Ordination: A Biblical-Historical View* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), p. 17.

⁷ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, pp. 1140, 1141.

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⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See Hugo Mantel, "Ordination and Appointment in the Period of the Temple," *Harvard Theological Review* 57 (1964): 325-346.

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¹² Arnold Ehrhardt, "Jewish and Christian Ordination," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* V (1954): 131.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 138.

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¹⁷ ———, "Jewish and Christian Ordination," *Journal of Theological Studies* XXVI (April 1975): 15.

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¹⁹ H. Burn-Murdoch, *The Development of the Papacy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 76, 77.

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²² Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 87, 88.

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²⁵ *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, trans. Burton Scott Easton (Archon Books, 1962), p. 38.

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³⁰ Book III, Sec. II, par. xx; Book VIII, Sec. II, par. iv.

³¹ Book II, Sec. IV, pars. xxvi, xxix-xxxi; Book VIII, Sec. III, pars. xvi-xx.

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³³ Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing*

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Change can be transforming

James A. Cress

The gospel's account of Jesus healing the demoniac of Gadara offers some fascinating insight into human nature. People resist change. People resist change even for the better.

Consider the demoniac. He lived a hellish existence. He made his home among the tombs. He broke off the strongest bonds with which he was fettered, and ran naked through the villages. He terrorized everyone. Then came Jesus.

The account of the demoniac's transformation is compelling. After the swine plunged into the sea, the pig herders ran and told their tale to the citizens of the 10 towns. Then the people "came to Jesus and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid" (Mark 5:15).*

What was so fearful about a sane man, sitting quietly with his clothes on? The fearful sight would be a demon-possessed individual running naked and wild. But the Bible says that *they were afraid!*

The people were accustomed to their profession, their politics, their priorities, and their processes. They were even accustomed to their wild man. Now Jesus had disrupted the equilibrium. His intervention—even one with marvelous results—frightened them. In fact, they were so frightened that "they began to plead with Him to

depart from their region" (verse 17.)

Do you see the irony? If Jesus was going to change things, they preferred to be left alone. Better to have the status quo than anything that requires something different.

Change goes against our nature. We invest so much energy and emotion toward maintaining the status quo that our tendency is to resist change, even a change for the better. But the gospel is essentially a call for change.

The gospel requires change

When Jesus encounters human lives He brings change despite our resistance and reluctance. That is the nature of Christ's message. Conversion. Transformation. Change.

The story of the early church is one of this dynamic change encountering both the established traditions of the Jewish religion and the Roman empire.

The kingdom of heaven required a new order. Such change was so dynamic that the ministry of the early Christians "turned the world upside down."

This does not mean that the requirements for God's kingdom were easily accepted. They never are! Even the disciples wanted to burn villages that rejected Jesus' message. They certainly didn't love the world any more than they loved each other as they competed for position and personal advancement.

Even after the resurrection, Peter struggled with God's intention toward Gentiles despite what Jesus had shown by His personal call to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well—that neither nationality nor gender nor social standing prevented effective ministry. Finally, in the vision of unclean animals, God got Peter's attention and he learned the lesson we still struggle to absorb. The God of heaven is no respecter of persons, and He requires nothing less from His church.

When these requirements finally impact His church, Christ's followers relate differently. Parents relate differently to children. Masters relate differently to slaves. Spouses relate to each other differently. Race barriers are broken. Class distinctions are abolished. Gender prejudices are removed. And the results are so amazing that all are "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Perhaps it is because of God's power to transform that Satan uses our resistance to change to hinder the finishing of the work.

As for the demoniac? What was the result of his change? As in the case of the cursing fisherman and the Samaritan woman, Jesus called him to preach. That is Jesus' way. He takes the unlikely prospects and makes them ministers!

* All Scripture references in this article are from The New King James Version.



When you don't get what you want

J. David Newman

The 1995 General Conference session at Utrecht, Holland, is going to make a very important decision regarding women's ordination to the gospel ministry. The session is going to decide whether world divisions of the church can make their own decision or not on this matter. Whatever the decision, some are not going to like it. When you do not get what you want, what do you do? Should we obey the General Conference in session if we do not like what it decides?

Obedience is not a popular word in the world today. It is not popular in the political world; witness the strife in Bosnia. Many people do not want to obey the United Nations' peacekeepers. It is not popular in the business world. People hire high-priced lawyers to discover ways around government regulations. It is not popular in the entertainment world. The marriage vow seems to last as long as frost on a warm summer morning. It is not popular in schools. Metal detectors are springing up in schools to prevent kids from bringing in guns and knives. It is not popular on the streets where people run red lights with impunity. It is not popular in the church, where people chafe over policies, whether financial or moral.

However, obedience is the very foundation of law and order. Without obedience we would have anarchy. We would be living back in the days after the death of Joshua and the elders when "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 17:6).^{*} When government passes laws, we are duty-bound to obey

them. If I do not like the law, then I can seek to change it through the proper channels. But in the process I must obey it. The only exceptions are when government law clearly conflicts with the law of God; then obedience to God takes precedence over obedience to humans.

General Conference in session

The General Conference in its session every five years is the highest authorizing body of the church. If we do not like what it votes, then we can work through legitimate channels of the church to change the decision. But in the process we must obey what the session has voted. What is the alternative? Anarchy, disunity, conflict, and fragmentation.

Part of the struggle of living in this sinful world is living with decisions we do not like. While majorities must always be respectful of the minority, the minority cannot expect to have its way when the majority rules otherwise. Either God is leading this church or not. If He is, then we need to respect the decisions made by the church in its highest governing session.

Jesus obedient

Let me give an example from the life of Jesus. Luke records that Jesus spent some time in the Temple dialoguing with the teachers when He was just 12 years old. His distraught parents finally found Him after searching for several days. He returned with them to Nazareth and was "obedient to them" (Luke 2:51). A perfect child was obedient to imperfect parents!

I wonder what it was like to parent a perfect child? I am sure that Mary and Joseph made some mistakes in their parenting of Jesus. I am sure they told Him to do some things that He may not have liked. They were probably not always sweet and kind to Him. Yet Jesus obeyed them. Until the age of 30 Jesus lived at home and obeyed His parents. Wonder of wonders, God in human flesh was obedient to the creatures whom He created.

His obedience was not always easy. The author of Hebrews records, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb. 5:8, 9). His playmates may have taunted Him because He would not enter into some of their games. His parents did not always understand His mission. His brothers certainly did not.

"Jesus did not contend for His rights. Often His work was made unnecessarily severe because He was willing and uncomplaining. Yet He did not fail nor become discouraged. He lived above these difficulties, as if in the light of God's countenance. He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently."[†]

There were times when Jesus rejected tradition. He would not conform just to conform. But He never deviated from following His Father's will. Jesus obeyed the laws that He had given to Israel. He kept the law perfectly. Finally, He obeyed the unjust decisions of the Sanhedrin and Pilate's court. He died on the cross so that we might live.

His obedience saves us

It is the obedience of Jesus that saves us: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Just as the disobedience of one man, Adam, cursed us, so the obedience of one Man, Jesus, blesses us. When we accept the obedience of Jesus and trust in Him, God gives us eternal life. God saves us on the basis of how good Jesus was, not how good we are. But when we accept the obedience of Christ, God transforms our lives through the new birth so that we want to become obedient to Christ. Because we love Him we want to do everything that He asks us to do.

He asks us, as members of the remnant church, to obey the church in general session. It is the highest authority of the church. This is not just a human organization; feeble as it might seem, it bears a divine imprint. We can trust the One who leads this church to act upon the hearts of the delegates to this session to make the best decision for the church at this time.

Painful as it might be, let us be obedient to Him and His church. ■

* All Scripture passages are from the *New International Version*.

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⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

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⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁵⁸ Warkentin, p. 186.

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