



Why All the Fuss?

by Wellesley Muir

Seven a.m., and the phone was ringing. I was eating breakfast, but the voice on the other end was urgent. “It’s Gladys,” I told my wife.

“Daddy, what shall I do?”

“Do about what?”

“Daddy, the college church is asking me to serve as an elder. What do you think about ordaining women?”

My quick-off-the-cuff answer, “I’m against it.”

“Why?,” she wanted to know.

“I really haven’t thought about it. We’re back in the States after serving 21 years overseas where ordaining women is not an option. I’m heavily involved in a church building program right now and haven’t stayed on top of current issues. This is something I need to study.”

A feeling of pride filled my heart. The college church had recognized my daughter as a spiritual leader! I said, “Gladys, you need to pray and study this out for yourself. Since they asked you to serve, go ahead if that’s what God leads you to do. I can’t make the decision

for you.”

I hung up—and then it hit me. You’ve really let your daughter down! She has questions, and you gave no Bible reasons “for” or “against.” I remembered that we were overseas when our mission president returned from a trip to the States and announced, “It’s been voted for ministerial interns to baptize.” My instant reaction had been, “Isn’t that kind of like having sex before marriage?” Up to that time, only ordained ministers had been authorized to baptize. It troubled me that it was the tax authorities and not the Bible that had led to such a decision. But, occupied with the pressures of raising money and building a church, I swept the ordination matter from my mind.

My teenage daughter figured church leaders knew what they were doing and accepted ordination. Taking it all very seriously, she bought a black dress to wear in the pulpit.

My older daughter, Gail, working on a master’s degree at an Adventist university, didn’t bother to ask her parents’ opinion on women’s ordination. She simply wrote home saying she had been ordained as an elder.

All of our family, along with a new son-in-law,

attended the 1990 General Conference Session at Indianapolis, though not as delegates. My ordained daughters seemed pleased when the session voted 1,173 to 377 not to ordain women ministers. It was obvious they had been searching Scripture and making decisions on their own. They said “Amen!” when Paul Wangai’s mother from Africa stood up and said, “God called women to evangelize, not baptize.”

The next day, I watched their distraught expressions when, while many delegates were absent, a vote was taken approving a document making it possible for women ordained as local elders to do just about everything an ordained minister does, including baptizing and marrying.

By 1995 my wife and I were serving in Thailand. We traveled to Utrecht, again joining our family there. I served as a delegate from the Asia Pacific Division. Two Seminary professors made presentations. One, against ordaining women, appealed powerfully to the Bible for authority. The other, for women’s ordination, was not biblically convincing.

My daughters told me they felt God led when the session voted 1,481 to 673 not to let the North American Division go its own way. Their reaction: “What we really need to do now in order to be consistent is to take an action annulling all previous actions permitting the ordination of women as local church elders.”

My daughters said that! I didn’t. They did. I am so proud of them!

Today my younger daughter is a full-time missionary on an island in the Asia Pacific Division. She looks back on her ordination at a college church and says, “There were no Bible reasons. It was the politically-correct thing. The leaders wanted to be ‘cool.’” She did not accept her latest invitation to serve as an elder.

ordination, she says, “They wanted to make a ‘statement.’ There was nothing spiritual about my ordination. It was all political.” Soon after becoming a local church elder, she got “turned off” (her words) when she was sent to an elders’ retreat and one woman elder, a featured speaker, spent two hours telling all the reasons why it is all right to drink wine.



After moving away from the university my daughter was again asked to serve as an elder, but desiring to be a woman of the Word, she declined. Later she decided to return her ordination certificate to the church that had issued it. Wow!

Why all the Fuss?

Paul says, “. . . there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28, NKJV). So why all the fuss about ordaining women? It’s simple. The Bible provides as much evidence for keeping Sunday as for ordaining women. It’s true, not a single text says, “You shall not keep Sunday.” So how much fuss do you think there would be if leading Adventists said, “Let’s keep Sunday”?

In his *Dies Domini*, Section 12, John Paul II quotes Genesis 2:3: “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” Eleven lines later in the same document he says: “Sunday is the day of rest because it is the day ‘blessed’ by God and ‘made holy’ by him.” Wait a minute! Did God bless both Sabbath and Sunday? We need to pray for the pope.

Not a single Bible verse says, “You shall not ordain women!” Inspired by God, Paul writes clearly: “If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, . . . one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission” (1 Tim. 3:1, 2, 4, NKJV).

Feminist pressures ask us to revise the Scripture to say, “If a woman desires the position of a bishop, she desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the wife of one husband, . . . one who rules her own house well, having her children in

submission.” Does God ask both men and women to rule their homes? “Therefore . . . as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:24, 25, NKJV). We need to pray for our church, our leaders and our homes.

The Creator of the universe instituted the Sabbath and the family at the very beginning of earth’s history. Jesus chose to make man the head of the family. It is His decision for church leadership to model His plan for families. The breakdown of the family is the world’s greatest problem. God calls the last-day church to build strong, loving, disciplined families.

Does this mean God has no place for women to serve in His church? Absolutely not! God has given women the most important position on the planet—that of being mothers. But doesn’t God want to use women in finishing His work on earth.? Yes, Yes, and Yes!

No man in the remnant church has accomplished more for God’s work than Ellen White. She wrote: “But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. . . . Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.” (The Great Controversy, p. 595, emphasis supplied). Let’s look at the words omitted by the ellipsis in the preceding statement. “The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith.”

In the paragraph preceding our quote, Ellen White tells how Paul looked down to the last days and declared: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:3, KJV). Then she says, “That time has fully come” (The Great Controversy, p. 595). On the same page she adds, “Satan . . . leads the people to look to Bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves.”



A Cultural Issue?

Isn’t all this just a matter of culture? Isn’t John Paul II right to suggest that we take Sabbath and find its fulfillment in Sunday? Wasn’t the Roman Church right when they decided to take the popular pagan day of the sun and make it the Christian Sabbath? Isn’t it time for Seventh-day Adventists to be sensitive to the culture of our times and give women positions that God reserved for men? Books with feminist ideals have been sold in our college and university bookstores for many years. Can’t we get their message?

If culture is the issue, God missed a perfect opportunity. At the time of the Exodus, Egyptian culture dictated that it was proper for a woman to become a pharaoh. The Lord could have avoided all the trouble of having Miriam watch over her baby brother in a basket on the Nile and followed the culture of the times by making her the leader of Israel, a position which she later coveted.

God’s attitude on culture comes to us in clear language. “According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do: and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances” (Lev. 18:3). It is not the feminist agenda, but the will of Jesus, we must seek. God is getting us ready for the culture of heaven. He wants

to be part of His family. Christ—not a goddess, as “discovered” by some women pastors in other denominations—is the head of His church.

Bible reasons should be enough justification for obeying God, but we can also find some practical reasons for not ordaining or commissioning women. First, the women’s issue affects our own church’s unity. If we are honest, we must admit that ordaining women is a divisive issue in the Seventh-day Adventist church, even in North America. Jesus never commanded his followers to ordain women, but He did call upon them to live together in harmony.

Impact on Outreach

What is more, the women’s issue affects our church’s outreach. With a billion Roman Catholics in the world, more Catholic Christians choose to leave Babylon and join the remnant church than any other group. The great majority believe in the biblical teaching of male leadership, and there is no scriptural reason to offend them by ordaining women pastors. Many Protestant groups also believe it is unbiblical. Among them are the Southern Baptists, the largest Protestant denomination in North America. Other large groups in the world who may be offended by women pastors include Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus.

The impact of this issue on our evangelism was brought home to me forcefully and personally. While serving as a pastor in Bakersfield, California, I received a call from an attorney. “I’m looking for a church that follows all the Bible,” he said.

My response, “You’ve found the right church.”

He questioned, “Does your church ordain women elders?”

Even though my own church had no women

had to admit my daughters had been ordained in Adventist churches. Although I visited him several times, he continued to be offended by a practice not authorized by Scripture and he turned away from the Adventist church. Jesus has very strong words for those who offend others. “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones“ (Luke 17:2, NKJV).

Because of our family’s 23 years of mission service, we have contact with a lot of overseas leaders and know firsthand that many are offended by what is going on in North America. Whether we call it “ordain” or “commission,” it’s all the same when we lay hands on a candidate and give them the full authority of the gospel minister. Even the government tax people agreed.

To commission women and say, “We uphold the General Conference action not to ordain,” is about as true as President Clinton saying, “I did not have an affair with that woman.” Commissioning women while ordaining men will not satisfy many. One woman says, “We dream of achieving full recognition as equals in ministry” (Pacific Union Recorder, Dec. 7, 1998, p. 10).

We cannot afford to be a stumbling block

to the rest of the world. Our overseas brothers and sisters expect the best example from North America. We’ve gone pretty far, but God will forgive us, just as he forgave my daughters for sincerely accepting a non-biblical ordination. And I pray God will forgive me for sidestepping the issue when my daughter first asked



me about ordination for women.

Elder Charles Bradford was right back in 1989 when he spoke at the Annual Council, saying, “And if we have made a horrible mistake, there is such a thing as the Spirit’s ministry and He will bring us back. Because, as Ellen White says, we are captives of hope. He has us in His hands. We are the remnant people of God.” (Women in Ministry, p. 243)

Delegates at the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Sessions, our church’s highest authority, made decisions regarding woman as ordained ministers based on Bible principles. We in North America need to demonstrate leadership to the world field. We need to recommend to the next General Conference Session that, based on the Word of God, all previous actions to ordain women as local church elders or commissioned ministers be annulled.

Pray That Jesus Will Guide

We must get on our knees, review the plain instructions in the Word and ask, Is Jesus truly leading North America to ignore the decision of two General Conference Sessions and promote a book, Women in Ministry, which endorses women’s ordination? Is the Holy Spirit truly guiding the North American Division to recommend to the General Conference Session in 2000 that every use of “ordained minister” in our Church Manual be revised to read “ordained/commissioned minister?”



Jesus calls women and men, pastors, educators, medical workers and administrators to be ready to stand with Him on the sea of glass in Heaven soon. He gives my daughters, my wife and me, all of us, one great task: “The gospel to all the world.” The little lady who died in 1915 is right, “God will have a people on earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms” (The Great Controversy, p. 595).

Why all the fuss? Shall our church follow popular fashions or maintain the Bible as our standard? That’s a question worth fussing about.

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