

When “No” is “Yes”

by C. Raymond Holmes

No one regrets more than I that it has been women's ordination that has forced to the surface of our consciousness the fundamental issue of how we read, understand and apply the principles of God's Word.¹ But something had to get our attention, and evidently in God's plan and timing this was it — as painful and distressing as it has been. The event can be compared to that of Moses and the burning bush (see Exodus 3). God had something to say to him as well as something important for him to do, and while he was busy tending sheep got his attention in an unmistakable, dramatic way.

God has something to say to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the midst of Protestantism's gradual abandonment of the Reformation and its basic principle of sola scriptura — the Bible and the Bible alone for faith and life. The Great Controversy struggle at the time of the Reformation was between the authority of the Bible and church tradition. Today, 500 years later, the Great Controversy struggle is between the Bible and secular culture. The time is short, and the Remnant Church cannot afford to cave in to the demands of secular culture and its ever-changing human tradition. It is the Word of God, not time and culture, that defines right action for the Church. The right time to adhere to that definition is the General Conference Session 2015, at which delegates will vote on whether it is "acceptable for division committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry." A definite "yes" or "no" vote will be called for. A "no" vote would constitute a "yes" because it would acknowledge and support the biblical definition. If we are to "preach the Word" to the present generation, it is imperative that we stay faithful to that Word. How do we do that?

First, by having the Spirit-empowered courage to repent of wrong actions. We did our faithful women a terrible wrong and disservice by means of the 1975 Autumn Council action,² allowing for the ordination of women as local elders. It was wrong and a disservice because it gave so many gifted, talented women false hope, and that needs to be rectified. How? By rescinding that action in order to open the way to a process in harmony with those biblical principles that apply to the call and appointment of individuals for church leadership and pastoral work. A "no" would be "yes!"

¹ <http://www.Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary> defines "Hermeneutics" as the study of the methodological principles of interpretation (as of the Bible), 2015. (Retrieved May 12, 2015).

² This was not an action taken by the world church in General Conference session.

Second, by applying Spirit of Prophecy principles of Bible interpretation that assure outcomes pleasing to God: (1) Scripture interprets Scripture³; (2) Take the Bible as it reads;⁴ (3) Focus on the Bible's plain statements;⁵ (4) Explain the language of the Bible according to its obvious meaning.⁶ One example will suffice: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer,⁷ he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife... (1 Timothy 3:1–2, also Titus 1:5-6 ESV).⁸ Applying these principles, it is plainly obvious that the prerequisite for the specific office of overseer/spiritual leader is that the candidate be male, because a husband is a man not a woman. These principles are transcultural, applicable to the understanding and meaning of Scripture in every culture, and in every age, in which we evangelize and establish churches. A "no" vote means culture does not prevail but that Scripture does, which would promote and sustain theological unity. Again, "no" would be "yes!"

Third, in order to finish the work that God has assigned to us, we must be united. Unity is based on truth, on common beliefs not on common mission. Mission grows out of truth and shared theological/doctrinal beliefs. So the question is, "What is the truth?" God's truth alone must determine right action. In the interest of mission and unity, we must be sensitive to, and surrendered to, God's truth in every time and every culture. A "yes" vote would actually constitute a "no" to church unity because it would officially approve and sustain the division and disunity already demonstrated by unilateral actions. A "no" vote would be "yes," because it would sustain and uphold the biblical witness of the whole, united, world church.

In conclusion, and as a member of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC), I am obligated to make the following observation. The recent website statement that the findings of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee was that "there is no Biblical consensus on this issue, and thus it must be treated as a matter of

³ White, Ellen G. "Child Evangelism" in *Evangelism*, p. 581, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 1946

⁴ White, Ellen G. "Scripture as a Safeguard" in *The Great Controversy*, p. 598. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911

⁵ White, Ellen G. "Thoroughness in Christian Work." in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 27, 1885, and *Signs of the Times*, July 17, 1888, Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association

⁶ White, Ellen G. "The Scriptures a Safeguard." in *The Great Controversy*, 598. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1858.

⁷ A spiritual leader such as bishop, pastor, elder

⁸ The context of these verses must be taken into account in order to fully understand their meaning, such as "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise [usurp – KJV] authority over a man..." on the basis of the fact that "...Adam was formed first, then Eve." (1 Timothy 2:12–13 ESV).

practice and not of theology" is incorrect and misleading. The truth is that the lack of consensus on the part of TOSC was not that there is no biblical consensus, it was that the committee was virtually divided on what that consensus actually is. The members of TOSC, of which I am one, find ample biblical consensus.

Letting the Bible interpret itself apart from the influence of contemporary culture, and with the aid of Spirit of Prophecy counsel and insight together with the application of Ellen White's principles of interpretation, we find that: (1) God created the human species male and female (Genesis 1:27); (2) that he created them equal in essence and being but having differing functional roles; (3) that in terms of salvation and baptism he treats them as equal with one having no advantage over the other (Galatians 3:26–29); (4) that the trajectory of male leadership/headship extends from Genesis through the Old and New Testaments and into the Early Church; (5) that when it comes to the organization of the church, God has reserved the office of spiritual leader/overseer/bishop/elder/pastor for men (1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1); and (6) that God is calling women to a specialized ministry for which they are uniquely qualified and gifted, and for which they must be trained. It is our failure to provide such specialized training that constitutes unfairness and injustice. Therefore, a "no" vote would be a resounding "yes" to the biblical consensus and trajectory!