

**MISLEADING AND ERRONEOUS CLAIMS  
REGARDING EARLY ADVENTIST HISTORY**

**Table of Contents**

Misleading and Erroneous Claims Regarding Seventh-day Adventist History.....	1
(a) Did Early Seventh-day Adventist Women Function as Ministers? .....	1
(b) Did our Adventist Pioneers Endorse Women as Ministers? .....	3
(c) Did the 1881 General Conference Session Vote to Ordain Women? .....	5
Here are the facts. ....	5
These then are the facts regarding the 1881 resolution: .....	6
(d) Did Ellen G. White's 1895 Statement Call for Women's Ordination? .....	7
But evidence that Ellen G. White's 1895 statement is not applicable to the ordination of women <i>as</i> <i>pastors or elders</i> may be found within the passage itself.....	7
(e) Was Ellen G. White Ordained? .....	8
Summary. ....	9

The focus in this article will be on *Women in Ministry's* handling of historical matters concerning early Seventh-day Adventist history.

**Misleading and Erroneous Claims Regarding Seventh-day Adventist History**

There are instances in which *Women in Ministry* is "factually challenged." We must remember that the members of the Seminary Ad Hoc Committee had been asked to come up with a basis in the Bible or Ellen G. White's writings on which to support the ordination of women as elders or pastors. There is no such basis in either source; so the committee manufactured one. This may sound like harsh criticism, so let me show you what I mean.

Here are five "facts" that I say the committee "manufactured." See what you think. (a) There were women ministers (preferred term "leaders") in the early Seventh-day Adventist church (at least prior to 1915); (b) our pioneers wrote strongly in support of women ministers; (c) the early Seventh-day Adventist church voted at the 1881 General Conference session to ordain women; (d) Ellen G. White called for women's ordination in an 1895 statement; (e) Ellen G. White herself was ordained.

I will show that, in making the above claims, the authors of *Women in Ministry* make a use of historical sources that is characterized by misunderstanding, a serious inflation of the evidence, and an uncritical reliance on revisionist histories of the early Seventh-day Adventist church offered by feminists and liberal pro-ordinationists.

**(a) Did Early Seventh-day Adventist Women Function as Ministers?**

In early Seventh-day Adventist history women played major roles in the publishing and editorial work,  
Page 1 of 13 Misleading and Erroneous Claims about Adventist History

home missionary work, the work of Sabbath schools, church finances and administration, frontier missions and evangelism, and medical and educational work. Those women who labored as full-time workers were issued the denomination's ministerial *license* but not the ministerial *credentials* reserved for ordained ministers—indicating that they were not authorized to perform the distinctive functions of ordained ministers.<sup>1</sup>

In *Women in Ministry*, however, some of the authors have left the erroneous impression that because early Adventist women labored faithfully and successfully in the soul-winning ministry, and because they were issued ministerial *licenses*, these women performed the functions of the *ordained* ministry.<sup>2</sup> On this inaccurate basis, they join other revisionist historians in concluding that today the "ordination of women to full gospel ministry is called for by both the historical heritage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and by the guidance of God through the ministry of Ellen G. White."<sup>3</sup>

One prominent author of *Women in Ministry* has made the same claim in his most recent work, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, a book promoted by its publishers as "providing a short but accurate history of Adventism." This church historian states the following under the heading "The Contribution of Female Ministers in Early Adventism":

Because the bulk of Adventism's ministry has consistently been male, too few have recognized the contribution to the church made by women who have served as ministers and in other official positions. . . . What is beyond doubt, however, is that she [Ellen G. White who] was probably the most influential 'minister' ever to serve the Adventist church. Many other women participated during the late nineteenth and early centuries as licensed ministers.<sup>4</sup>

Statements such as the above lend credibility to the spurious claims by women's ordination advocates that "there were many women pastors in early Seventh-day Adventist church."<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to such creative reinterpretations, the Adventist women of the past typically understood that while they had been called to do the work of soul-winning, and while it was biblically legitimate for them to preach, teach, counsel, minister to the needy, do missionary work, serve as Bible workers, etc., the Scriptures prohibited them from exercising the headship responsibility of elder or pastor. These dedicated Adventist women did not view their non-ordination as elders or pastors to be a quenching of their spiritual gifts or as an arbitrary restriction on the countless functions they could perform in gospel ministry. As they labored faithfully within the biblical guidelines of what is appropriate for men and women, the dedicated women of old discovered joy in God's ideal for complementary male-female roles in the church.<sup>6</sup>

In early Adventist records, full-time workers carrying ordained ministers' *credentials* were listed as "Ministers," while the term "Licentiates" was used for unordained workers (men and some women) with ministerial *licenses*. Not until 1942 would the *Yearbook* of the church employ the terms "Ordained Ministers" and "Licensed Ministers" for these two categories of church workers. Both the early and later distinctions between the two groups of workers ensured that unordained laborers in the soul-winning ministry would not be confused with ordained ministers. One author, whom *Women in Ministry* quotes on other matters, noted that by the turn of the century, when about 15% of church employees were women in various roles, "the church classified *none of them* as ministers except Mrs. White"<sup>7</sup> (a reference to her ordained minister credentials; see discussion below).

Indeed, we have yet to see any of these women referred to as ministers in the writings of Mrs. White or the other pioneers. There is, therefore, no valid justification for some contemporary writers to suggest or to create the impression that women listed as "licentiates" or even occasionally as "licensed ministers" performed the functions of ordained ministers or were generally thought of as "woman ministers."<sup>8</sup> Nor does the history of those days support the idea that women today seeking to do full-time work in gospel ministry must be ordained as elders or pastors. The facts from the "historical heritage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church" do not support such a

conclusion.<sup>9</sup>

## (b) Did our Adventist Pioneers Endorse Women as Ministers?

Under the heading of "Defense of women in ministry," a chapter in *Women in Ministry* devotes two pages to citations from the *Review and Herald* and other sources which, the author claims, show the pioneers to be "so passionate in defense of 'women preachers.'"<sup>10</sup> By "women preachers," our author seems to want readers to understand "women as pastors." But in fact, most of the articles address a different issue. While none of the pioneers endorses women pastors or elders, they all uphold the right or propriety of women to speak in the church or in other public places.

For example, our *Women in Ministry* author cites a January 7, 1858 *Review and Herald* article by James White, claiming that he "spoke favorably . . . on women's role in the church." It quotes how he dealt with an objection: "Some have excluded females from a share in this work, because it says, 'your young men shall see visions.' . . ." Actually, though, the article is not about "women's role in the church" but about "Unity and Gifts of the Church," specifically addressing the gift of prophecy. It does not mention women as pastors or elders. It has only one paragraph that our author could quote, but he omitted its first sentence, where James White indicates that the role he was referring to was *prophecy*. The paragraph actually begins this way: "Under the influence of the Holy Spirit both sons and daughters will prophesy. Some have excluded females from a share in this work, because it says, 'your young men shall see visions.'" By omitting the first sentence and applying the remainder of the paragraph to a topic James White was not discussing—"women in ministry" and "women preachers"—the author has misled the reader regarding James White's actual concern.

Likewise J. N. Andrews's *Review and Herald* article (January 2, 1879) which the author cites was not addressing whether women could be ministers or could preach. His title, which our author did not give, was "May Women Speak in Meeting?" Andrews's, opening sentence shows his real concern: "There are two principal passages cited to prove that women should not take *any part* in speaking in religious meetings" (emphasis mine). Andrews's article did not specifically mention preaching. His purpose was to show that women may freely bear their testimony or take other speaking parts in meeting.

The author next cites a James White article (*Review and Herald*, May 29, 1879) as stating that "Joel's message that 'sons and daughters' would prophesy indicated the participation of women in preaching." In fact, James White never mentioned preaching in the article, and his only comment about Joel's message is that "women receive the same inspiration from God as men." On women's role in the church, he said, "But what does Paul mean by saying, 'Let your women keep silence in the churches'? Certainly he does not mean that women should take no part in those religious services where he would have both men and women take part in prayer and in prophesying, or teaching the word of God to the people." Having women as ministers was not James White's concern.

The author claims that others through the years defended the sisters and their "prominent roles in the work of God." He cites the example of G. C. Tenney, whose article appeared in the *Review and Herald*, May 24, 1892. The author claims Tenney "defended women who labored publicly in the gospel," an undefined expression which leaves the reader to think of women serving as gospel ministers. But in fact, as Uriah Smith's introduction to the article indicates, Tenney was dealing with "the question whether women should take any public part in the worship of God." Where our author says that Tenney "rested his case" by stating that God is no respecter of persons, male or female, Tenney actually was defending women's bearing their testimony, not serving as ministers. The sentence before the one quoted in *Women in Ministry* reads, "But it would be a gross libel on this valiant servant of Christ [Paul] to impute to him the purpose to silence the testimony of the most devoted servants of the cross." Nowhere in his article does Tenney ever mention "preachers" or "preaching," which *Women in Ministry* seems to equate with "pastors" or "pastoring." He speaks only of women participating in the work of the gospel and being able to speak aloud in the meetings of the church.

The chapter quotes Ellen G. White recounting how, prior to her addressing a congregation for more than an hour, S. N. Haskell had been called upon to answer a question from a Campbellite objector who quoted "certain texts prohibiting women from speaking in public." According to Mrs. White, Haskell briefly answered the objection and "very clearly expressed the meaning of the apostle's words" (*Manuscript Releases*, 10:70). Interestingly enough, even here the words "preaching" and "preacher" are not used. As in the other cases, the issue seems to have been just what Mrs. White said it was: the propriety of women "speaking in public."

Only one of the six exhibits found in this section of *Women in Ministry* even mentions women preaching. It is the article by J. A. Mowatt, under the title "Women as Preachers and Lecturers." It was reprinted from an Irish newspaper; evidently it was not written by a Seventh-day Adventist. *Women in Ministry* quotes in full Uriah Smith's introduction to the article. Alert readers will note how Smith qualifies his endorsement of the article. After noting that Mowatt applies the prophecy of Joel to "female preaching," Smith shifts the point: "while it must embrace public speaking of *some kind* [emphasis mine], this we think is but half of its meaning." Smith declines to comment on the work of the non-Adventist female preachers and lecturers whom Mowatt commends so glowingly. His interest, he says, is in the argument that women have the *right* to do such activities.

All of the exhibits, then, contend that women are not required to be silent in public or in the meetings of the church. Only one of them, from a non-Adventist, offers an explicit endorsement of women preachers. Far from being "so passionate in defense of 'women preachers,'" the Adventist sources seem uninterested in that specific aspect of the matter. They are concerned with the right of *all* women to participate in the services of the church, to testify for the Lord, and to have an active part in the work of saving souls.

Given our author's interest in determining the pioneers' views on women as pastors, it is unfortunate that he has overlooked a significant *Signs of the Times* editorial in 1878 which addresses the issue explicitly. J. H. Waggoner, the magazine's resident editor and the author of a treatise on church organization and order, is the presumed author of the unsigned editorial "Women's Place in the Gospel." After defending, as others had done, the right of women to speak in meeting, Waggoner specifically addressed whether Scripture allowed women to serve as pastors or elders. He wrote, "The divine arrangement, even from the beginning, is this, that the man is the head of the woman. Every relation is disregarded or abused in this lawless age. But the Scriptures always maintain this order in the family relation. 'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.' Eph. 5:23. Man is entitled to certain privileges which are not given to woman; and he is subjected to some duties and burdens from which the woman is exempt. A woman may pray, prophesy, exhort, and comfort the church, but *she cannot occupy the position of a pastor or a ruling elder*. This would be looked upon as usurping authority over the man, which is here [1 Tim 2:12] prohibited" (emphasis mine).

Waggoner's editorial conclusion revealed how this position harmonized with that of the other pioneers we have cited: "Neither do the words of Paul confine the labors of women to the act of prophesying alone. He refers to prayers, and also speaks of certain women who 'labored in the Lord,' an expression which could only refer to the work of the gospel. He also, in remarking on the work of the prophets, speaks of edification, exhortation, and comfort. This 'labor in the Lord,' with prayer, comprises all the duties of public worship. Not all the duties of *business meetings*, which were probably conducted by men, or all the duties of *ruling elders*, and *pastors*, compare 1 Tim. 5:17, with 2:12, but all that pertain to exercises purely religious. We sincerely believe that, according to the Scriptures, women, as a right may, and as duty ought to, engage in these exercises" (*The Signs of the Times*, December 19, 1878, 320, emphasis his). Waggoner's 1878 statement supports the idea that the women licentiates of his time were not serving in the role of pastor or elder.

The views of those opposing ordination of women in the Seventh-day Adventist church today correspond to those of our pioneers. They believe that women may serve the Lord in many ways, both personal and public, even including preaching. It is the headship role of pastor or elder which they believe Scripture restricts to qualified men.

*Women in Ministry's* attempts to promote ordination of women by misrepresenting the views of our pioneers should concern all fair-minded Seventh-day Adventists.

### **(c) Did the 1881 General Conference Session Vote to Ordain Women?**

The 1881 General Conference session considered a resolution to permit ordaining women to the gospel ministry (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1881, 392). The minutes clearly show that instead of approving the resolution (as some today have claimed), the delegates referred it to the General Conference Committee, where it died. Neither Ellen G. White nor the other pioneers brought it up again. The issue did not resurface until recent decades.

Some authors in *Women in Ministry* make the oft-repeated claim that at the 1881 General Conference session, the church voted to ordain its women. Recycling this myth, one of the authors referred to the comments of a current General Conference vice-president who served as chairman of the July 5, 1995, Utrecht business meeting session which considered the ordination question. Our author writes:

The [SDA] church has often considered the issue of ordaining women, and has, at times, come amazingly close to doing so. . . . The church, at the General Conference session of 1881, had voted that women might, 'with perfect propriety, be set apart for ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.' The action was then referred to the General Conference Committee. After that, as [the current General Conference vice-president] has so eloquently explained, 'Nothing happened.' Nearly 90 years later in 1968, leadership in Finland officially requested that women be ordained to the gospel ministry.<sup>11</sup>

This author apparently didn't know what really happened to the 1881 General Conference session "vote" for women's ordination, but another author suggests that the resolution was "voted" but was either later killed or ignored by a three-member committee consisting of George I. Butler, Stephen Haskell, and Uriah Smith. He cites the 1881 "resolution" (from *Review and Herald*, December 20, 1881, p. 392) thus:

*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.

This was discussed . . . and referred to the General Conference Committee.

Speculating on why "nothing happened," this author suggests: "These brethren [Butler, Haskell, and Smith] seem to have been uncertain at the time whether women could be ordained 'with perfect propriety.' There is no record of further discussion or implementation of the resolution voted. However, . . . [quoting another scholar] 'the fact that this could be at least discussed on the floor of a G. C. Session indicates an open-mindedness on the part of the delegates toward the subject.' It also clearly demonstrates the open-mindedness toward women serving in the gospel ministry during this time period in the Adventist Church's history."<sup>12</sup>

What many readers of *Women in Ministry* may not know is that there is no need to speculate on what happened regarding woman's ordination in 1881. What actually happened is recorded in the *Review and Herald*. The 1881 General Conference session *never* approved the resolution, and therefore the referral to a committee was not for the purpose of implementing the resolution.

### **Here are the facts.**

1. In the nineteenth century, items were brought to the General Conference session as "resolutions," in the appropriate debating form: "Resolved that . . ." To untrained modern ears, this

sounds like the decision (i.e., the resolution of the matter), when in fact it was only the *starting point* for discussion of the proposal.

2. Once a resolution was presented, it would be debated from the floor, after which it could either be voted on ("Approved" or "Rejected") or handled in some other way appropriate to parliamentary procedure. For example, (a) sometimes a motion was made and passed that the resolution (the issue being discussed) be "tabled," which meant that the members would stop deliberating on it then and take it up at a later time; (b) the delegates could vote to "refer to committee," which meant that they would not take the matter up again until the designated committee had considered it and returned it with a recommendation, after which it could be debated again and a decision reached on it (a process illustrated by another resolution appearing on the same page of minutes); (c) in some cases, referral to committee (then and today) is a polite way of killing a motion—handing it off to another group that is not expected to do anything with it.

### **These then are the facts regarding the 1881 resolution:**

(1) An item was brought to the floor proposing that women be ordained.

(2) After discussion, the resolution was not "approved," as was almost every other resolution on that page, but was "referred to the General Conference Committee," who never sent it back to that session or to any subsequent General Conference session.

(3) In order for an item to be "referred to [any] committee," those present at the session had to vote in favor of referring it to committee. Referral does not happen just because one person calls for it.

(4) The fact that the "resolution" (i.e., the proposal brought to the floor) was "referred to the General Conference Committee" means that the 1881 General Conference delegates *did not accept* the women's ordination proposal.

(5) Therefore, contrary to some widely held assertions, the 1881 General Conference session actually *declined* to approve the proposal to ordain women! For whatever their reasons (we are not told in the minutes of the session), the delegates referred the matter to the General Conference Committee and let it die there. No one brought it to the General Conference delegates again until 1990 (North American Division request at Indianapolis) and 1995 (North American Division request at Utrecht).

(6) The minutes of the meeting, published in the *Review and Herald*, reveal that prior to the matter being "referred to committee," it was discussed by at least eight of the delegates.<sup>13</sup> After that discussion came the decision to refer to committee. Thus, contrary to some pro-ordination scholars (not writers in *Women in Ministry*), the "resolution" *was* entertained on the floor. And having discussed it, the delegates voted that it be "referred to the General Conference Committee."

(7) If the 1881 resolution was referred to the committee to be *implemented*, as *Women in Ministry* alleges, one wonders why at the next General Conference session no one questioned the failure of the committee to implement it. General Conference sessions were held yearly until 1889, after which they were held every two years. One also wonders why Ellen G. White failed to speak out against this alleged injustice against women when a group of three committee men supposedly refused to act upon a General Conference decision. The silence of subsequent General Conference sessions and Ellen G. White is additional evidence showing that in 1881, the church *never approved* the resolution on women's ordination.

Why did the General Conference in 1881 turn away from women's ordination? Was it because the delegates were not bold enough, or open-minded enough, or even prudent enough to act "with perfect propriety" to ordain women who were "serving as gospel ministers"?<sup>14</sup>

For answer, it is best to read the *published* theological position of the leading Seventh-day Adventist pioneers (e.g., through the editorials by resident editors of the *Review* and *Signs*—Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner, James White, J. N. Andrews) on their view on the question of women serving in the headship roles of elder or pastor. When we do, we discover that, for them, because of God's "divine arrangement, even from the beginning," women could not serve in the headship roles as husbands in



their homes or as elders or pastors in the church. To do so, according to our Adventist pioneers, would be to disregard and abuse God's divine arrangement.<sup>15</sup>

#### **(d) Did Ellen G. White's 1895 Statement Call for Women's Ordination?**

*Women in Ministry* takes a statement by Ellen White out of its context and misuses it to argue for ordaining women as elders or pastors.<sup>16</sup> This is the actual statement:

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. *They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.* In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church.<sup>17</sup>

On the basis of this statement, one writer in *Women in Ministry* laments: "If only Ellen White's 1895 landmark statement had come fourteen years sooner [in 1881] !" He apparently believes that this "landmark statement" would have encouraged the General Conference committee brethren who were wondering about the question of "perfect propriety" in implementing the alleged 1881 vote to ordain women "who were serving in the gospel ministry."<sup>18</sup>

#### **But evidence that Ellen G. White's 1895 statement is not applicable to the ordination of women as pastors or elders may be found within the passage itself.**

- (1) This is a part-time ministry, not a calling to a lifework. "Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time. . . ."
- (2) The work is not that of a minister or a church officer. "In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister." Evidently this work is not that of an elder or pastor.
- (3) It was a ministry different from what we were already doing. The portion quoted here is followed immediately by, "This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor."
- (4) The statement appears in an article entitled, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," which called upon ministers to allow and encourage church members to use their talents for the Lord. The last sentence of the quoted paragraph reflects this thrust: "Place the burdens upon men and women of the church, that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness."

Thus the statement and its context clearly indicate that these women were being dedicated to a specific *lay* ministry, not the ministry of elders or pastors.<sup>19</sup>

This, however, is not the only statement from Mrs. White addressing laying on of hands for women. We could wish that *Women in Ministry* had cited the only known statement in which Mrs. White specifically spoke of ordination for women. Here it is:

Some matters have been presented to me in regard to the laborers who are seeking to do all in their power to win souls to Jesus Christ. . . . The ministers are paid for their work, and this is well. And if the Lord gives the wife as well as the husband the burden of labor, and if she devotes her time and her strength to visiting from family to family, opening the Scriptures to them, *although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon her*, she is accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry. Should her labors be counted as nought, and her husband's salary be no more than that of the servant of God whose wife does not give herself to the work, but remains at home to care for her family? (*Manuscript Releases*, 5:323, emphasis mine).<sup>20</sup>

time workers to be paid appropriately, but she dismisses the lack of ordination as irrelevant. In this paragraph and elsewhere in her manuscript she highlights the arena in which women could make an especially significant contribution: personal work with women and families. Such work did not require ordination.

When did she write this way about ordination for women? In 1898, three years after *Women in Ministry* says she called for women to be ordained!

### (e) Was Ellen G. White Ordained?

The implication that Mrs. White was ordained involves a serious inflation of the evidence. It rests on the fact that she was issued ministerial *credentials*, the same as those which were given to ordained men.<sup>21</sup> Because Ellen White's ministerial credentials have given rise to some unfortunate misstatements by those seeking her support for women's ordination, I digress briefly to illustrate how this misinformation became institutionalized.

In addition to promoting and distributing *Women in Ministry* and other pro-ordination materials at the 2000 Toronto General Conference session, advocates of women's ordination also handed out a flyer which has its source in the 1995 pro-ordination book *The Welcome Table*. The leaflet is a xeroxed reproduction of two of Ellen White's credentials (dated 1885 and 1887). Immediately below the credentials, the pro-ordination scholar who pulled it together in *The Welcome Table* makes the following comment:

"Notice her [Ellen G. White's] credentials dated Dec. 6, 1885, where the word *ordained* has been crossed out. However, that is not the case in credentials issued December 27, 1887."<sup>22</sup>

By this comment, readers of the book are left with the erroneous impression that although Ellen White was not ordained in 1885, by 1887 the church's position had evolved to the point of ordaining her. (Some proponents of women's ordination go so far as to suggest that even though the Seventh-day Adventist church has today rejected women's ordination, as allegedly in the [1885] case of Ellen G. White, one day the church will see the light and ordain its women, even as the church allegedly did [in 1887] after "denying" Ellen G. White her rightful ordination in 1885!) But "are those things so?"

The above statement is a half-truth; the other half is "manufactured." The full truth, as we have already noted, is that a number of dedicated women who worked for the church in the late 1800s and early 1900s were issued *licenses* (not ministerial *credentials* that are given to ordained pastors). Ellen White was the only woman ever to be issued ministerial credentials by the Seventh-day Adventist church; she received them from 1871 until her death in 1915. At least *three*, not two, of her ministerial credential certificates from the 1880s are still in the possession of the Ellen G. White Estate. These are dated 1883, 1885, and 1887.

On one of the certificates (dated 1885) the word "ordained" is neatly crossed out, but on the other two it is not. Does this mean that Ellen White was "ordained" in 1883, "unordained" in 1885 and "re-ordained" in 1887? Obviously not. Rather, the crossing out of "ordained" in 1885 highlights the awkwardness of giving credentials to a prophet. No such special category of credentials from the church exists. So the church utilized what it had, giving its highest credentials without an ordination ceremony having been carried out. In actuality, the prophet needed no human credentials. She had functioned for more than twenty-five years (prior to 1871) without any.<sup>23</sup>

Although Ellen G. White was the only woman known to have been issued Seventh-day Adventist ministerial *credentials*, she was never ordained. Mrs. White herself makes this clear.

In 1909, six years before her death, she personally filled out a "Biographical Information Blank" for the General Conference records. In response to the request on Item 26, which asks, "If remarried, give date, and to whom," she wrote an "X," indicating that she had never remarried. Earlier, Item 19 had asked, "If ordained, state when, where, and by whom." Here she also wrote an "X," meaning that she had never been



ordained. She was not denying that God had chosen her and commissioned her as His messenger, but she was responding to the obvious intent of the question, indicating that there had never been an ordination ceremony carried out for her.<sup>24</sup>

This clear and unambiguous statement of Ellen White herself should put to rest the unfounded impression left by *Women in Ministry* that the church's issuance of a ministerial credential to Ellen White is an indication that she was ordained.

If any woman was so spiritually gifted as to qualify for ordination *as elder or pastor*, it was Ellen G. White. If any woman was so effective in her ministry as a teacher, preacher, and soul-winner as to qualify for ordination *as elder or pastor*, it was Ellen White. If any Adventist was so justice-inspired, sensitive and caring (and with demonstrable evidence of other fruits of the Spirit) as to qualify for ordination *as elder or pastor*, it was Ellen G. White. If any Adventist was so prolific an author and so gifted a leader as to qualify for ordination *as elder or pastor*, it was Ellen G. White. And if any woman could legitimately claim the title of *Elder or Pastor*, it was Ellen White.

But during her later years, Mrs. White was known mostly as "Sister White" and affectionately as "Mother White." She was never known as "Elder White" or "Pastor Ellen." Every church member knew that "Elder White" was either her husband, James, or her son, W. C. White.

Could it really be that we are ethically and theologically more enlightened than Ellen G. White? Or is it perhaps that we do not view the Bible as she did? Whatever our response is, this much can be said: The claim or implication by some advocates of women's ordination that Ellen White was ordained is clearly wrong.

## Summary.

Throughout our history, Seventh-day Adventist women labored faithfully in the ministry as teachers, preachers, missionaries, Bible workers, etc., and made a vital contribution to the mission of the church, all *without ordination*. Far from providing a case for ordination, the nine women mentioned in the *Women in Ministry* chapter we have been considering illustrate what women may accomplish without it. They are by no means alone. The Bible workers, as an example, offered valuable service in the ministry; they were an important part of the evangelistic team because they often knew more about the people being baptized and joining the church than the minister did; and the minister welcomed their wisdom and judgment. But none of these women was ever ordained. If these women, who were well versed in Scripture, had been asked if they wanted to be ordained as elders or pastors, most would likely have exclaimed, "Oh, no! It isn't biblical!" I say this because it continues to be the attitude of thousands of dedicated Adventist women around the world today.

In light of these facts of Adventist history—such as that Ellen G. White was never ordained, she never called for women to be ordained as elders or pastors, and none of our dedicated Seventh-day Adventist women of the past was ever ordained as elder or pastor—I again ask those who support women's ordination, just as I would ask those who support the attempted change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday:

Since the testimonies of Scripture indicate that God the Father *did not* do it; the Old Testament is clear that the patriarchs, prophets and kings *never did* do it; the gospels reveal that Jesus, the Desire of Ages, *would not* do it; the epistles and the acts of the apostles declare that the commissioned apostles *could not* do it; Ellen White, with a prophetic vision of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, *dared not* do it, should we who live at the turn of another millennium do it?<sup>25</sup>

What then shall we say in response to these manufactured "facts" in *Women in Ministry*? Simply this: It would have been better to tell the facts as they are, for then *Women in Ministry* would have been what the Ad Hoc Committee wanted it to be, a reliable guide to church members trying to make the right decision regarding the ordination of women as elders or pastors.

Instead of recycling misinformation, half-truths, and errors, we must honestly and accurately state the facts regarding the position and practice of our pioneers on women's ordination. Having done so, we may then be at liberty to: (1) debate the rightness or wrongness of their action or (2) decide either to follow their theological understanding and practice or chart our own course. It is irresponsible, however, to attempt to inject our biases and self-interests into a historical fact or reinterpret it in order to push our ideological agenda.

**Even if there was no intent on the part of *Women in Ministry* authors to mislead, neither the church nor her Lord are well served by "scholarly research" which distorts the history it purports to tell.**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Kit Watts, "Ellen White's Contemporaries: Significant Women in the Early Church," in *A Woman's Place: Seventh-day Adventist Women in Church and Society*, ed. Rosa T. Banks (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1992), 41-74; Laurel Damsteegt, "S. M. I. Henry: Pioneer in Women's Ministry," *Adventists Affirm* 9/1 (Spring 1995), 17-19, 46. The spirit of the early Adventist women is also reflected in the soul-winning ministries of women in Africa and many other parts of the world. See, for example, J. J. Nortey, "The Bible, Our Surest Guide," *Adventists Affirm* 9/1 (Spring 1995), 47-49, 67; cf. Terri Saelee, "Women of the Spirit," *Adventists Affirm* 9/2 (Fall 1995), 60-63. But contrary to revisionist interpretations of Adventist history, none of these roles required women to be ordained as elders or pastors (see William Fagal, "Ellen White and the Role of Women in the Church," available from the Ellen G. White Estate, and adapted as chapter 10 in Samuele Bacchiocchi's *Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1987). A summary version of Fagal's work is found in his "Did Ellen White Call for Ordaining Women?" *Ministry*, December 1988, 8-11, and "Did Ellen White Support the Ordination of Women?" *Ministry*, February 1989, 6-9, together reproduced as chapter 16 of this book; cf. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures*, 70-83, where we discuss "Restless Eves" and "Reckless Adams."

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Michael Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Ministry," *WIM*, 220-229; Randal R. Wisbey, "SDA Women in Ministry, 1970-1998," *WIM*, 235. A more restrained position is found in Jerry Moon's "A Power that Exceeds that of Men': Ellen G. White on Women in Ministry," *WIM*, 190-204.

<sup>3</sup> Bert Haloviak, "The Adventist Heritage Calls for Ordination of Women," *Spectrum* 16/3 (August 1985), 52.

<sup>4</sup> George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1999), 104-105.

<sup>5</sup> Kit Watts made this claim in her presentation on June 28, 2000, during the Ministerial Council Meeting preceding the Toronto General Conference session. More examples of such revisionist interpretation of Seventh-day Adventist history can be found in some pro-ordination works, which leave readers with the wrong impression that the issuance of ministerial licenses to dedicated Adventist women of the past implied that they labored as ordained ministers. See, for example, Josephine Benton, *Called by God: Stories of Seventh-day Adventist Women Ministers* (Smithsburg, Md.: Blackberry Hill Publishers, 1990). Cf. the following chapters in *The Welcome Table*: Bert Haloviak, "A Place at the Table: Women and the Early Years," 27-44; idem, "Ellen G. White Statements Regarding Ministry," 301-308; and Kit Watts, "Moving Away from the Table: A Survey of Historical Factors Affecting Women Leaders," 45-59; cf. "Selected List of 150 Adventist Women in Ministry, 1844-1994," Appendix 6. A careful review of the source references in some of the chapters of *Women in Ministry* shows that their authors followed too closely the trail left by the revisionist interpreters of Adventist history of ordination (see, for example, Michael Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century

Women in Adventist Ministry Against the Backdrop of Their Times," *WIM*, 233 notes 74 and 78; Randal R. Wisbey, "SDA Women in Ministry, 1970-1998," *WIM*, 252 notes 1, 2, 4).

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful corrective to the historical revisionism of some on the issue of ordination, refer to the careful work by William Fagal, "Ellen G. White and Women in Ministry," in *Prove All Things*, 273-286; Larry Kirkpatrick, "Great Flying Leaps: The Use of Ellen G. White's Writings in *Women in Ministry*," in *Prove All Things*, 231-249; cf. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scripture*, 70-83, on "Restless Eves" and "Reckless Adams."

<sup>7</sup> John G. Beach, *Notable Women of Spirit: the Historical Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1976), 55, emphasis mine.

<sup>8</sup> Of the nine notable "women in Adventist ministry" which Michael Bernoi profiles (*WIM*, 225-229; cf. George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 105-106), only four were licentiates for significant periods of time: Ellen Lane, Sarah A. Lindsey, Hetty Hurd Haskell, and Lulu Wightman, who all gave substantial full-time work to evangelism, whether private or public. The other five women vary from the general picture *Women in Ministry* would like to draw. S. M. I. Henry held a license for about three years while she advocated a "woman ministry" which encouraged women to work for the Lord where they were; female pastors were not a part of her program. Margaret Caro was licensed in 1894 and from 1897 to 1900 (we have not found record yet of her licensing in 1895 and 1896). During this whole time she seems to have continued her dental practice, using the proceeds to help educate young people for the Lord. I found no record of licensing of any kind—not even a missionary license—for Minerva Jane Chapman. But look at her achievements. L. Flora Plummer was licensed in 1893, but in the year before that and the year after she was given a missionary license; I have yet to find another year in which she was a licentiate. This means that during the time she was secretary and, according to *Women in Ministry*, acting president of the Iowa Conference (a claim I could not verify because the references were erroneous), she was not even carrying a ministerial license but was a licensed missionary. This makes the author's claim for her sound inflated: "Of all the women who *labored in the gospel ministry* while Ellen White was still alive, Flora Plummer was perhaps the most notable" (emphasis mine). Finally, Anna Knight was a licensed missionary, not a licensed minister, contrary to what one might assume from her listing among the "women in Adventist ministry." (The above information is drawn from the church's *Yearbooks* and from the *General Conference Bulletin* index, which extends only through 1915.) So all of these truly notable women serve as examples of what women may indeed do in the line of ministry. But *Women in Ministry* (and Knight's *A Brief History*) seem to want us to think of them as examples of woman ministers from our history and to consider how we have fallen away from our "roots." The conclusion is inescapable: all nine women cited by Bernoi (and Knight) were certainly part of the Adventist soul-winning ministry; *but none of them was a minister as we use the term today*. See also the next notes.

<sup>9</sup> One example of where *Women in Ministry* fosters a confusion between the duties of ordained ministers and licentiates is found on 225-226, where the author claims that Sarah A. Lindsey's "1872 license permitted her to preach, hold evangelistic meetings, and *lead out in church business and committee sessions*" (emphasis mine). He offers no evidence for the latter point, which may be no more than his assumption. Several pieces of evidence suggest a conclusion different from his. An expression used for licentiates in some conference session minutes at that time indicates a more limited authorization: candidates were "granted license to improve their gift in preaching as the way may open" (see, for example, *Review and Herald* 35/14 [March 22, 1870]: 110). In 1879, in an article our author quotes on another point, James White wrote his understanding that 1 Cor. 14:34, 35 applied to women keeping silence in the *business meetings* of the church (ibid. 53/22 [May 29, 1879]: 172). And, as we will show at the end of the next

subsection, J. H. Waggoner mentioned "business meetings" as an area where the scriptural restrictions likely applied. Beyond this one matter, the chapter shows an unwise dependence on feminist secondary sources, which are often unreliable. We cite a few examples from the same two pages of *Women in Ministry*. Ellen Lane was not licensed by the Michigan Conference in 1868, as claimed. The minutes show that the licentiates that year were "Wm. C. Gage, James G. Sterling, and Uriah Smith" (ibid. 31/23 [May 12, 1868]: 357). Though she was indeed licensed in 1878, as the chapter states, she was actually first licensed in 1875 (ibid. 46/8 [August 26, 1875]: 63). Further, she was not the first woman licentiate among Seventh-day Adventists, a distinction which apparently belongs to Sarah A. H. Lindsey. The chapter also mentions Mrs. Lindsey, as we noted above, but it dates her licensing to 1872, though she is known to have been licensed in 1871 (ibid. 38/13 [September 12, 1871]: 102). After citing her licensing, the chapter mentions that in one series of meetings she preached twenty-three times on the second advent, but it fails to note that this series took place in early 1869, three years before the author's date for her licensing (ibid. 33/25 [June 15, 1869]: 200). Thus in fact her example serves to demonstrate that lack of ordination or even licensing need not stand in the way of a woman who wants to serve God. See Michael Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Adventist Ministry Against the Backdrop of Their Times," *WM*, 225, 226.

<sup>10</sup> See Michael Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Adventist Ministry Against the Backdrop of Their Times," *W/M*, 211-229. The portions referenced here are from 222-224.

<sup>11</sup> Randal R. Wisbey, "SDA Women in Ministry, 1970-1998," *WIM*, 235. Wisbey is currently the president of Canadian University College. He is quoting Calvin Rock, who served as the chairman of the Utrecht business meeting that considered the North American Division request to ordain its women. Cf. "Thirteenth Business Meeting," *Adventist Review*, July 7, 1995, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Adventist Ministry Against the Backdrop of Their Times," *WIM*, 224. The scholar he quotes is Roger W. Coon, former associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate, now retired. Dr. Coon's document says that the resolution was "introduced" and "referred to committee," but it never claims the resolution was voted.

<sup>13</sup> The minutes of the 1881 General Conference session state that the resolution "was discussed by J. O. Corliss, A. C. Bourdeau, E. R. Jones, D. H. Lamson, W. H. Littlejohn, A. S. Hutchins, D. M. Canright, and J. N. Loughborough, and referred to the General Conference Committee" (*Review and Herald*, December 20, 1881).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Wisbey, *WIM*, 235; Bernoi, *WIM*, 224. A visit to the endnotes of the Seminary scholars reveals their reliance on the pro-ordination authors who also wrote for *The Welcome Table*. There was no reason why these *Women in Ministry* authors should have missed the facts on this matter. The information was readily available in published works by those opposing women's ordination (see, for example, Samuele Bacchiocchi's *Women in the Church* [1987] and my *Searching the Scriptures* [1995] and *Receiving the Word* [1996]). More fundamentally, the primary sources—the minutes themselves—are easily obtained at Andrews University, and their pattern of recording actions is clear and consistent.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see the editorial in the December 19, 1878 *Signs of the Times* which summarized the understanding of the Adventist pioneers on the headship responsibility of the man in both the home and the church. I have already quoted the key points in this chapter, on 291. Cf. Uriah Smith, "Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches," *Review and Herald*, June 26, 1866, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Adventist Ministry," *WIM*, 224, 225; cf. J. H. Denis Fortin, "Ordination in the Writings of Ellen G. White," *WIM*, 127, 128. Cf. Rose Otis, "Ministering to the Whole Church," *Elder's Digest*, Number Nine, 15. *Elder's Digest* is published by the General Conference Ministerial Association. A more nuanced discussion of Ellen White's 1895 statement is provided by Jerry Moon, "A Power That Exceeds That of Men': Ellen G. White on Women in Ministry," *WIM*, 201, 202.

<sup>17</sup> Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895, 434, emphasis mine.

<sup>18</sup> Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Adventist Ministry," *WIM*, 224. Observe that this kind of "historical research" is built on the following questionable assumptions and speculations: (1) "women were serving as gospel workers" [understood as elders or pastors]; (2) the 1881 General Conference session voted to

ordain women as pastors; (3) a 3-member male committee failed to implement the alleged 1881 General Conference session vote because they were wondering about the question of "perfect propriety"; (4) it took Ellen G. White 14 long years to speak to the "correctness" of women's ordination.

<sup>19</sup> This fact is acknowledged by Jerry Moon, "A Power That Exceeds That of Men': Ellen G. White on Women in Ministry," *WIM*, 201. For more on this matter, see William Fagal's reprinted articles in *Prove All Things*, 273-286.

<sup>20</sup> Though no mention of this statement appears in Bernoi's chapter, two other chapters do mention it. One of them gives only a brief summary of the statement and omits the specific reference to ordination (J. H. Denis Fortin, "Ordination in the Writing of Ellen G. White," *WIM*, 127), while the other provides a helpful and much more thorough study of the manuscript in question (Jerry Moon, "A Power That Exceeds That of Men': Ellen G. White on Women in Ministry," *WIM*, 192-194). The chapter does not quote the reference to ordination as a part of that discussion, but it does quote it later, in the chapter's last sentence.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Bernoi notes, "For a number of years both she [Hetty Hurd Haskell] and Ellen White were listed together in the *Yearbook* as ministers credentialed by the General Conference, Ellen White as ordained and Mrs. Haskell as licensed" (Bernoi, "Nineteenth-Century Women in Adventist Ministry," *WIM*, 227). Given this way without further explanation, such a statement will mislead many into assuming that Mrs. White was ordained.

<sup>22</sup> Bert Haloviak, "Ellen G. White Statements Regarding Ministry," in *The Welcome Table*, 308.

<sup>23</sup> For more on this, see William Fagal's "Ellen G. White and Women in Ministry," in *Prove All Things*, 273-286.

<sup>24</sup> A copy of her Biographical Information Blank may be found in Document File 701 at the Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office, James White Library, Andrews University. Arthur L. White published the information regarding these matters in the introduction to his article, "Ellen G. White the Person," *Spectrum* 4/2 (Spring, 1972), 8.

<sup>25</sup> See my *Searching the Scriptures* (1995), 65.