Introduction

Regardless of one’s position on women’s ordination, this one fact is incontrovertible: Ordaining women as elders or pastors is new light which the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist church is being urged to embrace.[1] For more than 100 years, Adventists have been unanimous in their view that no precedent for the practice of ordaining women can be found in Scripture, nor in the writings of Ellen G. White and the early Seventh-day Adventist church. [2]

By the 1970s, however, this established position began to be reversed in favor of ordaining women as elders and pastors.

This new trend was created by the converging interests of feminism, liberalism, church leaders’ desire to enjoy United States tax law benefits to ministers, questionable church policy revisions and *Church Manual* alterations allowing women to serve as elders, calculated attempts by some influential North American churches unilaterally to ordain women as pastors, the silence of leadership to this defiance of two General Conference (GC) session votes against women’s ordination, a well-orchestrated strategy by influential thought leaders and pro-ordination groups to domesticate the practice in the church, a determined effort by some church scholars to *reinterpret* the Bible and early Adventist history to justify the practice, the systematic and aggressive lobbying by liberal and feminist groups for the church to issue unisex ordination credentials for ordained and non-ordained employees of the church, the hijacking of official church publications, institutions, departments, and certain other organs and events of the church for pro-ordination propaganda, and the silencing, coercion, or persecution of individuals who challenge the unbiblical practice of ordaining women as elders or pastors.[3]

Initially, the campaign to overthrow the long-standing biblical position of the Seventh-day Adventist church was spearheaded by a relatively few, but influential, liberal and feminist thought leaders within the church. But today, as a result of the converging interests identified above, and as a result of a wide range of arguments being employed, an increasing number of church members are not sure about what the real issues are in the debate over women’s ordination, nor about the biblical correctness of the practice.

In this article, I will (i) briefly summarize the arguments that have been employed over the years in defense of women’s ordination, (ii) identify the crucial issues in the campaign for women’s ordination, (iii) discuss the role-differentiation between men and women, and (iv) set forth the biblical and theological obstacles against ordaining women as elders or pastors.

I’m writing this article from the perspective of one who used to support the practice, but who...
has since changed my mind on the strength of the evidence from the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy as reflected also in the understanding and example of the Adventist pioneers, including Ellen G. White.[4]

The Evolving Arguments for Women’s Ordination

Since the 1970s, several arguments have been employed in the church in an attempt to overthrow the church’s longstanding position against ordaining women as elders or pastors. During this period two major pro-ordination works have come to embody the most reasoned defense of women’s ordination: (i) The Welcome Table and (ii) Women in Ministry.

The Welcome Table. In 1995, fourteen (14) pro-ordination thought leaders produced the 408-page book, The Welcome Table: Setting a Table for Ordained Women.[5] Published shortly before the 1995 General Conference session in Utrecht, this volume was designed to convince the world church to approve the request by the North American Division to ordain women.

In this work some of the authors argued that Bible passages (like Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Pet 3:1-7; 1 Cor 11:3, 11-12; 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-14; 3:2; and Titus 1:6) which Adventists historically understood as having a bearing on male-female role relations in both the home and the church are the product of the Bible writers’ faulty logic or mistaken rabbinic interpretations in vogue in their day.

Reasoning along feminist and higher-critical lines, some of the writers maintained that the apostle Paul erred in his interpretation of Genesis 1-3 when he grounded his teaching of role distinctions between male and female in Creation and the Fall. They claimed that the apostle Paul’s statements were merely expressions of uninspired personal opinions—opinions that reflect his culture and hence do not apply to us. To these authors, Paul was “a man of his own time.” He occasionally glimpsed the ideal that Jesus established during His time on earth; yet he never fully arrived at “the gospel ideal” of “full equality” or complete role interchangeability in both the home and the church.[6]

Despite the wide publicity given it, The Welcome Table (1995) did not gain much credibility among thoughtful Adventists because its conclusions were based on liberal/feminist and revisionist interpretation of the Bible and Adventist history. Thus, at the 1995 Utrecht General Conference session, the world church overwhelmingly voted to reject the request to ordain women. The arguments in this book, together with other pro-ordination arguments up till 1995 failed to convince the world church. These can be summarized as follows:

1. The Bible is “silent” or “neutral” on the women’s ordination issue (that is to say, the Bible is neither for nor against women’s ordination).

2. The lack of biblical precedence for women in spiritual leadership (as priests in the Old Testament, and as apostles and elders in the New Testament) and the presence of biblical
prohibitions against women serving in those roles is due to the nature of the Bible as “culturally conditioned” (that is to say the Bible is the product and a reflection of its unenlightened or patriarchal culture)

3. Ordaining women as elders or pastors is a “power” issue (this argument transformed the biblical teaching of male “headship” in both the home and in the church into a symbol of male oppression of women).

4. Ordaining women as elders or pastors in the church is a “cultural” issue (in the sense that it has to do with the “cultural readiness” of groups or regions of the world Adventist church).

5. Women’s ordination has to do with “equality,” “capability,” and “ability” of male and female (this argument transformed the women’s ordination issue into a “fairness,” “justice” or civil-rights issue).

6. The issue of women’s ordination is not theological but “ecclesiological”; (by this argument proponents meant that the issue of women’s ordination could be settled by the Bible, but by administrative “policy” of church leaders)

7. The issue of women’s ordination is an example of “unity in diversity”; (this argument, which deals with pluralism in belief and practice, maintained that just as there is “diversity” in attitudes and practices within the church, in such areas as Sabbath observance, worship styles, dress, participation in one’s tribe’s/nation’s war machinery, so also on the issue of women’s ordination there should be “diversity”). Some argued that “diversity” or pluralism in theological belief and practice was evidence of maturity, strength and true unity, not of blind uniformity, or lockstep conformity.

8. The issue has to do with the “Spirit’s leading” or “progressive revelation”; (this argument seeks to make the women’s ordination issue a question of “present truth” or “new light”). Not infrequently, the issues of polygamy, slavery, war, divorce and remarriage were cited as biblical examples to illustrate God’s “accommodation”; to sinful human situations in the Bible-writers’ times—conditions which led God, under His “Spirit’s leading,” to later “correct” these prior revelations. In this argument, biblical examples and texts that teach male-headship and female-supporting role, within the complementary relationship of spiritual equals in the home and church, were explained away as culturally conditioned.

Despite the aggressive campaign, proponents were unable to convince the world church of the biblical soundness of their arguments to ordain women as elders or pastors. By 1995 three major books were published that exposed the biblical, hermeneutical, and theological flaws in the works of those promoting women’s ordination. Against the pro-ordination works, these three books---*Women in the Church* (1987), *The Tip of An Iceberg* (1994); and *Searching the Scriptures* (1995)---were instrumental in convincing the church of the soundness of its longstanding position on ordaining women as elders or pastors. Thus, on the two occasions that the issue of women’s
ordination came up at General Conference sessions (Indianapolis, 1990, and Utrecht, 1995), the overwhelming majority of the church voted "No" to requests to ordain women.

When the pro-ordination arguments (ably articulated by the 14 scholars in their 1995 book *The Welcome Table*) failed to overthrow the longstanding Seventh-day Adventist position against women's ordination, some pro-ordination church leaders in the North American urged pro-ordination scholars at Andrews University Theological Seminary to "do something about it [Utrecht’s decision against women’s ordination]." The result was the 1998 book *Women in Ministry*.

*Women in Ministry.* The second major pro-ordination work was published by some 20 scholars at Andrews University.[9] The book, *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (1998), prepared by an Ad Hoc Committee from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, was supposed to offer the much desired justification for the new light of women's ordination.[10]

The initial request for the *Women in Ministry* book came from “several union presidents of the North American Division” who, before and during the 1995 Utrecht General Conference session, had urged the North American Division President that there be “no turning back” in their campaign for women’s ordination.[11] As the book’s editor later explained, the North American Division leadership, feeling “let down” at Utrecht, wanted the Seminary to “do something about it [the Utrecht vote].”[12]

Because the authors of *Women in Ministry* concede that they “do not claim to speak for others, either at the seminary or in church administration,”[13] and because they deliberately excluded dissenting scholarly views from a book published and financed by the Seminary, there have been justifiable criticisms that the Seminary’s name and resources were hijacked or misused by influential church leaders and scholars to promote the ideological agenda of women’s ordination. In response, promoters of *Women in Ministry* sometimes offer three major reasons for their action.

First, they argue that, until the publication of *Women in Ministry*, the church never had the chance of hearing the reasoned views of pro-ordination thought leaders. Some claim that unlike opponents of women’s ordination who allegedly defied a 1988 moratorium or ban by the General Conference president on publishing and distributing materials on the issue, proponents loyal to the church chose not to present and publicize their theological defense of women’s ordination, in compliance with the supposed moratorium. The alleged ban was apparently lifted in 1995 when “several” North American Division leaders met with some professors from Andrews University Theological Seminary and urged them to “do something about Utrecht.”[14]

Second, in the opinion of other proponents, the 1990 General Conference session vote was
not a categorical No to women's ordination. Instead of a theological reason against the practice, proponents claim that the GC session simply cited pragmatic reasons—“the widespread lack of support” for it and “the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church” that could result had the church gone ahead at that time in ordaining women as pastors.[15]

Third, some other proponents of women's ordination claim that the 1995 General Conference session addressed “only the procedural recommendation” of the North American Division, not “the theological appropriateness of women’s ordination.”[16]

The above justification for Women in Ministry is based on a creative reinterpretation of church actions on women's ordination (see the previous three endnotes for a rebuttal). Yet, building upon these contestable arguments, advocates and promoters believe that a pro-ordination book from the Seminary would now create the much-needed consensus for women's ordination.

Unlike the authors of The Welcome Table, many of whom seem to put their liberal and feminist commitments above Scripture, the authors of Women in Ministry consciously underscore the claim that their approach to the Bible is different. They disavow the feminist and higher critical method of their ideological cousins.[17] Although the actual practice in the Women in Ministry book was inconsistent with the authors' claim, at least for the first time, a group of church scholars attempted to present conservative arguments to justify women's ordination.

The Seminary book presents new arguments and, in some instances articulates more carefully old arguments, to justify women's ordination. The following are the essential contours of the biblical and historical arguments advanced by Women in Ministry:[18]

1. Genesis 1-3 teaches that God did NOT institute headship and submission or male-female role distinctions at creation. Adam and Eve enjoyed “full equality” of “shared leadership” or “shared headship.” Male headship and female submission were introduced by God after the Fall; even then, this was a non-ideal arrangement designed only for the governance of the home, not the church or covenant community.

2. New Testament teaching on headship and submission (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Pet 3:1-7) suggests that today Christians should aim at reaching the creation ideal of “total equality,” understood to mean the obliteration of any gender-based role differentiation.

3. A careful study of the Bible reveals that there was actually at least one “woman priest” in the Old Testament. God Himself ordained Eve as a priest alongside Adam when, after the Fall, He dressed both as priests in the garden of Eden using animal skins. Prophetesses Miriam,
Deborah, and Huldah exercised headship or leadership roles over men.

(4) The Bible also reveals that there were actually “women apostles and leaders” in the New Testament. Junia (Rom 16:7), for example, was an outstanding “female apostle,” and Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2) was a “female minister.”

(5) The New Testament teaching of “the priesthood of all believers” suggests that women may be ordained as elders or pastors.

(6) When correctly understood, biblical texts (like 1 Tim 2:11ff., 1 Cor 14:34ff., etc.) which seem to preclude women from headship responsibilities in the home as husbands and fathers and in the church as elders or pastors are temporary restrictions that applied only to specific situations during New Testament times.

(7) Careful study of early Seventh-day Adventist history reveals that women actually served as pastors in those days and were issued ministerial certificates. Ellen G. White apparently endorsed the call of such women to the gospel ministry.

(8) The 1881 General Conference session voted to ordain women. This vote, however, was apparently ignored or killed by the all-male General Conference Committee (comprised of George I. Butler, Stephen Haskell, and Uriah Smith).

(9) A landmark statement in 1895 by Ellen G. White called for ordaining women to the gospel ministry. This statement could have spurred on the male brethren who were reluctant to implement the alleged 1881 General Conference decision.

(10) Ellen G. White was herself ordained and was issued ministerial credentials.

But there is also a moral-ethical argument. Emphasizing the ethical necessity of ordaining women as elders or pastors, some of the Women in Ministry authors argue that “it is morally reprehensible to hold back from women the one thing that formally recognizes their work within the church.” “It is imperative” that the church act “with justice, with mercy, and with courage on behalf of its women.” The failure of the church to act ethically, or a delay on its part to do so, will compel “the forces of history” (such as the churches in North America which unilaterally engaged in “congregational ordinations”) to drag the church along.

Moreover, we are told, unless the new light of women’s ordination is implemented, the witness of the church will not only be discredited in countries where it is wrong to “discriminate” against women, but it will make God “look bad.” Thus, the church’s rejection of women’s ordination will be an affront to the character of God, even as slavery was in the nineteenth
If the reader is not yet convinced by *Women in Ministry*’s biblical, theological, historical, and moral or ethical arguments, there is one final argument: We must listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit as He calls upon us today to change our patterns of ministry in response to the pragmatic needs of a growing church. Writes the editor in her summation chapter:

“If circumcision, based on divine [Old Testament] mandate, could be changed [by the apostles, elders, and believers, together with the Holy Spirit, at the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15], how much more could patterns of ministry [ordaining women as elders and pastors], which lack a clear ‘Thus says the Lord,’ be modified to suit the needs of a growing church?”[22]

Today, *Women in Ministry* has become the basis for some to see the campaign for women’s ordination as an issue of the "individual's moral conscience" (this argument, which is another way of saying "I'll have my own way, regardless of what others think," offers a moral basis for advocates of women’s ordination to go against the decision of the world church on the matter). The Seminary book is also the reason why some view the question of ordaining women as a "moral imperative" (in the sense that it is immoral for the worldwide church to refuse to ordain women as pastors). This argument offers the ethical basis for silence any objection to the practice and coerce or persecute anyone who objects to the practice).

*Women in Ministry* is the most recent attempt by well-meaning church scholars to provide a much-desired biblical, historical, and ethical justification for ordaining women as elders and pastors. But as some other church scholars have argued in their *Prove All Things: A Response to ‘Women in Ministry,’* the Seminary book suffers from some serious shortcomings. *Prove All Things* reveals that the Seminary book is based on: (1) ambiguity and vagueness, (2) strawman arguments, (3) substantial leaps of logic, (4) arguments from silence, (5) speculative interpretations (6) questionable re-interpretations of the Bible, (7) distorted biblical reasoning, (8) misleading and erroneous claims regarding Adventist history, (9) a seriously flawed concept of “moral imperative,” and (10) a fanciful view of the Holy Spirit’s leading.[23]

**The Evolving Arguments.** Perceptive observers of the Adventist theological landscape will discover that, during the past four or more decades, the arguments for women’s ordination have evolved, some overlapping, and others contradictory. In recent times there have been a180-degree change in some of the arguments that had in the past been advanced in favor of women’s ordination.

For example, during the initial phase of the church debate proponents of the practice argued that the Bible was either "silent" or "neither for nor against." But now, since women’s ordination is believed to be a "moral imperative," it means the Bible is *for* women’s ordination! The Bible is no longer to be seen as "neutral" on the issue of women’s ordination; Scripture is now decidedly for it!
Also, proponents in the past admitted that there was no biblical precedence for women serving in the roles of spiritual leadership as priests, apostles, and elders in Bible times. But now, under the “Spirit’s leading” (or His work of “progressive revelation”), advocates are now preaching the “new light” that there were in fact women priests, women apostles, and women elders in the Bible!

Furthermore, because it was originally believed that the Bible was “neither for nor against” women’s ordination, the decision was to be determined by each culture, according to the cultural readiness of the respective divisions. In other words women’s ordination was to be settled by administrative policy; and the decision was not to be binding on all. But now, since women’s ordination is believed to be a moral imperative, it would seem to follow that, sooner or later, the practice would be urged as binding upon all, with moves to encourage it in all areas of the world church.

In view of the orchestrated attempt to impose women’s ordination on the Seventh-day Adventist church, and in view of the confusing, sometimes plausible-sounding, arguments being advanced for women’s ordination, it is important that we identify the crucial issues that are at stake and find out what the Bible has to say on the issue.

Endnotes


1. Does the Bible Support Ordaining Women As Elders or Pastors?--Part 1


[6] For a brief evaluation of the pro-ordination arguments by some of the authors in The Welcome Table, see my Receiving the Word, chapter 5, part 2, 126-129.

[7] During the discussions that culminated at the General Conference session in Utrecht, some voices heralded the ordination of women as elders and pastors as new light for God’s church in the last days. For example, in a letter dated June 1, 1995, given out to delegates at the 1995 General Conference session in Utrecht, the president of a major North American Conference, in support of women's ordination, presented new interpretations of "new light," "present truth," and "progressive revelation," arguing that truths that were not present in earlier times were not privileged to have the new light that our twentieth-century progressive culture needs.

[8] Samuele Bacchiocchi, Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1987); C. Raymond Holmes, The Tip of An Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventists Affirm and Wakefield, Mich.: Pointer Publications, 1994); Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Searching the Scriptures: Women’s Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventists Affirm, 1995). At the time they published their works, Samuele Bacchiocchi was a professor of church history and theology in the religion department of Andrews University; C. Raymond Holmes was the director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and professor of Worship and Preaching at the Theological Seminary; and Samuel Koranteng-Pipim was a Ph.D. candidate in systematic theology at the Theological Seminary, having served there as a contract teacher in theology and ethics.

[9] The 20 scholars whose works are published in Women in Ministry are: Nancy Vyhmeister, Jo Ann Davidson, Richard Davidson, Walter Douglas, Jacques Doukhan, Roger Dudley, Jon Dybdahl, Denis Fortin, Robert Johnston, George Knight, Jerry Moon, Larry Richards, Russell Staples, Peter van Bemmelen, Randal Wisbey, Daniel Augsburger, Raoul Dederen, Keith Mattingly, Michael Bernoi, and Alicia Worley (the last two were MDiv. Students at the time the book were published).
The generic phrase “women in ministry,” employed as a title for the book, can be misleading. For, the authors’ goal was not simply the ministry of women in the church (which has never been opposed by the Adventist church), but rather ordaining women as elders and pastors. For an insightful background into how this book came into being and its serious theological and historical defects, see Mercedes Dyer, ed., Prove All Things: A Response to ‘Women in Ministry’, (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000).


The editor of the unofficial magazine Adventist Today summarizes the circumstances leading to the production of the Seminary book, as narrated by Nancy Vyhmeister, chair of the Seminary Ad Hoc Committee and editor of the book, at the October 1998 meeting of the pro-ordination group Association of Adventist Women held in Loma Linda, California. On the circumstances leading to the feeling of “let down,” Vyhmeister mentioned that in the wake of the Utrecht defeat of the North American Division petition for women’s ordination, people from opposite ends of the ordination spectrum blamed or praised the Seminary for sending two representatives with opposing viewpoints. She, however, explained that the two professors who spoke at Utrecht (Raoul Dederen and P. Gerard Damsteegt) did not speak for the Seminary: “Those people were invited by ‘someone else,’ and they agreed to speak long before the seminary knew anything about it.” When, therefore, less than a month after Utrecht “several” North American leaders met with the Seminary faculty and told them, “you let us down [at Utrecht]; you’re against women’s ordination,” reports Adventist Today’s editor, “every representative of the seminar who was attending the meeting insisted that they were not against women’s ordination. In fact, Nancy said, about 90% of the seminar faculty favor women’s ordination.” What follows is significant:

“Then do something about it,”
November-December, 1998, 24, 10; emphasis mine) “Doing something about Utrecht” is what the Seminary book is all about, rather than being a quest for an open-minded investigation of
what the Bible actually teaches on the subject of women in ministry. Some North American leaders wanted the scholars at the Seminary to speak with one voice in favor of women’s ordination.


[14] In view of these oft-repeated claims by proponents of women’s ordination, the following questions deserve a brief response: (1) Was there a ban on publishing and distributing materials on women’s ordination between 1988 and 1995? (2) Were advocates of women’s ordination relatively silent during the period of the “moratorium” or “ban,” while opponents published two books (The Tip of An Iceberg [1994] and Searching the Scriptures [1995])?

These are the facts: In May 1988, while awaiting the July 1989 meeting and recommendation of the “Role of Women Commission,” General Conference president Elder Neal C. Wilson appealed to all church members “to abstain from circulating books, pamphlets, letters, and tapes that stir up debate and often generate more confusion [on women’s ordination].” Proponents of women’s ordination often misinterpret this specific appeal by the General Conference president to mean a permanent moratorium or ban on publishing works on women’s ordination. They claim that out of loyalty to the General Conference president they honored his moratorium while those opposed undermined it by publishing and distributing their works. In making these claims, advocates are either unaware of or overlook the facts concerning the General Conference president’s appeal and the aggressive campaign mounted by pro-ordination entities. First of all, the president’s appeal was not a permanent “ban” or moratorium. Elder Wilson’s statement reads: “The 1985 General Conference session action called upon the church to prepare a recommendation by the time of the 1989 Annual Council, so a further meeting of the commission [the Commission on the Role of Women] will be held in July of 1989. Indeed, in such important matters we must at all costs avoid hasty action, and so we will set aside one week to pray together, listen to each other, discuss further papers that will be prepared, and—I hope—come together in a decision dictated by the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, I appeal to all members of the church, whatever their particular convictions on this matter, to avoid further controversy and argument. I request you to abstain from circulating books, pamphlets, letters, and tapes that stir up debate and often generate more confusion. I think it would be much better if we prayed and fasted, and studied the Bible and the writings of Ellen White for ourselves” (Neal C. Wilson, “Role of Women Commission Meets: The General Conference President Reports to the Church,” Adventist Review, May 12, 1988, 7, emphasis mine). Notice that the president’s appeal was not a permanent moratorium or “ban”; it was limited to the period between May 12, 1988 and July 1989 when the Commission was expected to present its theological findings. Even then, the appeal was directed against works that “stir up debate and often generate more confusion.” Second, if the moratorium did indeed exist as proponents of women’s ordination often claim, (1) then editors of church publications like Adventist Review and Ministry contravened it when they published several pro-ordination articles during the period between...
1. Does the Bible Support Ordaining Women As Elders or Pastors?--Part 1

1988 and 1995; (2) then the pro-ordination authors and some church institutions like Pacific Press, Review and Herald, Andrews University Press, and Loma Linda University Press broke the ban when they published and distributed pro-ordination books like Caleb Rosado’s

*Broken Walls*
(Pacific Press, 1989), and

*Women, Church, God: A Socio-Biblical Study*
(Loma Linda University Press, 1990), Josephine Benton’s *Called by God* (Blackberry Hill Publishers, 1990), V. Norskov Olsen’s

*Myth and Truth: Church, Priesthood and Ordination*
(Loma Linda University Press, 1990), Jennifer Knight’s, et al.,

*The Adventist Woman in the Secular World: Her Ministry and Her Church*
(North Ryde, N.S.W., Australia, 1991), Rosa Taylor Banks’s, ed.,

*A Woman’s Place*
(Review and Herald, 1992), Sakae Kubo’s

*The God of Relationships*
(Review and Herald, 1993), Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart’s, eds.,

*The Welcome Table*
(TTEAMPress, 1995), Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson’s, ed.,

*Women and the Church: The Feminine Perspective*
(Andrews University Press, 1995); (3) then certain authors of the Seminary book violated the alleged “moratorium” by publishing articles in favor of women’s ordination; see, for example, Richard M. Davidson’s “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2” and “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3,”

*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
26 (1988); Nancy Vyhmeister, “Review of The Tip of An Iceberg,”

*Ministry*
, February 1995, 26-28; etc. Space limitations will not allow me to document the fact that during and after the alleged seven-year “moratorium,” advocates of women’s ordination, including a number of the Seminary authors of

*Women in Ministry*
, used a number of means to publicize their pro-ordination views. But in spite of their aggressive campaign, proponents failed to convince the world church of the soundness of their theological arguments for women’s ordination. A pro-ordination scholar of ethics puts to rest the oft-repeated claim that until the publication of

*Women in Ministry*
proponents of women’s ordination had been relatively silent. He correctly noted that, prior to the more than 2-to-1 defeat of the women’s ordination request at Utrecht, “denominational leaders, with others, had backed ordination with speeches at Annual Council, the speech in Utrecht, and a special strategy committee. The Southeastern California Conference Gender Inclusiveness Commission and others had sent materials to all General Conference delegates. The

*Adventist Review*
had run special covers, issues, and features promoting women. . . . Some ordination proponents thought that they might win if they got enough materials to the delegates, but found themselves wrong” (Jim Walters, “General Conference Delegates Say NO on Women’s Ordination,”

*Adventist Today,*
Observe, however, that the above pragmatic reasons—namely, “the widespread lack of support” for it and “the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church”—were the secondary reasons stated at the 1990 General Conference session against ordaining women as pastors. Despite the contrary claims of proponents, the primary reason given by those opposing the practice of ordaining women as pastors was that it was unbiblical and out of harmony with the writings of Ellen G. White. Thus, in the opinion of those opposed to women’s ordination, to go ahead with a practice that lacked widespread theological support could result in “disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church.” The following are the two recommendations from the “Role of Women Commission” that the 1989 Annual Council brought to the 1990 General Conference session: “1. While the Commission does not have a consensus as to whether or not the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, it concludes unanimously that these sources affirm a significant, wide ranging, and continuing ministry for women which is being expressed and will be evidenced in the varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the Holy Spirit. 2. Further, in view of the widespread lack of support for he ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world Church and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church, we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry.” Notice that whereas the first reason is theological (lack of theological consensus) the second is pragmatic (lack of support and possible risks). By a vote of 1173 to 377, the world church voted against women’s ordination. [See Adventist Review, July 13, 1990, 15.]

One pro-ordination reviewer of the Seminary book sums up the reason for Women in Ministry and how the book could be used to justify theologically a possible North American Division “push” of the issue at a future General Conference session: “So why this book? Why now? Utrecht. That is the answer given in the prologue to the book. One might think that after the 1995 General Conference session in Utrecht, the discussion would be over and that everyone would go home and quit talking about it. But that has not happened. How could it? The motion voted at Utrecht did not address the theological appropriateness of women’s ordination. It addressed only the procedural recommendation of the North American Division that the decision be made by each division. The increasing dissonance between theological understandings and church practice remained unresolved. . . . Now, it is both appropriate and timely for Seminary professors to lead the church in a study of the theology of women’s ordination as it relates with the mission of the Adventist church” (Beverly Beem, “What If . . . Women in Ministry,” Focus, Winter 1999, 30, emphasis hers). In response to the so-called procedural argument, a respected North American church leader has correctly noted: “Though the issue had been presented as a policy matter, whether to allow divisions to decide for themselves about ordination, most delegates knew that they were really voting on the biblical legitimacy of women’s ordination. How could the world church make a so fundamental a change unless it could find biblical support? How could it allow itself to be divided on something so essential to its unity and function? So as it had done five years earlier, the world church gave an emphatic No” (Jay


[18] Source references from *Women in Ministry* for each of the following points, are provided in my evaluation of the book in *Prove All Things*, pp. 179-218; 287-312; cf. *Must We Be Silent*?, pp. 127-289.


