Multiple viewpoints aired on women’s ordination question
Theology of Ordination Study Committee hears from range of scholars

Study committee votes consensus statement on ‘Theology of Ordination”
Document to go to 2014 Annual Council, 2015 General Conference Session

In Pakistan, Adventist sentenced to life imprisonment for alleged blasphemy
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Ferreira to serve as associate director of Health Ministries for Adventist world church
Portuguese physician was missionary in Namibia; ‘Jesus’ healing ministry’ a comprehensive effort, he says

Multiple viewpoints aired on women’s ordination question

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Mark A. Kellner, Adventist Review
Members of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee rounded out three days of meetings with presentations from a variety of viewpoints on questions related to women’s ordination, a controversial question for the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide.

Those who support the ordination of women and those opposed to the practice were given equal time and opportunity during the July 21-24 event to marshal biblical evidence supporting their positions, as well as statements from Adventist Church co-founder Ellen G. White, whom Adventists believe exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.

“We are now at the point that [the] two groups have presented the hermeneutical issues, the principles. They have illustrated it, and they have given all the facts, all the findings, they have found for both positions,” said TOSC chairman Artur Stele, a general vice president of the world church and director of the Biblical Research Institute at Adventist world church headquarters.

 “[The presentations] are in printed form [and] we have heard them. We hope that in a few days they will be available online for everyone who would like to study and research,” he added. The papers will be archived online, officials indicated.

Stele added that “the next step, based on what was presented, [is] to try to see if we can find a common ground, whether we really can come up with one position” on the ordination issue. If that can’t be done, he said, “then we would have to prepare two different reports, and concentrate on what solutions we would suggest.”

He concluded, “We have seen a good spirit, which was a big blessing. Both groups, although having different views, have really demonstrated respect for each other, and it was a very friendly atmosphere, a very open atmosphere.”

Among the papers presented during the July TOSC meetings there was a historical summary of women’s ordination “in Seventh-day Adventist policy and practice” presented by church archivist David Trim. A total of 17 papers were presented during the three days.

In a paper on hermeneutical principles, Jiří Moskala, newly-appointed dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, told delegates there is no statement in the Bible commanding: “Ordain women to ministry!” Nor, he noted, is there one urging: “Do not ordain women to ministry!”

Moskala concluded: “There is no theological hindrance” to ordaining women. “On the contrary, the biblical-theological analysis points in that ultimate direction, because the Spirit of God tears down all
barriers between different groups of people in the church, and gives freely His spiritual gifts to all, including women, in order to accomplish the mission God calls all of us to accomplish."

Taking a contrary viewpoint, Gerard Damsteegt, an associate professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, cited the Wesleyan-Methodist antecedents of Adventism, as well as early church fathers and Protestant reformers, to oppose women’s ordination: “If we look as the Adventist pioneers on women’s involvement in the mission of the church,” he said, “we notice that their position is very similar to that of Wesley and Methodism. These pioneers strongly encouraged female participation, excepting in the headship offices of elders and ministers.”

Adventist pastor Stephen Bohr, also arguing against women’s ordination, said that Ellen G. White’s role involved her being “set apart by God to be a prophet, not an elder/overseer. To say that because Ellen White was a prophet she had the right to be an elder or pastor would be like saying that because I am an elder, I have the right to be a prophet! The conclusion simply does not follow the premise!”

Richard Davidson, seminary professor of Old Testament at Andrews, focused the committee’s attention on the Biblical passage at the heart of the debate: “In the modern discussion over whether women should be ordained as pastors the foundational passage for both those who affirm and those who oppose women’s ordination is Genesis 1-3.”

Davidson pointed to the roles given Adam and Eve at creation: “According to Genesis 1:27-28, both the man and woman are equally blessed. Both are to share alike in the responsibility of procreation, to ‘fill the earth.’ Both are to subdue the earth. Both are given the same co-managerial dominion over God’s non-human creation.”

Illustrating their very different reading of the same Biblical text, Paul S. Ratsara, president of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division and Daniel K. Bediako of Valley View University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution in Ghana, asserted “God created man and woman as equals and with role differentiation. In the church, men are to lead.” They maintained that if women’s ordination is permitted, either globally or on a regional basis, the church’s influence and theological unity would be diminished. “A decision to ordain women as pastors can be made only outside the bounds of Scripture,” they concluded.

Additional presentations contrasted Biblical concepts of authority with models built on “elitism” and “hierarchy,” and explored the views held by Adventist co-founder Ellen White on the appropriateness of women serving in various ministry roles.

Urging the committee to disavow models of male authority and headship that he maintains are rooted in post-apostolic Christianity, Darius Jankiewicz, chair of the seminary’s Theology and Christian Philosophy department, maintained that “if anything apart from commitment to Christ and His church, spiritual gifting and maturity determine fitness for various functions in the church, then, whether we intend it or not, we create an elitist community.”

Edwin Reynolds, a New Testament scholar at Southern Adventist University, underlined a very different view of how authority should function in the church. “Spiritual headship and teaching authority seems to be vested in the roles of apostle and elder in the [New Testament],” his presentation noted. “These roles would not seem to be appropriate for women to seek under the principle of submission to male headship.”
Teresa Reeve, New Testament professor at the seminary and one of several female presenters, reached an opposite conclusion: “The New Testament practice of ordination as the formal appointment and endorsement of an individual for a ministry task or role gives no impediment to the ordination of suitably qualified women to serve as pastors.”

Denis Fortin, a church historian, offered a detailed summary of Ellen White’s perspective on women serving in ministry: “Ellen White understood ordination as an ordinance at the service of the church to commission people in various kinds of ministry and responsibilities, and to ask God’s blessing on their ministry. There is no indication in her writings that the rite of ordination should be limited only to men or that it should be used to establish some kind of church hierarchy. She emphatically encouraged the involvement of women in all forms of ministry.”

Adventist world church President Ted N.C. Wilson, an ex officio member of the committee, commended the event’s cordiality: “The Holy Spirit provided a setting during the committee for a respectful and courteous atmosphere in which to study what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy have to say on the subject,” he said, asking members to “please pray for all those involved as they seek to follow God’s guidance.”

TOSC members will reconvene in January 2014 for a five-day session to evaluate the papers presented and to chart the path ahead for the study process. The committee will also receive reports from each of the church’s 13 division Biblical Research Committees that are concurrently studying the issues at a regional level.

Study committee votes consensus statement on ‘Theology of Ordination”

Members of the Adventist Church’s Theology of Ordination Study Committee voted today to approve a consensus statement on the Adventist theology of ordination. The committee is navigating challenging issues surrounding the Christian tradition. [photo: Ansel Oliver]

By a vote of 86 to 8 – a ratio of almost 11 to 1 – delegates at the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) agreed today to approve a consensus statement on an Adventist theology of ordination. The action was an early endorsement of the goal of TOSC leaders to move unitedly through the challenging issues surrounding the church’s discussion of ordination.

According to the statement, “Seventh-day Adventists understand ordination, in a biblical sense, as the action of the church in publicly recognizing those whom the Lord has called and equipped for local and global church ministry.” Biblical examples of ordained persons include
elders/supervising elders and deacons, the document says, as well as “elders who were itinerant and supervised greater territory with multiple congregations.”

Explaining the role of an ordained person, the statement continues: “In the act of ordination the church confers representative authority upon individuals for the specific work of ministry to which they are appointed. These may include representing the church; proclaiming the gospel; administering the Lord’s Supper and baptism; planting and organizing churches; guiding and nurturing members; opposing false teachings; and providing general service to the congregation.”

Unlike the beliefs of some other Christian faiths, however, Seventh-day Adventist ordination “neither conveys special qualities to the persons ordained nor introduces a kingly hierarchy within the faith community.”

The statement concludes by noting “the ultimate model of Christian ministry is the life and work of our Lord, who came not to be served but to serve.”

The approval of the document came on the second day of the second 2013 gathering of TOSC members, who met at a private, non-church conference center near the Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport. Delegates included church pastors, lay members, scholars and officers from throughout the Seventh-day Adventist global community, with Artur Stele, a general vice president of the world church and director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, as chairman. Geoffrey Mbwana, another general vice president, is vice chair.

“This is the first time the church has taken a serious study to develop a theology of ordination,” Mbwana said shortly after the vote. “It’s critical that before we discuss any issue of ordination, we actually understand a theology of ordination. Today, I think a milestone is beginning to happen: that a consensus statement has been accepted to be recommended to the General Conference, the Annual Council and then to the [GC] Session to be adopted as a statement of a theology of ordination.”

Agreeing on a theology of ordination is preparatory to the TOSC’s other task, discussing the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. The subject has been debated among Seventh-day Adventists for years, with the worldwide General Conference Sessions of 1990 and 1995 declining to permit such ordinations. The TOSC is charged with producing material for discussion and making recommendations that will be acted upon at the church’s July 2015 world session, due to be held in San Antonio, Texas.

According to Bill Knott, Adventist Review editor and a member of the TOSC, “If the church can reach consensus on a common theology of ordination, it offers hope that it may also find a solution that honors the strongly held convictions on both sides of this issue.”

Committee meetings continue through Wednesday, July 24.

In Pakistan, Adventist sentenced to life imprisonment for alleged blasphemy
A court in Pakistan this month sentenced a Seventh-day Adventist man to life in prison for allegedly defaming the Prophet Muhammad in a case that falls under the country’s controversial blasphemy laws.

Sajjad Masih, 29, was convicted of sending blasphemous text messages to a member of a religious extremist group in 2011, despite his accuser’s subsequent retraction and prosecutors’ failure to produce any evidence of his involvement. Javed Sahotra, Masih’s defense attorney and fellow Adventist Church member, said the judge buckled under pressure from extremists who dominate the local religious and political landscape.

John Graz, director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the Adventist world church, said Masih’s case is not unusual.

“Members of religious minorities in Pakistan live with the constant threat of being accused of blasphemy,” Graz said. “They know that if they are accused, they cannot count on a serious investigation.”

According to news reports, Masih was framed by Donald Bhatti, who in May 2011 forcibly married Masih’s then fiancée, coercion her parents with promises of work visas. Bhatti had dated the young woman before moving to the United Kingdom, and is said to have still been jealous of her relationship with Masih. After the ceremony, Bhatti immediately returned to the U.K., taking his new wife with him. Masih and his former fiancée, however, maintained a close friendship, frequently calling each other.

In late December, the Gojra police ransacked Masih’s house, looking for evidence and intending to arrest him, Sahotra said. His accuser, Tariq Saleem, had informed local police of the text messages and urged them to track the mobile number and arrest its owner, he said.

The number was later found to be registered in Bhatti’s wife’s name. She told Masih that Bhatti had purchased a SIM using her ID card and arranged for an accomplice to send the messages, hoping to muddy their relationship, Sahotra said.

Gojra police arrested Masih on December 28, 2011. His lawyer accompanied him to the Gojra City Police Station, where he hoped Masih could record a statement and clear his name, church leaders said.

But the case was registered under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, which call for death or life imprisonment for any person found guilty of blaspheming Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.
Michael Ditta, president of the Adventist Church’s Pakistan Union, said the laws are notoriously used to take revenge on Christians and other religious minorities. Pakistan is 96 percent Muslim, with only 2 percent of the country’s population identifying itself as Christian.

“We as a minority faith are concerned about the misuse of this law and growing intolerance toward Christians in the country,” Ditta said.

Earlier this year, Pakistan was categorized as a “tier 1” country by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for "systemic, ongoing and egregious" intolerance toward minority faith groups.

At the police station, Masih said he was forced, under duress, to “confess” to sending the text messages, Sahotra said. He was subsequently sent to prison to await trial.

After more than a year and a half in District Jail Toba Take Singh, Masih has been sentenced to life in prison, despite the fact that under cross-examination, his accuser admitted he had not received any blasphemous text messages as he originally claimed.

Furthermore, affidavits from Masih’s co-workers confirm that he was at work in Pakpattan at the time prosecutors claim he sent the text messages from his former fiance’s cell phone.

Sahotra said he is planning to appeal the ruling in early August.

At world church headquarters in the U.S. state of Maryland, Graz and other members of the newly-formed Defense of Members Persecuted for Religious Reasons Committee are monitoring Masih’s case. The working group is also advocating on behalf of Antonio Monteiro, another Adventist Church member arbitrarily detained.

"We want our members and government leaders to know that the Seventh-day Adventist Church takes these cases very seriously," Graz said.

“What is happening to Sajjad Masih is another tragic example of the abuse of blasphemy laws in some parts of Pakistan. Oppressing people on behalf of a religion contradicts the message of peace and justice to all religions that we advocate.”

Ferreira to serve as associate director of Health Ministries for Adventist world church

Jul 29, 2013
Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
ANN staff

Dr. Viriato Ferreira, a physician and health ministry leader, accepted a call last week to serve as associate Health Ministries director at the Seventh-day Adventist world church headquarters.
Ferreira, 47, a Portuguese citizen, currently oversees Health Ministries for the church’s Inter-European Division (EUD), headquartered in Berne, Switzerland. He also serves as president and physician at the Portuguese Association of Preventive Medicine in Lisbon, Portugal.

In his new position, Ferreira will replace former associate director Dr. Peter Landless, who has acted as director-elect of the department since Dr. Allan Handysides announced his retirement in April.

“I am looking forward to learning and being inspired by the leadership of the Health Ministries department, and by the experience and wisdom of church members around the world, as we move forward in His service,” Ferreira said.

Ferreira brings a broad range of experience and abilities to the position, Landless said, as well as “a deep commitment to the Lord. We expect him to be an excellent fit as the church continues its emphasis on a wholistic philosophy of health ministry and even further broaden this precious ministry.” Adventist health leaders are planning to unveil a comprehensive health ministries initiative at a church business meeting in October.

“I know Viriato will bring dedication and energy to this initiative,” Landless said.

Ferreira spent his childhood near the Adventist Church’s Bongo Mission Hospital in the Southern African nation of Angola, where he says the selfless dedication of mission doctors deeply impacted him. After completing his medical training in South Africa and marrying Marianne Raitt, the couple helped establish mission work among the Himba people in a remote area of Namibia.

In 2003, Ferreira began overseeing Health Ministries for the Adventist Church’s Portuguese Union of Churches. Four years later, he accepted a call to serve as Health Ministries director at the division. In that role, he organized a health expo initiative in Europe that has drawn thousands of people from largely secular communities. He is also co-founder and project director of a lifestyle center still in development in Portugal. In 2009, he helped organize the Global Conference on Health and Lifestyle in Geneva and in May chaired the steering committee of the European Health Conference in Prague.

Ferreira says he’s passionate about modeling Christ’s example of outreach—meeting practical needs before spiritual ones. “Jesus’ method is truly unparalleled in positively affecting the lives of others and giving meaning to our own,” he said. “This method can only be genuinely followed when we are filled with God’s love. This is true whether you work in a highly sophisticated and technological hospital, or at a humble clinic or wellness center.”

Ferreira and his wife, also a physician, have three children. “The family will be a great asset to Health Ministries and the Adventist world church,” Landless said.
Ferreira is expected to phase into the position starting part-time in October and working full-time by the beginning of next year, subject to finding a replacement for his current position, Landless said.

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