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# Speaking in Turn: Excerpts From Delegates' Speeches On the Ordination of Women

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*The role of women in the Seventh-day Adventist church dominated the General Conference Session for three days, July 10-12. The following excerpts from the speeches in that debate are divided into two parts. On Tuesday and Wednesday the delegates discussed a motion that "we do not recommend authorization for women to be ordained to the gospel ministry." A speech in favor of the motion was a speech against ordination of women. The delegates adopted that motion 1,173 for, 377 against.*

*Thursday, the delegates discussed changes in wording of the Church Manual that would allow "selected licensed or commissioned ministers" (including unordained men and women pastors) to give the "charge, vows, and declaration of marriage" at a wedding. A speech in favor of the motion was a speech for expanding the role of women in ministry. The motion was adopted, 776 for, 496 against.*

*Careful readers will notice that the number of pages in these selections, on either side of the two motions, are not exactly even. However, the excerpts do reflect the distribution of comments on the opposing sides during these three days of debate.*

— The Editors

## I. Ordination of Women, Tuesday, Wednesday—July 10, 11

**HERMAN KIBBLE**, ordained SDA minister and commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps.

I am definitely in favor of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. Even as I speak, on the staff of chaplains at the United States naval hospital in Oakland, where I am the senior supervision chaplain, a female chaplain is serving efficiently and effectively so that I can attend this session. For over 20 years I have served with ordained clergy of various denominations who are

women. You might also be surprised to know that on ships . . . women [chaplains] are assigned. . . . These women have been well accepted in the military. . . .

Our organization, our church, was founded by a woman, and when I listen to sermons preached all around the world where I am stationed, in Adventist churches, I want you to know that a woman is quoted as the final authority about Peter, James, John, and Jesus Christ himself. . . .

We cannot push the church forward by putting our foot on the gas

pedal, while keeping our foot on the brake pedal. . . .

God is waiting for us to release the enthusiasm, the energy of women and young women in our churches to help us push the work of God forward. . . .

I am in favor of the ordination of women.



**GABRIEL BOAKYE-DANQUAH**, publishing director for the West African Union Mission.

Mr. Chairman, the issue that we are dealing with right now is whether the Seventh-day Adventist church will allow itself to be governed and ruled and influenced by sociological factors or whether we will just simply go by "thus saith the Lord." You see, when we listen to these great preacher evangelists of our church, any time they have a crusade, the first week they begin to put in the minds of the hearers a simple statement: if it is in the Bible we want it; if it is not in the Bible, we don't want it. The challenge of the question that faces us now: is it in the Bible that we should ordain women?

I know a whole host of women—some classmates of mine—who are now pastoring. But you see we should not go beyond that fact. . . . We are not here to listen to a whole lot of pleadings and a whole lot of preachings, we are here simply to hear "thus saith the Lord." The Bible is silent on women's ordination. The writings of Ellen G. White are silent on women's ordination. And I tell

you, my brothers and sisters, that we also need to be silent on women's ordination. . . . My brothers and sisters, I am only a small boy but sometimes it is good to listen to the small boys also. I tell you if it is in the Bible we want it. If it is not in the Bible this church must reject it. I speak for the motion.



**JOHNSON A. ADENIJI**, *director of Church Ministries, Nigerian Union Mission.*

I'm speaking in favor of the motion. The Holy Spirit worked through the early church. The Holy Spirit worked through Mrs. White. In the early church, Acts, to mention the book, we have records of ordination. No woman was mentioned. Mrs. White, highly respected as a leader and used by God, was not ordained.

It is true that they say what a man can do a woman can do it. Somebody else also says what a woman can do a man can do it. So I read of a man who had a surgical operation and turned himself into a woman. I don't know if they had children before then, whether he will be called a mother or father; that is left to him.

What I'm after is that there is a list of many ladies in the Bible that did positive work for God, but there is no record of any one of them being ordained. And it is true that, with God, sex makes no difference when it comes to salvation. But it appears it does when it comes to ordination. In short, women are mothers of pastors, they are not pastors themselves.



**L. STEPHEN GIFFORD**, *president of the Southeastern California Conference.*

I wish I could have been a Seventh-day Adventist way back in the 1860s. The embryonic Seventh-day Adventist church waged [a] battle for equality. I would have been proud then to have been a Seventh-day Adventist and watch Joshua V. Himes and other abolitionists fight for

equality and justice. Today we stand at another injustice in the history of mankind. There are many here who have suffered from racial inequality and injustice. There are many here who have suffered and continue to suffer from political repression. There are many here who have suffered from religious persecution, and today I believe that we stand . . . at another crossroads that again shows inequality.

We do not ask for something that cannot be done in other parts of the world. We ask for something that can be done in our part of the world. We say we must stay together. That does not mean we are to be in lock-step with one another. That is not the Seventh-day Adventist church. I believe in unity in diversity.

I realize that what is acceptable in one part of the world may be different in another area. When I was a boy in the deep South in the United States, I rode the trolley. I always sat in the front. African-Americans always sat in the back. In rush hour the two races would become closer and closer together and you could simply feel the tension in the air, until finally blacks and whites were sitting together. Today we see how wrong that system was. Today we know better.

Yet, we still perpetuate injustice. Many have their Bible quotes to be sure that women are kept out of the ministry and cannot be ordained. Recently, Dr. Lyn Behrens became president of Loma Linda University. Our General Conference president said, "It gives me special satisfaction to announce that such an outstanding woman has accepted a key leadership role." She is qualified to be president of that university, but she is a woman. She cannot pastor my smallest church. Today I speak in favor of equality for women in ministry.



**ERNESTO UGARTE**, *layman from Chile.*

. . . The idea of ordaining women . . . is not found in Scripture. Instead,

we find it in the secularism and its influence on other churches, especially Protestant churches. On the other hand, we take, as an example, the ministry of Ellen White as a basis for the ordination of women. Let us not forget that Ellen White was never ordained, and the ministry which she exercised was given to her or delegated to her by the Lord himself. It is for this reason that I am totally opposed to the ordination of women.



**ROBERT JOHNSTON**, *chairman of the New Testament department at the SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University.*

I agree with those who ask for "Thus saith the Lord." What does it mean to be biblical? What does it mean to be unbiblical? Is something only biblical if it is commanded? If so, Pathfinders are unbiblical. Religious liberty departments are unbiblical. Quinquennial sessions are unbiblical. Breathe Free antismoking plans are unbiblical. None of these are commanded in Scripture.

Perhaps, then, biblical means something which is not forbidden in Scripture. When I look through my Bible, and particularly the New Testament to see if the ordination of women is forbidden, I don't find anything yet. I have found that the apostle forbade women to speak in church, but I don't find any place where ordination is forbidden to them. Now, it may be that I have missed something. But it seems to me if we allow women like Ellen G. White to speak in church, but we forbid ordination, we are straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel, for we are going contrary to something which I do not find forbidden.

Perhaps I have missed something. I hold here in my hand a \$50 bill. I will give this \$50 bill to anyone who can show me a "Thus saith the Lord" forbidding the ordination of women. Now, an inference will not be good enough. I can find texts where the

ordination of women can be inferred, but I would not impose that on my brethren who disagree with me, and so I will not accept any inferences. I want a plain "Thus saith the Lord."

Mr. Chairman, the argument that a prohibition is not found because priests in the Old Testament were male doesn't really wash, because that was an hereditary office. One had to be a Levite, a descendant of Aaron, and in the New Testament, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. Mr. Chairman, before a vote is taken, may I ask that you ask me whether I still have my \$50 bill? If I have relinquished it, I will vote for this recommendation.



**ED MOTSCHIEDLER**, *president of the Ohio Conference.*

I would like to tell my brothers and sisters in South America that there are zero ordained women in North America. There was a reference made to that. There are zero ordained women in North America.

... In the lack of a clear message from the Lord, the church should not legislate. I believe that divisions that would like to ordain women should have the right to be able to do that. We are not asking South America to ordain women. We are not asking our African brothers and sisters to ordain women, or any culture, or division, or conference, or union that feels uncomfortable doing it. ... Let's let the Holy Spirit lead the local church leadership, who have been entrusted with that assignment, to lead the church in that portion of the world.



**JEAN ZURCHER**, *former secretary of the Euro-African Division.*

I support very strongly the document which is in front of us, for the reason which was indicated. Many said that we restrain the Holy Spirit by not ordaining women. I believe in the whole inspiration of the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, and I could not find in the Bible that the Holy Spirit is in favor of ordain-

ing women. I am very sorry if Andrews University went ahead by giving the possibility of women to prepare for the ministry. I believe this was not inspired by the Holy Spirit.



**RALPH MARTIN**, *president of the Potomac Conference.*

I am not certain how many of our delegates have actually seen the Holy Spirit fall on a women pastor. I've had that privilege. We have pastors on whom the Holy Spirit has fallen and God has placed his ordination. They are effective in their church.

... I have called many hundreds of pastors over the last decade or two.

... Not every part of the world would want a woman pastor. But there are churches that do want women pastors. They feel that they can make a contribution that is significant and unique. It is unfortunate when one part of the world would deny another part of the world the ministry of a person on whom the Holy Spirit has been poured out.

## II. Performance of Marriages, Thursday, July 12

**A. C. McClure**, *president of the North American Division.*

We believe ... that the matter that is before us is one that does not divide the church but rather provides for some diversity while maintaining unity. ... Here in North America, for 16 years we have been following these practices. We would hope that we would not be forced to turn back the clock, thereby posing multiple problems. We would, therefore, plead for the understanding of the world, while we are not asking that this be imposed upon every area of the world. ...



**PETER BATH**, *provost of Kettering College of Medical Arts.*

The issue before us is more than the form and function of ministry, but involves deeply our understanding of the theology and doctrine of ordination, and even more profoundly what it means to be a world church; a world church that is called to be united but does not practice uniformity. ... On Friday, Elder Folkenberg told us that the true president of the General Conference is Jesus Christ. I would remind you today that it is the Body

of Christ that we could possibly divide if we defeat this motion.



**RONALD GRAYBILL**, *chair of the History Department, Loma Linda University Riverside.*

... The delegates should know that many of us who favor the ordination of women, voted yesterday not to ordain women. The reason we did this is because our fellow delegates from many world divisions said it was necessary in order to maintain the unity of the church. Today we need your help to maintain the unity of our church. In about a thousand churches, women function peacefully and effectively as local church elders. In a handful of churches they sometimes baptize and perform wedding ceremonies. These

are matters of practice, they are not matters of doctrine. The Bible does not forbid any Christian from performing these functions. . . . My 16-year-old daughter is waiting at home tonight for a telephone call. "Daddy," she'll say, "what did they do about women in ministry?" She doesn't want to be a minister, but she wants to know that her church affirms her full personhood. Yesterday I had to disappoint her and beg her to understand that this is a world church. What can I say to her tonight? That the world church does not care? No, I believe you do care, and I believe that just as we helped you to maintain the unity of the church yesterday, you will help us today to maintain the peace and harmony we enjoy in our churches.



**ENRIQUE BECERRA**, *field secretary of the South American Division.*

. . . Brother delegates and Mr. Chairman, do we have to accept a compromise because of one situation in one division? Would it not be better to effect a study for the entire world based on Scripture and based on the Spirit of Prophecy? I love North America and the missionaries who brought us the message; I love the philosophy of the education which they taught me, a philosophy which, in many ways, South America is practicing better than North America—philosophies, for instance, in respect to health areas in which North America has had to change. For instance, those of us in South America maintain closer the ideas of the Spirit of Prophecy in regards to the medical work. Let's look for a solution for the North American problem without impact or affecting the world field.



**GEORGE REID**, *director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute.*

. . . We had decided that we would retain our historic position with

regard to ordination. That was done yesterday. Now we are proposing functions which would alter, or perhaps are even incompatible with, the integrity of ordination as we have understood it. The effect is to create a most unpleasant situation in that we are going to tell certain persons that we are not prepared to ordain them, but that we expect them to perform these functions, such as the one addressed in this particular issue, without ordination. To my mind this creates a very strange situation. I think that the solution to the problem. . . . is that we return to our long-standing practices as Adventists prior to 1976; that we set aside the question of gender, which is involved here, and treat all persons in certain categories, ordained or nonordained, in an equal manner.



**DAROLD F. BIGGER**, *senior pastor of the Walla Walla College Church.*

. . . I expect I may be able to speak with more experience, having worked longer with women pastors, than anyone else in this room. For nearly 10 years as senior pastor of my church I've had a woman on my staff. . . . Mario Veloso was gracious enough last night to spend some time visiting with several of us. He mentioned that the issue involved here, he thinks, is the authority of the church. I would suggest that the best way to establish and maintain the authority of the church is to open up the process and include those who have been unheard from; to allow those to participate who have been restricted. Those who have felt eliminated from discussions and decision-making in the past ought to sense that most intensely.

Let me speak on behalf of my sister pastors with whom I have worked through the years. They have brought to our congregation, and, our conference president tells me, to our conference territory, a sense of commitment, of settledness, of refocusing on the mission of this

church. If we are now asked to back away from that; this which is not for us a peripheral concern but is what the gospel is, a preaching of freedom for those that have been oppressed, and announcement of acceptance by those who have been rejected; that central gospel message will be severely impaired in the congregation which I serve, in the field in which I work.



**MARIO VELOSO**, *secretary of the South American Division.*

. . . I would like to speak against the motion because it is against the pattern of ordination in the Bible. We've heard that there is nothing sure or clear in the Bible about ordination of women. Even, we say, there is silence in the Bible. You know, when you have a pattern clearly stated and followed through all the way, through the Old Testament and New Testament, how could we say there is silence on ordination? . . . I recognize that we do have a problem in the church. Inequities? Yes. We do have. Ladies are not treated fairly. I agree. They are not. We have discrimination in salaries, in accessing of different positions and activities in the church. We should solve those problems. But this solution we are trying to present as the one that is going to solve the problem is not the solution. It is bringing more problems even for them because we will create a new inequality, not giving the ordination to those persons to whom we are allowing to do all the functions of ministry. That's why, Brother Chairman, I'm against this motion.



**RON M. WISBEY**, *president of the Columbia Union, North America Division.*

I stand here today in favor of this church manual amendment. . . . It is a recommendation that will allow each of the divisions to make up their mind about this function. This dramatically affects North America. This dramati-

cally affects the future of North America, and even more so it dramatically affects our young people in the 20-40 age group category, that we are losing a whole generation of in this division just now. This dramatically affects our recruitment of pastors with the quality and professional skills that we need. As an administrator in this division, it greatly complicates how we proceed in the training and the internship programs that we have in place and have been following for the past 12 to 15 years. Yesterday or the day before, I was invited to spend time with the college delegates who are observers here at this session. They are concerned about what we do. This is highly symbolic to this division and the future of this division. We must be allowed to empower our people to function. . . . There must be unity in diversity. So Brother Chairman, around the great circle of this world we must be allowed this diversity. . . .



**DUMITRU POPA**, former president of the Romanian Union Conference.

It was not my intention to comment on this recommendation, but I wish to express my concern and a concern of many of those of whom I represent and hear regarding such action; an action that can divide our church and destroy the unity of our church. We are a world church. We have a unique doctrine, and a unique organization and we are obliged by our mission to remain united. By the way, it seems to me that this recommendation comes in conflict with the recommendation on p. 17 on ordination of women that was already voted. The work that we have accomplished today asks for a complete unity of the entire church. Therefore, let us remain on the old waymarks and standards of our church. Thank you.



**SUSAN SICKLER**, laymember, Columbia Union Executive Committee.

I think that it is time that someone

speaks for the most valuable resource this church has—our children. They are the ones who are going to suffer because of the decisions that we make in this room. Yesterday, when this body voted not to ordain women, a young pastor of a large college church was sitting near me. He put his head in his hands and said, “What am I going to do? When I get home young people are going to be lining up outside my office door waiting to resign their membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church.” When our young people feel that their church has a lower standard for treating all people with justice and equality than the secular society has, they tend to feel that the church has nothing to offer them and they leave.

The group most affected by this issue is that of young adult professionals, who have a good education and bright financial prospects for the future. In previous times, this was the group who could be expected to provide a major share of tithe income to the church during their middle years. This loss cannot help but affect the work of the world church. So, in the end, all of our children will suffer and our mission will be severely compromised.

When you look at the more accurate figure of tithe per capita adjusted for inflation, tithe for the North American Division has decreased 20 percent in the last 10 years. We have a situation where our best givers, our senior citizens, are dying. Most of our new converts are poor people who need our help to subsidize their children’s education. Our young adults are hemorrhaging out the back door of our churches and an increasing number of members are withholding or diverting tithe for a number of reasons, including the church’s refusal to ordain women.

Brothers and sisters, we crave your help and your understanding. Who is going to bear the burden of world church finance if our children leave? We need each other. Our children need each other. Our grandchildren

need each other. I can’t begin to describe what it feels like to sit in this room and watch my brothers and sisters vote things that may drive my children or my grandchildren out of the church that I love. Please, I beg of you, we need all of our children with us if we are to follow faithfully One who said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me; and forbid them not.”



**F. W. WERNICK**, retired General Conference vice president.

. . . This amendment, in my opinion, will further erode the importance and sacredness of ordination to the gospel ministry by granting functions of an ordained minister to those who will never be ordained, unless this session changes its mind according to its vote yesterday, and I think that would be a mistake.

. . . I’ve read it as well as heard it, that granting these functions to our ladies who we highly respect and regard in their ministry, that granting these functions—the functions of an ordained minister of which this particular item is one—will inevitably lead to ordination of women whether we vote for it or not. . . . It seems to me that before we grant these functions, we should decide the issues involved and then let the functions flow from that decision. For that reason I cannot vote for this amendment at this time.



**CHARLES SCRIVEN**, senior pastor of the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church.

A few months ago an energetic youthful couple in my church came to me and said, “We can no longer support a church with an official policy of discrimination.” Over half the members of our church are now excluded from one of God’s most precious opportunities, the opportunity to be the pastor of a flock, and this young couple told me that they could no longer in good conscience be

members of such a church. The couple symbolize a terrible fact about the church in North America. Not only are young people leaving in droves, they are leaving from conviction. From the conviction that this church no longer has the courage to be the remnant and live up to its own ideals. Now, if we vote down the action before us just now, many Adventists, and especially young Adventists, will read our vote as an official endorsement of discrimination, and it will give them a moral reason to leave the church. Doug and Trina know that you can quote Scripture to unjust ends. You can quote Scripture to justify apartheid. You can quote Scripture to justify the headship of men over women. They also know that the Christian who reads Scripture takes Jesus to be God's highest authority on earth, the only human being who bears the stamp of God's being. . . . They know, too, that Paul the great apostle crystallized the Jesus story into his magnificent vision of a family where every distinction, whether slave or free, Jew or Greek, or male or female, dissolves into the magnificent unity of new life in Christ. . . . You may appeal to the Old Testament priesthood, which was limited only to men, but Doug and Trina know that the apostle did away with the priesthood of few in order to establish the priesthood of

the many. I appeal to us to send to Doug and Trina at least this much: a signal of respect for views that, although not everyone agrees with them, have to be taken seriously. We'll lose them and many others if we don't.



*W. FLOYD BRESEE, secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Department.*

I would like to appeal to my brethren and sisters in the North American Division and others of you who are strongly in favor of women's ordination. I hope that this debate of the last two days has been helpful to you in assisting you in understanding that it is not the leadership that is in opposition to your wishes. I hope that as you have listened patiently to the world church you understand the issue is a world church problem and issue. . . . The issue of world-wide unity is at this moment in the church a greater issue than the ordination of women to the ministry. And if any should choose to go back and say we are not going to pay attention, we are going to ordain anyway, you would be in rebellion not so much against the leaders of your church as against the whole united world church.

Let me say this very carefully. The world does not want to be told by

North America what to do, but the world does tend to want to do what North America does. And if North America began ordaining women it puts undue pressure upon our church and our leaders around the world who say, "Well, we ought to do it to keep up with North America." And that is why our leaders have taken a stand against the idea of doing this thing of ordaining women to ministry, division by division. . . . North America has sent to the whole world field its sons and its daughters and its dollars for generation after generation because the world field had a need. Dear brothers and sisters, you now have an opportunity to reciprocate. The North American Division has a great need, and they are asking you, not out of obligation because of what they have done for you, but . . . out of the depths of their need, please allow them to encourage women in pastoral ministry.

I plead with my North American friends, accept no ministerial ordination at this time for the sake of the needs and the problems of the world church. But on the other hand, I ask the world church to give also, and allow a little more significant functioning of ministry where it is so desperately needed in North America. Can't we both sides give a little, meet in the middle, and go out from Indianapolis united and get on with the finishing of the work?