

ISSUES IN AUSTRALASIAN ADVENTISM



Views of Australia from Darb.net, left to right: Hammersely Iron Rail Access Road; Kalbarri National Park; Milstream Chichester National Park; Pilbara Region; Hammersely Iron Rain Access Road. Next page, left to right: Pinnacles; Kalbarri National Park; a storm over the plains; Coral Bay, Nigaloo Reef; Milstream Chichester National Park.

The human agents are to be laborers together with God, doing the same kind of work that he came into our world to do. As long as it is in our power to help the needy and oppressed, we must do this for the human beings whom Christ shed his own blood to save from ruin....We cannot with our wills sway back the wave of poverty which is sweeping over this country [Australia]; but just as far as the Lord shall provide us with means, we shall break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free [Isa. 58:6]. (Ellen White to H. W. Kellogg, Oct. 24, 1894; and J. H. Kellogg, Oct 25, 1894)

From light which the Lord has graciously given to mother...I learn that the Lord has chosen to use Australia, as [a] field in which to work out an object lesson for the benefit of his church, the world, and all, and in which to demonstrate the power of the Gospel presented in the spirit and manner of his counsels. (W. C. White to John Wessels, Mar. 28, 1899)



THEN AND NOW

Discussed: public labor, Isaiah 58, poverty, minister's wives, Christian Help Work, female prisoners, Tasmania, tithe funds, self-supporting work, ministering servants



Ellen White, the Australasian Ministers, and the Role of Women Preachers

By Bert Haloviak

Until 1895, Seventh-day Adventists had only three categories that allowed for ordination: pastor-evangelists, local church elders, and local church deacons. In that year, Ellen White wrote in the *Review and Herald* that women who participated in ministry “should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.” Historical sources indicate that the Church had not yet ordained women to any of those categories before she wrote these words.¹ This study probes the possibility that Ellen White’s advice suggested an entirely new understanding of Seventh-day Adventist ministry to which women should be ordained.



Here is her statement in fuller context in the July 9, 1895, issue of the *Review and Herald*:

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. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, *privately or publicly*, to help forward this grand work.²

The meaning of the term *public labor* assumes great importance in this study, which attempts to probe the fullest context of Mrs. White's statement. That context included the Australasian understanding of ministry, which she guided from 1893 to 1901. This writer believes that the resulting analysis reveals her support for full-fledged ordination of Seventh-day Adventist women to the most progressive ministry in the Church up to that time.

Crucial to this study is the Church's understanding at that time that ministry precluded the local church pastorate. No Seventh-day Adventist church during that period retained what would later be called a "stationary pastor," someone who had jurisdiction over a local congregation. General Conference president O. A. Olsen reaffirmed this understanding to the Australasian Union Conference at its first session in February 1894:

"A minister should not be located with a church."³

Thus, when the term *minister* is used in this article, it means a minister under the jurisdiction of a local or union conference who ministers through that entity. Most often in the Australasian setting, it referred to the conference president.

Ellen White's Ministry to Australasia

Ellen White constantly alluded to the impoverished situation she observed throughout the Australian countryside, especially within the cities: "Men are willing to do anything, and women will do what they can, washing or working in any line, but money is very, very close in this country."⁴

Mrs. White described the Australian context of ministry to Stephen Haskell in August 1894: "On every hand we see opportunities for using our means. Poverty and distress are everywhere. I will not see the people suffer for the want of food and clothing so long as the Lord gives me something to do with." She went on: "I will dispense to the poor. Throughout New South Wales we have been tested and tried with the epidemic influenza. Nearly every family has been afflicted in the cities and country towns."⁵

In October of that year, she referred to Isaiah 58 and gave hints of another form of Seventh-day Adventist ministry that would soon pervade Australia and New Zealand: "We cannot with our wills sway back the wave of poverty which is sweeping over this country; but just as far as the Lord shall provide us with means, we shall break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free."⁶

The Australasian setting became the backdrop for



the significant Ellen White testimony titled "The Laborer is Worthy of His Hire." In that testimony, dated March 22, 1898, she clearly referred to women who were defined as "laborers" beyond the local church level. Those women, according to Mrs. White, should be paid from tithe funds. Indeed, the testimony deals with every basic issue addressed in this article.

It encompasses the following points stated briefly:

1. Minister's wives were performing ministry as defined by Mrs. White.
2. Such ministry was *recognized by God*; thus, in God's sight, such woman were ordained (implied).
3. Women who labored beyond the local church should be paid within the normal administrative structure.
4. Ministry for women, as defined in the Australasian context, was gospel ministry.
5. Doors should be opened for consecrated women to enter public labor paid by the conference.

Christian Help Work

Among the evangelistic tools that A. G. Daniells, president of the Australasian Union Conference, used at the Toowoomba camp meeting in 1899 were stereopticon slides of Seventh-day Adventist institutions. These slides depicted the Melbourne Helping Hand Mission; the Sanitarium at Summer Hill, New South Wales; the Adelaide Rescue Home for Women; the Napier New Zealand Bethany Home for Women; the Orphanage; and the Old People's Home.

Because of the ministry known as Christian Help Work, Seventh-day Adventists were recognized throughout Australia and New Zealand in 1899, and

they had more than doubled their membership between the beginnings of that ministry in 1894 and 1900.⁷

Ministry defined as Christian Help Work involved training lay members of local churches to visit, report physical needs within families, and provide biblical training to assist those families along spiritual lines. Although trainees from local churches were lay volunteers, the Australasia Union provided financial support for those who educated them. This program supported both women and men.

Perspective from the General Conference

Numerous letters from General Conference administrators demonstrate that General Conference leaders worked to transform the definition of ministry in the United States to bring it into harmony with Ellen White's counsel. Space precludes citing more than one related letter from General Conference president O. A. Olsen, who wrote the following to Washington Conference president R. S. Donnell:

The line of work which we call "Christian Help Work" is essentially important; and if we take hold of it as God would have us, our people would become noted for the practical blessings of Christianity....And the good works that we ought to do, and in which we ought to exceed others, is in the line of work that Christ himself performed while here on the earth....From the light that God has given me [through Ellen White], and from the practical results that have come under my observation, I am satisfied that any Conference that can have the opportunity, can well afford to



expend some money in that line of work, even if there has to be curtailment in some other lines....*Hereafter this branch of the work will receive much more attention than it has in the past. This must be so, if we shall meet the mind of the Spirit of God.*⁸

Margaret Caro

Ellen White praised the ministry of licensed minister Margaret Caro. Indeed, Mrs. White attended the meeting of the New Zealand Conference at which Caro received a ministerial license.⁹ Not only did Mrs. White speak approvingly of Caro holding a ministerial license, she also approved of Caro's major role within the local church at Napier, New Zealand.

"She speaks to the people, is intelligent and every way capable," stated Ellen White. In the absence of a stationary form of pastorate within nineteenth-century Adventism, Caro obviously maintained a prominent position within that local church.¹⁰

As with others from the Napier church, Caro embraced Christian Help Work, focusing on projects that assisted unwed mothers, former female prisoners, and female alcoholics. After several years of such ministry, participants decided that the ministry needed a home of its own.

The community was canvassed for funding and eventually the ministry rented a building "in the most aristocratic quarter of the city, on one of the hills for which Napier is famous." One of the members of Napier church's Christian Help Band became the matron of Bethany Home, which opened February 16, 1898, with the mayor of Napier present.¹¹

Caro described the success of the home after its initial eighteen months of operation: "The Home is presided over by a matron, whose heart is full of love to God and love for fallen humanity, and yet possessing the firmness required for the place which she holds." "She has the confidence of all classes," continued Caro, "and can go anywhere to obtain the help required, and our work has been signally blessed in the evidences we have had of the poor lost creatures that have been saved."¹²

"[O]ne of the hardest cases" that Caro experienced put her in contact with a woman who affirmed that the personal care she received from Caro had pointed her toward salvation. "Now she is married," wrote Caro of the woman, "and they have sent to me

for another to take her place" in the home.

Caro concluded after discussing a number of other incidents: "The cases mentioned here are but samples of the work we are enabled by the grace of God to do. Many others might be given, but these suffice for illustration, and this is why we refer to them."¹³

Jennie Wilson and Tithe

In the latter part of her ministry in Australasia, Ellen White made three statements that, taken together, seem to link the women ministers of Australasia, the nature of Australasian ministry, and implications concerning the ordination of women. The central issue involved how tithe should be used.

I have never so fully understood this matter as I now understand it. Having questions brought directly home to me to answer, *I have had special instruction from the Lord that the tithe is for a special purpose, consecrated to God to sustain those who minister in the sacred work, as the LORD'S CHOSEN to do his work not only in sermonizing, but in ministering.*¹⁴

If the husband should die, and leave his wife, she is fitted to continue her work in the cause of God, and receive wages for the labor she performs... This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the *women who labor in the gospel*, whose work testifies that they are essential to carry the truth into families....Again and again the Lord has shown me that women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which *he has APPOINTED them* as are men. They should not be compelled by the sentiments and rules of others to depend upon donations for their payment, any more than should the ministers....*There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry.*¹⁵

There are ministers' wives, Srs. Starr, Haskell, *Wilson* and *Robinson*, who have been devoted, earnest, whole-souled workers, giving Bible readings and praying with families, helping along by personal efforts just as successfully as their husbands....*I will feel it my duty to create a fund from my tithe money, to pay these women who are accomplishing just as essential work as the ministers are*

*doing, and this tithe I will reserve for work in the same line as that of the ministers, hunting for souls, fishing for souls.*¹⁶

After ministerial labor in Michigan, West Virginia, and Georgia, Gilbert Wilson and Jennie Wilson were sent as missionaries to New Zealand, where the husband served as president of the New Zealand Conference. Later, the couple assumed ministerial responsibilities in Tasmania and Australia. In 1898, Ellen White commented on the nature of the ministry in the Sydney, Australia, suburb of Stanmore in which the Wilsons worked:

The interest continues to be good. Bro and Sr Haskell, Bro and Sr Starr, and Bro and Sr Wilson are at work. Meetings have been held in the tent on Sabbaths and Sundays, and every evening in the week except Monday. The workers visit from house to house, laboring personally with the people. They have so many calls that the three married couples separate, one going to one place and one the other, to hold readings with those who are interested. New families, one after another, are soliciting help, and the workers say that ten or twenty more could be employed to good advantage. In the mission there is a company of twelve. Two classes are held every day, that the workers may receive instruction from the Bible, and know how to work to enlighten others.¹⁷

Gilbert Wilson died in Brisbane, Queensland, of tuberculosis on January 13, 1899, at the age of forty-one. In a letter written in 1900, Ellen White expressed high regard for Jennie Wilson's ministry, which continued in the tradition of work that she and her husband had conducted together during their marriage.

"Brother Colcord, and Brother and Sister Hickox, and Brother and Sister James from Ballarat, and Sister Robinson and *Sister Wilson*, are doing just as efficient work as the ministers;" Mrs. White wrote of the ministry in Maitland, New South Wales, "and some meetings *when the ministers are all called away, Sister Wilson takes the Bible and addresses the congregation; and Sister James says she does excellently.*"¹⁸

Considered within context, Mrs. White's statements about payment of women ministers from conference (tithe) funds, the ordination of women to either public or private ministry, the role of women in bring-

ing the gospel to families, and women giving the spoken word during Sabbath services all clearly relate to Jennie Wilson.

Given this realization, it seems apparent that administrative action to ordain women to the gospel ministry is required if today's church wishes to be in harmony with the counsel of Ellen White.

After a year of ministry in Maitland, Jennie Wilson served as a Bible worker and trainer of "young ladies" as Bible workers in the South Australia Conference. She continued to minister to newly baptized believers in the aftermath of camp meetings, when the ordained conference ministers went on to new fields.¹⁹ According to a report on baptisms written by J. H. Woods, president of the South Australia Conference, Jennie and her Bible workers remained active in his conference until 1901.²⁰

Jennie's ministry continued after she returned to the United States in 1902. She ministered in Michigan and Tennessee, and in 1907 married W. W. Williams, an ordained minister. The couple labored together in varying capacities, including self-supporting work, and Jennie died in 1938.

Scripture within the Australasian Context

As Ellen White analyzed the situation in Australasia from the early 1890s onward, she developed a scriptural rationale that, she believed, outlined a ministry appropriate to the impoverished situation that existed at that time in that area of the world. She seemed to focus primarily on two pairs of passages: Isaiah 61 and Luke 4, and Isaiah 58 and Luke 14.

The passage in Luke 4 identified ministries linked to Jesus' ministry on behalf of the poor and needy. The passage in Luke 14, which focused on the parable of the great supper, emphasized a ministry in the "highways" and seemed to urge compassion that would "compel them to come in" because of its unselfishness.

Later, General Conference leaders created a series of Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers from copies of testimonies that Mrs. White had made available to them. The passages from Isaiah and Luke were



constantly used as underpinnings for the new concept of ministry that Ellen White had fostered throughout the denomination.

One of her favorite phrases as she thought about the kind of ministry she had fostered in Australasia was *helping hand*. Many of the missions established in Australasia and the United States used that phrase as part of their mission name, as did the Helping Hand Mission in Melbourne, the Helping Hand Laundry, and others.

After her return from Australia early in 1901, Ellen White wrote the following from St. Helena, California:

“In the mind of God, the ministry of men and women existed before the world was created.” E. G. White

“I cannot sleep after half past two o’clock. I wish to speak to my brethren who occupy positions of trust. As God’s husbandry you are invested with the responsibility of acting in his stead, as his helping hand.”²¹

As she continued reflecting on the scriptural rationale for Christian Help Work from Isaiah and Luke, Mrs. White linked both men and women within a ministerial context as neither Isaiah nor Luke had done in their time. “If men *and women* would act as the Lord’s helping hand, doing deeds of love and kindness, uplifting the oppressed, rescuing those ready to perish, the glory of the Lord would be their rearguard,” she wrote.²²

Quoting Luke 4:18, she went on: “You are not to comfort only the few whom you are inclined to regard with favor, but all that mourn, all who apply to you for help and relief; and more, you are to search for the needy.” “Wake up, wake up, my brethren and sisters,” she warned. “You must do the work that Christ did when he was upon this earth. Remember that you may act as God’s helping hand in opening the prison doors to those that are bound.”²³

In this testimony, Mrs. White brought the New Testament into the twentieth century, proclaiming a vital ministry for women within a new context shaped by Christ’s emphasis in the first century.

As she quoted Isaiah 61:6, Mrs. White shattered all suppositions Seventh-day Adventists may have held concerning women in ministry: “Of those who act as his helping hand the Lord says, ‘Ye shall be named Priests of the Lord; men shall call you the ministers of our God.’”²⁴

In this quotation, Ellen White applies to both men and women a passage from Isaiah written when there were no women priests and considered within a con-

text in which to be named a *priest* or *minister* referred to the special status accorded through ordination.²⁵

Shortly before beginning her Australasian ministry, Mrs. White had addressed ministers at the 1891 General Conference Session in Battle Creek. In addition, she wrote some of the contents from that address in her diary. There she provided a foretaste of the ministry she eventually endorsed in Australasia.

“The Lord has given Christ to the world for ministry. Merely to preach the Word is not ministry,” she wrote. “The Lord desires His ministering servants

to occupy a place worthy of the highest consideration. *In the mind of God, the ministry of men and women existed before the world was created.*”²⁶

The original 1891 version did not contain the phrase *men and women*. She added it in 1903, perhaps because of her observation and counsel concerning the ministry of women in Australasia during her stay there.

If we accept as true Mrs. White’s premise that God had considered a concept of ministry for both men and women prior to creation, does that not destroy any premise of a lesser role for women? Does it not inherently include women within the sphere of ministry? Does it not reveal Ellen White’s premise that women were indeed full-fledged ministers in the sight of God as they ministered along “Christ’s own lines”?

The history of the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the nineteenth century and Ellen White’s conception of it early in the twentieth century illustrate that women indeed served as priests and ministers of the Lord in her day.

Notes and References

1. See W. H. Littlejohn, “The Duties of Local Church Officers,” *Review and Herald*, Nov. 22, 1887, 730; “Ordination,” in *SDA Encyclopedia* (1976); and 1986 edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, “THE DEACONESS...Women served in the early church as deaconesses. There is no record, however, that these women were ordained; hence the practice of ordaining deaconesses is not followed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

2. Ellen White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895, 434, emphasis supplied.

3. O. A. Olsen, Address to Australian Union Conference Meeting, Feb 18, 1894, 10, GC Archives.

4. Ellen White to Dear Children, Sept. 17, 1894, White Estate, W118-1894, 2.

5. Ellen White to S. N. Haskell, Aug. 13, 1894, White Estate, 5 H30-1894.

6. Ellen White to Brother Kellogg, Oct. 25, 1894, 5, White Estate, K46a-1894.

7. From 1,146 in 1894 to 2,375 by 1900.

8. O. A. Olsen to R. S. Donnell, May 21, 1895. GC Archives, OAO Bk 14, p 377ff, bracketed insertion and emphasis supplied.

9. At that same session, G. T. Wilson received the ordained minister's credential. The ministry of Wilson's wife would later assume prominence within Australasia and elsewhere. Andrew Simpson, "The New Zealand Conference," *Bible Echo*, May 15, 1893, 156.

10. Ellen White, White Estate, Ms 22-1893.

11. E. R. Caro, "The Napier Bethany Home," *Bible Echo*, Mar. 7, 1898, 77.

12. Mrs. Caro, "The Bethany Home, Napier, N.Z.," *Union Conference Record*, July 19, 1899, 1.

13. Ibid.

14. Ellen White to Brother Daniels, Mar 16, 1897, 1. *Special Testimonies 1897 Vol.*, emphasis supplied.

15. Ellen White, "The Laborer is Worthy of His Hire," White Estate, Ms 43a-1897, 1ff, emphasis supplied.

16. Ellen White to Brothers Evans, Smith, and Jones, April 21, 1898 (copy for George A. Irwin) I191a-1898; *Special Testimonies, Vol. 6*, 1897-98, 68-69, emphasis supplied.

17. Ellen White, White Estate, C6-1898, 2.

18. Ellen White to "Brethren Irwin and Haskell," July 17, 1900, *Special Testimonies, Vol. 11 1898-1900*, 365, emphasis supplied.

19. *Union Conference Record*, Dec. 1, 1900, 15.

20. See July 1, 1901, 15; Mar. 1, 1902, 18-19, as examples.

21. Ellen White, Jan. 17, 1901, *Special Testimonies 1901*, 296.

22. Ibid.

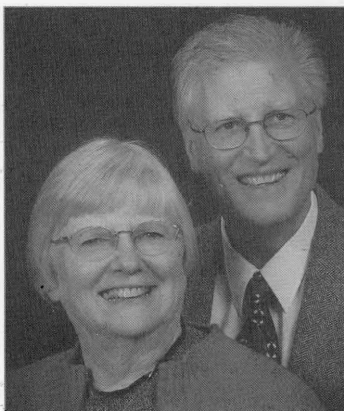
23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 303, emphasis supplied. See "Ordination," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1986), 3:612.

26. Ellen White, Mar. 12, 1891, with 1903 editing, White Estate, Ms 23-1891, emphasis supplied.

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Pastor Roy &
Bennie Gee

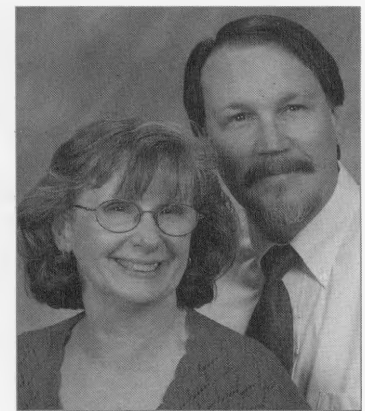
AU '66

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FOR GOD'S GRACE"

10:45 A.M. Sabbath

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Nancy Kuykendall

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