

Perspectives on Ordination—*Divergent Views in the Spirit of Unity* | BY GARY BURNS AND C. RAYMOND HOLMES

How could two brothers in the faith, both waving the banner of the Reformation, *sola scriptura*, and sharing an elevated regard for the supreme authority of scripture, come to very different conclusions on the matter of ordination of women? Our love for one another drove us to open our Bibles and open our hearts and minds together, in prayer, to seek to understand the other's reasoning and

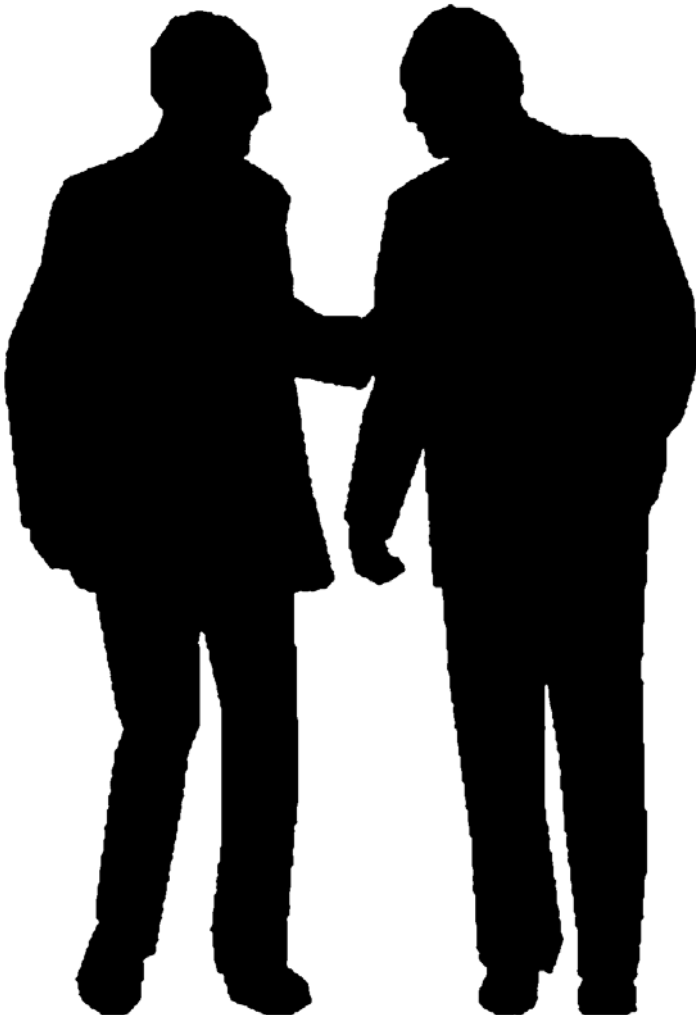
perspective and, ultimately, the will of God.

So, we met together as friends to study prayerfully the relevant texts on the subject of ordination. Debate was never considered, as it is by nature combative. Rather, we posed probing questions of one another to gain clarification and to understand the heart and soul behind the position held. As a result, we gained a greater appreciation for the other's point of view. As we closed the first session with prayer, both of us realized that at no time did we ever get the sense that either one of us was trying to convince the other of our position. We felt we were onto something! We wished the whole church could share in the blessing.

As we studied, it seemed as though God was redirecting our thoughts—not to theology, hermeneutics, and exegesis, not to arguments for or against but, rather, to the process. Why was the Lord leading us this way? It seemed obvious to us that how we come together is as important as what we come together about. So, this article is about our hearts.

How We Feel

Ray: Every summer, at the Michigan Camp Meeting, I enjoy the privilege of participating in the solemn ritual of ordination. The annual experience leaves me with mixed emotions. I rejoice with the men who are set apart for ministry, and I feel sad, too. Sad, because a friend of mine quietly and unobtrusively joins us for the ritual, even though she, herself, has never been so recognized. I have told her of my sadness and, also, of the fact that I find it impossible to change my point of view respecting biblical authority and hermeneutics as they relate to ordination. I have begun to feel more conscious of the hurt that exists on the part of many women. I'm



sorry for that. If I were to write my book, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, now, I would change some things—not the basic content, but the way I say them.¹ She confirmed that some of my statements hurt. I regret that deeply. I never want to hurt anyone. That was not my intent, but unintended consequences are still consequences. So, we had a moment of heart-touching-heart. I was almost tearful as I asked her forgiveness.

The feelings came back when I attended the Theology of Ordination Study Committee meeting in Maryland in January 2013, because there also were women in ministry there. I made a point to seek them out and speak to them personally, and that's why I made the statement, in my final remarks at the committee, that we have some repenting to do. I meant two things: not only do we need to rescind the action that caused all this agony, specifically the 1975 action allowing for the ordination of local women elders, because the action is in conflict with 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:5 and Titus 6:2, but we also need to repent, personally, for the agony we may have caused others. I think we all have some repenting to do, on both sides.

Gary: My entrance into pastoral ministry came later in life as my second career. At that time, the conference had just begun a process to prepare their pastors for ordination. We were each assigned to excellent mentors. Several times a year, we met as a group and followed a curriculum designed to prepare us for pastoral leadership. Among us was a woman who knew, as did we all, that she would receive all the training and all the preparation without ever completing the process by being ordained, nor could she ever hope to move beyond the entry-level pay scale for a pastor.

After four years, those of us who completed the requirements met with the conference ordination committee, along with our spouses. A few months later, all but one of us was ordained—even though I felt she had the best



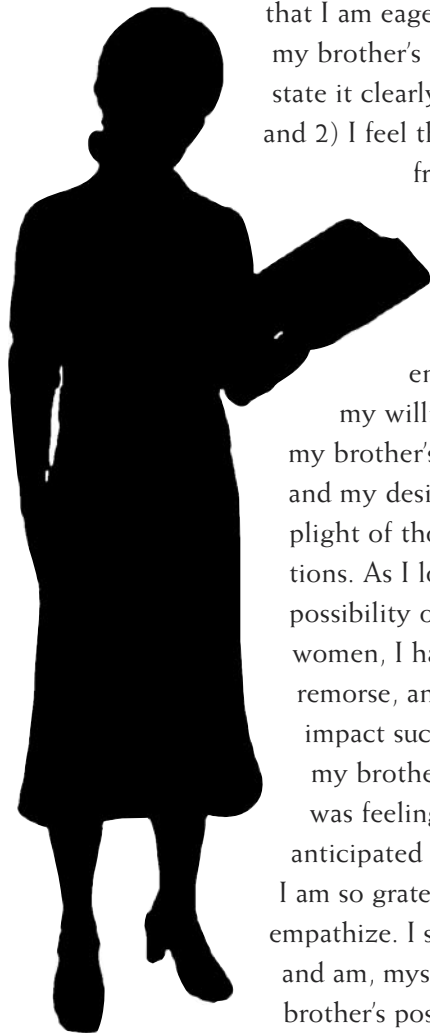
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—Gary

record of us all. That troubled me deeply.

Shortly after that, I attended the 1990 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana, where the North American Division brought the request to do what I thought was equitable and right for my counterpart and others like her. I was devastated, not only by the vote to deny the request but by the response to the request from the delegates on the floor. Following the session, I shared my perspective with one of the chairs of the discussion. I felt that, in effect, what we had done as a church was go on record that if, indeed, God had and was calling women to pastoral ministry, we would not recognize his calling. I felt we needed to repent not only of the official action, but also of our actions and attitudes, on both sides.

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Ray: How can we deal with the differences if we can't get past our feelings? I have sensed sublimated hostility and anger on both sides. Recently, I was associating with a group whose opinions I share. I didn't say much because I was feeling uneasy—not with the informational content of what was said, but with the underlying feelings. Somehow, we have to get past that.

Gary: Something has happened to me through our process of seeking God's will together that I recently just realized. I had been intellectually aware of a transformation in my thinking, but I became emotionally aware as I participate in discussions where I attempt to explain and show respect for the position of those who oppose the ordination of women, even though I don't personally share that

position. I am surprised by two facts: 1) that I am eager to speak up on behalf of my brother's position and am able to state it clearly and quite convincingly, and 2) I feel the same hostile pushback from those who do not agree with my brother's thinking. Some, at times, convey a sense that they feel threatened and even betrayed by my willingness to show respect for my brother's thoughts and feelings, and my desire to empathize with the plight of those who share his convictions. As I look to the future and the possibility of a decision to ordain women, I have emotions of sadness, remorse, and hurt for the personal impact such a decision would have on my brother. When I realized what I was feeling, it surprised me. I had not anticipated it.

I am so grateful for this new capacity to empathize. I still have lots of questions and am, myself, not convinced of my brother's position, but I appreciated

learning new things and incorporated some into my thinking.

Ray: That is the manifestation of a miracle that comes by faith, faith that God can change us at such a fundamental level.

Gary: Because of my association with so many women in ministry, I understand and appreciate their experience. I attended grade school with some who are now ministers, and taught and baptized others. At least two are now ordained in the Pacific Union Conference. My heart would also be saddened for their sakes if the vote went the other direction. I have to admit I also would be saddened for myself, but my feelings for others are equal on both camps.

Ray: I feel the same way. I think that's part of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, love that manifests itself in all the other fruit of the Spirit.

Gary: I believe it's a miracle of grace and evidence of growth in the fruit of the Spirit, for which I am unworthy and forever grateful.

Ray: I've been through this before. I suppose remnants of my experience, of leaving the Lutheran Church, are still there in my consciousness and now are beginning to emerge again with respect to this issue. It was a struggle. I hated to leave that congregation. All along, I was aware of the fact, I supposed, that because I was a pastor I was not the only one involved in this crisis. My whole church was involved. Wonderful colleagues in ministry, personal friends with whom I prayed and shared in Bible camps—all of them were involved. And I kept thinking, how are they going to feel? Am I going to hurt them profoundly by betraying them, abandoning them, and moving? All of that was a part of the picture. That was on the feeling level, not the doctrinal or theological.

I don't like to have conflict. I don't like to have negative feelings between some of my colleagues and I; but, at the same time, this is why I'm torn. The Word of God tells me not only to preach the Word, but to guard the truth—protect it. And so I'm wrestling, thinking, how can I do this? And this is the motivation for my recent paper.² How can I help this church arrive at a solution that is biblical but doesn't hurt anybody, that instead supports, affirms, and encourages women in ministry?

Gary: That motivation is not so much a motivation for truth as much as it is a motivation for the Body of Christ. That speaks volumes.

Ray: I love the church. When I say that, I don't mean the organization but the people...the people.

Gary: You have a pastor's heart.

Summary

Ray: We should not be overly concerned about the amount of time the church needs to come to a consensus. If we rush to a conclusion that is not satisfactory to the whole church, we risk alienating people. My wife, Shirley, and I were talking about this whole, agonizing process. "You know," she said, "I think I'm coming to the place where I'm beginning to understand that this whole process is necessary for the church, under God's guidance. It's part of the cleansing that is also a part of revival and reformation. Maybe the church has to go through this agony in order to be cleansed. Jesus is coming soon. What does it mean to be ready, or to get ready?" (In the corporate sense, she was saying.)

We need to work together as the Body of Christ. We need to work through this thing together, and allow the Spirit to lead us in community to the place he wants us to be.

Gary: I'm reminded of that familiar quote in *Christ's Object Lessons*: "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."³ Christ was ever cognizant of the community in which he was serving and how his actions would be perceived and interpreted; he adjusted his actions and words, based on place and time, not only to protect his ministry and mission but, also, to protect the hearts of the people.

We need to be like him, not only in character, but in our methods and practice. And becoming like him is not something we do; it is something we receive. We cannot conjure it up, we cannot craft it, we cannot determine to have it; we can only receive it. "For it is God who works in [us] both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13 NKJV). "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). God is the one who accomplishes this through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who produces his fruit in us. We're talking about heart work. "It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses."⁴ If we consent!

Where to Begin

What we've really been talking about here is spirituality, because we've been talking about being concerned with feelings and hurt and souls and a desire to not lose any. If everyone came together with that passion, to not lose any in the process, we would go about it differently.

The best place for all of us to start is at the foot of the cross. At the foot of the cross, there is no rank or position. Every-

Becoming
like [Christ]
is not some-
thing we do;
it is some-
thing we
receive.





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thing we hold precious and dear to ourselves must be let go. It is the place of complete and total surrender, and where all are on equal ground. ■

Gary Burns is a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist. His mother,



Hazel Burns, recently retired as an associate pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Kettering, Ohio. Walter Wright served as his senior pastor/advisor in an unprecedented relationship between the Ohio and Allegheny West confer-

ences. For the past ten years, he has ministered as director of communication and editor of the *Lake Union Herald*, and director of native ministry for the Lake Union Conference. He received a Master's degree in Religious Education from Andrews University in 1998. Though he never attended the seminary, he has been mentored in pastoral ministry by seminary professors and seasoned pastors such as Doug Kilcher, Don Jacobsen, Walter Wright, and Ray Holmes.

C. Raymond "Ray" Holmes was born of Scandinavian heritage



aligned with Martin Luther, though he did not come to a living faith until his early 20s. After earning a master of divinity degree from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, he served as a pastor in the Lutheran Church until discover-

ing the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He earned master of theology and doctor of ministry degrees at Andrews University. His book, *The Tip of An Iceberg*, discusses the biblical authority and interpretation that underlie the role and ordination of women in ministry. Since retirement, he has served as "senior" pastor of Christ Community Church in Bessemer, Michigan, and affirms women in ministry, who often share his pulpit. Holmes has been appointed to serve on the General Conference Study of Ordination Committee.

References

1. C. Raymond Holmes, *The Tip of the Iceberg* (Wakefield, MI: Adventists Affirm and Pointer Publications, 1994).
2. Holmes's article "Women in Ministry: What Should We Do Now?" will be available later this year at <http://ordination.lakeunion.org>.
3. Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Company, 1900), 69.
4. Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Company, 1940), 668.