

**AN OPEN APPEAL FROM FACULTY, ALUMNI, STUDENTS, AND FRIENDS
OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**TO FACULTY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
REGARDING THE RECENT SEMINARY STATEMENT ON THE
UNIQUE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH**

Preamble

On August 21, 2014 the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary voted to approve a statement that affirmed and explained in detail “that Christ is the only Head of the Church (Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:18).” The next day the online edition of the *Adventist Review* published an article about the Seminary statement and concluded that the faculty hoped the Andrews statement would help end some divisions among church members and would “prove to be a unifying influence in the church.”

The article had a link to the actual document which resulted in this statement becoming widely known. The reactions to the document have been mixed, with some approving, others disapproving, and still others expressing doubts. Instead of unifying church members it seems that the document has brought confusion in regard to the Biblical view of Christ’s headship and its implications for leadership under Christ in the church.

This appeal offers the views and concern of some current and retired seminary faculty, seminary alumni, students, and friends who disapprove of various aspects of the statement on the unique headship of Christ. It urges the faculty to reconsider their statement and adjust it so that it considers the full biblical counsel on this subject and be in harmony with the vital Protestant and Adventist principle of “the Bible and the Bible only.”

Problematic arguments

The recent Seminary statement points out that God’s moral government is based on love. In the great controversy between Christ and Satan, this government of love is most clearly contrasted with the oppressive control that has manifested itself especially in the development of the historic antichrist, the vast structure of church government seen in the Roman Catholic Church. We fully agree about the danger of this unbiblical headship model of the papacy—in which the headship of Christ is replaced with that of the pope as the vicar of Christ, the Son of God—and its apostolic succession.

However, we need to be careful not to project this distorted Catholic model onto the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although in some regions of the world the Adventist leadership may demonstrate a certain authoritarianism, this is not the servant leadership model that has been taught in and by the church and is practiced in many areas. We fully agree that Christ’s headship is absolute. However, the arguments in the Seminary document to support His headship role are at times problematic, giving rise to serious misunderstandings and confusion.

While we concur that Christ’s headship is absolute, for every knee shall bow to Him as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rom 14:10-11; Phil 2:10-11), we see the need to recognize that Scripture is clear that Christ has delegated leadership responsibility for His church to ministers and elders as undershepherds in His stead with His authority. We question the

following arguments the Seminary statement uses to support the idea that the headship of Christ is non-transferable.

1. The Seminary statement argues that the interpersonal relationship within the Trinity is not a model for a governmental structure for human leadership within the Church (p. 4).

Reply: On the contrary, the Bible points to this relationship in salvation history within the Trinity as a guide for the church, even in its leadership. Jesus declared that the relationship between His followers should resemble the relationship existing between the Himself and the Father (John 17:21-23). In a similar way, in 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul parallels the relationship male believers have to Christ with the relationship that Christ has to the Father, employing the concept of headship within the Godhead and between men and women in the church: "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God" (NKJV).¹

Here the Bible teaches that headship and submission are principles of heaven belonging to the Godhead, and that on earth human beings have been created to reflect these principles because they bear the image of God. This issue of headship has important implications for the church. In this passage Paul refers to the principle of headship to address a problem regarding the way that men and women worship in the church (1 Cor 11:4, 5, 16). He is not addressing relations between husbands and wives in the home as we find in Eph 5. In both contexts, Paul bases his instructions on the pre-Fall circumstances of Gen 2 (see 1 Cor 11:8-9; Eph 5:31), not the cultural norms of Corinth or of the Greco-Roman world. In 1 Corinthians 11, the headship of Christ and that of God the Father form the pattern for the headship of the man-woman relationship in the church, just as Christ's headship in relation to the church forms the pattern for the headship of husband to wife in the home in Ephesians 5:23-24. Since the context of 1 Corinthians 11 is clearly the church and not the home, this passage is significant for our understanding of gender relationships in the church.

2. The Seminary statement argues that neither the Scriptures nor the writings of Ellen G. White endorse any transfer of the role of head in the home to roles within the Church body (p. 4).

Reply: The Bible uses the pattern of leadership in the home as a model and qualifier for church leadership. When we use the Protestant and Adventist principles of Biblical interpretation for formulating doctrine by comparing Scripture with Scripture, we discover that there is an intimate connection between leadership in the home and leadership in the church (see esp. 1 Tim 3:5, 15). Toward the end of his life, Paul mandates the necessary qualifications for male elders, who are to be the leaders of the church, to oversee its operations. In two separate instances he points out that one of the crucial qualifications for this role is that the church needs successful, proven leadership in the home first (1 Tim 3: 4, 5; Titus 1:6). Only those who demonstrate successful leadership of their homes would qualify for the office of overseer/minister to serve the church in loving leadership. The home is the smallest unit of the church, and a godly, loving father in the family indicates eligibility for being a godly leader in the church. According to Paul, being the spiritual head of the home (Eph 5:23) is indeed the key that determines if one is suitable for spiritual leadership in the church because the church is a collection of families who come together for worship on a weekly basis.

Ellen G. White also makes this point that shepherds who fail at home will fail as shepherds/ministers of the church: “He who is engaged in the work of the gospel ministry must be faithful in his family life. It is as essential that as a father he should improve the talents God has given him for the purpose of making the home a symbol of the heavenly family, as that in the work of the ministry, he should make use of his God-given powers to win souls for the church.” She continued, “As the priest in the home, and as the ambassador of Christ in the church, he should exemplify in his life the character of Christ. He must be faithful in watching for souls as one that must give an account. . . . He who fails to be a faithful, discerning shepherd in the home, will surely fail of being a faithful shepherd of the flock of God in the church.—6MR 49” (PaM 88, 89).

3. The Seminary statement argues that headship in the Church is unique to Christ and is non-transferable (p. 4).

Reply: As we have seen above, though the headship of Christ is indeed unique (i.e., special), unique here does not mean singular, or only. Jesus clearly calls some people to leadership in the church. What, then, does the statement mean by “non-transferable” headship? Certainly we all agree that the role of Christ as the only mediator between God and humans is non-transferable. The question that really needs to be answered though is this, “In what way does Christ rule or lead the church?” The Bible shows that in the operation of the church, Christ as the Great Shepherd, delegates some authority to His undershepherds who meet specific biblical qualifications. Some examples of such leaders under Christ are Moses, Joshua, David, the Twelve Apostles, Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, and the elders appointed by these leaders in every newly established church. These elders were undershepherds. The apostle Peter cautioned these them, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the *Chief* Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet 5:2-4, emphasis supplied; AA 525, 526).

The relationship between Christ and the elders/overseers is that of the Chief Shepherd to the undershepherds. These leaders receive their authority from Christ under whose authority they function in accordance with His word. Christ delegates leadership authority in the church to these officers. Ellen White shows the relationship between Christ and His ordained leadership as follows, “The great Head of the church superintends His work through the instrumentality of men ordained to act as His representatives” (AA 360). Elsewhere she states, “Christ remains the true minister of His church, but He delegates His power to His under-shepherds, to His chosen ministers, who have the treasure of His grace in earthen vessels. God superintends the affairs of His servants, and they are placed in His work by divine appointment” (ST, April 7, 1890). This does not usurp the unique role of Christ as the only mediator between God and humans (1 Tim 2:5), which Paul makes clear before setting forth instructions on church worship and church leadership (1 Tim 2:8-3:15).

In the Seminary statement, the headship of Christ in relation to the headship/leadership of the New Testament offices is not carefully presented. Christ’s headship is presented in such a way as to downplay any authority ministers may have as His chosen representatives. But, as Ellen White points out, Paul identifies these (along with himself) as Christ’s ambassadors

(see 2 Cor 5:20): “Since His ascension, Christ the great Head of the church, has carried forward His work in the world by chosen ambassadors, through whom He speaks to the children of men, and ministers to their needs. The position of those who have been called of God to labor in word and doctrine for the upbuilding of His church, is one of grave responsibility. In Christ’s stead they are to beseech men and women to be reconciled to God” (GW 13). Ambassadors carry the same authority as the person they represent. To overlook the New Testament evidence for this authority (e.g., 1 Cor 9:18; 2 Cor 10:8, 13-14; 13:10; 1 Tim 5:17; Titus 2:15; Heb 13:17; see also AA 360) leads to incorrect conclusions.

In the New Testament Christ’s delegated authority was not centered in any one person. The apostles did not appoint a single leader for the church, but a plurality of leaders as they “appointed elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). Already in the 1850s, Adventists realized the need for credentialed ministers (see EW 97-104). By 1863 in the face of divergent personalities and fanatics, they sensed the need for even more “gospel order,” and gave authority to an elected leader. In no way was this “president” to resemble the antichrist power, yet they realized that the church, for organizational and functional reasons needed solid leadership.

In time Adventists have accepted the concept that the highest authority on earth is not vested in individuals or small committees but in the voice of the General Conference session when all the delegates throughout the world are assembled. Yet this does not do away with leadership authority in the local churches at various levels of church organization. Elders have spiritual teaching authority as overseers, according to the New Testament (1 Tim 2:12; 3:2; 4:11; Titus 2:15; Heb 13:7, 17, 24).

4. The Seminary statement argues that no inspired writer teaches the headship of man over woman at Creation. It contends that before the fall, God established an egalitarian ideal of full equality without hierarchy between male and female, and that the Bible consistently calls us back to this ideal (p. 5).

Reply: The Seminary statement neglects very important aspects in this discussion of gender relationships. There are clear indications in both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White that Adam had a leadership role before the entrance of sin, one that continued after the Fall, because both are created in the image of God. This view is in harmony with the plain teaching of the apostle Paul with regard to the equal value of men and women as heirs of salvation (Gal 3:26-29). However, the expression “in the image of God” invites us to recall that at Creation Christ, as the Son of God, had already taken a position that included functional differences from God the Father. He was committed to the function of the Lamb of God that was to take away the sins of the world in the future by His death on the Cross (1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8). Functional differences were also reflected in God’s original design of the relationships between male and female as the rest of the Creation story reveals.

In Genesis 2 the Bible shows the different functions of Adam in relation to Eve. Again there is equality of nature and essence because Eve was created from Adam’s rib, indicating that she was to stand by her husband’s side as an equal—not to be inferior or superior (PP 46). Yet the chapter describes the functional differences of the couple by showing the priority of man being formed from the dust (Gen 2:7); how God put the man in the garden and gave instructions to him “to tend and keep it” (2:15); how God gave the command concerning what he could eat (2:16) and the warning about the forbidden tree (2:17). Then God

brought the animals and birds to Adam and gave him the responsibility of naming them (2:19). Finally, God created a woman from Adam's rib and "brought her to the man" (2:21, 22), giving to Adam the privilege of also naming his companion (2:23). Further, God indicates that, in the marriage relationship, the man is to take the initiative by leaving his family and being joined to his wife (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6). At this time Eve considers Adam "her husband" (Gen 3:6). Ellen White interprets the term "husband" to mean that "he is the house-band of the family, binding the members together, even as Christ is the head of the church and the Saviour of the mystical body [Eph 5:23]" (AH 215). Thus the internal evidence in Genesis prior to Adam's fall reveals his leadership role and his responsibility toward the woman.

In the following statements Ellen White confirms Adam's leadership role in the Garden of Eden: "Under God, Adam was to stand at the head of the earthly family, to maintain the principles of the heavenly family" (CT 33; 6T 236); "Adam was appointed by God to be monarch of the world, under the supervision of the Creator" (BE, Aug 28, 1899; cf. ST Apr 29, 1875; see also RH, Feb 24, 1874); "The Sabbath was committed to Adam, the father and representative of the whole human family" (PP 48); "Adam was lord in his beautiful domain" (FE 38). Although both were given dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26, 27), the leadership in this relationship was given to Adam. "Adam was crowned king in Eden. To him was given dominion over every living thing that God had created. The Lord blessed Adam and Eve with intelligence such as He had not given to any other creature. He made Adam the rightful sovereign over all the works of His hands" (SDABC 1:1078). Co-leadership and representative roles and titles for Eve are completely missing from the inspired writings. Adam alone is designated as representative and the leader of the earthly family.

What type of relationship existed between the man and the woman at this time? Here we need to follow an important rule of comparing Scripture with Scripture by consulting the whole Bible to see if there are any other references that describe the relationship between the man and the woman in Genesis 2 before sin. We should definitely consult the New Testament because "the New Testament explains the Old" (Ev 578).

As we have seen, Paul explains the headship/leadership principle of man as "the head of the woman" (1 Cor 11:3) by referring to Genesis 2:18, 21-22, stating that the man "is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (vv. 7-9). It is therefore incorrect to say that no inspired author teaches the headship of man over woman at creation, for Paul clearly teaches it in this passage. Elsewhere the New Testament gives further evidence regarding these relationships. In 1 Timothy 2:12, 13, Paul again refers to the pre-Fall situation of Genesis 2, on which he bases the leadership principle that is to operate within the church. God gave a leading role to the man before He created woman, which Paul cites as the rationale for not permitting women "to teach or to have authority [KJV: "to usurp authority"] over a man" in the church (1 Tim 2:12), because it is "the house of God, . . . the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). The apostle had already established the link between home and church in connection with the qualifications for elders: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim 3:5).

After the Fall recorded in Genesis 3, Adam's headship role became even more pronounced. It was only after Adam, as leader, followed his wife in the path of disobedience and sinned that the eyes of both were opened and they realized their sinful condition and resulting nakedness (Gen 3:7). Next God came down to question Adam first (not Eve) as the responsible leader (3:9-12). Only after this did He address the woman (3:13). Adam received the death penalty, which consequently affected every human being (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22). Then he was expelled from the Garden, his wife also (Gen 3:24).

The Fall of Adam and Eve brought a change to their relationship. Before the Fall, there was harmony. Eve gladly and willingly accepted Adam's transparent godly leadership, submitting without resentment or duress. However, once their relationship was damaged and distorted by sin, it was necessary for God to encourage Adam's role by way of command. The principle itself had not changed, but the woman must now accept his preeminent "rule" over her (Gen 3:16), although her new sin-borne desire was to rule over him (note the similar meaning of the terms in the close parallel a few verses later, in Gen 4:7).²

This change was not in terms of two pre-Fall heads being reduced to one, but in moving from the harmonious, willing cooperation with Adam's loving, beautiful leadership to a different relationship that would include tension and rivalry within the human family between the two genders. As a result, harmony could only be preserved by the (now unnatural) submission of the woman to the man, since there can be only one head/leader in any relationship. Otherwise, there would be constant and open conflict over authority. This authority within the home (and also within the church family) is given by God, but it must never be demanded or used autocratically or abusively. Rather, it should be expressed in loving care for the wife, "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph 5:25). That is the nature of the headship authority modeled by God and Christ (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:22-33).

To Adam God said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife" and eaten from the forbidden tree, the earth will be cursed and you will die (Gen 3:17, 19). Using again the interpretive principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture, we notice that the New Testament also teaches that Adam, as the leader, was held responsible for the entrance of sin into the human race—not Eve, despite her being the first to transgress God's command: "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Rom 5:18). Clearly, Paul's contrasting of Adam's role with that of Christ is rooted in the fact that Adam was the responsible leader. Even though Adam followed the leadership of his wife in disobedience, the Bible continues to recognize Adam's role as head of the human race.

In subsequent generations, following this divine design of headship, husbands occupied similar leadership roles. Ellen White writes, "In early times the father was the ruler and priest of his own family, and he exercised authority over his children. . . . His descendants were taught to look up to him as their head, in both religious and secular matters" (PP 141; see also Gen 18:19). The importance of this statement should not be underestimated. Here she designates the father of the family as the "head in both religious and secular matters," which forms the basis for the New Testament model of the male spiritual leader in the

church, the spiritual family. Abraham, representative of God's truth and father of true believers, followed this divine pattern. Ellen White adds, "This patriarchal system of government Abraham endeavored to perpetuate, as it tended to preserve the knowledge of God" (PP 141). Stressing the divine origin of this system, she continues, "It was a wise arrangement, which God Himself had made, to cut off His people, so far as possible, from connection with the heathen" (PP 141). From this quotation, one can conclude that the system of patriarchy as implemented by Abraham, the father of believers, was not a curse as many today want us to believe, but was intended to be a blessing that would protect God's people against idolatry and apostasy so that "the true faith might be preserved in its purity by his descendants from generation to generation" (PP 142).

On the historical development of headship/leadership Ellen White comments, "In the beginning the head of each family was considered ruler and priest of his own household. Afterward, as the race multiplied upon the earth, men of divine appointment performed this solemn worship of sacrifice for the people" (LHU 25). So the leadership role moved beyond the family to priests functioning for the corporate people of God—the church in the wilderness. With Israel's Exodus from Egypt, God established the nation of Israel as His kingdom on earth and appointed men to lead His people. From that time onward, the Bible reveals the installation of qualified men for service in leadership offices so that they might guide God's people under His direction. The same Old Testament leadership pattern was repeated in the New Testament where the qualifications for leadership by elders and ministers is spelled out by the apostle Paul and was continued throughout the Christian church. Although distorted by apostasy in the church and the rise of the man of sin (2 Thess 2) distorted this arrangement, the Protestant Reformation restored the biblical leadership principle of an elder-led church. Later developments in Protestantism resulted in a distortion of this leadership model until the rise of the Great Second Advent Movement and its reestablishment in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This headship/leadership model is fully biblical and will be successful when church leaders follow it with the humility and "mind of Christ" (Phil 2:5).

Recommendations

In light of the above evidence from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, we humbly appeal to the Seminary leadership and faculty to reconsider the recently-published statement and include our suggestions. We feel strongly about the reputation of the Seminary and are concerned that this statement, released on August 22, 2014, will not solve the current controversy over gender and leadership roles in the church. To the contrary, it may hurt the Seminary's reputation, trust, and credibility among members in North America and worldwide, and may undermine our credibility among thinking scholars in other denominations.

Current and retired faculty, alumni, students, and friends of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, October 6, 2014

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¹ Unless indicated otherwise, the biblical text is quoted from the *New King James Version*.

² Paul Ratsara and Daniel K. Bediako, "Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3: Ontological Equality and Role Differentiation" (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, July 22-24., 2013), 39-42, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/man-and-woman-in-genesis-one-thru-three.pdf> (Accessed Sept. 26, 2014).