

An Astounding Event in Adventist History - -

The Women's Ordination at Sligo

PART ONE OF THREE

One of the most amazing events in Seventh-day Adventist history has just occurred:

The main church at our world headquarters in Maryland, the 2,000-seat Sligo Church with 3,000 members on its books, which is regularly attended by many General Conference workers and leaders,—has declared itself in rebellion against the Adventist Church constitution, leadership, and a ruling of church delegates meeting in Session.

It is well-known that the first organized step in the formation of any new religious organization is an independent ordination of ministers, not approved by a pre-existing church organization.

This has now taken place at our headquarters church! It occurred on Sabbath, September 23, 1995. This event is of such serious import that we are herewith providing you with a rather complete report.

The following eyewitness report, written on Tuesday, September 26, comes from an individual who was present at the September 23 ordination. He obviously favored it.

In the following report, it is clear that many of our leaders were present—and a remarkable number of them tacitly, or openly, approved of the affair. For example, Louis Venden, Pacific Union College senior pastor, traveled across the nation in order to take part in the service. Others who took part in the service, thus openly approving this rebellion against church authority, were Charles Scriven, president of Columbia Union College; Larry Geraty, president of La Sierra University (LSU); Fritz Guy, Bible teacher and past president of LSU; and Robert Osborn, retiring associate General Conference treasurer.

Recognizing the historic nature of the open rebellion, “hundreds flew in from across the U.S. and three officers from each of the two European divisions, in town for GC Annual Council which begins next week, were present, as well as Jim Cress, the GC ministerial secretary.”

One week later, the Annual Council convened in the auditorium of the new world headquarters building in Silver Spring, Maryland. They surely had a lot to talk about!

Here is the eyewitness report. We have indented his comments and added paragraphing, brackets, subheads, and our own comments in

non-indented paragraphs:

THE OCCASION—The 2,000-seat Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church was packed. The attractive and dignified eight-page program booklet said, “*Ordination to the Gospel Ministry.*” Louis Venden, theology professor at Pacific Union College, conducted the “prayer of ordination” while a large number of clergy and laity gathered around and placed hands on the “ordinands” [those being ordained]. In the group was Robert Osborn, retiring associate treasurer of the GC.

PRESENTATION OF THE THREE CANDIDATES—“This is a historic occasion,” said Charles Scriven, president of Columbia Union College, as he introduced the first candidate: Kendra Haloviak, assistant professor of religion at CUC currently on study leave to complete a Ph.D.

Larry Geraty, president of La Sierra University, introduced Norma Osborn, associate pastor at Sligo; and Fritz Guy, professor of theology at LSU, presented Penny Shell, chief chaplain at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital.

THE SERMON AND CHARGE—Arthur R. [Rudy] Torres, senior pastor at Sligo, preached the homily. Scriven gave the charge and each of the ordinands [those being ordained] made a brief response. Sligo associate pastor, Paul Anderson, had the invocation. The liturgy was that of a traditional Adventist ordination service.

HUNDREDS FLEW IN—There was a pronounced feeling of joy throughout the congregation, and it was a very festive occasion. Hundreds flew in from across the U.S. and three officers from each of the two Euro-

pean divisions, in town for GC Annual Council which begins next week, were present, as well as Jim Cress, the GC ministerial secretary. None of these men participated.

TWO RESPONSES BY THE ORDINANDS—[Kendra] Haloviak, in her response said, “Today we are more Adventist than we have ever been. Today our commitment to Adventism around the world and to justice are no longer in conflict.”

“I no longer belong to a church which will not ordain the women,” said Shell in her response.

SPONTANEOUS OVATIONS—Three times, during the service, the crowd rose in spontaneous standing ovations; once each for statements in Torres’ homily, Scriven’s charge, and Haloviak’s response. “I have not felt better since Utrecht,” one delegate from the Columbia Union to the GC session confessed privately. Large numbers of teenagers and college students were present. It seemed to have a magnet[ic] pull on young people who usually would not be caught dead in church on Sabbath afternoon.

At this point in this eyewitness’ report, we

The following historical statement was printed on the back of the Ordination Program Booklet, distributed to those attending this remarkable September 23, 1995, service.

Sligo Church and Women in Ministry

For more than 20 years, women have blessed Sligo Church with their ministry, and expanded the ministry of women throughout the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In the spring of 1973, senior pastor Dale Hannah invited a young book editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Kit Watts, to join the Sligo staff as minister of publications. The daughter of missionaries to Japan, Watts majored in religion and physical education in college. She is now an assistant editor of the *Adventist Review*.

Four months later, when his young associate pastor, Arthur R. [Rudy] Torres, left to pastor his own church, Hannah invited the professor of speech at Columbia Union College to join the pastoral staff. In September, 1973, Dr. Josephine Benton replaced Torres as associate pastor, the first women to hold that title in North American Adventism. Benton was also the first woman ordained as a local church elder.

As a member of Sligo Church, she had helped create an interracial congregation. The Columbia Union and Potomac Conference presidents organized the Brotherhood Church in May, 1973, and

shall interrupt to add a comment:

A study of the history of the women’s ordination movement in our denomination has always something of a carefully crafted, subtle operation. Because church rules forbade it, the first step was to hire women as “associate pastors.” The next step was give them ordination as “local elders.” The next step was to ask the 1990 Session for permission to ordain women as ministers and, when that was refused, while most of the delegates were out, quickly pass a ruling that any ordained elder could baptize or conduct the Lord’s Supper.

Now, when the ordination of women as ministers was, at Utrecht, rejected for the second time, the liberals in the church decided to wait no longer.

What they did was initiate women’s ordination as ministers at the denomination’s leading church, with many church leaders officiating or in attendance to give it an appearance of organizational approval—and then use another subtle play on wording to make it appear acceptable—as something which could be done by other local churches throughout the world

ordained Benton a local elder. In 1974, Sligo Church recognized that ordination by electing her a local church elder.

A year later, churches were officially permitted to ordain women as elders by the 1975 spring meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee. Now, more than 1,100 women serve as ordained elders in churches around the world.

Janice Eiseman Daffern became Sligo’s second female associate pastor in 1980. Four years later, in Sligo’s baptistry, she performed the second baptism by a woman pastor in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (The first had been performed two weeks earlier in Fairfax, Virginia.)

Now, women pastors, in North America and in other parts of the world, routinely baptize members into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Since 1986, Sligo has had two women on its pastoral staff at the same time, including Dr. Marianne Scriven (1986-88), Hyveth Williams (1986-89), Norma Osborn (1987-present), Esther Ramharacksingh Knott (1990-present), and Kendra Haloviak (1991-92).

Today, Sligo Church again recognizes and honors the gifts of the Spirit by ordaining three women to gospel ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We welcome pastors and fellow believers from across North America as they join us in heralding a new day in the work of the Spirit in the Seventh-day Adventist community.

The following article appeared in the September 23, 1995, issue of the *New York Times*. Entitled, “An Adventist Church Breaks Ranks,” and written by Gustav Niebuhr, it was arranged that this article would be printed on the very day the ordination ceremony took place. It is clear our Adventist liberals wanted all the world to know that our denomination was compromising on yet another point of faith:

Two decades after some major Protestant denominations began ordaining women as clergy members, the presence of a woman serving as a pastor of a Protestant church has become progressively less remarkable. Yet barriers to women in the clergy remain. Some are firmly fixed; some are more symbolic.

For the latter, one could look to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one of whose founders was a woman, Ellen White. The denomination, best known for its hospital system and its Saturday worship, allows seminary trained women to do just about everything one would expect of a minister: They can baptize, perform marriage and burial ceremonies, and serve as pastors. But they cannot be ordained.

In Adventist tradition, only men can take part in the spiritually significant ceremony in which a minister kneels in the front of the church, while other ministers lay their hands on his head and shoulders, thereby symbolically endowing him with his authority. Today, the second-largest Adventist congregation in the country will challenge that rule.

Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church, in Takoma Park, Maryland, a congregation of more than 3,000 members, will hold an ordination service for three women, a ceremony whose organizers say will be otherwise no different from the ones held for men.

“I do think it’s a historic event for the church,” said Kendra Haloviak, assistant professor of religion at Columbia Union College, a church-affiliated institution in Takoma Park. Historic, too, for her, as she is one of the three women who will take part. Ms. Haloviak, a sixth-generation Adventist who traces her family’s religious roots to the denomination’s 1863 founding, added: “I don’t know if there are words that can adequately express how thrilled I am.”

The Sligo Church decided to perform the ceremony, in direct response to a closely watched vote by delegates, to the Seventh-day Adventists World Congress on July 5, who solidly rejected a move

to allow women’s ordination.

Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded in the United States in 1863, its growth overseas in this century has far outstripped membership in this country. Worldwide, there are more than 8 million Seventh-day Adventists: Fewer than 10 percent of that number live in the United States and Canada, the nations that make up the worldwide church’s North American Division.

At the World Congress, held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, officials of the North American Division asked that decisions on whether to ordain women be left up to each of the worldwide church’s 11 divisions. According to a church news report, Alfred C. McClure, president of the church in North America, urged the delegates to vote yes, saying that younger members of the church in the United States and Canada favored women’s ordination and would be “seriously disillusioned by a negative vote.”

Monte Sahlin, an assistant to the church president, said the request ran aground on cultural divisions within the church. “We’re very, very multicultural,” he said. “While Americans, Canadians, and many Europeans saw women’s ordination as a matter of “social justice, other members of the church did not. In many parts of the world, I have heard people express a fear that it undermines traditional family values and structures.”

Less than a month after the vote, the Sligo Church voted to hold Saturday’s service. “Sligo has a long history of utilizing women in ministry,” said Robert Visser, a member of the church who has helped plan the service. He said the church has two women on a six-person ministerial staff. Saturday’s service is intended to “affirm women in ministry,” he said.

Another member of Sligo Church, Roy Branson, predicted that the service would set a precedent that could be followed by smaller, like-minded congregations throughout the denomination. Other congregations “could say, ‘Well, Sligo did it.’ ” said Mr. Branson, who is also editor of *Spectrum*, an independent, Adventist magazine.

Ms. Haloviak saw another result growing from the service: a chance to build support for women’s ordination among a new generation of Seventh-day Adventists. She spoke about how she thought the service would look through the eyes of children and teenagers in the congregation. “Every single little girl will realize she can be called by God to grow up and be a minister, just like the little boys she’s in school with,” Ms. Haloviak said. “This is for all Adventist women.”

field!

What they did was to artificially separate the act of ordination from the certificate of ordination! On this basis, leadership on certain levels said that a local church can ordain its women as ministers, but the conference will not issue a certificate declaring that it happened!

What confusion. But it is another step in the onward progress of the liberals, and no one wishes to offend the liberals. Why not? Because far too many of our leaders, and those in positions of influence in the North American Division, are liberal.

But the ramifications of this are immense—for we have here an act, or ordination, to an independent ministry! This is exactly what occurred at Steps to Life several years ago!

Let us now continue on with the eyewitness report:

CONFERENCE PRESIDENT APPROVED THE REBELLION—The understanding Torres has with his conference president [Ralph Martin] is that “this is within our authority as a congregation” [which it is not], the senior pastor told his church board on the Wednesday night prior to the event. A letter of explanation circulating to union and division officers indicates that the event is “an affirmation of women in ministry.”

IT WAS AN ACT OF ORDINATION TO AN INDEPENDENT MINISTRY—Careful nuances, during the service, included the use of the phrase, “ordination ‘to’ gospel ministry,” instead of “the” gospel ministry [of the Seventh-day Adventist Church]. “This is not all that we had hoped it would be,” said Norma Osborn in her response, “but it is a step in the right direction.”

This seemed to be a reference to the fact that the Potomac Conference committee, in a close vote, decided not to participate in the event or issue the credentials of an Ordained Minister to the three women. The major departures from tradition, in the service, was an element near the end, when all present were reminded that “every believer is ordained to ministry” [not the Adventist Church ministry] as well as the inclusion of unordained church members among those placing hands on the ordinands. [!] The homily and the challenge both included heavy emphasis on the priesthood of all believers.

Evidently the accommodation arrived at, to keep this event from becoming a major conflict, is this: Ordination, in the Adventist system, has two elements—a ceremony and a credential. The local church has, in recent years at least, been allowed to conduct the ceremony; but only the conference, with the approval of the union, has the authority to issue the credential. What happened at Sligo is half a loaf. When and if the Potomac Conference gets around to it, the credential half will make it whole.

The ambiguities involved led one of Sligo’s two female pastors—Esther Knott—to forgo participation in

the event.

NOT THE FIRST—Surprisingly enough, the event is not even a real “first” at this level of elaboration. Sally Jo Hand, youth director of the Potomac Conference, was included in an ordination service conducted by the Arizona Conference, in 1993, on the same basis. The committee told her that they were recommending her for regular and full ordination, and considered the service to accomplish the spiritual ceremony of that nature; but, because the GC would not allow them to issue the Ordained Minister credentials, they could only give her Commissioned Minister credentials at the present. “When the policy is changed in the future, will I have to be re-ordained,” she asked, and the official answer was “no.” [!]

THE ORDINATION AND ALL THE FUNCTIONS OF MINISTERS—That same statement has evidently been made relative to the event at Sligo. To the average church member in Takoma Park, “if it looks like a duck and walk[s] like a duck, it must be a duck” [she must be an ordained minister].

These three pastors were ordained by the laying on of hands. They conduct baptisms and weddings. They visit and counsel just like any other pastor, except that they do a better than average job in many cases. They preach and lead in communion. They organize volunteer ministries and bring theological perspective to discussions. They teach the doctrines and preach evangelistically. They are on the same pay scale as their male counterparts and are recognized as having the same status by the government.

ONLY THE CERTIFICATE IS DIFFERENT—To denominational leaders, they are *Commissioned Ministers* who have had “an appropriate service of dedication,” to quote the *NAD Working Policy*. Because they are ordained as local elders, the conference president has the option of giving them the right to conduct baptisms under certain circumstances. But they are not ordained to the Gospel Ministry.

WHERE WILL IT LEAD US?—Does this further estrange the reality of the local church, in North America, that is dominated by “concern for our youth” from the reality of the ecclesiastical bureaucrats who are dominated by foreign interests? Or does it just institutionalize the halfway house, in which North America exists, while the rest of world struggles with issues of Biblical interpretation and culture? Or is it simply another step toward a “congregationalism” of sorts, in which the local church solves its own problems when the denominational structure comes to an impasse on an issue? These questions will be answered not by what happened yesterday but by how all Adventists respond to that event.

That concludes the extended quotation. Here

Continued on the next tract

More WAYMARKS - from —
PILGRIMS REST

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PART TWO OF THREE

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

are some comments which have come across our desk, written by a variety of church members. Many of them live in Maryland or Virginia, and were close to the events at that Sligo meeting. As you will note, many of them are not necessarily historic believers:

Tell me, how does the ordination in Sligo differ from the ordinations of a couple years ago by the folks from *Steps to Life* in Wichita, which were so roundly denounced by the brethren? The candidates there were "all presented by ordained brethren, and then proceeded with the laying on of hands by the sponsors," etc.

I haven't read up on ordination procedures in the *Manual*, or wherever it is, but I have never seen an ordination of pastors that was not conducted by a conference, with union officials, generally the president of the Union, presiding. Was this done, and if not, why not? If local churches can "legally" ordain ministers, then the future has indeed arrived, and the SDA Church has become a congregational church.

Leaving aside the furor over whether or not women should be ordained to the ministry, it seems to me the Sligo Church is skating perilously close to rebellion, in taking this matter into their own hands. It will be of great interest to see if the conference, union, or GC brethren do any official investigation of this action or if they just let Sligo go its way because it is a big and influential church.

May the Lord have mercy on us

The SDA Church is on the verge of congregationalism.

Neither ordination service has received recognition from the denomination, and the harvest that will be reaped from this latest rebellion will be a bitter one for many. The NAD's attempt to maintain unity between the wheat and the tares has just about ended. As Sister White told us, "two parties will be developed" in the church.

We need to pray for our church and our faithful leaders, that they will step up and lead us away from this type of thing rather than encouraging it as some have done recently. The "spirit of Korah" is unfortunately still alive in the church.

I believe that what Sligo has done is treason! I would hope that our leaders would take a firm stand against these actions. In fact, I believe that the minister should have his ministerial license pulled because he has defied that GC session that voted against women's ordination in Utrecht. I fear for our church.

I am a women's ministries leader. I presented a seminar in Utrecht, and I very much hope that women will someday achieve the equality that we deserve. However, it is mandatory that we 'step in time' with the Lord. We are not called to militant radicalism. In fact, this militant flavor has caused me to leave several Women's Ministries meetings. The Bible is ripe with stories of people who couldn't wait on God. Read the story of Sarah carefully.

Sligo's action simply escalates an internal 'fight' to worldwide proportions. Have you considered that "it all moved so well during the ceremony" because the Devil was orchestrating it? God is not double-minded. If *He* had wanted women's ordination to occur at this time in the world's history—*nobody* on the face of this earth could have prevented a positive vote in Utrecht! *Nobody!*

I am so sad I was awake almost all night—I am up this morning praying for our church. I can't understand why our people think that human wisdom is the ultimate solution to this dilemma. What God would have done for us I believe Sligo has ruined. I have never had a doubt that ordination of women would be approved—in God's time!

Now, we are faced with a situation that calls for chastisement of a group of our members which will, in turn, anger more of our members! If the Devil can, he will have us all at each other's throats to the point that we will not prepare ourselves for the soon coming of Jesus! You have no idea how I long to go to Heaven. Anything that detracts from that goal makes me want to cry!

This Sligo Rebellion has detracted not only me—but the rest of our denomination from the goal of salvation. I love God's people and you folks. I simply fear for all of us as a result of yesterday. In Christ.

Then why was the church so vigorous in opposition to the ordination at *Steps to Life* if it doesn't matter? Why does not one address this issue when

trying to dodge the real statement at Sligo?

Is it not true that this ordination is equated, by the denomination, at about the same level as the ordinations conducted by the John Osborne group from Florida?

If that is so, the Sligo ordination was meaningless.

With *Steps to Life*, our leaders had to deal with what was Biblically and religiously (church policy) correct. Sligo's situation has the added dimensions of what is politically and socially correct, which makes it, potentially, a much more volatile situation, with shock waves that extend much farther were it to explode.

If the resources—the women—are being wasted it's only because they refuse to work unless they can set the terms of their employment.

Just as there are a lot of men who sit around discussing things so are there women who find plenty of other things to do and neglect the Lords work.

I'm sorry that anyone working for the Lord can feel frustrated and hurt at the conditions they work under.

Christ laid aside His glory, honor, and titles . . . came to seek and to serve the lost humbly after the will of His Father. Why are we seeking what He did not?

The fact that the two presidents [Potomac Conference and Columbia Union] who have jurisdiction over Sligo are in favor of women's ordination does not necessarily mean that they are in favor of Sligo's independent action. Many who are for women's ordination (some within Sligo's congregation itself) are against what Sligo has done. Until we hear from these leaders we can only speculate on their approval or disapproval of Sligo's action.

This action will have consequences, one way or another. Two and Two does still equal four. Before Sligo ever even announced their intent, the bets were being taken on who was going to do this first. It's not hard to see that, in Sligo's action, they are attempting to make an end run around the middle.

I'm not a prophet, but common sense says that there are two easily identifiable courses from here.

Our leaders can ignore Sligo's action as if nothing has happened; in which case, it's as good as sanctioning their action and giving the rest of NAD the green light to ordain women, across the country within individual congregations. Those who do so can and will recognize each others ordinations. By

manipulating loopholes, they will have achieved a major part of their objective for the NAD. And by taking for themselves the right to "ordain women to pastoral ministry," they will have usurped the authority of the union/conference to formally recognize and confer ordination rights, be they to women or men and they will have usurped the authority of the World Church (G.C. in session) to determine how we will move as a body on controversial and contentious issues. This path leads to congregationalism.

The other option is that our leaders can act before this becomes a movement of such size and strength as to be unmanageable rather than react too late. There are no instant answers; and, because this is for many (on both sides) a very emotional issue, it might for them be a painful process. Where emotions are not so involved but firm beliefs are held, it can be a very frustrating process. But the goal to be one as Jesus would have us be is worth the effort, frustration, and pain.

There will be repercussions. Some here have implied it's almost like "the shot heard 'round the world" to proclaim that we're on the road to women's ordination and/or congregationalism. Others have implied it will cause the world church to harden against women's ordination. They both may be right. We'll see.

It has been said that, on August 1, the Sligo church business session voted "to ordain eligible women serving in pastoral ministry." The resolution didn't say that. Early drafts of the resolution said that, but the resolution that was voted said something very different.

This is a point that has concerned me about how the resolution and the event have been represented. Early drafts of the resolution used the word, "ordain." But in the final draft presented to the congregation, that expression clearly, and deliberately, was not used. I am troubled by what appears to be a classic bait and switch: Win a vote for something that says one thing, and then say it says something else.

Some are calling Sligo's service an ordination to the Gospel Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Sligo's resolution did not call for such, and Pastor Torres made it clear that it was not such a thing.

Is the August 1 draft an early draft? I have that copy and find the word, "ordination" used in one paragraph. They did say "laying on of hands" and the service, as I understand from the *Washington*

Post article, did certainly declare this service one of “ordination.”

The August 1 draft, in the actual resolution of what the Sligo members voted they would do, does not use the word, “ordination” to describe the service to be held on September 23. And that was a deliberate action on the part of the drafters. Original drafts did use that term, and that term was deliberately taken out. I can only presume that was done so to make the resolution easier to pass.

Thus, Pastor Torres arranged for the service to be announced as an affirmation service, as the resolution called for. When he did, he received strong criticism for not using the word, “ordain.” So he agreed to use “ordain” in the sense that the local church has the authority to use that term for deacons, deaconesses, and local elders.

The three women were already ordained as local elders, before that Sabbath program.

Think for yourself. The only danger that women’s ordination holds is that it breaks up the “old boy’s club.” If it succeeds in doing that it should be applauded instead of chastised.

What really happened? Actually, hardly nothing. Those women got no new credentials! The women woke up the next morning with the same status within the denomination. I think that’s too bad because I’m pro-women’s ordination, but everyone that went in to the Sligo service knew the result.

It was a vote by a majority representing our church, from the GC down to the lay people. In spite of the fact that I was all for women’s ordination, I feel that God has spoken through His church. Those who thumb their noses at this kind of consensus are in clear rebellion. They manifest the same spirit that Lucifer manifested when he rebelled against God, in heaven. And in like manner, they are dragging a part of the church with them, with smooth speech and crafty arguments. This will only deepen the rift between North America and the rest of the church.

Some are making the receiving of the Holy Spirit synonymous with ordination. There is no Biblical precedent for that, that I am aware of. The Holy Spirit is given in special measure for all types of ministry up to, and including, gospel pastoral ministry, but not all are ordained. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that, while each member of the body (church) has different roles, none is above the other. While their roles

are different there is no implication of inequality. All members are necessary in order for the body to function properly. The eye does not attempt to function as a hand and a hand does not try to be a foot, but each fills its designed role as God has planned. None go around complaining that they do not have some special title.

While God does use both women and men in various ministries He has not called them to be especially set apart or ordained to ministry. I am not an ordained minister, but I have a reasonably effective ministry. I preach; I teach; I am involved in evangelism; I have been instrumental in starting new congregations, and I am able to lead and counsel others as God opens the doors for that to take place. I do not need to have a title from the church to work for His Kingdom; and, if I did, He would provide my lack. I have faith in that, and I act accordingly. He will do the same for anyone that has faith in Him; but it is not faith to ask God to make you a foot; when He has lovingly designed you to be a hand. We each need to accept the role that God has given us rather than demanding our rights. I don’t see demanding of anything as one of the gifts of the Spirit.

Even though the Lord chose many women prophets through the Scriptures, He never even once hinted that a woman should be ordained as a pastor or priest. This is my position; not that women should not minister as prophets, teachers, or even evangelists—but not as priests. Pastors and elders lead in holy communion; this is the New Testament equivalent of an offering and was consistently a male role. Many priests were prophets, but no women prophets were priests. The men always made the offerings for the family.

I was fortunate to have attended both the Utrecht discussion and the Sligo service in person. Perhaps that gives me some perspective that others apparently were not fortunate enough to get.

Several things about this have raised questions in my mind. Some have said that the “Spirit” made what was done at Sligo OK. Why do those people not think what the delegates, at Utrecht, did was of the “Spirit” also?

I confess that I attended the Sligo service with the express purpose of being a spectator. Somehow I anticipated that this would be a day worth remembering.

Being there in the third row from the back, I can assure you that there was definitely no unanimity. This would have been difficult to observe from the front rows, where the “supporters” apparently were sitting.

There were several occasions where some deemed it appropriate, in this ordination service, to give standing ovations to comments made. It was at these times when I observed what appeared to be approximately 25% to 30% of the congregation remained sitting without applauding.

It was also quite obvious, when I walked in, that there were several visitors in the church. I cannot be sure how many there were, but the complexion of the group seemed different from other times I have visited Sligo.

My feeling, throughout the service, was uncomfortable. My discomfort was not with the issue of recognizing or ordaining women in ministry, but rather with the issues of church authority and protocol which you raised.

From the opening prayer [invocation by Paul Anderson, Sligo associate pastor], which included reference to “those who had chosen not to attend . . .” in the context of what I interpreted to be a “political jab” at the decision by the conference and union officers, the discomfort built. It just didn’t seem right to do this in a prayer or at all, from a simple “good manners” perspective. I don’t think it would be good manners if I invite several people to a dinner at my home and some don’t come, to announce to those who do that others have chosen not to. It just doesn’t seem to be in good taste.

Having attended several ordination services in the past, it was quite obvious that this service was designed to approximate as closely as possible a normal “camp meeting style” ordination. The most obvious demonstration of this was the beautifully printed program.

I was also uncomfortable when the church pastor [Rudy Torres], in his homily, compared the decision of one of the “candidates” to stand for what she believed in, to the experience of Desmond Ford. While this may have been an accurate comparison, it seemed to me that in the context of the sensitivity of this issue, a different example might have been chosen.

I was also uncomfortable when lay people as well ordained ministers were invited to participate in the laying on of hands portion of the service. My understanding of the explanation was that the concept of the priesthood of all believers was the justification for no discrimination between those who we have believed have been ordained to positions of leadership and those who have traditionally agreed to be led.

My last example of discomfort came in the response of one of the candidates to the ceremony. She referred to the embarrassment she had experienced in her ministry when she has had to interact

with non-SDA colleagues, where ordination was expected. Apparently her discomfort was that she belonged to a church that did not do that. Her comment to Sligo was that she was happy that now she belonged to a church that did.

My question was and is, “What church does she belong to?” I heard that the Seventh-day Adventist church voted not to ordain women to the gospel ministry in Utrecht. I am truly interested in knowing what this all means. Is the Sligo SDA Church not [part of] the Seventh-day Adventist Church? This question is particularly concerning, because it comes at a time when we are seeing a similar apparent disregard for church authority and protocol in the area of forwarding of tithe from local churches and independent hiring of local church pastors. In the Maryland area, there are questions regarding these issues in the Damascus, Silver Spring, Beltsville, and Takoma Park churches. Which church will be next? What is happening?

I’ve heard a lot of “emotional responses” from those who attended, which I also found discomforting, somehow. Many of them sound like my Pentecostal friends’ expressions about their worship services. That doesn’t necessarily discount them, but I needed something more substantial than emotions.

I’ve been reading a book by John MacArthur (a non-SDA minister), called *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern*, and it was well worth the money I spent. Maybe you’d find the following passages worth considering:

“It is fashionable today to characterize anyone who is concerned with Biblical doctrine as Pharisaical. The Biblical condemnation of the Pharisees’ legalism has been misread as a denunciation of doctrinal precision. And love of the truth has often been judged inherently legalistic. But love for truth is not the same as legalism. The fact that it has been portrayed that way has sabotaged the very thing the church so desperately needs today . . . Doctrine divides; therefore any concern for doctrinal matters is commonly seen as unchristian. People concerned with discernment and sound doctrine are often accused of fostering a pharisaical, divisive attitude. But that is exactly backward. True unity is *rooted* in truth. Jesus prayed: “ ‘Sanctify them in thy truth; Thy word is truth . . . For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves may also be sanctified in truth. I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word,

Continued on the next tract

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An Astounding Event in Adventist History - -

The Women's Ordination at Sligo

PART THREE OF THREE

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

that they all may be one.' The unity for which He prayed is preceded by, and grows out of, sanctification in the truth. Fellowship that ignores or glosses over the crucial doctrines of the faith is not Christian unity; it is ungodly compromise. As doctrine has been de-emphasized, the church has moved from preaching the Word to other activities: drama, music, entertainment—things designed to evoke an emotional response rather than enlighten the mind. The charismatic movement has supplanted doctrine with experience. Psychology has elevated 'felt' needs over real needs and behavioral theory over revealed truth. All this has accelerated the move away from doctrine and focused the pulpit message on everything but the objective truth of Scripture. Preachers have become comedians, storytellers, therapists, showmen, and entertainers rather than powerful envoys of divine truth."

The prayer at the beginning of the ordination service seemed to set the tone which had to be overcome. Unfortunately, being an admirer of the usually well-planned and almost rehearsed nature of the typical Sligo services, I was inclined to believe that the prayer was more than a slip. Rather, it seemed to be a demonstration of the attitude which must have existed during the planning for this event.

Regarding the underlying objective of the exercise, I just could not shake that feeling that they were more concerned about making a point than celebrating women in ministry.

I spoke to two others, who were there with me, about the Desmond Ford reference. They both felt that the reference gave them the impression that the candidate was a Ford supporter.

These are seasoned preachers who seem to have the ability to choose their words carefully. I therefore find it difficult to believe that this was simply a bad choice of example. It seems more plausible that, like the prayer, the comment was designed to fan the atmosphere of "rebellious" excitement.

Of course, none will really know the true motives. I believe though, that not only can, and should, ministers of the gospel be held accountable for what they actually say from the pulpit, but also for the atmosphere and attitude they create with their words, from that position of power.

To go against the spirit of the vote at Utrecht is to rebel against the intent of the vote. Their action can in no way be seen as in harmony with the Utrecht decision, but rather in defiance of it.

If Sligo had the power to ordain these women to the pastoral service within the worldwide church, no doubt they would have done so and defied more than just the spirit of the Utrecht vote. The evidence of that is in Sligo's asking the union/conference to participate and issue ordination credentials which they could only do in direct violation of the vote.

In violating the spirit of Utrecht, there is something very crooked here. It has caused vexation of spirit even among supporters of women's ordination. Many who would like to see women ordained are against the action that Sligo has taken. I can respect the actions of those who believe women's ordination is right and labor diligently, through the means given us by God, to govern ourselves as a body. But I cannot respect what Sligo has done.

Jesus said that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

No matter which side of the fence you're on, yea or nay, both sides agree that women's ordination is a pivotal issue in the church. Jesus prayed for unity. For His people to be one as He and the Father are one. In turning down Women's ordination, the G.C. at Utrecht turned it down for the third time. In turning down NAD's request to move independently on this issue, the Utrecht G.C. said we will move in unison on issues that significantly impact the World Church as a body.

In contrast, Sligo's action does nothing to foster unity. It has moved "independently," contrary to and in spite of the world church. It has forced the issue, aggressively escalating the conflict and the stakes.

I know that many who champion the cause of homosexuals welcome Sligo's recent action in ordination of women to gospel ministry. While not all who support women's ordination condone homosexual behavior, the fact that these two issues are closely linked has been widely documented. The logic employed to justify both is the same (cultural interpretation of the Scriptures). Either the two movements are from God or they are from Satan.

All can read and decide for themselves whether

There are those who believe this Sligo ordination may be the beginning of a massive split within our denomination.

Yet why did it occur?

The underlying reason harkens back to a shift in church doctrines and standards. It is ironic that the shift has affected both the conservatives and liberals.

On one side are the conservatives, who are deeply upset because church leaders are repudiating the necessity of obedience to the law of God and the standards given us in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. Therefore, they are rising in protest.

Because their leaders are not submissive to the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, the conservatives hesitate to respect the authority of those leaders.

On the other side are the liberals, who have felt themselves freed by the new church positions from subservience to anyone's laws and standards. But now it is leading to rejection of church

authority as well. If the law of God need not be obeyed, why obey the delegates at Utrecht who are far less powerful?

Because church leaders declare that no one need obey God's law, and that standards are no longer necessary, the liberals have decided they can be a law to themselves.

The conservatives fear that leadership is getting too close to the world. *The liberals are impatient* that their leaders are not close enough.

Yet a firm stand for the principles outlined in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, on the part of our ministers, teachers, and administrators would have solved the problem on all sides.

Every day the denomination becomes more worldly. Every day more and more faithful souls are edged out, and every day more and more liberals abandon it for the luxury of total lawlessness.

It is a time for earnest prayer.

the Bible predicted these movements that would precede Christ's second advent. I find a most startling prophecy in Isaiah 3:8-9, 5, 12-14, 16-26.

With the above passage in mind, while not all of us adorn ourselves with pendants, bracelets and ornaments, we have arrayed ourselves with piety and a profession of righteousness in what was done at Sligo. We have claimed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Sligo and have experienced grand feelings. In this passage, the Lord, through Isaiah, tells us that all these outward ornaments will be stripped in the day of Judgment, so to speak, so that our real motives, intents, and purposes will be made plain. It may not yet be clear to many where the women's movement is taking the SDA Church, but the Lord has promised to "uncover their secret parts." In the day of Judgment, the secret things will be made plain, and that which has long been hidden will be revealed.

I think few grasp the significance of the Sligo ordination. We little realize what is about to come upon us. It will affect us for years to come.

Has our church reached a turning point? Will it now be carved up into little rebellious pieces?

I don't understand how all this has happened, but here we have it in our laps.

It is clear as the day that the great rebellion has begun. It will sweep through the church and more and more of our people will leave. The people who call themselves "historic Adventists" have already

left. The place is going to be cleaned out. We will have to hand it over to Desmond Ford, the guy that offered us so much until leaders stopped him in 1980.

Well, that concludes the collected statements, primarily written by nominal and liberal Adventists in the Maryland and Virginia area.

It is asked: Where are we headed? One thing we know for certain: Those who remain with the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy are on the right track. They are the remnant.

OTHER STUDIES YOU MAY WISH TO READ WHICH ARE ON THIS TOPIC

WOMEN'S ORDINATION—Part 1-5 [WM-481-485] This study provides an historical background to the problem, and outlines some of its principle aspects.

WOMEN'S ORDINATION CRISIS: 1995—Part 1-2 [WM-598-599] This study discusses the plan of North American Division leaders to obtain a favorable vote on this issue at the 1995 Utrecht Session.

THE WOMEN'S ORDINATION AT SLIGO—Part 1-3 [WM-649-650] The study you now have in hand. Additional copies are available.