

# Ministry, Mission and Ordination

*Tom de Bruin*

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# FOREWORD

At the 2010 General Conference Session, a commitment was made to study the theology of ordination. Each Division was requested to study the question and submit a report to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC), appointed by the General Conference. Between June 2012 and November 2013 the Trans-European Division's Biblical Research Committee (TED BRC), carried out a thorough study of the subject.

The initial work was delegated to a subcommittee of the TED BRC, consisting of Audrey Andersson, Jan Barna, Daniel Duda, Raafat Kamal, Janos Kovacs-Biro, Laurence Turner, Cedric Vine and Bertil Wiklander. Their draft report was sent to the full TED BRC, which was given time to comment on and discuss the contents. The final version of the report was a very substantive work, consisting of some 863 pages and more than 350,000 words.

On 18 November 2013, the TED Executive Committee unanimously voted in a secret ballot to approve and recommend the report to the TOSC. The report's findings and rationale were presented to the TOSC by Bertil Wiklander, then President of the TED and chair of the TED BRC. We extend our thanks and appreciation to him for his commitment, leadership and significant contribution to the study.

Recognising the importance of this study, and the fact that many members simply do not have the time to read the full report, the TED Executive Committee voted to publish a condensed version. The purpose of the condensed version is to make the contents of this massive study accessible to as many church members as possible. This shorter, easier-to-read summary aims to make the

content available while preserving the theological depth of the original. We would like to offer our deepest appreciation to Tom de Bruin for accepting this task, and delivering the manuscript within a very tight timeframe.

We thank God for his blessings in our work, and pray that both this book and the study on which it is based will prove a valuable tool for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it addresses the important issue of ordination.

Raafat Kamal  
President, Trans-European Division  
St Albans, 20 April 2015

# INTRODUCTION

You have in your hands a book on the theology of ordination. This is a complicated subject. Ordination is a process of selection, of training and of induction to leadership, and has been practiced in the Christian church for 1900 years or more. The theology and practice of ordination has changed a great deal in those years, and even within a single denomination like the Seventh-day Adventist Church, many different assumptions and understandings of ordination exist. This potentially confuses and distorts the conversation.

In this book we will set out to examine our Adventist theology of ordination. We have tried to write in a way that is easy to read, but that still contains as much theological depth as possible. Nevertheless, do remember that this book only represents about 15% of the original study, so there is always more to know and discover. By all means, after reading this book, get your hands on the Trans-European Division's full 863-page report!

The theology of ordination is currently a hot topic in the Adventist church. In all aspects of church life, from Facebook groups to Sabbath school, from websites to the General Conference, Adventists are discussing this subject. Some support the ordination of women, claiming that God is a God of equality. Others see the use of female ministers, but would prefer them to serve under the leadership of a male pastor. There are even those that suggest that any form of ordination is unbiblical. The book you are holding attempts to reply to this ongoing, worldwide Adventist discussion. We hope it will contribute in a positive and uplifting way.



As far as this study is concerned, there is neither clarity nor unanimity among the inspired authors of the Bible on the topic of ordination. No biblical writer describes the theological significance of 'ordination'. No writer says anything about the process of selecting candidates for 'ordination'. Nothing said about the ceremony of 'ordination'.

We will be the first to admit that this idea sounds strange. Almost every Adventist has some idea of ordination, and can easily name a couple of passages where ministers are ordained. You might be thinking 'What about the seven?' or 'What about Timothy?'

Good questions! We hope your interest is piqued. Read on: we will answer these questions, and more.

## **ORDINATION IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

Before we jump into the history and theology of ordination, let's quickly look at the current practice of ordination in the Adventist church. In our church we hold ordination ceremonies, where we ordain people for a specific office. We acknowledge that God has called them, and they are set apart by the laying-on of hands for a specific ministry or service. This means our ordination process has three parts: a divine call and formal approval from the church, the setting-apart by prayer and the laying-on of hands, and the associated ministry the ordained individual will perform.

Ordination applies to various offices and roles in the Christian church. As Adventists, we ordain for three classes of church functions: gospel ministers, local elders and deacons or deaconesses. According to our current world-church policies, the first of these positions is currently only open to male members. The others, if so desired, are open to all genders. In the Adventist church we have linked ordination to a number of administrative roles, but it should be underlined that the decision to ordain someone and the decision to elect someone for leadership are two

different acts, taken by different bodies on different occasions for different reasons.

Ordained ministers are not the only ministerial offices. The Adventist church recognises both the licensed minister, for those on the path to ordination, and the commissioned minister, for those who cannot be ordained for reasons of gender or ministry position. A host of pastoral ministries in the church are thus carried out by both men and women who are not ordained. These ministries also include church administration, institutional work, departmental work at General Conference, Division, Union and Conference levels, financial auditing and naturally the various functions in the local churches.

It is vital to our church structure and ecclesiology that we understand the reasons for ordaining some members and not ordaining others. We must understand the biblical and theological context of our ordination practices. These too will be discussed in detail in this book.

This book's structure should be easy to follow. We will begin with some principles of biblical interpretation, which form the foundation on which the rest of the study stands. We will then trace the theme of ministry and ordination through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. To help us understand the origins of our current practices, we will also briefly examine ordination in post-biblical Christian tradition. Finally, because of the high esteem we give to Ellen G. White, we will also examine her views on the subject of ordination.



# 1. PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

The subject of ordination in the Bible can be approached from many angles, and a book discussing theological interpretation would be incomplete without an examination of the principles of biblical interpretation. Anyone delving deeper into the word of God should pause to ponder their methods of biblical interpretation. Although this chapter is likely the most difficult part of the book to read and understand, it is a vital foundation for the other chapters. When reading, remember that Paul says ‘endurance produces character’ (Rom 5:4). Do persevere: you will be justly rewarded.

Imagine, if you will, a study of the Sabbath by someone who does not believe that the Old Testament has any authority on that subject. Such a person might very well come to very different conclusions about the Sabbath and its role in a contemporary Christian’s life. Clearly, in such a study there would be no references to the Ten Commandments, or to the Sabbath at creation. From this example it becomes natural that a biblical study should take the whole of Scripture into account, not just a part. This is a principle of biblical interpretation that you might take for granted, but if it is not clearly defined, how will anyone else know?

For this reason we will begin this study by laying out ten principles for our theological interpretation of ordination in the Bible. As you read them, you might realise that you already apply many of these principles in your own Bible study. These principles are not new, but they do need to be put down clearly on paper so that we know the basis from which we argue.

## **PRINCIPLE 1: THE BIBLE IS OUR ONLY CREED**

The first and most important principle for biblical interpretation is part of Adventist DNA. Since the time of the earliest Adventist pioneers, Adventists have been reluctant to speak about doctrines and have always maintained that the Bible is our only creed. Even today, the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are prefaced by a statement emphasising that we put our faith in the Bible alone.

Generally this principle is referred to by its Latin name *Sola Scriptura*, 'Only Scripture'. This principle emphasises that only the Bible can reveal God and the teachings of God. In other words, the Bible is the only normative authority for Christian belief and practice.

This principle represents a greater challenge than many see, because it means that anything believed or practiced should continually be held up to the Bible. Even ordination, a two-thousand-year-old practice, needs to constantly be weighed against the biblical evidence. If it is found wanting, changes must be made.

As Seventh-day Adventists we base our analysis of the biblical presuppositions, principles and methods of interpretation on a document entitled *Methods of Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods*. This document was voted in 1986, at the Annual Council of the General Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Insofar as it is applicable to the current study, these *Methods of Bible Study* will also be incorporated into the other ten principles outlined in this introductory chapter.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: DEALING WITH ISSUES NOT CLEARLY STATED IN SCRIPTURE**

If the Bible is our only creed, and we accept that the Bible is the only authority over Christian beliefs and practice, this automatically

leads to the question of how we deal with topics not explicitly discussed in the Bible. You may wonder why we would want to discuss a topic not clearly defined in the Bible, but unfortunately, as you will see, this study shows that ordination is just such a topic. If the Bible does not clearly or explicitly discuss ordination, we need a principle for how to deal with that fact.

It is clear that James White, one of the Adventist pioneers, dealt with a similar issue. George Knight describes White's struggle and solution wonderfully in his July 2014 article in *Ministry*, entitled 'Ecclesiastical Deadlock: James White Solves a Problem That Had No Answer'. White was struggling to organise the church in a proper, biblical manner. Unfortunately, there was very little biblical evidence on topics like church order, church ownership of property, the payment of preachers, the placement of pastors, the transfer of members between congregations and the overlying structure that binds individual congregations together. Eventually, after much discussion among the leaders of the church, it was generally accepted that any method that meets the following conditions could be applied: (a) the method will advance the gospel, insofar as we can judge, and (b) the method is not explicitly disallowed in the Bible.

In order to maintain a strong biblical foundation, this second principle, which offers an accepted Adventist way of dealing with issues not discussed in the Bible, will not be used directly in this study. Nor will any of this study's conclusions be based on it. But, as will become clear, this principle will ultimately be an essential part of the church's decision on how to deal with the issue of ordination.

### **PRINCIPLE 3: PROTESTANT REFORMATION**

The Protestant Reformation was a turning point in the history of the church. Five principles of interpretation were introduced during the Reformation, each of which addresses the nature of the

Bible. These five principles are still the foundation of Protestant theology and biblical interpretation, and they will also impact our current study.

### **The Bible and the Bible Only**

This first principle is so vital that we have separately discussed it as the first principle of this study. The discussion above was extensive, but we need to add one idea, called the 'Sufficiency of Scripture'. This idea is part and parcel of *Sola Scriptura*, and assumes that the Bible is a fully sufficient guide to salvation. In other words, everything that a believer needs to know to be saved can be found in the Bible. There are no deficiencies that need to be filled with tradition, additional revelations or announcements from church leadership.

### **The Totality of Scripture**

The second principle from the Protestant Reformation is the 'Totality of Scripture', *Tota Scriptura*. This principle emphasises the need to read the entire Bible when studying a topic. Theology and biblical studies cannot simply be based on a portion of the Bible, ignoring the rest. They must remain firmly grounded in the entirety of Scripture. When assuming the totality of the Bible, there are two consequences that need to be taken into account. Firstly we see that the Bible is an inseparable union of the divine and the human, and secondly we see that it is the word of God.

Scripture is divinely inspired, although the authors kept their God-given free will. The Holy Spirit filled the authors with the divine message, and the human authors put that message into words. In this way the Bible's nature is similar to that of Jesus. It is a complete and inseparable mixture of the divine and the human: fully trustworthy, yet brought forth by human hands.

The second consequence of *Tota Scriptura* is that the Bible must be seen as the word of God. If every part of Scripture should be read on equal footing, this leads us to the conclusion that the

Bible as a whole is also God's word. To drive this point home, the Bible does not simply *contain* the word of God, it *is* the actual written word of God.

### **The Analogy of Scripture**

The third interpretative principle of the Protestant Reformation is the 'Analogy of Scripture', or *Analogia Scripturae*. This principle follows from the previous argument for the totality of Scripture. If the entire Bible is the word of God, and the entire Bible is divinely inspired, then there must be fundamental unity and harmony throughout. Every part of the Bible must be analogous with the other parts. Practically this means that we can claim three things: Scripture interprets Scripture, Scripture is consistent and Scripture is clear.

Firstly, the divine nature of Scripture allows us to understand that there is a unity among the various human voices represented in the Bible. When a single voice is unclear, the rest of the Bible will be useful in the further and correct interpretation of that voice. In this way one part of Scripture interprets another part.

Secondly, given that it has a single divine inspiration, the Bible must necessarily be consistent. When discussing a theme, one part of the Bible cannot stand opposite another part. Interpretations must harmonise all the teachings on a particular topic.

Finally, given that the Bible interprets itself and its message is consistent, it follows that Scripture must also be clear. The various authors each build on the writings and understanding that came before. Diligent students can also consistently gain more understanding of each of the different parts of the Bible, making other parts clearer. In this way, through time and study, the later writings elucidate the earlier ones, and the earlier writings illuminate the later ones.



## **Spiritual Things Spiritually Discerned**

The fourth fundamental interpretative principle of the Protestant Reformation is what is often called ‘Spiritual Things Spiritually Discerned’, or *Spiritualia Spiritualiter Examinatur*. This penultimate principle builds on the previous three, and takes the divine/human nature of the Bible into account. Just as the author of the Bible was a divinely inspired human writer, so a proper interpreter of the Bible needs to be spiritually inspired. This means that any accurate interpretation of the Bible must be aided by the Holy Spirit, and the interpreter must have an active spiritual life.

## **Christ is Lord**

There is a fifth and final principle from the Protestant Reformation that is not always included in lists like this one. This principle can be summarised as ‘Christ is the Content and Lord of the Bible’. In the history of biblical interpretation this principle has not always been properly applied. This does not invalidate the principle, only certain applications.

Christ is integral to the fulfilment of the law, to the fulfilment of prophecy and to the fulfilment of God’s plan for creation. He is central to God’s mission and is central in the Bible. In the overarching theme of God’s mission, the intertwined narratives of the Great Controversy and the plan of redemption, ‘Christ as Lord’ is the overarching theological framework of the Bible as a whole.

There are two sides to the idea that Christ is Lord. Firstly, through the cross we see that Christ revealed the nature and essence of God. Christ’s death – the death of the divine – showed the extent of God’s love for mankind. Christ’s death also made it absolutely clear that God’s primary aim is to have an eternal, loving communion with humankind on the new earth. This revelation of the true nature of God is the truth that Christ proclaimed throughout the Bible.

The second part of the message that Christ is Lord is that Christ’s incarnation began a new phase of God’s plan of redemption. Christ