

**RESPONSE TO ANGEL RODRIQUEZ AND HIS ‘EVALUATION OF THE ARGUMENTS USED BY
THOSE OPPOSING THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE MINISTRY’**

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POINTS OF AGREEMENT

Agreement 1: We agree this is not about personalities or character, this is about the validity and strength of biblical arguments.

Agreement 2: We agree that the method of biblical interpretation used by the groups is a problem.

Key Contribution 1: His paper makes it clear that the pro-woman’s ordination position has a new and different method of biblical interpretation.

Contribution 2: His paper highlights a common error used in biblical interpretation by mistaking God’s silence for God’s approval.

Contribution 3: His paper gives a specious definition of balance which would actually make His own paper unbalanced.

Key contribution 4: His paper illustrates why inspired sources must never be altered.

Agreement 3: We agree that context is crucial.

Contribution 5: By taking inspired quotes out of context, His paper effectively highlights how context alters meaning.

Agreement 4: Our purpose for Bible study makes a difference.

Contribution 6: His summary of the first section on hermeneutics virtually nullifies the remainder of his paper, since it suggests he is not taking the pro-biblical qualification arguments seriously, dismissing them as mere attempts to prove a point instead of efforts to keep our church from drifting from long-established Bible truth.

In this dissertation, I will refer to those who stand with the early church and promote the biblical qualifications for overseers as the “pro-biblical qualifications” group. I will refer to those who promote women’s ordination as the “pro-women’s ordination” group.

THE METHOD OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION IS AT “THE HEART OF OUR DISCUSSION”

I am in complete agreement with his insight that the method we use to interpret the Bible “is at the heart of our discussion” (p. 2). The Bible is our source of unity and nothing but the Bible can unite God’s people. When “God is leading a people . . . they will not be at variance, one believing one thing, and another having faith and views entirely opposite” (3T 446).

The point he makes is an important one. There is only one Leader; we need to get His orders straight. We don’t give the orders, we follow His orders⁽¹⁾. His orders are given in the Bible. How effective can an army be that argues over the orders from its general? By our disagreement we are actually declaring to the world that our General can’t write clear orders. Is He being untruthful when He says His orders are plain and perfectly understandable for those willing to follow them (John 7:17; Dan 12:10)? Would Christ give orders that divide and weaken His own army? Did Christ mean for His orders to be a source of conflict? Or did He give them to unite us in a common mission? Something is seriously wrong when the Bible is dividing friends instead of uniting them.

How can two groups, both professing to take the Bible as their standard rule of faith and practice, come to diametrically opposite views on such a basic issue as the biblical qualifications for ordination? We agree that these groups must be interpreting the Bible differently. The method of Bible interpretation is indeed “at the heart” of the problem. This should lead each group into a time of self-examination to see what cherished sin is blocking us from properly understanding God’s word. Rightly understood, the Bible does not teach contradictory doctrines. While it is possible that the method of Bible interpretation used by both groups is flawed, it is not possible for both of them to be right⁽²⁾.

NEW AND DIFFERENT METHOD OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

The early church had no division over their interpretation of the Bible regarding church leadership. They were “in one accord” when Matthias was selected for a leadership position. The pioneers had no division over their biblical interpretation regarding ordination⁽³⁾. Since those holding the pro-biblical qualifications view use the same method of Bible study and interpretation as the pioneers⁽⁴⁾, those holding the pro-women’s ordination view must employ a new and different method of biblical interpretation. His paper makes an important contribution by highlighting the fact that there is a difference between the method of Bible interpretation used by those who agree with the Bible’s emphasis that all should be engaged in ministry (the pioneers’ pro-biblical qualifications view), and the new and different method of Bible interpretation developed by those whose actions imply the very thing their words deny, that unordained ministry is somehow inferior and women must be ordained to truly engage in ministry (remarkably, the pro-women’s ordination view with this evident class distinction is sometimes called egalitarian!).

It is only right that the “new” and different method of Bible interpretation which is advocated in His paper be given close scrutiny and thorough investigation. This places a heavy burden of proof on my pro-women’s ordination friends who are promoting their “new” and different method for Bible interpretation that actually casts aside “the established faith of the body” and threatens the church with schism⁽⁵⁾. “Light and darkness cannot harmonize. Between truth and error there is an irrepressible conflict. To uphold and defend the one is to attack and overthrow the other” (GC 126). Isn’t it prudent to say, “Proceed with caution” when a view is advanced that is occasionally portrayed by some supporters as more correct than the ordination practices of Christ, Paul, and our pioneers?

A COMMON ERROR IN BIBLE INTERPRETATION

It is a common error to mistake God’s silence as indicating His affirmation.

“These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you” (Psalm 50:21).

Certainly Jesus' silence during His mock trial did not indicate His approval (Mark 14:60; 15:6), rather it was the greatest rebuke He could give (DA 729). To avoid this mistake in Bible interpretation, we have been instructed "to demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord'" (GC 595), so it is not reassuring to have the NAD TOSC report begin its recommendations with "The Bible does not directly address the ordination of women"⁽⁶⁾. This is employing a method of biblical interpretation that Jesus did not use. He said, "It is written"⁽⁷⁾ never "It is not written." He asked, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26, ESV) not "What is *not* written in the law? What can you read *into* it?"⁽⁸⁾.

He has stated, "There is not a divine command in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or in the writings of Ellen White against ordaining women to the gospel ministry. Neither is there an explicit command not (sic) to ordain them" (p. 75).

But this, like the confession of Achan, is simply acknowledging that which cannot be denied. And it is the same line of reasoning used by my Sunday keeping friends: There is no command in the Bible "Keep Sunday holy!" or "Do not keep Sunday holy!"

However, the gospel commission does not direct us to go into all the world and teach whatever is not forbidden. It tells us to go into all the world and teach what has been commanded (Matthew 28:20). Since women's ordination is not commanded, it forms no part of the message we are to carry to the world and thus has no business being taught in seminaries and colleges that train Adventist pastors. Neither does it have any place in our publications.

It may be said, "Women's ordination is like arguments over the 144,000, the ten horns, or the daily and is not an important point." But if it doesn't matter, why spend 76 pages advocating it? **If it does matter, why didn't God command it?**

EXAMINING CLAIMS

During his years at BRI, how many times did he have to deal with groups claiming to have "new" light? And how many times had he seen them quote Ellen White regarding the importance of not rejecting advancing light? Unfortunately, under scrutiny nearly all so-called "new" light is found to be old error repackaged. There is a reason the wise man advised, "Do not associate with those who are given to change" (Proverbs 24:21, NASB).

Both the Old and New Testament warn of departures from the faith (Deuteronomy 32:15; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Timothy 4:1)⁽⁹⁾. Members of God's remnant church are not immune from such danger (Hebrew 3:12). The method of interpreting the Bible used by the early church and the pioneers brought church unity⁽¹⁰⁾. From its early history, the Adventist Church was unified on the subject of ordination until relatively recent times⁽¹¹⁾. Undoubtedly he has seen the problem when

"a man takes his views of Bible truth without regard to the opinion of his brethren, and justifies his course, alleging that he has a right to his own peculiar views, and then presses them upon others" (CET 201).

This causes schism. I have no doubt that he has had to deal with such problems many times; this is one of the great reasons the BRI exists. Since we neither want to reject light nor accept error⁽¹²⁾, we investigate claims of "new" truth. In this investigation we use the tool of a common method to interpret the Bible.

Are we departing from the uniting method of biblical interpretation of the early church and our pioneers? This can only delight our enemies who can then say, "The Adventists are divided and thus cannot be Christ's disciples, since the truth unites" (John 17:21;13:35).

HOW PLAIN TRUTHS OF THE BIBLE ARE OBSCURED

God has given us a striking warning that "the truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men" (GC 598). Furthermore, we are to avoid allowing the "seeming difficulty" contained in some Bible passage to confuse "the minds of others in reference to points that are clear and easy to be understood" (5T 705).

BALANCE

We agree that inspired sources should always be used in a balanced way (p. 8). However, His defining lack of balance as “tend[ing] to quote what supports their [the pro-biblical qualifications’] argument” (p. 8) is specious. “Tending to quote what contradicted and undermined one’s own argument” would be foolishness, not balance. Those who humbly accept the Bible implicitly and seek to follow it, form their views from their study of the inspired writings. Their views constantly expand as they continue their study and see truths they have missed in their prior study. They study deeply and carefully, comparing Scripture with Scripture until they know “what saith the Lord.” In their presentations they present those passages that most clearly and forcibly convey the sense of what they have learned from the entire body of inspired writings. This is not lack of balance; this is the only way to have balance and use inspired sources lawfully, and “we know the law is good if one uses it lawfully” (1 Timothy 1:8).

USED SIGNIFICANTLY ALTERED QUOTATION OF ELLEN WHITE

In his presentation and paper he selected a recently and significantly altered quotation of Ellen White from *Christ Triumphant*⁽¹³⁾ in place of using Ellen White’s actual wording found in the unpublished manuscript (p. 66, also see His summary statement p. 75)⁽¹⁴⁾.

For convenience I am including the quotes side by side. I have retained the italicizations he added. I have placed the altered portions in **bold**.

As Recently Altered by the White Estate

Those placed in positions of responsibility should be men **and women** who fear God, who realize that they are **humans** only, not God. They should be **people** who **will** rule under God and for Him. Will they give expression to the will of God for His people? Do they allow selfishness to tarnish word and action? Do they, after obtaining the confidence of the people as **leaders** of wisdom who fear God and keep His commandments, belittle the exalted position that the people of God should occupy in these days of peril? Will they through self-confidence become false guideposts, pointing the way to friendship with the world instead of the way to heaven? (Your Footnote is “Manuscript 163, 1902= CTr 146.”)

What Ellen White Actually Wrote

Those placed in positions of responsibility should be men who fear God, who realize that they are men only, not God. They should be men who rule under God and for Him. Will they give expression to the will of God for His people? Do they allow selfishness to tarnish word and action? Do they, after obtaining the confidence of the people as men of wisdom, who fear God and keep His commandments, belittle the exalted position that the people of God should occupy in these days of peril? Will they through self-confidence become false guide-posts, pointing the way to friendship with the world instead of the way to heaven? (Unpublished Ms 163, 1902)

After condemning the tendency “to quote what supports their argument,” it is particularly ironic that he utilized this inaccurate quotation. Would he have used the unaltered quotation for his argument? I don’t think so. Does the original Manuscript 163, 1902 really equal *Christ Triumphant*? No. This altered document is a very serious misrepresentation of Ellen White’s words. Though these additions were made with the best of intentions and approved by the trustees of the White Estate, they appear to violate a prohibition of God, “Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:6). His paper has done the world church a service by exposing the danger when such changes are made. Hopefully, the practice will be stopped and the alterations in these otherwise fine books be removed.

SOURCES FOR OUR METHOD OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

His assertion that a concern about the importance and source of one’s method of biblical interpretation is somehow a diatribe (p. 8) is itself a diatribe. “You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?” (Romans 2:21 ESV). This *ad hominem* attack could raise questions about the genuineness of the paper’s introductory graciousness.

PROPER USE OF CONTEXT

He has made an astute observation by zeroing in on the fact that the major difference between the method both groups use in Bible interpretation is in “the proper use of the context” (pp. 4, 9). His point needs emphasis because taking passages out of context is the foundation for false doctrine and is how false doctrines and unbiblical practices enter the church.

“In order to sustain erroneous doctrines or unchristian practices, some will seize upon passages of Scripture separated from the context” (GC 521).

Illustrating how this can be done Ellen White wrote:

“A few words of Scripture are separated from the context . . . and used in proof of doctrines that have no foundation in the word of God” (GC 539, emphasis added)⁽¹⁵⁾.

Perhaps an example of this would help: “There is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28) are “a few words of Scripture” which can be “separated from the context” “and used in proof of Bible” support for ordaining women as overseers or even gay marriage, but would be “doctrines that have no foundation in the Word of God”⁽¹⁶⁾.

His paper provides many examples of quotations lifted out of their context. For example, immediately after seriously misquoting an unpublished Ellen White manuscript (p. 66), he quotes a Spirit of Prophecy excerpt without providing the context:

“When women are wanted with well-balanced minds, with not a cheap style of education, but with an education fitting them for any position of trust, they are not easily found” (p. 67).

Let’s look at the context of this quotation and examine how Ellen White uses the term “any position of trust.” The title of the *Review* ⁽¹⁷⁾ article is “Proper Education of the Young.” The first paragraph of the article gives us the context,

“Ministerial labor cannot and should not be intrusted to boys, neither should the work of giving Bible readings be intrusted to inexperienced girls, because they offer their services, and are willing to take responsible positions, but who are wanting in religious experience, without a thorough education and training” (RH 6/21/1887).

Elsewhere Ellen White explains what she means by the expression, “any position of trust.”

“Faithful, earnest, and frequent prayer should be offered that these children may be fitted for any position of trust *to which God shall call them*” (ST 6/9/1881)⁽¹⁸⁾.

Context, as used by the Spirit of Prophecy and those holding the pro-biblical qualifications view, means the context given in the inspired writings themselves. It is from the riches of the Bible itself that all

understanding of the Bible must be drawn. When studying a verse or passage of Scripture we begin by looking at the immediate context to make certain our interpretation is consistent with the surrounding verses. It continues as we examine the passage more deeply, comparing Scripture with Scripture, making certain the interpretation is in harmony with every other biblical passage on this topic that we can locate (GC 320).

Our great need is to know the Bible⁽¹⁹⁾. “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130). Jesus is our example. “The Scriptures of the Old Testament were His constant study, and the words, ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ were ever upon His lips” (DA 84). Even as a young person he was urged to accept false doctrines commonly accepted by the Jews, and taught by the Jewish scholars, but “He asked for their authority in Holy Writ. He would hear every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; but He could not obey the inventions of men. Jesus seemed to know the Scriptures from beginning to end, and He presented them in their true import” (DA 85).

OBEDIENCE, THE KEY TO PROPERLY UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

“Disobedience has closed the door to a vast amount of knowledge that might have been gained from the Scriptures. Understanding means obedience. . . . They can be understood only by those who are humbly seeking for a knowledge of the truth that they may obey it” (COL 112).

Jesus understood whom to ordain because He was obedient. The early church understood whom to ordain because they were obedient. Paul understood the qualification for selecting overseers because he was obedient. As we obey, we too can understand (John 7:17).

PURPOSE, AN IMPORTANT PART OF UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

His summary of the section on the methods of biblical interpretation (p. 9) implies an important point—biblical interpretation always involves our purpose in Bible study as part of the method. In most of my college science and math classes, the textbook would provide an answer key that would give the correct answer to be reached, though not the process to reach the answer. The process was more important than the answer. When I was stumped, I would look up the answer in the answer key, then work backward trying to discover how to arrive at the answer and thus solve the problem. This was the purpose of Bible study used by both Jewish rabbis and medieval papists⁽²⁰⁾. **The rabbis “knew” their answer was right; the papists “knew” the pope was right; since they were confident of the answer, their method of Bible interpretation was to reason back until they could “prove” their position from the Bible, rejecting every contradictory view in the process.** By contrast the consistent Adventist purpose of Bible study is to humbly go to the Bible to learn what he should believe, not go to the Bible to confirm what he already believe⁽²¹⁾.

His summary of this section, however, virtually nullifies his entire paper by dealing with what it should not—motives, and omitting what it should have at its core—methods. His section summary moves the focus from the argument to the character of those making the argument, the very thing he condemns both in the introduction of the paper and in the immediately preceding paragraph⁽²²⁾.

Speaking of those who are pro-biblical qualifications advocates, the paper asserts the main problem with their method of Bible interpretation

“is to a large extent their desire to prove their point and to undermine the arguments of those who support the ordination of women to the ministry.”

First, this is pure speculation since only God can read the mind and know the desires of the heart (1 Kings 8:39). With the warning that “earnest zeal” and “intense desire to have others see and understand the truth” will be misinterpreted (5T 520), how can he be sure his surmising is not a misinterpretation of just such earnest zeal? “In commenting upon the . . . motives of another, who can be certain of speaking the exact truth?” (MB 68).

Second, this is forbidden speculation (Matthew 7:1) and those who make these speculative judgments are revealing their own motives (Romans 2:1).

Third, I believe it is a false statement.

Fourth, his summary statement ignores the fact that the pro-biblical qualifications' historical-grammatical method of biblical interpretation is a continuation of the pioneers' method of biblical interpretation.

James White, editor of *The Review*, very early wrote an editorial⁽²³⁾ and later published articles written by Elder Joseph B. Frisbee covering the biblical qualifications for ordination⁽²⁴⁾. Other pioneers, such as Roswell F. Cottrell, who served on *The Review* editorial committee, seconded these arguments⁽²⁵⁾. "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and the arguments used by the pioneers are similar to arguments his paper dismisses. We should be cautious in statements that would also impugn the motives of these pioneers, who being dead, yet speak.

Finally, his summary virtually nullifies the remainder of the paper, since he fails to take the pro-biblical qualification arguments seriously, dismissing them as mere attempts to prove a point instead of efforts to keep our church from drifting from long-established Bible truth.

SUMMARY

Truth is not advanced if we take inspired writings out of context, use *ad hominem* thrusts, or judge the motives of our friends. Truth requires no new method of biblical interpretation. The Adventist church long ago rejected as invalid the very "contextualized" approach the pro-women's ordination advocates must use and which the NAD report actually now acknowledges. This approach allows the power of man to change God's word instead of allowing the power of God's word to change the man.

NOTES:

1. "The study of the Scriptures will be considered a part of his religion; for by this he learns his orders. In the light of the Scriptures he regards himself as God's servant, employed to do His will. Sometimes he finds those orders different to that which he would choose were the decision left to him; but he does not find fault with his work because of this. And as he seeks to carry out the will of the Master, angels of God are with him, to be his defense against the wiles of Satan" (ST 2/24/1909).
2. "The word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body. There have ever been individuals of independent minds who have claimed that they were right, that God had especially taught, impressed, and led them. Each has a theory of his own, views peculiar to himself, and each claims that his views are in accordance with the word of God. Each one has a different theory and faith, yet each claims special light from God. These draw away from the body, and each one is a separate church of himself. All these cannot be right, yet they all claim to be led of the Lord. The word of Inspiration is not Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus" (3T 428).
3. "The majority of the Sabbatarian adventists (sic) seem to have settled fairly quickly on what ordination signified; and their views remained remarkably consistent, from the embryonic days of the 1850s until denominational organization became well established," David Trim, "Ordination in Seventh-Day Adventist History," p. 9, TOSC, January, 2013.
4. The Historical-grammatical method.
5. "All should be careful about presenting new views of Scripture before they have given these points thorough study, and are fully prepared to sustain them from the Bible. Introduce nothing that will cause dissension, without clear evidence that in it God is giving a special message for this time" (GW92 126).
6. NAD TOSC Report Summary, Recommendation 1.
7. Some years ago I found the term "it is written" or its equivalent 72 times in a phrase search in the gospels.
8. It is instructive to observe how Ellen White used the silence of the Scriptures to draw positive conclusions. For example, she says, "I cannot find an instance in the life of Christ where He devoted time to play and amusement" (CT309) and uses this to show that we should not be promoting this.
9. "The Jews perished as a nation because they were drawn from the truth of the Bible by their rulers, priests, and elders" (GW92 128).
10. "We must study to find out the best way in which to take up the review of our experiences from the beginning of our work, when we separated from the churches, and went forward step by step in the light that God gave us. We then took the position that the Bible, and the Bible only, was to be our guide; and we are never to depart from this position. We were given wonderful manifestations of the power of God. Miracles were wrought. Again and again, when we were brought into strait places, the power of God was displayed in our behalf" (CW 145).
11. "The history of ordination in general is largely a history of our early years and of how we established and agreed [on] our understanding of ordination; whereas the history of the place of women's ordination in Adventism is largely the history of ordination since 1968," David Trim, "Ordination in Seventh-Day Adventist History," p. 1, TOSC, January, 2013.
12. "While warning men to beware of accepting anything unless it is truth, we should also warn them not to imperil their souls by rejecting messages of light, but to press out of the darkness by earnest study of the word of God" (GW92 129).
13. A general acknowledgment of this is made in the Preface of this book as well as *To Be Like Jesus* and *From the Heart*, the three most recent devotionals produced by the White Estate.
14. This is an unpublished manuscript and not on the CD-ROM. The portion included in *Christ Triumphant*, is the only version found in the CD-ROM and, unfortunately, it is in the altered form.
15. Emphasis supplied.

16. "All should become familiar with God's Word; because Satan perverts and misquotes Scripture, and men follow his example by presenting part of God's Word to those whom they wish to lead in false paths, withholding the part that would spoil their plans. All have the privilege of becoming acquainted with a plain "Thus saith the Lord"" (ST 4/4/1900).
17. Officially *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.
18. Emphasis supplied.
19. "Our salvation depends on a knowledge of the truth contained in the Scriptures" (COL 111).
20. "We are not to think, as did the Jews, that our own ideas and opinions are infallible; nor with the papists, that certain individuals are the sole guardians of truth and knowledge, that men ... must accept the explanations given by the Fathers of the church" (GW92 125).
21. "We should not study the Bible for the purpose of sustaining our preconceived opinions, but with the single object of learning what God has said" (GW92 125). "You must lay your preconceived opinions, your hereditary and cultivated ideas, at the door of investigation. If you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, but accept the light given" (COL 112). "You will never reach the truth if you study the Scriptures to vindicate your own ideas. Leave these at the door, and with a contrite heart go in to hear what the Lord has to say to you. As the humble seeker for truth sits at Christ's feet, and learns of Him, the word gives him understanding.... Do not read the word in the light of former opinions.... Do not try to make the word fit these opinions. Make your opinions fit the word. Do not allow what you have believed or practiced in the past to control your understanding. Open the eyes of your mind to behold wondrous things out of the law. Find out what is written, and then plant your feet on the eternal Rock" (MYP 260). There are many more such statements, but this is a representative sample.
22. "It leads away from a discussion of the arguments themselves into an evaluation of the character and intentions of those involved in the discussion" (pp. 8, 9).
23. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 20, 1853.
24. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 26, 1854, January 9, 1855, June 19, 1856.
25. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 2 and 9, 1856.