

This is not a scholarly or theological dissertation on the issue before us, namely, the ordination of women to the Gospel Ministry. This article will reflect primarily the frustration of women being thus discussed, as if they are a breed apart.

The author watched with deep interest the evolution of the Literature minister from a "second class" laborer to the fully recognized co-professional that he/she now is. In the early days, the poor colporteur was allowed to "starve with it," and, indeed, his faithfulness was measured by his willingness to "endure hardness." My favorite story came from my deceased friend, Brother Willie White, who told of swapping a pig for a book sale and then selling the pig to get his money. If my reference to swapping a clean thing for an unclean thing may be forgiven, we need to glance at today's statistical data to be made aware of the "coming of age" of the literature minister and ministry. But it was not a quiet evolution. Advocates of the ministry amassed their quotations, compiled their data, agitated the waters, and most importantly - continued to faithfully do the work. They believed that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." And it came, all of it. Equality, security, and the recognition so long delayed, came, and the Church is stronger and better for it.

Racial relations have changed so radically in the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the better, that the harder times are difficult to recount. Internationally, indigenous leaders now conduct the business of the Church as leaders of divisions, unions, and local conferences. In North America, Blacks form parts of congregations all over the nation, and function as equals. As of this writing, a Black man is president of the North American Division. There is a Black union president. The Secretary of the world church is Black, and one of the vice-presidents of the General Conference is Black.

The road to summit was not easy by any means. In North America, 250 years of slavery and 100 years of segregation left it's mark on every institution in her borders. This was impacted in many ways on individuals on the underside of the prejudice spectrum. (1) There is a sense of exploitation; (2) A sense of not really belonging; (3) A sense of under-utilization; (4) A sense of expendability; (5) A sense of circumscription;

(6) A sense of futility; and finally, (7) A sense of low self-esteem.

Let us consider each separately:

Exploitation

To be used but not accepted, worked, but not rewarded, and employed but underpaid is exploitation in essence. That high value be placed on little effort if it is performed by a member of the controlling group is a motivational depressive. Without incentive, there is little to inspire the aspirant to quality or quantity out-put. And to condemn those who legitimately aspire as "power hungry" or "self-serving" is to reflect on those who hold these offices. For if it is a sin to aspire, it is a sin to occupy.

Not Belonging

I sent my son to a private school at the age of seven. He was the first Black in the school. Sensing that there might be a problem, I visited the playground at noon and watched from a distance. The young people formed a circle and began to throw a large ball to each other. My son stood with outstretched arms expecting to receive the ball. All in vain. He never understood to this day why no one threw him the ball. I decided that it wasn't worth it and transferred him to a school where his color did not matter. He got his hand on the ball and became an outstanding basket-ball player. Race, gender, education, wealth, or lack of it is not sufficient reason for denying one a sense of belonging. Let him or her handle the ball. He or she just may turn out to be your star performer.

Underutilization

To be under-used is to be misused. In the early years of my ministry, all conference officers and leaders were White. This carried through to the secretaries and janitors. Clearly, the Church was not making full use of its manpower pool. To us, the "shut out ones," skin pigmentation was the sole criteria. All other inadequacies flowed from Blackness. There was a superstition that Blacks wanted the status quo, that we would not follow our own. The Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1955 exploded that theory forever. In fact, a recent article in the ADVENTIST REVIEW cites the Methodist church as the denomination losing the most Blacks the fastest because it abolished its central jurisdiction which provided for Black leadership in the Church structure. Blacks in the Methodist Church now find themselves at the mercy of a voting White majority, with no "Bill of Rights" for protection. This is paternalism in its worst form. Under this plan, Whites consult with

themselves or Blacks of their own choosing, which, in effect is a form of self-consultation. This eliminates a large number of members with knowledge and expertise in areas most needed.

Expendability

This is confusing. You see, the excluded know themselves to be necessary to the movement for several reasons. (A) Its monetary contributions are necessary to the world budget. (B) No educational institution can survive financially without our physical presence. (C) No medical institution can exist without some form of federal funding. This is unavailable to those that exclude Blacks. Now, we knew all of this, but were in the old days made to feel expendable and privileged. Today, of course, this is not so. It is a violation of Church law to excluded or segregate in any Adventist institution or church. But from the beginning it was not so. It is frustrating to know that an all-White church would lose its influence in the world, and at the same time, be treated as if your membership is of little consequence. The ladies understand this.

Circumscription

More frustrating than exclusion is to be admitted and circumscribed. When admitted, one is permitted to see the promised land, but forbidden to cross over. Expectations are aroused, but unfulfilled. The excluded naturally ask the question, Why not? Make no mistake about it, the question is being asked. Color, gender, and national origin are insufficient answers. That is what caught up with the Church in New Orleans. And there is more "catching up" on the way. If the Church belongs to all of its members, who among us can say to the others, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further?" The ladies understand this.

Futility

A sense of futility swept Black America with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was our best. If America could not accept him, what hope was there for the rest of us? And so, the burning started. City after city was struck with flames and looting. It was an ugly moment in our history, but a predictable one. It was the fruit of futility, a sense that our best is not enough. A sense that I cannot affect anything. A sense that my own destiny is in the hands of others. An organization or state that allows this to happen is irresponsible. Everyone matters: The rich, the poor, the educated, the unlearned, "red, and yellow, Black and

White, all are precious....." Organizational function must achieve this level of inclusiveness. Ask any woman.

Self-Esteem

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is the divine summary of man's basic need. A sense of self-worth is essential to one's general well-being. Indeed, one's view of others and institutions is based^{on} one's view of him or herself. The Japanese industrialist understands this. Workers at the plant are consulted as to ways and means of improving the product. The custodian is canvassed for his opinion. Each worker has a stake in the success of the product. He feels responsible for the success of the company, and values his accountability to it. This accounts for the improvement of the product.

Having read thus far, one may ask, just what does this have to do with the subject under discussion? Namely, the role and function of women in the work of the Adventist Church? This article is intended to portray the state of mind of women through the eyes of a Black man who has passed through all of the^{mental} stages covered in this article, working to advance the Kingdom while pressing Church administration to reach its present state of racial philosophy. Under Church law, racially, we are "Free at last." In terms of implementation, we have much to do. But we can handle that.

But, as it relates to women, we are still guilty of "Middle age thought" and practice. It is difficult to get young ladies to train as Bible Instructors in our colleges because of the snail-like hiring pace and paternal treatment often received. We're almost back to the "some of my best friends are Bible Instructors" stage. Women are giving up on the soul-winning partnership on the grounds that they are not partners. This is unfortunate in the light of the fact that women out-number men, therefore, their productivity is essential to our early exodus from this planet.

The ordination of women to the Gospel Ministry is not the subject of this article. Including them more fully as partners in soul-winning ministry clearly is. During the Reformation, the Holy Spirit used men, women, and children to herald the fuller revelation of grace. So shall it be in the end of the age. While history says little about the ordination of women and children, it certainly places no limits on their ministry. The Church that recognizes this will unleash upon the world its (the church's) majority population in soul-winning service.