ORDINATION IN SEVENTH–DAY ADVENTIST HISTORY

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Part One: Introduction

I was asked to give two papers, one at this meeting and one in June, on the history of ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and our history of women's ordination, respectively. Now, such a division, between the Adventist historical experience of ordination in general and of women's ordination in particular, may seem an artificial one, but in fact, as we shall see, it works well, for there is essentially a chronological divide that parallels the thematic division. With the notable exception of the General Conference Session of 1881, ordaining women to ministry barely featured on the denominational radar before 1968. In fact, we can say more: that most of the key issues surrounding ordination were resolved by the time that the third edition of *Working Policy* in 1930 established a set of policies on ordination. Thus, the history of ordination in general is largely a history of our early years and of how we established and agreed our understanding of ordination; whereas the history of the place of women's ordination in Adventism is largely the history of ordination since 1968, for since then ordination has rarely, if ever, been considered as a separate subject—it has always been considered in the frame of whether women can Biblically be ordained and, if so, to what ecclesiastical offices. My paper today, therefore, is focused on the first eight decades of our denominational history, with a brief excursion to the late 1950s and the late 1970s. My paper in June will begin in 1881 but be almost entirely focused on the 45 years since 1968.

The place of Adventist history in theological debates

Before I move to history, there is an important preliminary point to make, which is that, to my mind, neither the history I will sketch out now, nor that which will I present in June, should be considered as making a case for any particular theological view of ordination in the twenty-first century. Our understanding of what pastoral ministry means, of what the role of elders and deacons ought to be, and of what the act of ordination signifies or entails—this understanding should be based on scripture, as should the ecclesiastical practices that flow from it. I want to stress that, because one of the weaknesses of Adventist historical scholarship is that those who write on the Adventist past very often are doing so in order to make a point about the Adventist present. They seek evidence in our history for arguments about what we should or should not do now and in the future. As a result, what I call historical proof-texting is far too common—that is, looking for quotations or actions to use as ammunition in current controversies, rather than seeking a deeply contextualised understanding of what was said or done in the past, in order to understand how our present-day positions emerged. Historical proof-texting is no more responsible or helpful than Biblical proof-texting. It is the fruit of a presentist mind-set.

1   I want to stress, therefore, that I don't see this historical paper as providing guidelines for
2 present practice. How we thought about and practiced ordination in the past does not tell us how
3 we should believe and act today. Now, it certainly should not be dismissed! However, as Ellen White
4 writes: "The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not
5 a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth".[1] The only grounds for an
6 Adventist belief or practice are that it is in accordance with Scripture.

7   Why, then, examine history? First, our present-day practices and theological perceptions
8 did not arise in a vacuum; they were historically conditioned. We cannot understand our current
9 thinking and attitudes without knowing their historical development.

10   Second, historical understanding is potentially vital as we contemplate the prospect of
11 change. For it is important to remember that Seventh-day Adventists, unlike some denominations,
12 allow in theory that our theology might adapt and evolve. Ellen White stressed that there are some
13 doctrines on which compromise is not possible; however these "landmarks" or "pillars" are actually
14 few in number.[2] And outside of them, she declared, "we are not safe when we take [the] position"
15 that "'We have the truth. There is no more light for the people of God.'" She continued that some
16 Adventists had asked her "if I thought there was any more light for the people of God. Our minds
17 have become so narrow that we do not seem to understand that the Lord has a mighty work to do
18 for us. Increasing light is to shine upon us".[3] Precisely because our beliefs are to be based on the
19 Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy always encouraged Seventh-day Adventists to study the scriptures
20 (exactly as we are doing in this committee!) because there are new insights to be gained into God's
21 word. "New light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living connection with
22 the Sun of Righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be
23 revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will find precious rays of light yet to shine forth
24 from the word of God."[4]

25   While accepting that beliefs or practices might change in some respects, however, I suggest
26 that the process of adjusting them is not something to be taken in hand unadvisedly, or lightly, but
27 reverently, reflectively, carefully and prayerfully—and also with an eye to history. Ellen White
28 stressed the importance of knowledge of Adventism's past, warning that only those who lacked a
29 deep grounding in "the truth: would "see nothing sacred in the past history of this people which has
30 made them what they are".[5] With a solid grounding, however, it is possible to identify where change
31 is possible and where it is not. Thus, Ellen White also observes: "It is a fact that we have the truth,
32 and we must hold with tenacity to the positions that cannot be shaken; but we must not look with
33 suspicion upon any new light which God may send".[6] Part of being open to new light must be to
34 understand accurately what those who came before us taught and practiced, and why they did so.
35 We owe it both to our pioneers and to ourselves, because understanding how they interpreted
36 scripture may afford us helpful insights. The very process of establishing what they believed may
37 bring out misconceptions or inconsistencies but may also highlight instances of insight and wisdom.

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[1] Ellen G. White, *R&H,* Dec. 20, 1892.

[2] See Ellen G. White, *R&H*, May 25, 1905; Letter 97, 1902; Manuscript 13, 1899

[3] Ellen G. White, *R&H*, June 18, 1889.

[4] Ellen G. White, *S.S.W.*, Feb.–Mar. 1892.

[5] Ellen G. White, Manuscript 28, 1890.

[6] Ellen G. White, *R&H*, Aug. 7, 1894.

1 In sum, historical study can potentially be part of the process of discerning new light; and it can
2 certainly help us to decide whether or not change is needed—and, in the latter case, help us to do so
3 responsibly, being appropriately conservative and not throwing any babies out with bathwater.
4   These are general arguments about the need for any theological study committee to include
5 an historical component in its proceedings. But third, in this particular case, the history has become
6 a kind of battleground. There are many claims about Adventist practices in the area of ordination
7 and not all are correct; and it is doubly important, therefore, to reconstruct accurately the history of
8 what we have thought and done about ordination.
9
10 *Framework of the paper*
11   In recent Adventist discourse "ordination" is sometimes used as shorthand for the actual
12 public act of "setting apart" certain ecclesiastical officers but sometimes for the process of selecting
13 those who are thus set apart. Sometimes, too, it is used to refer to the setting apart only of pastors
14 and at other times for other officers, such as elders and/or deacons. And sometimes the term
15 ordination is used inconsistently for several or all of the above.[7] I want to be clear, therefore that I
16 am looking at all of these. However, I am particularly concerned with how Adventists conceived the
17 role of what they initially referred to simply as "ministers". By this, they meant ordained ministers,
18 but in 1863, when the denomination became organized, they added the category of licensed
19 minister. Bert Haloviak, who has written extensively on ordination in Adventist history, recently
20 (and to my mind rightly) identified the question of what a ministerial license meant among early
21 Adventists as a fundamental one.[8] Having said that, however, in Adventist ecclesiology, ordination
22 of ministers has, in practice, been bound up with ordination of elders, deacons and deaconesses;
23 and therefore, while focusing on Adventist concepts of the "minister", I also survey the sometimes
24 significant debates about the concept of the "elder".
25   One of the most striking points about the Seventh-day Adventist history of ordination is that
26 this Committee is the first time that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, *qua* Church, has considered
27 the theology of ordination. Seventh-day Adventists have always been great Bible students and have
28 at various times set up official committees, commissions and working parties to study a wide range
29 of theological issues. But this is the first dedicated to the theology of ordination. In 1968 the General
30 Conference Officers assigned to a three–man committee the task of considering the "theology of
31 ordination of women".[9] Then, starting in 1973, in a sixteen–year span from the early 1970s to the
32 late 1980s, five special committees or commissions considered the "role of women in the Church"—
33 a remit that in practice largely, if not wholly, meant whether or not women should be ordained.[10]
34 But it is perhaps not widely appreciated that there has never before been an attempt by the global
35 church to establish the fundamental question of what ordination means. Individual Adventists have
36 of course studied the theology of ordination on occasion; and at three of the committees and
37 commissions on the role of women a paper was presented on the overarching theology of

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[7] Sometimes, too, this seems to be a conscious rhetorical strategy to undergird criticism of current practice.
[8] Bert Haloviak, "The pit dug for Adventist women ministers", *Spectrum*, 40, 4 (Fall 2012): 37.
[9] GC Officers' Meeting, Apr. 8, 1968, Minutes 1968: 183.
[10] These bodies met in 1973, 1975, 1985, 1988, and 1989: http://www.adventistarchives.org/committees-on-the-role-of-women.

ordination.[11] Nonetheless, as a Church, we have generally tried to grapple with the specific question of who can be ordained, without having first laid the theological foundation of what ordination means. Thus, this committee is in some ways unprecedented.

The failure to consider ordination in the round is reflected in historiography on ordination. There is a considerable body of scholarship on ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.[12] Its weakness is, again, that it is overwhelmingly concerned with the role of women and debates about ordaining them, rather than with establishing what ordination, whether of men or women, meant in practice in the Adventist church and how that concept developed.[13] Because of this lacuna, part two, which is the bulk of this paper, focuses on ordination in Adventism's early history: the embryonic years, of the Sabbatarian adventists who slowly emerged out of the Great Disappointment of 1844, up to the founding of the General Conference in 1863; and then the new denomination's formative, developmental decades, up to 1893, when the Seventh-day Adventist Church turned thirty. This was the period when Adventist practices and protocols evolved and were established.

This study is based as much as possible not on theoretical arguments presented in the pages of Adventist periodicals, but on formal actions taken by General Conference Sessions or the General Conference Committee. For the period before 1863, when no formally constituted authority existed among adventists, I draw on the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, or *Review & Herald* as it was familiarly known; however, I look not only at what future denominational leaders like James and Ellen White were advocating, but also at reports of what local churches were actually doing in the area of ordination; and these are also sources for the 1860s–70s, supplemented by reports from the conference sessions and camp meetings where ordinations increasingly took place. From 1863 until 1889, Seventh-day Adventists met every year in GC Sessions, at which they freely debated the key issues confronting and concerning them; the records of these sessions are the major source for part two, which sets out the Adventist theology of ordination as it emerged by the early 1890s. Part three explores, more briefly, the institutionalization and systematization of the practice described in part two, and sketches out the creation of the framework of policy on ordination that prevailed in the 1970s, as the denomination began to consider ordaining women, and still obtains at the present time.

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[11] E.g., Raoul Dederen, "A theology of ordination", presented to Role of Women Committee (Mohaven, Sept. 16-20, 1973); paper with same title, presented to the 1975 Role of Women Study Committee (Washington, DC, Mar. 20, 1975) published in *Symposium on the role of women in the Church* (s.l.: Biblical Research Institute Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1984), pp. 146–56; Miroslav Kis, "Thoughts on a SDA theology of ordination", paper presented to Role of Women Commission (Washington, D.C., Mar. 24-27, 1988).

[12] See http://www.adventistarchives.org/bibliographies.

[13] A notable exception is P. Gerard Damsteegt, "Have Adventists abandoned the Biblical model of leadership for the local church?", in Samuel Koranteng–Pipim (ed.), *Here we stand: Evaluating new trends in the church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventists Affirm, 2005), pp. 643–91. It is based, however, chiefly on the writings of Ellen G. White, and the draft Church Manual of 1883, which was rejected and never published, and thus has limits as a guide to actual Adventist practice.

Part Two: Ordination, 1850–1914

Part two explores the following questions:

- What were the types of office subject to ordination by early Sabbatarian adventists and Seventh-day Adventists?
- How was ordination carried out and what was the significance of the ordination ceremony?
- What did the "ordination" of ministers mean to early Seventh-day Adventists?
- What was the relationship of the ordained minister to other ecclesiastical officers?

The first two of these questions are dealt with together in section I, which spans the first sixty years of Adventist history, but focuses on the first thirty. The meaning, or significance, of ordination is the subject of section II and the place of ordained ministers in Adventist ecclesiastical polity the theme of section III—both of these sections examine the practice of the 1850s and of the first thirty years of the denomination, up to 1893. The theological understanding of ordination and ministry existing at the turn of the twentieth century is summarized in section IV.

I. Ecclesiastical offices and ordination

The Sabbatarian adventists and Seventh-day Adventists inherited ecclesiological presumptions and practices from the denominations and sects they had left. Among them were the threefold order of pastor or priest, elder and deacon, which was almost universal among Christian churches (although among Protestants the title "pastor" was frequently preferred to "priest", and the pastor's position differed soteriologically and ecclesiologically from that of the Catholic or Orthodox priest). Some North American Protestant denominations, including those from which Adventists most commonly sprang, had two classes of pastors, or ministers: the licensed and the ordained, with the later being senior. Among Protestant denominations, moreover, the meaning of "elder" and "deacon" varied, sometimes considerably.

The Sabbatarian adventists preferred the term "minister" to pastor. After beginning only with "ministers", they embraced the threefold order of minister, elder and deacon before they founded the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863. They adopted the traditional Christian practice of publicly acknowledging appointment to one of these offices by having recognized leaders place their hands on the appointee. From an early stage, this was termed "ordination" and took the form of a ceremony, which evolved into, in effect, a ritual, that was held to symbolize the deeply sacred nature of the offices held by those who were ordained.

Ministers

The Sabbatarian adventists of the 1850s generally seem to have taken for granted that they should have pastors, albeit the term they generally preferred was "minister". As well as inheriting presumptions about pastoral ministry, Sabbatarian adventists (and later the Seventh-day Adventist Church) inherited several ordained ministers from the denominations out of which the Millerites emerged. "James White had been ordained . . . as a minister" by the Christian Connection; both "Frederick Wheeler and John Byington were ordained Methodist ministers, and A. S. Hutchins was

ordained in the Freewill Baptist Church. There were a few others."[14] The fact of their ordination apparently gave them a *de facto* pre-eminence among the Sabbatarian adventist congregations; this is evident from the first credentials issued to adventist ministers—a simple card that declared them "approved in . . . the gospel ministry"—signed by two ministers whose status was widely accepted: frequently by "James White and Joseph Bates [who] signed . . . themselves as 'leading ministers'".[15]

The first ordination by Sabbatarian adventists, to any office, took place early in the summer of 1851. Washington Morse, who later helped draft the first constitution of the General Conference, was "set apart" by a congregation of Sabbatarian ex-Millerites in Vermont who did so "by the laying on of hands".[16] By September of 1853, James White, as he travelled among the scattered "little flock", was starting to "set apart" men "to the work of the gospel ministry", which he did "by the laying on of hands."[17] Later that year, in a *Review & Herald* editorial on "Gospel order", he averred that the New Testament taught that "the order of the gospel is that men who are called of God to teach and baptize, should be ordained, or set apart . . . by the laying on of hands."[18] The "laying on of hands" was thus regarded by White not merely as a custom; it was "the order of the gospel". Also in late 1853, Ellen White saw in a vision on that: "Brethren of experience and of sound minds should assemble, and following the word of God and the sanction of the Holy Spirit, should, with fervent prayer, lay hands upon those who have given full proof that they have received their commission of God, and set them apart to . . . His work."[19] Just over a year later, in January 1855, Joseph Frisbie, who though largely forgotten now was an influential figure in the development of the Sabbatarian adventists' beliefs and helped found the Battle Creek Church,[20] published a lengthy article in the *Review & Herald* on "Church order".[21] It addressed a range of issues, but in a section titled "Gospel order in the ministry", Frisbie declared that "Christ chose his disciples, and ordained them," then described how the church at Antioch "laid their hands on" Paul and Barnabas, and termed this the "ordination of Paul".[22]

Elders and Deacons

Starting in 1853, probably inspired by James White's call for the Sabbatarian adventists to embrace "gospel order", a number of churches in Massachusetts and Michigan selected deacons.[23]

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[14] Spalding, *Captains of the host*, p. 269. Cf. Bert Haloviak, "Some great Connexions: Our Seventh-day Adventist heritage from the Christian Church", GC Archives Research Paper (May 1994), pp. 1–3.

[15] George Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth: The development of Adventist church structure* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald Publ. Assoc., 2006), p. 37; Spalding, *Captains of the host*, pp. 268–69.

[16] F. M. Shimper to James White, July 30, 1851, in *R&H*, 2 (Aug. 19, 1851): 15. This event is described, but incorrectly dated to 1853, by Arthur W. Spalding, *Captains of the host* (Washington, D.C.: RHPA, 1949), p. 269. It is described with the right date, but without the ordained man's name, by Godfrey T. Anderson, "Sectarianism and Organization 1846–1864", in Gary Land (ed.), *Adventism in America: A history*, rev. ed. (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998), p. 39. It is also described by Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth*, p. 35, calling it "the first . . . ordination in Sabbatarian ranks".

[17] James White, "Eastern tour", *R&H*, 4 (Sept. 20, 1853): 85.

[18] James White, "Gospel order", *R&H*, 4 (Dec. 20, 1853): 189.

[19] *Early writings*, p. 101.

[20] Spalding, *Captains of the host*, pp. 205, 270-71; Schwarz, *Light bearers to the remnant*, pp. 91, 95.

[21] J. B. Frisbie, "Church order", *R&H*, 6 (Jan. 9, 1855): 153–55.

[22] *Art. cit.*, p. 154.

[23] H. S. Gurney to James White, Dec. 18, 1853, in *R&H*, 4 (Dec. 27, 1853): 199, describes the setting apart of deacons in two churches in Massachusetts, one of them Joseph Bates's home church; Joseph Bates to White, May 18, 1854, in *R&H*, 5 (May

Thereafter, in many areas, the "deacon was generally the sole church officer, and appears to have united in himself the duties" that later would be filled by "elder and deacon". There was a need for church officers other than a minister, because visits by "a minister of their own persuasion" might be at "irregular intervals," months apart.[24]

There was debate about setting apart elders, perhaps because of conflicting perceptions about the proper function of this office; controversy continued into the mid-1850s. In his landmark 1855 article, Frisbie made the case that both the elder and the deacon, as well as the minister, were integral parts of "gospel order".[25] He argued from the New Testament: "The office of elder and deacon were two different offices. One had the oversight of the spiritual, the other the temporal affairs of the church."[26] Indeed, one of the elder's spiritual duties was to take part in the ordination of other elders or even ministers. In an article from 1856, Frisbie posed the rhetorical question, "who has the power to lay on hands . . . . We answer in the first instance, the presbytery. And who are these?" They were, he continued, the "elders or chief persons in the Christian church."[27] The following year, Roswell Cottrell, a leading evangelist and contributing editor of the *Review & Herald*, also set out a case for deacons and elders. He endorsed Frisbie's "opinion, that the difference between an elder and a deacon is, that the former serve more especially in a spiritual, and the latter in a temporal, sense." In addition, acknowledging that ministers were few and far between, Cottrell argued that elders and deacons were needed in local churches, to supplement the minister.[28]

Consensus quickly emerged that those who held lesser offices, as well as ministers, ought to be ordained. Frisbie argued that the elder should undergo "ordaining".[29] Cottrell, writing of elders and deacons, affirmed that one of the functions of the minister was "ordaining proper officers" in the local church.[30] From the very beginning, the ordination service was the same. In the churches in Massachusetts that first ordained deacons, in 1853–54, the deacons, like ministers, were "set apart" by "prayer and laying on of hands".[31] And the practice spread.[32] The two articles, by Frisbie and Cottrell in 1855–56, seemed to settle the matter; from then on "Sabbatarians were ordaining local elders as well as deacons and pastors."[33] In the late 1850s, sometimes a minister and a deacon, or an elder and a deacon, were ordained in the same service, though separately.[34] In 1861, the newly founded Michigan Conference recommended that at least each local church should, from among its

30, 1854): 148, describes the ordination of two men at another church in Massachusetts. Spalding, *Captains of the host*, p. 268, referring to the ordination described by Gurney, but also to ordination of deacons at two churches in Michigan.

[24] Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light bearers: A history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, Idaho: PPPA, 2000), p. 85; Spalding, *Captains of the host*, p. 268; cf. Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth*, p. 37: "deacons . . . appear to be the only local church officers at that early period" (*c*.1853).

[25] Frisbie, "Church order", p. 154.

[26] *Art. cit.*, p. 155.

[27] J. B. Frisbie, "Church order", *R&H*, 8 (June 26, 1856): 70.

[28] R. F. Cottrell, "What are the duties of Church officers?", *R&H*, 8 (Oct. 2, 1856): 173. See Spalding, *Captains of the host*, pp. 198, 246.

[29] Frisbie, "Church order [1855]", p. 154.

[30] Cottrell, "Duties of Church officers".

[31] See sources cited in n. 22, above.

[32] Anderson, "Sectarianism and Organization", p. 39; Spalding, *Captains of the host*, p. 268.

[33] Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth*, p. 41.

[34] Minister and deacon: Sperry to Uriah Smith, Feb. 23, 1857, in *R&H*, 9 (Mar. 19, 1857): 158. Elder and deacon: Ingraham to Smith, n.d., in *R&H*, 14 (Oct. 27, 1859): 184; J. Bostwick, "Conference in Lynxville, Wis.", *R&H*, 16 (June 19, 1860): 87.

membership, elect one elder and deacon.[35] By 1879 Ellen White could describe "the laying on of hands" as "an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office", not just to the office of minister.[36] What had once been debated had now become established practice.

The ordination ceremony

In sum, even before the Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded, Adventist ordination was regularly carried out by the laying on of hands by men "of experience and sound minds" and/or those who had been ordained previously, whether as ministers or elders.[37] Public prayers during the ceremony were introduced and soon became the norm.[38] Increasingly often, all the ministers at a meeting joined in the laying on of hands and prayer.[39] Indeed, as conferences were founded, their annual sessions, and then camp meetings, became the habitual venues at which ministers would be ordained. This ensured a good turn–out of other ministers, but it also made the service a public spectacle.[40] In the mid 1860s, a charge by a senior minister, in addition to the prayer, was added to the service and became common, adding another ritualistic element to the service.[41] All this, along with the tone of Ellen White's words, and the description of one ordination service (of two deacons) as "a solemn and heavenly season",[42] strongly suggest that ordination quickly became, widely, if not invariably, a special ceremony and by the end of the 1860s was tending towards an informal ritual.

One of the clearest statements about how the act of ordination was perceived occurred in a resolution of the 1879 General Conference Session, which declared:

> We regard ordination as a solemn and impressive ceremony, sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures and indicating the setting apart, or separation, of the person receiving it from the body of believers with whom he has been associated, to perform the office to which he is ordained, and as suggestive of the conferring of those spiritual blessings which God must impart to properly qualify him for that position.[43]

From an early point, Adventist ordination consisted of those already ordained laying their hands on an appointee as part of an increasingly elaborate ceremony, perceived as having spiritual as well as ecclesiological significance. Indeed, the ceremony began to verge on ritual (a term I use advisedly).

The move towards a ceremony or ritual probably did not go as far in the case of elders and deacons' ordinations. In the early twentieth century, as the denomination grew, church leaders set

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[35] John N. Loughborough, et al, "The Conference Address", *R&H*, 18 (Oct. 15, 1861): 156–57.

[36] E. G. White, "Mission of Paul and Barnabas", *Signs of the Times*, 5 (June 12, 1879): 177.

[37] Quotation at p. 6, *supra*.

[38] E.g., James White, "Meetings in Ohio", *R&H*, 11 (Mar. 25, 1858): 149; idem [unsigned but almost certainly White], "The Conference", *R&H*, 14 (June 9, 1859): 20; Bostwick, "Conference in Lynxville". Cf. Ellen White's reference to "fervent prayer".

[39] E.g., G. W. Holt, "Report of business meeting at Gilboa Conference", *R&H*, 16 (Nov. 13, 1860): 206; A. C. Bourdeau, "The Vermont Conference", *R&H*, 34 (Nov. 2, 1869): 150.

[40] E.g. anon., report on "Fifth Annual Session of the N. Y. and Pa. Conference", *R&H*, 28 (Oct. 16, 1866): 158; James White, "Western tour", *R&H*, 38 (July 4, 1871): 20 (reporting on the Wisconsin camp meeting); C. W. Stone, "The Wisconsin camp meeting", *Signs of the Times*, 4 (Oct. 3, 1878): 293.

[41] E.g., James White, "The Conference", *R&H*, 23 (May 24, 1864): 204; Uriah Smith, "Editorial correspondence no. 3", *R&H*, 30 (Oct. 8, 1867): 264; idem, "Editorial correspondence no. 2", *R&H*, 30 (Oct. 1, 1867): 248; and Bourdeau, "Vermont Conference".

[42] James White, "Western tour", *R&H*, 16 (Nov. 6, 1860): 196.

[43] Eighteenth Session, 12th meeting, Nov. 24, 1879, 7 p.m. (General Conference Session Minutes 1863–1888 [hereafter GCSM 1863–88], p. 162).

up mechanisms to share organizational good practice. They began publishing *The Church Officers'*
Gazette, to educate elders and deacons in what was "proper", and later (as we shall see) published a
handbook for ministers. Writing in *The Church Officers' Gazette* on the "Qualifications, duties, and
responsibilities of elders and deacons", Ole Olsen, a former GC President, reproved any who thought
they could take on spiritual leadership without having first been "consecrated to such service by
prayer and the laying on of hands. That is wrong: it brings the most sacred service of God . . . to the
level of the common affairs of life."[44] That such a statement was thought necessary indicates that
ordaining elders and deacons "by prayer and laying on of hands" had not yet become universal. Yet
it also shows the significance that Adventists had come to identify with the act of ordination. There
is no doubt that, for ministerial ordination, there was a widely recognized and generally observed
ritual, which, in its essentials, dated from the denomination's first decade.

II. What did ministerial ordination signify?

After a minister had been ordained, however, what next? What did ordination signify to Seventh-
day Adventists? What did they understand it to mean?

Sabbatarian Adventism, 1844–63

The Adventist pioneers inherited a series of attitudes towards the pastorate and ordination,
but they were characterized by a tendency to question accepted orthodoxies, and by deep–seated
suspicion of formal organization which made them wary of existing hierarchical structures, which
they debated freely in the columns of their periodicals.[45]

As we shall see, however, some Sabbatarian adventists were hostile to the transition to a
traditional–style ordained ministry; so some of them, at least, were willing to contemplate, in effect,
a redefinition of the traditional understanding of ministry into a function rather than an office. Now,
the Latter–Day Saints had abandoned the concept of a full–time clergy formally differentiated from
the laity by ordination; but in the United States in the 1850s, Mormonism would have been an
unattractive model to follow and it is unlikely that ex-Millerites took Mormon practice as a model.
However, Adventists and Latter–Day Saints emerged in the same "space", chronologically,
geographically and culturally.[46] The radical approach of Mormons and some adventists towards
ministry probably shared common roots rather then being copied by the latter from the former.

Even so, the majority of the Sabbatarian adventists 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. Ordination meant
that an appointee had been set apart to a special role. Again and again in the pages of the *Review &*
Herald, ministers (and later elders and deacons) are described as having been "set apart". But it is
quite clear that the "setting apart" of a minister was, from very early on, regarded as having greater
significance than that of an elder or a deacon. To what, then, was the "minister" *set apart*?

[44] O. A. Olsen, "Qualifications, Duties, and Responsibilities of Elders and Deacons of the Local Church — No 6" (in section
entitled "Church Officers General Instruction Department"), *Church Officers' Gazette*, 1, 10 (Oct. 1914): 1.
[45] See Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth*, pp. 28-47.
[46] E.g., Jerome L. Clark, *1844*, vol. I, *Religious movements* (Nasville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Association, 1968).

Table 1: Significance of ministerial ordination in nineteenth–century
Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiastical practice

1. Right to preside (and primary role in presiding) over Ordinances of
   Communion and Foot Washing
2. Set apart from ordinary church–members, to an authoritative office
3. Sign of a vocation to a full–time calling
4. Obligation to preach
5. Duty to teach and instruct
6. Prerogative to baptize
7. Right to ordain new ministers, elders and deacons
8. Unique authority to organize a new church

This was made clear early in the 1850s. In the autumn of 1853, as James White laid hands on men he regarded as talented workers, they were being, in his words, "set apart to the work of the gospel ministry, to administer the ordinances of the church of Christ".[47] In being "set apart", then, the ordained minister was being set apart to "gospel ministry".[48] But what, in turn, did this mean? As White's words indicate, it included presiding over "the ordinances". Foot washing (which some adventists had started to adopt as early as 1845) and Communion were known as the "ordinances" (or "ordinances of the Lord's house") from the earliest days.[49]

In other words, the first meaning of ordination was that it conferred the right to administer, or preside over, these two ordinances. For example, when Washington Morse was ordained as a minister in the summer of 1851, he was said to have been "set apart . . . to the administration of the ordinances of God's house".[50] In his major 1856 article on ministers and elders, Frisbie maintained that New Testament texts "show quite conclusively that" an important "part of the . . . duty" of the minister or elder was to "administer the emblems of bread and wine".[51] In 1860, Hutchins, reporting on the ordination of the first minister in Canada, noted that one of an ordained minister's chief roles was to "administer the ordinances of the Lord's house".[52]

But being set apart to "gospel ministry" meant much more. In the thinking of James and Ellen White, "gospel ministry" was connected to what they and their circle increasingly referred to as "gospel order"—this meant formal organization, which, as the 1850s wore on they urged on the wary Sabbatarian adventists. This tells us something about the Whites' concept of the ordained minister's position: it was an authoritative one.

In the autumn of 1853, Ellen White reported that in vision an angel had told her: "The church must flee to God's Word and become established upon gospel order, which has been overlooked and neglected." And, she continued, in the same vision she had seen that "those who

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[47] White, "Eastern tour".

[48] E.g., James White, "Western tour", *R&H*, 12 (Sept. 23, 1858): 140; idem, "Western tour", *R&H*, 15 (Apr. 12, 1860): 164. Thereafter, it is used very frequently.

[49] See George Knight, *William Miller and the rise of Adventism* (Nampa, Idaho: PPPA, 2010). p. 214; Spalding, *Captains of the host*, p. 268.

[50] Shimper to White, July 30, 1851, in *R&H*, 2 (Aug. 19, 1851): 15.

[51] Frisbie, "Church order [1856]", p. 70.

[52] A. S. Hutchins, "Our visit to Canada", *R&H*, 16 (Nov. 13, 1860): 205

have given full proof that they have received their commission of God" should be "set . . . apart to devote themselves entirely to His work. This act would show the sanction of the church to their going forth as messengers to carry the most solemn message ever given to men."[53] In December 1853, James White published a series of four editorials in the *Review & Herald* on "Gospel Order."[54] In the third of these, he addressed ordination. After examining a series of New Testament texts, he roundly declared that, from them, "we learn that the order of the gospel is that men who are called of God to teach and baptize, should be ordained, or set apart to the work of the ministry". He hastened to add that it was not "that ordination makes them ministers of Jesus Christ", since only God could "call men into the ministry [and] makes them ministers of Jesus Christ". Nevertheless, it was, he concluded, "*the order of the gospel* that those who are called to the ministry should be ordained".[55]

Thus, the second meaning ascribed to ordination by early Adventists, following Ellen and James White, was that it conferred authority: gospel ministry was an ecclesiastical office, and its responsibilities including the maintenance of gospel order. This is evident, too, in Cottrell's 1856 *Review* article, in which he wrote, with evident satisfaction, of developments since 1853: "Order in the Church of God has been . . . established to a considerable extent by the ordination of officers in the churches."[56]

The quotations from Ellen White's vision and James White's editorial of 1853 reveal four other "meanings". Ordination was, thirdly, a sign of a vocation—a minister had a full–time calling. Hence Ellen White's comment that ordained ministers were "set . . . apart *to devote themselves entirely to His work*." In the light of this explicit statement, James White's characterization, both in his editorial and elsewhere, of ministry as "the *work* of the ministry" (or "of the Gospel ministry"),[57] a usage others adopted,[58] can be seen as similarly signaling his concept of it as a full–time job.

The fourth meaning of ordination was a call to preach and evangelize, as indicated by Ellen White's reference to the ministers "going forth as messengers". Frisbie agreed, declaring that, by ordination, "The Spirit had called to the work of preaching"; it was a point he emphasized: "To feed the flock of God is to minister the word of life", which meant to "Preach the word" and the "true gospel". Hutchins had no doubt that a minister was "set apart . . . to preach the word".[59]

Fifth, ordination made the minister responsible not merely for preaching and evangelizing, but also for educating in the details of doctrine; and sixth, it gave the minister the right to baptize— which was, of course, a natural upshot of the authority to teach, since baptism followed instruction in doctrine. These meanings are evident in James White's reference, in his 1853 editorial, to "men who are called of God to teach and baptize". Three years later, in 1856, Frisbie endorsed this, when declaring that it was the duty of the minister and elder to "teach and exhort".[60] In 1858 Uriah Smith,

[53] *Early writings*, pp. 100, 101. For the approximate date of composition, see Anderson, "Sectarianism and Organization", p. 39.

[54] Spalding, *Captains of the host*, p. 269; Anderson, "Sectarianism and Organization", p. 39.

[55] White, "Gospel order", p. 189. Emphasis not in original.

[56] Cottrell, "Duties of Church officers".

[57] White, "Gospel order", p. 188; idem, "The Conference"; idem, "Western tour [1860]" (which, ironically, is describing the ordination of Snook and Brinkerhoff); idem, "Western tour", 17 (Apr. 2, 1861): 157. Emphasis not in originals.

[58] E.g., Hutchins, "Our visit to Canada"; and see Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth*, p. 37.

[59] Frisbie, "Church order" [1856], pp. 70–71. Hutchins, "Our visit to Canada".

[60] Frisbie, "Church order" [1856], p. 70.

by now the editor of the *Review & Herald*, published a note that endorsed White's view of baptism as a prerogative of the ordained minister: "It is contrary to both the practice and views of the church, that any one should administer the ordinance of baptism who has not been regularly set apart to the work by the laying on of hands."[61] Baptism had thus been classified as an Ordinance, along with Communion and Foot Washing.[62]

Meanwhile, in his 1856 article Frisbie had expanded on the Whites' views, maintaining that those who had been "set apart by the laying on of hands" were called "to the work of . . . establishing churches, and causing elders to be ordained", while it was also their duty to "teach and exhort".[63] Cottrell agreed, asserting that the minister's "duty it is to travel from place to place and 'ordain elders".[64] Thus, a seventh significance of ordination was that it gave the authority to ordain other ministers or elders; and this fits well, of course, with Frisbie's and Ellen White's statements, quoted earlier, about who should carry out ordinations. But Frisbie's assertion that only an ordained minister could found new churches was made only in passing and, for the moment, it seems not to have been taken up by Adventists.

In sum, what emerged in the 1850s was a sense of ordination as something that set apart a worker to an authoritative office, rather than to a role or function. This was to be confirmed and amplified by official actions of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, following its foundation in 1863.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1863–93

At the first General Conference (GC) Session in 1863, the *authority* of the office of minister was underscored in the model constitution for State Conferences. Article I provided: "This Conference shall be composed of all ministers in good standing and delegates from organized churches within its limits."[65] In other words, *all* ordained ministers were automatically delegates to Conference Sessions, whereas licensed ministers or lay–members had to be elected as delegates by their local churches. The status of the minister was reinforced by an action of the 1866 GC Session, which provided that local churches were not "fully organized" until they had "ordained officers".[66] Frisbie's idea from 1856 now had received official endorsement. After the creation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in other words, an eighth "meaning" of ordination emerged—the 1866 Session conferred a unique authority to found new local churches, for a church was not organized until it had an ordained minister.

The authoritative nature of the minister's office was to be emphasized still further as the denomination matured. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's first formal statement specifically on ordination was adopted at the 1879 GC Session. It includes the observation: "Ordination signifies the setting apart, or appointment, of a person to some official position". The resolution concluded: "That we consider it inconsistent for our conferences to grant credentials to individuals . . . who

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[61] D. W. Emerson, n.d., untitled, under "Business items", in *R&H*, 12 (July 8, 1858): 64.
[62] Cf. Hutchins, "Our visit to Canada".
[63] Frisbie, "Church order" [1856], p. 70.
[64] Cottrell, "Duties of Church officers".
[65] From First GC Session, May 21, 1863 (in GCSM 1863–88, p. 6).
[66] Fourth Session [only meeting], May 16, 1866 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 19).

1 have never been ordained or set apart by our people."[67] Thus, ordination was definitively settled as
2 necessary for a credentialed minister, accentuating the minister's status. Furthermore, discussion
3 of this resolution prompted the creation of a special committee on ministers. Its report back to the
4 Session, which was accepted, included the assertion that it was the minister, rather than the elders
5 or deacons, whose responsibility it was to "set things in order in the church, give good counsel . . .
6 bring up the members to a proper standard . . . and thus edify and build up the church." As a result,
7 for any who wished to become ministers, "a course of study . . . should be systematically pursued."[68]
8 This repeated a sentiment first expressed at the 1873 Session, at which a resolution was adopted
9 calling on leaders "to establish a school . . . where those who give themselves to the work of the
10 Lord may discipline their minds to study."[69] Such resolutions and the collective intentions they
11 embody must, moreover, have reinforced the perception of the ministry as a full–time and life–long
12 vocation. (Adventists of that time disliked the terms "profession" or "career" for ministry; James
13 White in 1862 even wrote against "stationed, salaried preachers".[70])
14   That this was now the prevailing attitude is evident from the frequency with which, during
15 GC Sessions, pastoring was described as "the work of the ministry" (or "Christian ministry"), using
16 James White's language. Use of this formula in connection with "systematic benevolence" (the
17 method by which members gave offerings and ministers paid) and other "financial help [for] the
18 work of the ministry" are particularly revealing,[71] for systematic benevolence had solved a financial
19 crisis that threatened the Sabbatarian adventist movement by providing the money to pay
20 ministers a living wage.[72] Such references indicate how the "work" of the minister was perceived as
21 full–time work; and that understanding was to be explicitly emphasized in 1885, when the GC
22 Session adopted a resolution calling for ministerial credentials to be given only to those able and
23 willing to devote all their time to ministry; after much debate it was agreed to allow "exceptions to
24 this rule", but only if granted "very carefully".[73] Neither the professionalization of the pastorate nor
25 systematic Adventist theological training was to be fully realized for many years, but even in
26 embryonic form the effect of these trends was to start to differentiate pastors from parishioners in
27 a way not true for most early Adventist ministers.
28   The view that only ordination gave a right to administer the *ordinances*, including baptism,
29 was underlined at the 1879 and 1885 Sessions. A preamble to the 1879 resolution on ordination
30 observed: "Certain difficulties in the past . . . have grown out of the subject of ordination, arising
31 from the question, Who is authorized to baptize and administer the other ordinances of the
32 church?" It further noted that, as the church grew rapidly, "these difficulties will probably increase,

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[67] Eighteenth Session, 12th meeting, 7 p.m., Nov. 24, 1879 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 163).

[68] Idem, ibid.; and 14th meeting, 2.30 p.m., Nov. 25, 1879 (GCSM 1863–1888, p. 165).

[69] Eleventh Session, 6th meeting, Mar. [14], 1873, 9 a.m. (GCSM 1863–88, p. 71).

[70] Quoted in Damsteegt, "Have SDAs abandoned the Biblical leadership model?", p. 654.

[71] E.g., ibid.; Eighth Session, 2nd meeting, [2 p.m.] Mar. 15, 1870; Tenth Session, 2nd meeting, 1.45 p.m., Dec. 29, 1871; Fifteenth Session, 2nd meeting, Sept. 23, 1876; Sixteenth Session, 4th meeting, Sept. 28, 1877 (referring to "systematic benevolence"); Eighteenth Session, [1st] meeting, Nov. 7, 1879 ("financial help"); Twentieth Session, 5th meeting, Dec. 5, and 6th meeting, 10 a.m. Dec. 7, 1881; Twenty-Eighth Session, meeting at 8 a.m., Oct. 20, 1889 (referring to the need for training); Thirtieth Session, 18th meeting, 10 a.m., Mar. 6, 1893. Minutes in GCSM 1863–88, pp. 47, 62, 101, 114, 152, 197, 198; *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference*, 3 (Oct. 21, 1889): 29, and 5 (Mar. 6, 1893): 483.

[72] Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light bearers*, pp. 84–86; Anderson, "Sectarianism and organization", pp. 42–43.

[73] Twenty-Fourth Session, 7th-8th meetings, Nov. 23–24, 1885 (GCSM 1863–88, pp. 279–81).

1 as it extends to other people and draws from other denominations ministers and official members."
2 The conclusion was a resolution providing "that none but those who are Scripturally ordained are
3 properly qualified to administer baptism and other ordinances."[74] The 1885 Session underscored
4 both the ordained pastor's prerogative in administering the ordinances and the unique ministerial
5 authority to establish a new church when it adopted a resolution proposed by a "Committee on
6 Theological Queries", which stipulated that an unordained (i.e., licensed) minister did not have the
7 right to "celebrate the ordinances, to administer baptism, or to organize a church."[75]

8   There was one attempt to add substantially to the "meanings" of ordination. This was the
9 recently oft–cited proposal in 1881 for "females possessing the necessary qualifications to . . . be set
10 apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry."[76] After discussion, however, the
11 delegates did not adopt the resolution and instead referred it to the General Conference Committee;
12 and in practice, in the denomination's first twenty-five years, referring to the GC Committee
13 resolutions proposed by each Session's Resolutions Committee was a civil way of rejecting it. This is
14 something I will say more about in my paper in June.

15   Notably missing from the eight "meanings" of ordination are pastoral ministry *per se* and
16 also administration. As some Adventist scholars have noted, "the basic function of the minister" in
17 early Adventist thinking, was "to work for unbelievers", in "soul winning".[77] Ellen White expressed
18 outright hostility to churches that wanted "settled pastors", writing critically of some ministers who
19 were "hovering about churches".[78] That ordination meant primary responsibility for pastoral care
20 was a meaning of ordination that would only emerge in the twentieth century and perhaps the late
21 twentieth century.

22   Overall, we can see that the tendency in the decades after the denomination was founded
23 was towards buttressing and reinforcing the understanding of the significance of ministerial
24 ordination that had emerged in the 1850s and early 1860s. And the net effect was to increase the
25 status and authority of the ordained minister, and in practice to differentiate him (and thanks to the
26 1881 vote, the ordained minister always *was* a "him") more sharply from church–members. But this
27 inevitably raises the issue of how the ordained minister related to those who held other
28 ecclesiastical offices: licensed ministers, elders, and deacons.
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30
31
32   ### III. Ordained ministers and other ecclesiastical officers
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34 The concept of a licensed minister was, like concepts of ordination, a legacy. William Miller himself
35 was licensed by the Baptists, but not ordained.[79] Yet there is little evidence of licensed ministers

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[74] Eighteenth Session, 12th meeting, 7 p.m., Nov. 24, 1879, (GCSM 1863–88, p. 162).

[75] Twenty-Fourth Session, 14th and 15th meetings, Dec. 2-3, 1885 (GCSM 1863–88, pp. 294–95).

[76] Twentieth Session, 5th meeting, Dec. 5, 1881, original minutes in GC Ar., Box 6873, "Records of the General Conference", vol. 2, 1879–1886, p. 61; also in *R&H*, 58 (Dec. 20, 1881): 392 (GCSM 1863–88, p.197).

[77] Damsteegt, "Have SDAs abandoned the Biblical leadership model?", pp. 658–59, 663–66 at 663; Colin D. Standish, "The proper role of church pastors", *Our Firm Foundation*, June 1998, pp. 15–19 at 17.

[78] Quoted in Damsteegt, "Have SDAs abandoned the Biblical leadership model?", p. 663 (and cf. pp. 662–67); and Standish, "Proper role", p. 16 (and cf. pp. 17–18).

[79] See Sylvester Bliss and Apollos Hale, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), pp. 108–11.

functioning before the first, foundational General Conference Session in 1863, at which regulations for issuing licenses were introduced. It is possible, however, that such provision was made because Protestant Churches were known to license ministers before ordaining them, and this was held to be a good model for the future, rather than because the office of licensed minister already existed among the "scattered flock" of Sabbatarian adventists. Regardless, however, once denominational structure was created, a clear distinction between ordained and licensed minister emerged. Indeed, the 1863 provisions mean that, from the beginnings of the denomination, Seventh-day Adventists consistently identified two grades of minister.

Before we address the meaning, or significance, of a ministerial license (as opposed to the credential which indicated ordination), it is important to address the minister's relationship to the elder and deacon. Originally, in the mid 1850s, the relationship between the minister and elder had been somewhat clouded, before eventually being clarified. But some doubts lingered. One delegate to the 1879 GC Session specifically asked: "What is the position of a leader of a church when there is no elder? What are his duties? and what is his authority?" The minutes state simply (and perhaps diplomatically): "This was referred to the Committee on the Church Manual."[80] The exact scope of the elder's authority was still being demarcated in the mid 1880s.

Deacons, Elders, and Ministers

In his 1855 article on church order, Frisbie had muddied the waters by arguing that: "There were two classes of preaching elders in the churches at that time; one had the oversight of all the churches as evangelical or traveling elders or bishops . . . . Another class of local elders . . . had the pastoral care and oversight of one church". Frisbie's equation of the traveling elder to the bishop (a term used purely in its New Testament sense) suggests he may have regarded the term "traveling elder" as interchangeable with "minister". If so, it is unclear whether he meant that some elders should (or could) have responsibilities that went beyond the local church (an issue that was to be debated in 1885); or that, in fact, a minister and a traveling elder were the same office. He was, as noted earlier, much clearer on the distinction between elder and deacon. In the Bible, he held, "The office of elder and deacon were two different offices." Acknowledging that New Testament deacons preached, he observed wryly that this was because "the whole church after they were scattered became preachers, deacons and all." However, "their offices and duties were different." Deacons, in short, may have preached, as all Christians should, if need be. "But it is quite certain they were not teachers by virtue of that office.[81] Incidentally, he thus reveals, again, his view that teaching was primarily the duty of the minister.[82]

In 1856 Cottrell had also written of the "traveling elder or evangelist", a turn of phrase that also left it unclear whether they were equivalents, or whether the former might supplement the latter. However, the tendency of his argument is towards distinguishing elders from ministers. He wrote, for instance, "that a person may be an elder and not be a preacher; but as elders are exhorted to 'feed the flock of God' doubtlessly referring to spiritual food, it would seem reasonable to expect in an elder a gift of teaching and exhortation."[83] In other words, while an elder *may* (or might even

[80] Eighteenth Session, 5th meeting, Nov. 13, 1879 (GCSM 1863–1888, p. 156).
[81] Frisbie, "Church order [1855]", p. 155.
[82] See *supra*, p. 12.
[83] Cottrell, "Duties of Church officers".

be *expected* to) preach and teach, the minister *must.* However, a major part of Cottrell's argument is that elders and deacons ought to be permitted, in the minister's absence, to act in his place.

He expresses this in terms that underscore the certainty that principal duties of the minister were to administer the ordinances, including baptism, and to ordain elders and deacons. He is also confident, though, that deacons and elders, ordained by a minister, ought to stand in for a minister as necessary.

> [They] should have the power and means . . . to walk in all the ordinances of the house of God, and to admit others who may be brought into the truth to all the privileges of membership with them. A traveling elder or evangelist is not always at hand to administer in those duties that frequently devolve upon a church. A Timothy or a Titus whose duty it is to travel from place to place and 'ordain elders in every city,' cannot be expected to he present to administer the ordinances in every church on every occasion; but when he has performed his duty—has "set in order" the church by ordaining proper officers, they should be prepared to keep the faith of Jesus, to celebrate his death, to shine as the light of the world, and thus bring others into the fold of Christ, to administer baptism, receive to membership, and be the pillar and support of the truth; while those who labor in the field are going into new places to raise the standard of truth, gathering churches, and setting them in order.[84]

Such arguments won the day, at least to a degree. It became accepted that deacons and elders could stand in for a minister at the ordinances. In the early 1850s, indeed, the chief reason given for the appointment of deacons was that they could oversee the administration of the Lord's Supper and foot washing in the frequent (and often prolonged) absences of the minister.[85]

Yet early adventists were clear that there *was* a distinction between the minister and the other ecclesiastical officers. With the emergence of elders, the right of deacons to administer the ordinances was gradually restricted. Their duties diverged, until in Frisbie's words: "One [the elder] had the oversight of the spiritual, the other [the deacon] the temporal affairs of the church."[86] While deacons were still permitted to preach, they only assisted the minister or elders in administering the ordinances. An article in the *Review & Herald* in 1859 put it starkly: "deacons [were] chosen to attend to those things which the ministers . . . could not attend to on account of their being called to attend to the ministration of the word".[87] They performed the mundane duties so that ministers would not be distracted from sacred duties. When the Michigan Conference recommended, in 1861, that every local church elect at least one elder and deacon, the elder's role "was to conduct baptisms and the Lord's Supper when no ordained minister was available. Deacons were to take care for the temporal affairs of the church."[88]

Furthermore, as consensus grew that it was the minister's right to administer ordinances, a concomitant view seems to have emerged that it was more than a right—it was a prerogative. There is evidence, at least in some quarters, of a powerful presumption that taking ordinances from elders was second best. So strongly did some early Adventists believe that Communion and Foot Washing really ought only to be administered by a minister that early converts in Europe, who had been won over in the 1860s, refrained from taking ordinances until the arrival of John N. Andrews in 1874: a

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Spalding, *Captains of the host*, p. 268.

[86] Frisbie, "Church order [1855]", p. 155.

[87] E. S. Lane, "Church trials", *R&H*, 15 (Mar. 1, 1860): 119.

[88] Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light bearers*, p. 93.

conference that November was, for many of them, "their first occasion of celebrating the ordinances of the Lord's house".[89]

Nevertheless, the elder's right to stand in for the minister had been accepted. Even the 1879 GC Session resolution "that none but those who are Scripturally ordained are properly qualified to administer baptism and other ordinances"[90] had been carefully worded to allow for those who had gone through a scripturally appropriate *elder's* ordination to continue to baptize and preside over communion and foot washing. The *authority* given to an elder, then, was clear. When controversy emerged in the 1880s, it was about the nature of his *ordination* and extent of his *jurisdiction*. At the 1885 GC Session:

> The question of church elders was . . . introduced, with regard especially to the extent of their jurisdiction, and the effect of their ordination as to other churches; that is to say, Can an elder of a church upon removing to another church be elected to the eldership of this last church without re-ordination?[91]

Aware that this was an ecclesiological hot potato, delegates referred the question to the Committee on Theological Queries. Twelve days later, it presented its report to the Session. Its comments are revealing, noting:

> that we find there is a difference of opinion existing, and there has been a difference in practice in different conferences, in regard to the jurisdiction of local elders, or to the extent of their authority to act. In some places, the jurisdiction and ordination have been looked upon as confined to the church which elected them; in other cases, they have been permitted to administer the ordinances wherever they might chance to be, as unrestricted as a minister.[92]

Here, surely, we see a remnant of the "traveling elders" of Frisbie and Cottrell of some thirty years before.

In trying to reconcile the two positions, among the problems the committee faced were the possibility that, if an elder's jurisdiction *were* to be limited to his home church, then would he have to be re-ordained if he moved to another church and was elected elder there? Or even if re-elected in his original church? The conclusion the committee reached was notable: an elder's "ordination shall stand good for all time, except in case of apostasy". Ordination, again, was something unique, special, sacred—like baptism it was not to be repeated, except in the case of apostasy. Adventists were coming very close here to a sacramental view of ordination. At the same time, however, the elder's authority was limited to the church of which he had been elected elder, during the term of service.[93] This circumscribed the office of elder, in contrast to that of minister, whose authority was universal and permanent.

In Ole Olsen's article in *The Church Officers' Gazette*, in 1914, quoted earlier, the former GC president, writing to guide elders, wrote reprovingly that he had "known instances where persons appointed as leaders of companies have taken it upon themselves to administer baptism and to celebrate the ordinances of the Lord's house, not being consecrated to such service by prayer and the laying on of hands. That is wrong: it brings the most sacred service of God and the most sacred

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[89] Spalding, *Captains of the host*, p. 520.

[90] Eighteenth Session, 12th meeting, 7 p.m., Nov. 24, 1879, (GCSM 1863–88, p. 162).

[91] Twenty-Fourth Session, 5th meeting, Nov. 20, 1885 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 274).

[92] Idem, 14th meeting, Dec. 2, 1885 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 294).

[93] Idem (in GCSM 1863–1888, pp. 294-95).

ordinances down to the level of the common affairs of life."[94] This is doubly revealing: first, of how it was now established Adventist practice that, *in certain conditions*, ordained elders could carry out the "ordinances"; second, though, of how the ordinances had taken on almost a sacramental quality (they are "the most sacred ordinances", set apart from the mundane things of this world); and third, of how an ordination ceremony—even one for elders rather than ministers—was held to have sacred characteristics.

What, then, in sum, was the significance of ordination for elders and deacons? It was an external signifier of their appointment to a designated office, to be sure. However, the dignity and authority of the office in question were gradually restricted from the late 1850s through the mid 1880s. Deacons lost the right to baptize and administer Communion and Foot Washing. Elders continued to have that right, subordinated to an ordained minister, but it was limited in time and space. Furthermore, while elders could take part in the ordination of other elders, they no longer ordained ministers; and they had no right to organize new local churches.

Ministers and licentiates

So much for elders and deacons. What of licensed ministers? What was the significance, or meaning, of being a licentiate, as opposed to a minister: of holding a license rather than credentials?

Article V of the model constitution for State Conferences, adopted at the first GC Session in 1863, stipulated that it was "the duty of the Conference to determine who are the approved ministers within the bounds thereof, to grant suitable credentials to the same at each regular meeting"; and added that: "Those who feel it their duty to improve their gifts as messengers or preachers, shall first lay their exercises of mind before the Conference Committee, to receive a license from them, if the Committee consider them qualified."[95]

Having created the category of licensed minister, it would take the denomination a little while to establish what it meant. The wording of Article V tells us something about the presumed role of licensed ministers. They had a right, even a duty, to preach. This was amplified by the first action taken by a GC Session regarding licensed ministers. The 1878 Session adopted a resolution: "That those who apply for a license to preach the third angel's message, should, before they receive a license, be examined by a competent committee in regard to their doctrinal and educational qualifications."[96] The concern here is with ensuring that licenses should only be granted to properly qualified individuals; but it specifies the purpose of a license: "to *preach* the third angel's message." The 1880 Session heard a report from C. O. Taylor, who raised "the question of licensing some five individuals . . . whom he thought qualified to publicly present the truth", to help meet the "wants of the cause in Alabama and North Carolina". His request was referred to the GC Committee, since it had budgetary implications, but the wording yields further insight into what a licensed minister was supposed to do.[97] Taylor was not asking for ordained ministers: this may have been because, as more experienced men, they would cost more; but it was also because, due to circumstances in the South, what he needed most were men "to publicly present the truth", rather than to care for non-existent flocks.

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[94] Olsen, "Qualifications, Duties, and Responsibilities", p. 1.
[95] In GCSM 1863–1888, p. 7.
[96] Seventeenth Session, 7th meeting, 8.30 a.m., Oct. 11, 1878 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 133).
[97] Nineteenth Session, 3rd meeting, Oct. 12, 1880 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 187).

We also know that while licensed ministers were expected to preach, they had no right to baptize, administer the ordinances of communion and foot-washing, ordain, organize churches and so on. The 1879 GC Session resolution on "Ordination" specified "that none but those who are Scripturally ordained are properly qualified to administer baptism and other ordinances"—that included elders but excluded licensed ministers.[98] As part of the debates about the roles of elders at the 1885 GC Session, the authority of the licentiate was also clarified, in very stark terms. The report of the "Committee on Theological Queries" (which the Session adopted), stated baldly:

> It is well understood that a <u>license</u> from the conference does not authorize the licentiate to celebrate the ordinances, to administer baptism, or to organize a church. And, therefore, if a local elder receive a ministerial license, it does not enlarge his sphere of action as an elder; it gives him no authority to celebrate the ordinances outside of the church of which he is acting as elder.[99]

In other words, only an ordained minister could "celebrate the ordinances . . . administer baptism [and] organize a church". The elder, who had been ordained, could administer the three ordinances, but could only do so in one local church at a time; and could not organize a new church. The licentiate could do none of these things. The geographical (or one might say the quantitative) scope of the licensed minister's authority was more extensive than the elder's, but qualitatively it was much less. And there were colossal differences between the licentiate's and the ordained minister's jurisdictions.

Table 2: Significance of ministerial licensing in nineteenth–century Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiastical practice

1. Sign of a vocation to a full–time calling
2. Obligation to preach and evangelize
3. Duty to teach and instruct
4. In many cases, stepping–stone towards ordination

Article V of the model constitution hints at the licensed minister's place in Adventism's emerging ecclesiastical hierarchy. It was because of their hope or expectation of improving their gifts that they were being granted a license, as opposed to the "approved" (and ordained) ministers. Thus, a license could be regarded as an apprenticeship, until the licentiate's "gifts as messenger or preacher" improved sufficiently for the Conference to approve ordination. A licentiateship, to be sure, is not described as an apprenticeship, but this "meaning" of a license also emerges from two of the recommendations made by the "committee on improvement of ministers and licentiates" to the 1885 GC Session, and adopted by it. One was: "That the younger and less experienced laborers in the conference be placed for a portion of the year under the training of the best ministers in the conference". The other was that each conference committee should annually appoint "some person or persons . . . to examine all candidates for credentials or licenses as to their attainments, their

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[98] Eighteenth Session, 12th meeting, 7 p.m., Nov. 24, 1879, (GCSM 1863–88, p. 162).

[99] Twenty-Fourth Session, 14th meeting, Dec. 2, 1885 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 295). Emphasis in original.

habits of study, what they have studied during the preceding year, and to advise them with regard to the same in the future."[100] The "younger and less experienced laborers" are not identified as the licentiates, but a sense seems to be emerging that ministry ought to involve what today would be called professional development and that the license was a stepping-stone to ordained credentials.

A structured model of ministry as a career (in effect as a profession albeit Adventists did not like to use the term for ministry) was nevertheless starting to emerge. It was given concrete form twelve months later, when the 1886 GC Session adopted another report from the Committee on the improvement of the ministry, which provided that "Some standard of attainment . . . be required of those who receive a License", and that "A course of study [was] to be pursued by licentiates before ordination."[101] Adventist ministry thus had a career path and minimum standards. Nevertheless, it is not clear that a license was necessarily conceived of only as a path to ordination. If a "standard of attainment" was required to become a licensed minister, what was it that a licentiate had to be able to do?

Here we come to the second meaning or significance of a license. It was a recognition that the licentiate had demonstrated a set of attributes, knowledge and/or skills that warranted being given a place of trust and a ministerial role in the church, one that was general, unlike that given to elders and deacons, who of course were restricted to a particular local church. In particular, the licensed minister had demonstrated the ability, or potential, to preach and publicly proclaim Biblical truth—but lacked the experience, expertise, achievements, or innate attributes regarded as necessary for ordination to take place. For these reasons, then, it could well have been regarded, in some cases, as an end itself; and this is, in fact, implicit in a resolution adopted by the 1881 Session, which provided: "That all candidates for license and ordination should be examined with reference to their intellectual and spiritual fitness for the successful discharge of the duties which will devolve upon them as licentiates and ordained ministers."[102] This is, of course, yet further evidence of the emergence of a career structure in the ministry; however, in distinguishing between "the duties [of] licentiates and ordained ministers" it suggested they had discrete, distinct, but clearly identifiable responsibilities.

IV. Conclusion

In sum, within the first quarter–century of the organized existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the titles, roles, prerogatives and jurisdictions of the basic ecclesiastical offices had been defined. Deacon, Elder, Licentiate (or licensed minister), and Minister (or ordained or credentialed minister): each had its own conceptual and geographical spheres of influence, each of which was relatively clearly demarcated. Theologically, the ordained minister was regarded as the center of the work of the church, both in outreach and what might be called in reach. There was as yet no strong sense of the *pastoral* role of the minister—indeed, there was even some hostility to it. It may

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[100] Twenty-Fourth Session, 11th and 12th meetings, Nov. 27, 1885, original minutes in GC Ar., Box 6873, "Records of the General Conference", vol. 2, 1879–1886, p. 123 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 290).

[101] Twenty-fifth Session, 14th meeting, Dec. 6, 1886 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 335).

[102] Twentieth Session, 5th meeting, Dec. 5, 1881, in GC Ar., Box 6873, "Records of the General Conference", vol. 2, 1879–1886, p. 61; also in *R&H*, 58 (Dec. 20, 1881): 392 (GCSM 1863–88, p.197).

1 well not be a coincidence that Adventists of this period always prefer the title "minister" to that of
2 pastor! Nevertheless, the minister did have a direct pastoral role: in teaching and instructing and
3 sometimes in baptizing and in presiding over the ordinances "of the Lord's house". He also had an
4 indirect pastoral role. In nineteenth–century Adventist ecclesiastical polity it was the elder who
5 was primarily charged with direct pastoral care—but very clearly a limited one, which was under
6 the supervision of the minister, who if he was supposed to be more engaged in raising up churches
7 than caring for them nevertheless was ultimately responsible for his churches and for the work of
8 their elders and deacons.
9   In this system, moreover, the ceremony of ordination had central significance that was more
10 than functional; it verged on the ritualistic. It was a key rite of passage which as well as recognizing
11 the Holy Spirit's calling of the individual also symbolize the imparting of authority to the individual
12 by the Church. It was, consequently, an honor not accorded lightly. As the denomination developed
13 and grew, the ceremony became more elaborate and what it symbolized seems to have developed,
14 too. It was not sacramental, for Adventists never held that it was by going through the ceremony
15 that one received the spiritual gifts associated with and needed for ministry. However, the language
16 used about it strongly suggests that the ceremony was seen as more than just an acknowledgement
17 of a calling. Even if in a limited way, it imparted a spiritual quality as well as ecclesiastical authority,
18 to those who underwent ordination.
19
20

21   *Part Three: The authority to ordain*
22
23 Having reached a consensus about what ordained ministry meant and entailed, the denomination
24 still needed to effectuate its ecclesiological concepts. The process of putting in place formal policies
25 was further to extend the existing theological understanding. The question explored in part three is:
26 Who had the authority to ordain and what was the basis for ordination—what were the criteria?
27
28
29   **I. Applying criteria for ordination, 1863–1943**
30
31 From an early time there was great concern that all ministers meet certain standards. This reflected
32 the experiences of the pioneers of the 1840s and '50s, when Sabbatarian adventists "had no
33 systematic defense against imposters" and there were "no checks on ministerial orthodoxy or even
34 morality". The resulting vulnerability of believers had provided the chief impetus towards
35 organization and underpinned the calls for "gospel order".[103] Accordingly, within twenty years of
36 the first General Conference Session, Adventists began to institute a rigorous system of qualification
37 for the ministry, supervised by church leaders.
38   In 1863, of course, the model constitution for State Conferences provided that they should
39 issue "suitable credentials". However, this was increasingly perceived as unsatisfactory and, as we

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[103] Knight, *Organizing for mission and growth*, p. 36. Cf. idem, *A brief history of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald Publ. Assoc., 1999), pp. 58–59.

shall see, in 1879 a major change was instituted, vesting authority on who should be ordained in the General Conference, rather than the State Conferences. It is notable, however, that a basis for that change had existed since 1863. The minutes of the foundational GC session record that "one object [of forming] the General Conference is to secure uniformity of action throughout all the States" [i.e., all Conferences].[104] The GC Constitution originally contained a preamble, which was retained until the 1885 GC Session, avowing that one of the purposes of a General Conference was "securing unity and efficiency in labor".[105]

In 1879, the GC Session voted to "recommend to the General Conference [that it] furnish credentials and licenses to all those laboring in its employ."[106] Logically enough, it then adopted the report of a "committee on the proper qualifications of ministers" establishing a set of benchmarks on which "all candidates for the ministry [were to] be thoroughly examined".[107] The "qualifications" adopted in 1879 were Adventism's first official criteria for ministry; and their establishment was underscored by the 1881 Session action calling for formal examination of "candidates for license and ordination".[108] Starting in 1882, one of the standing committees at every annual GC Session was "a Committee on Credentials and Licenses".[109] In 1893, further criteria were adopted specifically for "candidates for ordination" as opposed to licenses.[110] Yet 1879 is particularly notable, not only for setting criteria, but also because for asserting the principle that in granting ministerial credentials ultimate authority rests with the General Conference.

Those basic criteria of 1879 identified "spiritual qualification[s]", knowledge, and "practical capabilities", especially the ability to "set things in order in the church . . . and build [it] up", while those of 1893 stressed familiarity with "present truth" and proven ability in "the sacred work of the ministry"—left undefined, but clear enough to contemporaries in light of their understanding of the significance of ordination (as outlined above). Inasmuch as in modern Adventism, ordination may acknowledge not a call "to the work of gospel ministry", but to administration, it should perhaps be emphasized that this was not the practice of the nineteenth–century denomination.

Beginning in the 1890s—perhaps earlier—the General Conference Committee was willing to ordain missionaries on the grounds of their call to mission work. Indeed, as foreign mission work developed, it became not uncommon, when a call to the mission field was voted, for it to be paired with an action to ordain the man, if then unordained (whereas if his wife were given a credential it would be a missionary license).[111] Even if called primarily to educational or medical work, he might well be ordained, for it was recognized that, in the mission field, it was likely he would need to act

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[104] "Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists", *R&H*, 21 (May 26, 1863): 205 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 4).

[105] Ibid., 204 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 2). The preamble was dropped by the 1884 Session as part of a series of "changes . . . in the Constitution of the General Conference": 23rd Session, 5th meeting, Nov. 3, 1884: minutes in *Yearbook 1885*, p. 21 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 249); cf. texts of the constitution in ibid., p. 75 and *Yearbook 1884*, p. 68.

[106] Eighteenth Session, 5th meeting, Nov. 13, 1879 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 156).

[107] Idem, 14th meeting, Nov. 25, 1879 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 165).

[108] Twentieth Session, 5th meeting, Dec. 5, 1881, in GC Ar., Box 6873, "Records of the General Conference", vol. 2, 1879–1886, p. 61; also in *R&H*, 58 (Dec. 20, 1881): 392 (GCSM 1863–88, p.197).

[109] Twenty-First Session, 1st meeting, 9 a.m. Dec. 7, 1882 (GCSM 1863–88, p. 212).

[110] Thirtieth Session, 18th meeting, 10 a.m., Mar. 6, 1893, *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference*, 5 (Mar. 6, 1893): 483.

[111] E.g., General Conference Committee meeting [hereafter GCC], Mar. 16, 1893, in GC Committee Minutes [hereafter GCCM], 1893 Spring Session Minutes, p. 19 [NB: GCC minutes are inconsistently paginated]; GCC, Oct. 11, 1906, Dec. 12, 1907, May 10, 1910, Sept. 14, 1911, and July 31, 1912, GCCM, vol. VII, pp. 216, 392, vol. VIII, p. 238, vol. IX, pp. 83, 234.

in a ministerial capacity at some point.[112] In 1897, for example, the GC considered calling Percy T. Magan, a professor at Battle Creek College, "who later became one of the most important heads of the Adventist medical school in Loma Linda", to mission service.[113] Because of Battle Creek College's importance in theological training, the GC Committee had previously discussed ordaining him, but had decided "to leave the matter for the time being" on the grounds that "he was connected with the school work"; in June 1897 it agreed that he should be ordained, but only if he was "accepted by the Foreign Mission Board".[114] In 1908 the Committee, meeting in Europe, considered whether or not to ordain W. K. Ising, who was being sent as a missionary to Syria, having previously had experience in Europe, but in administration. Committee members "questioned [Ising] as to his experience in this message and willingness to devote himself fully to the work of the gospel missionary in Syria. He . . . felt, although rather young and inexperienced in evangelical work, that the Lord had called him, and that, through the Spirit's power, he could have success, in winning souls".[115] The distinction drawn in Magan's case is fascinating, but, like the interrogation of Ising, reveal the seriousness with which ordination was taken by denominational leaders at the highest level, as well as the perception that evangelistic experience and mission service were justifications for ordination, while experience of conventional educational or administrative work was not.

As the church grew and required more and more administrators, the trend may have been towards ordaining workers simply for their administrative (and especially financial) skills. Church leaders were, however, evidently aware of this and fought against it. Thus, annual council in 1942 voted the following statement:

> The gospel ministry is the most important work ever intrusted to men, and those who are ordained to this sacred work should beware of the spirit of office seeking, ever regarding the preaching of the word in soul-winning service as of chief responsibility and highest honor. They should recognize that while ordination to the ministry is for life, the call to administrative service is temporary; therefore, those chosen for administrative responsibility from time to time should ever hold themselves in readiness cheerfully to engage in full-time ministerial service when called again to do so.[116]

Since an administrator should always be available for ministry, the implication was that only those truly qualified to work as ministers should be ordained. This was nuanced a year later, when the GC Committee recommended:

> If [a] worker gives evidence of the evangelistic and ministerial gift, and . . . is active in ministerial work, then, whether he serves in the field, in an institution, in a conference department, in financial or secretarial lines, or in any other capacity, he should, at the discretion of the employing committee, be granted ministerial license and look forward to ordination.[117]

With hindsight, however, we can say that this was a losing battle.

Collectively, these examples give a sense of how the guidelines established in the nineteenth century (as described in part two) were actually implemented by church leaders through to the mid twentieth century. In practice, up to 1925, while the General Conference Committee decided whom

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[112] E.g., see GCC, Feb. 23, 1909, GCCM, vol. VII, p. 595.
[113] Roy Branson, "Healing of the nations—Mission of the Adventist pioneers", paper presented at the annual conference of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies (New Orleans, Nov. 2009).
[114] GCC, June 17, 1897, in GCCM, [council of June 1897] minutes, p. 4.
[115] GC Committee in Europe, Mar. 4, 1908, GCCM, vol. VII, p. 423.
[116] Annual Council, meeting of Oct. 7, 1942, GCCM, 1941-45 minutes, p. 660.
[117] GCC, June 14, 1943, GCCM, p. 973.

to ordain, conferences had a key role in vetting and recommending names for approval. However, the guidelines about who could and should be ordained remained fairly basic up to the 1920s. Eventually, with increasing institutionalization and attempts to share good practice, church leaders moved to codify what was typical and longstanding practice, and also, with the expansion of the church, to formalize a larger role for the conference.

II. Institutionalizing authority, 1925–77

Ordination, 1925–44

In 1925 the GC published the *Manual for Ministers*; it went into a second edition in 1942 but thereafter was discontinued until eventually replaced by the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook*. The 1925 edition of the *Manual* set out criteria for ordination; a series of protocols for selecting those to be ordained and very detailed ones for the service of ordination itself (pp. 4–7); guidelines for issuing credentials to ministers (pp. 7-8); and principles on moral standards (pp. 8–9). It provided that the decision about whom to ordain was vested at the conference level and was to be taken "at a regular conference session, on recommendation of the committee on licenses and credentials", and after "counsel from the union". Neither a GC Session nor the GC Committee had approved the *Manual*'s contents, so it represented guidelines rather than being formal policy; nevertheless, having been *published* by the General Conference (not by the Review & Herald or Pacific Press), it represents an official statement. Furthermore, the GC Executive Committee in 1930, in an action on ordination, referred to "the long-established" guidelines on ordination in "The Ministerial Manual".[118] Thus, it can be taken as summarizing Adventist attitudes to ordination at least for the first quarter of the twentieth century, if not earlier.

In 1926 came a major development in denominational organization, with the publication of *Working Policy (WP)*, conceived of as a "careful digest" of "General Conference actions voted in former sessions and Councils", which was to "constitute a working policy". The decision to compile such a digest was taken at the 1926 GC Session in Milwaukee; the decision then to publish the first edition *Working Policy* by the 1926 Annual Council.[119] The original edition, however, had nothing on ordination. Not until the 3rd (1930) edition did *WP* include policies on ordination; the new text to be added was voted by Spring Meeting in 1930.[120] The section entitled "Ordination to the ministry" was very short and in essence endorsed the model described in the *Minster's Manual*, except that the authority of the union was enhanced. The relevant text is as follows:

a) The matter of ordination is first taken under careful consideration by the local conference committee.

b) In case of approval, the local conference committee submits the names of the candidates with their findings and convictions to the union conference committee for counsel.

c) The decisions of these two bodies are placed in the hands of the committee on Credentials and Licenses, on whose favorable report the conference makes final decision in the case.[121]

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[118] GCC, Apr. 3, 1930, GCCM, vol. XIII, p. 1122.

[119] Annual Council, meeting of Oct. 5, 1926, GCCM, vol. XIII, p. 128.

[120] Spring Meeting, Apr. 3, 1930, GCCM, vol. XIII, pp. 1122–23.

[121] *WP* (1930), p. 71.

This no doubt reflected the growth in the church and in the importance of the union–level of organization (which was only widely adopted forty years after the first conference was formed).

Among the policies was one on the ordination service itself; the view it presents is virtually the same as those expressed by the 1879 GC Session and by Olsen in 1914.

> In the carrying out of the ordination, a special service, preferably on the Sabbath afternoon, should be conducted, that will exalt the office of the ministry in the eyes of the people and solemnize the call in the heart of the candidate.[122]

Curiously, however, no criteria were included even though the 1930 Annual Council had actually approved a set; and, inasmuch as they were approved by a council of the GC Committee, they were official policies, albeit not printed in *Working Policy*.[123] However, a vital criterion is implicit in the text in *WP*, as part of the statement that opens the section: "ordination of the ministry is the setting apart of the man to a sacred calling, not for one local field alone, but for the entire church".[124] Thus, it was vital that any person ordained should be able to serve worldwide, not just locally. It should be noted that this is present from the very beginning of a formal *Policy* on ordination.

The provisions of *WP* on ordination remained essentially the same until the 10th edition (1955): there were slight changes in wording in the 5th edition (1942), but it remained essentially the same.[125] There were subsequently no changes at all in the 6th through 9th editions.

Meanwhile, as another step towards systematizing the variety of practices existing in the denomination, 1932 saw the publication of the *Church Manual*. There was no significant shift in the relationship between minister and elder: the latter continued, as they always had always been, to be subordinate to the minister, effectively functioning as his assistant and, in a sense, his viceroy.[126] However, the authority and status of the minister may have been heightened by the *Manual*'s mandate that, while the elder was "responsible to the church and the church board", the minister was not: he was "responsible to the conference committee and serve[d] the church as a conference worker." (p. 26). Furthermore, as Gerard Damsteegt pointed out in 1995: "The Manual gave its blessings on the position of the 'settled pastor,' a concept . . . strongly opposed by Ellen White, and incorporated it into the organizational structure of the local Adventist church." Ministers were becoming pastors! But this meant a marked increase in the number of churches where the pastor would be generally present, with a concomitant reduction in status for the "local church elder," who as in the past was only "the religious leader of the church" "in the absence of the pastor" (p. 23).

Ten years later, the 2nd edition of *Minister's Manual* (1942) replaced the text on ordination from the 1925 edition. It revised the preamble (pp. 11–12), added considerably to the guidelines on the ordination service (pp. 14–22), but it also replaced what had been a short paragraph on how a minister was selected for ordination with the relevant text of the 1942 edition of *WP*, quoted in its entirety (pp. 12–14). Also in 1942, veteran denominational administrator Oliver Montgomery

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[122] *WP* (1930), p. 72.

[123] Annual Council, Oct. 28, 1930, GCCM, vol. XIV, pp. 120-22.

[124] *WP* (1930), p. 71.

[125] *WP* (1942), pp. 90–93. The slight change comes in the policy on selection (p. 900, which is changed to read (added words in italics): "The decisions of these two bodies are placed in the hands of the committee on Credentials and Licenses *at the conference session*, on whose favorable report the conference makes final decision in the case". This added clarity as to which committee on credentials and licenses was to make the decision, since the original wording could have been taken to mean the union or even the GC.

[126] *Pace* Damsteegt, "Have SDAs abandoned the Biblical leadership model?", p. 672. Cf. *Church Manual*, p. 23, which notes:

1 published *Principles of church organization*, which included a chapter on "Ordination and licensed
2 ministers".[127] While nominally expressing only his own views, it clearly was officially sponsored. It,
3 too, reprinted in full the text of 1942 *WP* on ordination, but Montgomery's own observations are
4 also very interesting. He neatly summarized the prevailing consensus on what ordination signified,
5 in terms that reveal how the model forged between 1850 and 180 still obtained.

6   The ordination of a man to the gospel ministry confers upon him the authority to minister in all
7   spiritual things. He is sent forth to preach the gospel, to baptize believers, to administer the
8   sacraments of the church, to solemnize marriages, to organize churches . . . . By ordination he is
9   authorized to preside at business meetings of the churches in the conference as need may
10   require. His ordination gives to him the right and authority to have a part in ordaining other
11   men to the gospel ministry and to ordain local church elders and deacons.[128]

12 Here we have gone from "ordinances of the Lord's house" to "sacraments of the church"! But since,
13 regardless of how described, only an ordained man could administer them, there arguably had not
14 been a qualitative change in the way they were understood. And Montgomery described the
15 ordination ceremony in language similar to Olsen's, as a "solemn, sacred service."[129]
16   The net effect of these developments was that in the second half of the 1920s, the 1930s and
17 the early 1940s, church leaders increasingly asserted and codified their claim, which of course had
18 its basis in a series of nineteenth–century GC Session actions, to regulate and control who was
19 ordained to ministry. It was given its most explicit statement in 1944, in the claim: "That we, the
20 General Conference Executive Committee, [are] the highest authority governing ordination of
21 ministers in the religious denomination known as Seventh-day Adventists". This was made in the
22 context of meeting requirements of the United States government relating to conscription, which
23 may have led a particularly adamant assertion of hierarchical authority.[130] Yet the claim is entirely
24 consistent with the trend of official and semi-official publications from 1925 through 1942. The
25 General Conference devolved authority, but the very act of delegation, especially when prescribed
26 in an official policy, is in itself an assertion of ultimate authority. In these years, moreover, church
27 leaders also accentuated the sacred character of the "rites [as Montgomery called them!] pertaining
28 to the functions of an ordained minister",[131] including the ordination ceremony.
29
30 WP *evolves, 1955–77*
31   The 10th (1955) edition of *WP* saw a significant addition: thirteen criteria to be met during
32 the process of "Examination of candidates for ordination" (p. 63). Nevertheless, it was still the case
33 that a great deal was taken for granted. Only nearly thirty years after *WP* first included policies on
34 ordination were a set of lengthy explicit "Qualifications for Ordination" added—they first appeared
35 the 12th (1959) edition (pp. 122–27). Interestingly, these basically were those voted in 1930 and
36 included quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy which link ministry to the Old Testament
37 priesthood (p. 122). Another change was explicit recognition, for the first time, that:

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[127] Oliver Montgomery, *Principles of church organization and administration* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publ. Assoc., 1942), pp. 132–44.
[128] *Op. cit.*, p. 134.
[129] *Op. cit.*, p. 132.
[130] GCC, June 5, 1944, GCCM, 1941–45 minutes, p. 1439.
[131] Montgomery, *Principles of church organization*, p. 135.

> Workers in other capacities, such as editors, secretary–treasurers of conferences, departmental and institutional leaders, may also come to the place in their service where ordination is appropriate; however, in these cases as in every other, the divine call to the ministry must be clear before the church . . . separate them to the gospel ministry.[132]

The thirteen criteria to be met during examination stage remained the same, but the addition of the substantial prefatory material setting out an understanding of "the mind of the Lord concerning the qualifications for the ministry", supplemented the existing Adventist theology of ordination, but did not alter it.[133]

The qualifications established in 1959 remained the same for the next eighteen years. In the 21st (1977) edition, lettered sections with numbered sub-sections were used for the first time. The section on qualifications became L35 (as it remains). The policies on ordination were significantly modified, including this revision, in what became L40: "Workers who are ordained to the gospel ministry are set apart to serve the world church". This continued the emphasis, present since 1930 of the universal nature of ordained ministry, but the language became that "of the world church" rather than "the entire church". However, an entirely new section was added (L45), which begins: "Ordination to the ministry is the setting apart of the worker to a sacred calling, not for one local field alone, but for the entire church". This preserves the language of "entire church" from the 1930 edition, and indeed its addition emphasizes that ordination must take the whole church into account. In the 30th (1987–88) edition, in section L45, "entire church" was replaced with "world church". Thus, both L40 and L45 stressed that ordination is global in its impact and implications and must therefore take the world into account.

Thus, ever since the denomination agreed policies on ordination in 1930 those policies have always stipulated that ordination is a setting apart of ministry "to serve the world church". I suggest that this is theologically a very profound statement, as it underscores the unity of the body of Christ, and stipulates, very explicitly, that ministry to the body of Christ must both express and undergird that unity. As suggested earlier, then, the process of putting in place formal policies on ordination effectively extended the theological understanding that had been established in the late nineteenth century.

III. Summing up

What, then, can we conclude about the authority to ordain, and the criteria for ordination? One of the purposes of establishing a General Conference was "securing unit and efficiency in labor". From 1863 to 1879, the authority to choose who was ordained was delegated entirely to the conferences. Since 1879, it has been reserved to the General Conference. Nevertheless, at least since the early twentieth century, but probably since the 1890s, the actual decision on whom to ordain has been vested with "the body of believers among whom the worker has labored".[134] In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that meant the conference (or mission); in 1930 that changed to the union in consultation with the conference.

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[132] *WP* (1959), p. 126.
[133] Quotation from p. 122.
[134] *Manual for Ministers*, p. 5.

1   However, the authority exercised by the conference and now the union is a limited one: to
2   select candidates based on "qualifications" established, since 1879, by General Conference Sessions,
3   and supplemented, since 1930, by Annual Councils of the Executive Committee. Furthermore, the
4   most fundamental of those "qualifications", in that it is the longest standing, pre-dating all the other
5   current criteria, is that ordination is "not for one local field alone, but for the entire church". In the
6   light of the recent trend towards unilateralism in the matter of ordination to the ministry, and of
7   allied claims that such ecclesiological particularism is entirely in accord with historical Adventist
8   practice and policy, this is a point that needs to be made—and to be emphasized.
9
10

11   *Conclusion*
12
13
14   The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of what ordination signified, both in general, and in the
15   particular context of ministers, developed relatively quickly and then remained remarkably stable
16   and consistent for at least the first half of our history.
17   To return to my initial point: I do not suggest that, because we understood and practiced
18   ordination in a consistent way in our past (and especially our early history), this therefore must, of
19   necessity be the way we think about and practice ordination in the future. It is notable that early
20   Adventists did not theorize that much about ordination; their theology of ordination, as I have tried
21   to recover it in this paper, to some extent has to be worked out from their practice. Because of this,
22   where our pioneers perpetuated attitudes and practices of other churches it is not always clear
23   when they had first subjected them to scrutiny and decided to keep them because they were
24   Biblical, and when they simply were continuing in the ways they had been brought up to think and
25   act. In the 1850s, to be sure, Adventists gave sustained critical attention to Biblical passages on
26   organization. But there is less theoretical evidence for why their practice evolved in the ways it did
27   after 1863 and for the actions taken by GC Sessions of the 1860s, '70s and '80s. Our founders were
28   not impervious to the prejudices of the time and they may have not always realized how much they
29   had inherited from the Christian past.
30   Thus, even apart from the possibility of the "new light which God may send", as Ellen White
31   foresaw, one response to the history whose contours I have sketched out would be to say that it is
32   not Biblical—or rather, is only incompletely Biblical. There will be those on the Committee, I
33   suspect, who feel the early Adventists' decision not to ordain women to gospel ministry was right
34   on, and yet will find very troubling their tendency to perceive ministry in almost sacramental terms
35   and to elevate the ordination ceremony into a rite. But another response to this history would be to
36   argue that Adventists did not simply fall into this pattern—instead, they thought about it, nuanced
37   it but effectively maintained it over a long period, and that we should not too quickly or too lightly
38   dismiss it. Some may even resonate with Olsen's accentuation of the sacred.
39   In closing, then, I do not say: "Here is our history: Go thou and do likewise." But I do think
40   we need at least to be clear about what our practical theology of ordination actually was in our past.

I will end by quoting R. F. Weigley a prominent twentieth–century historian of America, who wrote about Americans, in words that can be applied to Seventh-day Adventists:

> . . . what we believe and what we do today is governed at least as much by the habits of mind we formed in the relatively remote past as by what we did and thought yesterday. The relatively remote past is apt to constrain our thought and actions more, because we understand it less well than we do our recent past . . . and it has cut deeper grooves of custom in our minds.[135]

Without knowing the shape and depth of those "grooves", we cannot intelligently decide whether or how to reshape them. For Seventh-day Adventists, who know we "have nothing to fear except as we shall forget", the past is an important component of the roadmap to the future.

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[135] Russell F. Weigley, *The American way of war: A history of United States military strategy and policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977) p. xx.