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Item Type	Article
Authors	Hanks Harwood, Ginger;G. Beem, Beverly
Publisher	Andrews University
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Download date	2026-09-17 00:27:29
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/237063

“IT WAS MARY THAT FIRST PREACHED A RISEN JESUS”: EARLY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS TO WOMEN AS PUBLIC SPIRITUAL LEADERS¹

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In 1818, even as the North American Second Great Awakening was winding down to a close, New England farmer William Miller reached a conclusion that would revive flagging religious enthusiasm: according to his study of Scripture, Jesus would return in approximately twenty-five years.² Although Miller was content to share his findings in a piecemeal way with local church groups as he received invitations from interested parties who had heard of his interpretation of the prophecies, the limited and informal promulgation of his ideas changed abruptly after he met noted social-reform leader Joshua Himes in Boston late in 1839.³ Himes organized a major campaign to publish the news broadly, and the “Millerite” movement was born. The interest of theologians, clergy, and lay people was piqued and hundreds of thousands embraced the doctrine of the “Advent Near” as the projected time drew close.⁴ When Christ did not return on October 22, 1844, the date calculated by Advent lecturer Samuel Snow and accepted by prominent movement leaders, the crowds abandoned the movement.

In the months that followed, those who remained were fragmented and

¹The authors wish to acknowledge with thanks the generosity and support of the Faculty Grants Committees of Walla Walla University, College Place, Washington, and the School of Religion of La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

²A number of excellent studies review the profile and career of William Miller and the millennial movement he started, beginning with Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller: Generally Known as a Lecturer on the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853). David L. Rowe provides a helpful bibliographic essay in his work, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1850* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 165-176.

³George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 70-92.

⁴Estimates of numbers of people who participated in the movement vary widely. George R. Knight notes that “*The Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* put the figure at 150,000 to 200,000” (*Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* [Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993], 213), while historian Whitney Cross estimated that in addition to those who left their churches or were counted as recognized Millerites, there were “a million or more of their fellows [who] were skeptically expectant” (*Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1820-60* [Ithaca: Cornell University, 1950], 287).

uncertain as to which parts of their Advent expectations and exegetical methodology they should retain. Splinter groups formed around various interpretations of where their reading of prophecy had failed.⁵ During this period, respected Millerite leader Joseph Bates began to form a coalition of sabbatarian Adventists. Although most of the remaining Millerite leaders were more interested in sustaining the belief in the Advent Near than exploring this new theological proposition, Bates worked tirelessly to promote and secure this new branch of the Advent movement. While he successfully persuaded certain prominent Millerites to join the small circle of sabbatarian believers, one of his most significant additions was a young couple, James and Ellen (Gould Harmon) White. In James White,⁶ the group gained a dedicated preacher and worker who would take on the monumental responsibility of creating, editing, and operating *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, the nerve center and official voice of the group. Until his death in 1881, White, who played a major role in shaping the sabbatarian Adventist movement, contributed significantly to the group's growth and personality, as well as its theological, organizational, and financial dynamics.

Ellen White, the product of a pious Methodist household where spiritual discipline and personal connection with God were conscientiously cultivated, was equally committed to spreading the message of the Advent Near. Religiously sensitive from childhood, she had received a vision shortly after the Great Disappointment in which she saw the Advent people led by Jesus along a steep and narrow path headed for heaven. In a subsequent vision, she received the mandate to share her vision for the comfort and clarity of the struggling Adventists. Initially assisted in her task by her family who drove her to meet with scattered bands, she recited her vision where she could. After her marriage, she traveled and preached alongside James and other Advent "messengers," receiving additional visions and communications from God for group (and individual) encouragement and growth. She brought to the fledgling movement assurance of God's presence and sanction through her ongoing mystical experiences.

In the years that followed, Ellen White was repeatedly confronted by social prejudice against women in nineteenth-century public ministry. Despite the evangelistic success of a number of women who preached the Advent Near fearlessly, reactions to women's preaching were frequently hostile. Many members questioned whether Scripture allowed women to speak publicly where men were present, however positive the results. Ellen White's gifts and practices were problematic to many who had been steeped in the general social and religious traditions of the period and believed that only men should exercise the full range of spiritual gifts in the church setting. The social obstacles to the practice of her spiritual gift might have been overwhelming had she not received her husband's full assistance.

Despite general social trends forbidding women to "speak" publicly, it is not

⁵Rowe, 141-149.

⁶Hereafter, James White will be referred to simply as White; his wife will be referred to as Ellen White.

surprising that White and the Millerite Movement allowed women to preach. Several Millerite leaders, such as Himes and Joseph Bates (and many of the individuals who formed the nucleus of the sabbatarian Adventist movement) were from the Christian Connection Church, a communion that recognized God's call to women, as well as men, to preach. White shared the Christian Connection's understanding that all individuals should exercise the full range of spiritual gifts that God had given them. He would remain an outspoken champion for women's full participation in religious gatherings until his death.

While Bates's sabbatarian branch of the Advent Near movement succeeded in gathering a gradually expanding core of adherents still looking for the imminent return of Christ, the work of organizing the traveling evangelists, preparing material for distribution, communicating with the scattered believers, and fund-raising for new projects grew exponentially. Although the sabbatarian Adventists were linked together by their common hope and occasional fellowship opportunities, they were not a formally organized or legally recognized entity. There were several drawbacks to the unincorporated state, including the inability to own property as a group.

White, with the group's printing press in his possession, was well aware of the potential legal problems that could arise if he were to die unexpectedly. He argued vociferously for several years that the movement needed to take a name and legally incorporate.⁷ After a series of legal steps were taken between 1860 and 1863, the scattered and amorphous bands of sabbatarian Adventists were incorporated into a formally recognized organization, and the young church was ready to press ahead in an "ordered" and more disciplined fashion.⁸ The

⁷For a helpful review of the discussion of "church order" and White's clearly articulated sentiments concerning formal organization, see Andrew G. Mustard, *James White and SDA Organization: Historical Development, 1844-1881* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1987).

⁸Joseph Bates also pressed for organization of the church and the restoration of what was termed "Gospel order." White, working as he did at the *Review* and functioning as the *de facto* superintendent of ministry, was regularly faced with the dysfunctional aspects of their amorphous movement: problems of property ownership and regulation; transfers in church membership (including of those who had been removed from communion in a particular congregation); and the control, assignment, and payment of ministers. These issues appear and are argued through in a series of articles in the 1850s and early 1860s. White's general level of frustration with those who were resisting the move in 1860 appeared at the end of a lengthy article, "The Loud Voice of the Third Angel," *Review and Herald*, April 26, 1860, 177-178. He noted: "The work of Bible union is well begun among us, and is progressing gloriously. Thank God for a religion that will convert both heads and hearts, so that we may be perfectly united in mind, judgment and spirit. Those who are seeking for perfect union on Bible truth are gathering with Christ, and preparing for the loud voice of the third angel. Those who are stupid to the subject are in danger, while those disposed to act independently of the church please Satan, wound their brethren, and are preparing for a fall. J.W." For a general overview of the situation, see George R. Knight, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 28-47.

church was, White concluded, "left to move forward." Rather than being restricted solely to models of organization and practices outlined in Scripture, "all means which, according to sound judgment, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations, should be employed."⁹ White was anxious to establish the church on secure legal, financial, and organizational footing by providing the necessary structure and authority to create a system that would facilitate mission and bring cohesion to the scattered Adventist bands. Additionally, he wanted to be certain that the group was shielded from assault by "self-called, tobacco-eating, gift-hating preachers," individuals who claimed to be Adventist ministers yet undermined the believers' confidence in God's message and messengers.¹⁰ Some of these devourers had a particular problem with women exercising their spiritual gifts.

By the time the church formally organized in 1863, the Adventist understanding of group mission had expanded from encouraging the disappointed to a more generalized spreading of what they called the "Third Angel's Message."¹¹ As the official ministry was being licensed and appointments assigned at annual conference sessions, the church was seriously considering ways to sustain its full-time workers in a systematic manner.¹² Of the several great challenges the young church faced, none appeared greater than that of providing relief to the few established workers, many of whom were on the verge of collapse from overwork.¹³ "What Shall Be Done? Laborers Wanted" was only one

⁹James White, "Making Us A Name," *Review and Herald*, April 26, 1860, 180. While other leading Adventists continued to insist that the church could only do what they found commanded or modeled in Scripture, by 1859 James White had moved to arguing that the group "should not be afraid of that system which is not opposed by the Bible, and is approved by sound sense" ("Yearly Meetings," *Review and Herald*, July 21, 1859, 68).

¹⁰James White, "Organization," *Review and Herald*, September 30, 1862, 140. The lack of official organization had created confusion in certain places over who represented the group and who did not. J. N. Loughborough's experience in Otsego, Michigan, provides a case in point. In his report on meetings in the area, he included the following notation: "Eld. Cranmer, who had been preaching what *he* calls the Third Angel's Message in Otsego and vicinity, has picked up those that wished to rebel against the body" ("Meetings in Otsego, Monterey and Wright, Mich.," *Review and Herald*, February 3, 1859, 85).

¹¹For a general overview of this process, see Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1990); see esp. "Worldwide Outreach, 1868-1885," 130-145.

¹²It is important to remember that tithing was adopted as an Adventist practice during the General Conference Session of 1876. For a record of that action, see U. Smith, "Special Session of the General Conference," *Review and Herald*, April 6, 1876, 108.

¹³As Gerald Wheeler noted: "Poor health and sudden death were a constant litany in the lives of the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers" (*James White: Innovator and Overcomer* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003], 154). Exhausted from stress and overwork, discouraged and threatened, several of the leading pioneers were almost to the point of giving up the ministry. White suffered a major stroke in 1865 that took him months to

of many articles with the same essential message: "From all parts of the country the Macedonian call is heard, 'Come over and help us.'"¹⁴ The responsibility for evangelism needed to be transferred to a larger host of messengers.

Calls for workers were frequent and gender-inclusive, as every person's effort was needed to accomplish the enlarged mission. White announced in an 1870 article, "There are a hundred young men and young women who should attend a thorough course of lectures at Battle Creek immediately after our General Conference, to qualify them to teach the word to others."¹⁵ Even more pointed was an 1873 article on upcoming ministerial lectures, where the description of the proposed lectures was followed by a challenging appeal to women, as well as men. It read:

We earnestly call the attention of our young men and women of inquiring minds to this subject. Is it not time to recognize the claims of God upon you? When are we going to realize that a world is to be warned of its approaching doom? Will your skirts be clear of the blood of souls if you neglect opportunities for proper preparation to labor in the cause of God?¹⁶

Women, valued as collaborators in the cause, were invited repeatedly to prepare themselves for ministry by attending the new set of lectures designed to equip ministers to labor more effectively.¹⁷ Other announcements of the ministerial lectures, which were considered the interim method of training young ministers until a school could be opened at Battle Creek, also made it clear that the training was available for women. In fact, in order to facilitate women's enrollment, women were offered a significant discount on the course (they paid \$3.00, whereas men paid \$5.00) in recognition of their generally more limited access to financial resources.¹⁸ The article, "What Shall Be Done?

recover from. Several other leaders, including Ellen White, were not far behind him in general debilitation.

¹⁴"What Shall Be Done? Laborers Wanted," *Review and Herald*, December 12, 1871, 204.

¹⁵James White, "The Future," *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1870, 32.

¹⁶General Conference Committee, "Ministerial Lectures," *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1873, 117.

¹⁷An example of the many and various forms assumed by these calls to service appeared in an article by Francis Gould, "For the People Had a Mind to Work," *Review and Herald*, April 25, 1871, 147. The article asserted that God sends forth qualified individuals to proclaim present truth in every time, including the present age. He noted: "Honest men and women are taking their respective positions to do the work to which the Lord has assigned them," and then proceeded to discuss the absolute significance of every spiritual gift, as "Truth is a unit." The author pressed the point that "The smallest gift in this direction cannot be dispensed with." Not willing that any should excuse themselves on the basis of the meagerness of abilities, Gould added, "I have found by observation, and it is a fact in my experience, that the more we improve upon our gifts, however small they may be, we are adding strength to strength, and gaining a rich experience."

¹⁸[James] W[hite], "Minister's Lecture Association," *Review and Herald*, January 10,

Laborers Wanted,” cited above, is a good example of this call. After sketching the need for workers to carry the gospel message, it noted that “Those who have found pardon of their sins, and are the adopted sons and daughters of the Almighty . . . are debtors. And in no way can they approximate toward paying the debt, only by a life devoted to the work of bringing others to Christ.” The piece then reminded the readers of the scheduled set of lectures designed to train preachers: “And again we call the attention of our people to the subject of brief courses of instruction in the present truth, and the best methods of teaching it, for the benefit of those young men and young women who feel that the grace of God has made them debtors to sinners, and that they must devote themselves to the last message of mercy to the world.”¹⁹ On May 19, 1874, the *Review* featured a short article “Who Shall Preach?” urging all members to take up their responsibilities as preachers of the gospel. Pressing the soul-winning obligation of all Christians, the author challenged the reader to “Let each one proclaim the message, so that all may hear; for how can they hear without a preacher, and how can they preach unless they be sent?” While recognizing that churches ordain certain individuals to ministry, the author directed the readers’ attention to a larger reality, “the Heaven-ordained ministry of *all* Christ’s disciples.” The author explicitly included women among those so ordained and obligated to preach: “[L]et it be done by all sorts of instrumentalities, young or old, men, women, or children.” He added: “The Head of the church would fain call into the field a great many more of those preachers, who, like those scattered men and women in the early days of Christianity, went everywhere preaching the word.” The article closed with the reminder that “we are our brother’s keepers,” prompting believers to take up their duties to preach.²⁰

Although Protestant churches were becoming increasingly sensitized and polarized on the issue of women’s “place” in the church, dividing themselves into liberal and conservative camps on the issue, the pages of the *Review* continued to report women’s evangelistic labors and successes and encouraged women to move into active and visible roles within church life. In 1871, the *Review* editors included “Women—Social Devotions,”²¹ a small but interesting article inserted after reports on the progress of the work submitted by stalwarts such as J. N. Loughborough and Bates. The bulk of the piece was a statement that Henry Ward Beecher, one of the most renowned and prestigious nineteenth-century American ministers, discussed “Woman’s Work in the Church” during a Congregational Conference. Beecher, while openly admitting that “I know I go against the Puritan fathers, whom I revere, but do not feel bound to follow blindly,” went on record for the inclusion of women in the formal functions (e.g., prayer) of church services. Drawing from his own experience of his stepmother’s powerful spiritual

1870, 32.

¹⁹“What Shall Be Done? Laborers Wanted,” 205.

²⁰“Who Shall Preach?” *Review and Herald*, May 19, 1874, 178.

²¹“Women—Social Devotions,” *Review and Herald*, May 23, 1871, 183.

efficacy in prayer, he deduced that the Congregational Church's stance against women's participation in worship services functioned to "exclude those who are adapted by God for it." He succinctly summarized his conclusion on the controversy raging in American Christianity at the time concerning women's roles in public space: "We shall never have a church in its full power until the women take part in the devotional meetings." While this piece may be viewed as a simple reporting of conversations in other denominations, women believers found themselves reminded of the relationship between their full participation in church life and the triumph of God's kingdom.

The practice of encouraging women to exercise the full range of their spiritual gifts excluded Adventists from the religious circles of those who viewed their own practice of restricting the public roles of women as a mark of fidelity to Scripture and God. In August of 1868, M. W. Howard wrote an article for the *Review* to express his own ruminations on the religious debate on the "place" of women in the church and the stance of the "conservatives" against women's "liberty."²² Thinking particularly about Ellen White and the negative response being accorded to her because of her gender, Howard was moved to try to harmonize her role with Scripture. As he noted, "And thus as I reflected upon that conservatism which so readily takes fright at the prominence accorded to a woman, I was convinced that the conservatism should be in another direction." By examining the scriptural record of women's leadership and teaching in the early church, he was convinced that conservative Christians (i.e., those who follow scriptural teaching and practice) must welcome the labors and messages of women.

In his short article, "Woman as a Co-Worker," Howard reviewed the accounts of Paul's ministry in Acts 18:18ff and Rom 16:3, 12 in order to remind readers that Paul recognized women as coworkers, traveled with them on missionary journeys, and commended their labors (often by name, as in the case of the "beloved Persis who labored much in the Lord," Rom 16:12). He related Paul's choice to travel with Priscilla and Aquila, and asked rhetorically, "What, Paul leave the brethren and take with him as traveling laborers a man and his wife? Yes, for so the sacred record stands." He also cited the experience of Apollo, who, though "fervent in spirit," had an incomplete knowledge of the gospel until Aquila and Priscilla "expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly." He declared, "Here is the simple record. Nor do we glean from what follows that this servant of God, this minister of the gospel, felt any depreciation of his self-esteem, or was held in less repute by the brethren for having been 'instructed in the way of the Lord more perfectly' by such instructors." These narratives of women's activity in the early Christian experience led him to conclude that the call of a woman to leadership "is not so far aside from the order of God's original appointments as we at first supposed." Thus his article served in the *Review* as a challenge to those who would claim that fidelity to the scriptural model prevented their acceptance of

²²M. W. Howard, "Woman as a Co-Worker," *Review and Herald*, August 18, 1868, 133.

women's spiritual gifts: Scripture records that women have always been coworkers with men in gospel labor.

An "Address and Appeal" by Ellen White

In addition to the generalized appeals for all individuals to commit their lives to service and utilize their spiritual gifts for the building up of the church, some articles focused specifically on recruiting women to various arenas of mission. Ellen White, in one of the relatively few articles she published in the *Review* during this period, made a special appeal to women to accept the call to the preaching ministry.²³ An impassioned plea for gospel workers,²⁴ the article urged believing women to look beyond their own discomfort with public ministry to the needs of the perishing. Stating her position clearly from the opening sentences, she began with the statement, "Women can be the instruments of righteousness, rendering holy service. It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus." Underscoring Jesus' mission to redeem the lost, and that there is "no holier work than this," Ellen White declared, "If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth. The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth."

Challenging women who were withholding their spiritual gifts for ministry, whether from fear of potential censure and social disgrace for laboring out of women's traditionally approved sphere ("If this work was not beneath the dignity of the world's Redeemer, the Creator of worlds, should it be considered too humiliating for sinful mortals?"), or other concerns, Ellen White utilized the well-known NT metaphor based on Jesus' parables of laborers in the vineyard to call them to action: "The Lord of the vineyard is saying to many women who are now doing nothing, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?' Zealous and continued diligence in our sisters toiling for the spread of the truth would be wholly successful, and would astonish us with its results." Thus, in the opening paragraph of her appeal for workers, Ellen White established the appropriateness and necessity of women's faithfulness to public aspects of ministry: God's redemptive work needed women's preaching labors.

This article, which characterized faithful Christians "as co-laborers with the Redeemer of the world," made the connection between the work for others and individual spiritual development.²⁵ Ellen White argued that spiritual growth

²³E[llen] G. White, "Address and Appeal, Setting Forth the Importance of Missionary Work," *Review and Herald*, January 2, 1879, 1-2.

²⁴Ibid. White noted that "I wish I could speak words to men and women which would nerve them to diligent action. The moments now granted us to work are few. We are standing upon the very borders of the eternal world."

²⁵Ibid. White stated: "If God and Christ and angels rejoice when even one sinner repents and becomes obedient to Christ, should not man be imbued with the same spirit, and work for time and for eternity with persevering effort to save, not only his own soul, but the souls of others? If you work in this direction with whole-hearted interest as the

requires willingness to "bear the yoke of Christ," to utilize gifts given for the world's salvation. With every ability and "all their powers a willing sacrifice to him," believers must be "faithful to duty, ready for every good work," despite discouragements. She noted that Christian growth occurs "amid strangers to God, amid scoffing, subject to ridicule." Her words had particular meaning for women in a time when preaching automatically excluded them from general social approval and exposed them to criticism and disparagement. The *Appeal's* message was clear: women who desired to progress toward sanctification and to receive divine approval must be willing to utilize their spiritual gifts despite the cost. As she observed, it is the "faithful sower of the seed [who] will hear the commendation of the Master, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant, . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'"

The general appeals to women to enter public evangelism had to counter both the systematic socialization of women to accept a passive (silenced) role in public religious gatherings and the heightened hostility generated toward women preachers and teachers by the controversy raging among Christians in the late nineteenth century. In a series of articles, George I. Butler, a faithful and conservative leader who served twice as president of the church, asked and answered the question concerning whether or not visions and prophecy have been "manifested among Seventh-day Adventists," and then explored the objections certain people posed to accepting them.²⁶ A careful examination of Scripture relating to the "end-times," its fulfillment in his contemporary era, and the Adventist Church's experience with the fulfillment of the promises found in Joel and Acts ("I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy") were ultimately focused on the gifts given to the church through Ellen White. Butler provided information and testimony to establish the verity and efficacy of her gifts for the church, and then addressed the resistance to Ellen White that stemmed from issues with her gender. Butler was candid on this point: "Some object to these visions because they are given to a woman. They would not think them so objectionable if they came to a man. In reply we would say, It is for God to choose his own agents." Butler then reminded the readers that "He has in ages past often chosen women in this capacity," and listed women prophets in the biblical record. Ending his argument with Joel's promise ("Your daughters shall prophesy in the last days.' Acts 2:17"), he concluded, "So this objection is of no force."

Women in Public Ministry: Answers to Objections

While the early *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* list women who held ministerial licenses (such as Sarah Hallock Lindsey, Ellen S. Edmonds Lane, Julia Owen,

followers of Christ, discharging every duty, improving every opportunity, your own souls will be gradually settling into the mold of a perfect Christian." On the other hand, "hundreds are dying a spiritual death of inaction because they will not work at all."

²⁶Geo[rge] I. Butler, "Visions and Prophecy—Have They Been Manifested Among Seventh-day Adventists?" May 19, 1874, 181; June 9, 1874, 201-202.

Hattie Enoch, and Anna M. Johnson), demonstrating that women were officially sanctioned ministers/evangelists for the church during this era, rapid church growth meant that there was a constant supply of new members for whom the idea of women in ministry seemed surprising, strange, or even inconsistent for a conservative, Scripture-honoring church. The *Review* periodically featured articles answering the objections that were posed to women's full participation in the ministry of the church.²⁷ This section reviews the articles addressing the propriety of women's participation in the speaking and teaching ministries of the church between the formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863 and 1881, an important year in Adventist history on several accounts, two of which are germane to this topic. First, respected church leader James White, who consistently promoted the recognition of women's spiritual gifts and call to ministry, died, eliminating his advocacy on the issue.²⁸ The second point of interest was the introduction of a resolution at the General Conference designed to establish the propriety of ordination for women in ministry.²⁹ Church leaders were concerned about the quality of ministry (and ministers) and were working to create a better educated and more carefully screened clergy. The resolution, which was referred to the General Conference Committee for follow-up after discussion, indicates interest in moving women licentiates (ministers examined and granted a ministerial credential) through the same process that was being regularized and established for men in ministry.

The articles that appeared in the paper, of which some pieces were penned specifically for *Review* readers and others were reprints selected from other Christian periodicals, outlined the church's response to arguments that Scripture forbids women's public-speaking ministry. During this period, the *Review* ran seven articles focused on refuting the misuse of specific Pauline

²⁷For a fuller discussion of this point, see Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood, "Your Daughters Shall Prophesy": James White, Uriah Smith, and the 'Triumphant Vindication of the Right of the Sisters' to Preach," *AUSS* 43 (2005): 41-58.

²⁸Joseph Bates, who was also a supporter of women's exercise of their spiritual gifts, had passed away in 1872. Of the three individuals usually considered the church founders, this left only Ellen White.

²⁹Minutes of the 1881 General Conference session read in part as follows: "Fifth Meeting, Dec. 5, 10 A.M. . . . *Resolved*, 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.

"*Resolved*, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.

"This was discussed by J. O. Corliss, A. C. Bordeau, E. R. Jones, D. H. Lamson, W. H. Littlejohn, A. S. Hutchins, D. M. Canright, and J. N. Loughborough, and referred to the General Conference Committee" ("General Conference-Business Proceedings [Continued]," *Review and Herald*, December 20, 1881, 392).

verses to exclude women from preaching or teaching ministries. The arguments presented in these articles were consistent with the stance taken before formal church organization and did not present a change in either exegesis or hermeneutics. They maintained the position that both women and men receive and exercise spiritual gifts in and for the church. The occasional nature of these pieces reflects the settled practice of the church on this issue, the continued need to present the denomination's position for new believers, and the need to deflect the criticisms that were being presented by religious "conservatives."³⁰ The next section provides a brief overview of each of the major articles presented to deal with this issue.

"Shall Women Speak in the Church?"

The first article addressing the Pauline injunction to silence to appear in the *Review* after formal church organization was a piece in 1871 selected from the Free Will Baptist journal, *Morning Star*.³¹ In this article, the author examined the Pauline restriction on women in the church, noting its employment among various Christian communities: "Among some Christian sects it is considered disorderly for women to speak or pray in a public assembly. Of course they quote 1 Cor. 14:34, 35, as deciding the case." In subsequent paragraphs, the author developed his thesis that the way these Christian groups were using Pauline texts to exclude women from spiritual leadership was misinformed and illogical, and ultimately a violation of the gospel.

In the discussion that follows, the author looked at the implications of taking the cited verses as "a general law." His presentation insisted that readers move from a casual citation of the text to settle the issue to a careful consideration of what such a stance would signify for church life. He contended that acceptance of the global application of 1 Cor 14:34-35 would mean, "It is forbidden to a woman to speak, pray, or sing, in public, for silence is commanded. It is as much a violation of this scripture to exhort in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, as to exhort in prose and to pray." He argued that as no one would deny women those forms of speech, forbidding other forms of speech creates a state of inconsistency in church proceedings. Assuming that Scripture would not set up an illogical and contradictory formula for church assemblies, he concluded that the current inconsistent

³⁰The need for the periodic review of the established stance on women in ministry was at least in part a function and sign of Adventism's evangelistic success. The church was growing rapidly. While there were 3,500 members when the church was organized in 1863, and 4,320 in 1867, the 1870s saw the number expand to 5,400 and enrollment had reached 14,984 by the end of the 1880s. The growth continued exponentially in the 1890s (27,031), while the first decade of the new century would see membership top 63,000. Cf. George Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 132. Adventist historian Emmet K. VandeVere referred to this era as the years of expansion ("Years of Expansion: 1865-1885," in *Adventism in America*, ed. Gary Land (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 66-94.

³¹"Shall Women Speak in the Church?" *The Review and Herald*, March 14, 1871, 99.

state experienced in those groups forbidding women's public speaking originates from a misunderstanding of the text, stemming from improper interpretation.

The bulk of the article was devoted to answering the question, "Shall women speak in the church?" through the use of the methods standard in Adventist biblical hermeneutics: looking at specific texts in the historical context, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and examining general biblical practices that throw light upon the issue. The author first highlighted the particular context of Paul's statement in the church of Corinth: the struggle against disorderly services and confusion in the use of the gift of tongues. He noted that this situation is not the norm in all churches and asserted that "Because it is very improper for women to take part in such meetings as they had at Corinth, it does not follow that they may not take part in orderly religious meetings." Relating this freedom to speak with the often-quoted silence passage of 1 Tim 2:11-12, where women are "commanded to learn in silence, and forbidden to teach, or usurp authority over the men," he contended that this "cannot mean absolute silence, but the opposite of loquacity, impertinence, arrogance." Again, the author painted a picture of the context and concluded that "Women who usurp authority over men, and become dictatorial in public assemblies, are very much out of place; but that does not prove it improper to speak in a proper manner." He was unambiguous: "That these passages do not forbid a modest, orderly utterance of their views, hopes and joys, in religious meetings, is evident from the fact that the Scriptures indorse and commend such acts." He directly challenged those who restrict women's roles at church, citing the passage in 1 Cor 11:5, where instructions are given that "women who pray and prophesy in public should follow the custom of society, and have their heads covered. If it was wrong for them to speak or pray in public, why give these directions? The only difference made between men and women, is that men are to uncover their heads, and women are to cover theirs, when they speak or pray."

In his efforts to answer the question credibly, the author set the "silencing" texts beside the rest of Paul's teachings and harmonized these verses with other Scripture, including those that describe women's spiritual leadership. He insisted that proper interpretation of Paul's instructions must be in harmony with the words of the prophets, including Joel's prophecy that "sons and daughters' should both prophesy, or exhort, as the word means; and Peter, Acts 2:17, so applies it. It is not likely that Paul's words conflict with this." He ended his overview by calling the readers' attention to the gospel record that Philip had four daughters "that were exhorters, and so noted and useful were their services, that the inspired writer was moved to mention them, that all other sisters having the same gifts might be encouraged to exercise them in the same way." He closed with an observation that could serve as a grave warning to churches that persisted in their practice of silencing women: "When women are forbidden to speak for Christ, the spirit of the gospel is violated."

I. Fetterhoof: "Women Laboring in Public"

In 1871, the August 8 issue of the *Review* featured a forceful and incisive article on the propriety of women laboring in public ministry taken from the Free Methodist publication, *The Earnest Christian*.³² The author, I. Fetterhoof, presented the debated question and his thesis in his opening sentences: "Ought women to take a part in public worship? to pray and exhort, encourage others to love and serve God? We believe it is not only their privilege, but their duty, so to do." The remainder of the article is his reasoned defense of that position, utilizing a question-and-answer format to organize his points.

Once he had asserted that it is women's duty to publicly labor for God, Fetterhoof presented a survey of biblical history, examining the roles women played in both the OT and NT. He pointed out that in the Hebrew Scriptures, women were acknowledged as prophetesses, and "took part in the worship of God, and gave counsel as God directed them." Deborah, a prophetess and judge, had "dominion over the mighty." Miriam, Huldah, and Anna are cited as women whom God used to communicate his word: "Thus we see that under the old dispensation God gave of his Spirit to women, and made prophetesses of them, and directed them how to speak, and God's will was made known to men through them, and God was honored. And truly God doth respect women as much under the gospel as he did under the law."

Turning to the NT, Fetterhoof examined the work performed by various women in the early Christian movement. He noted that the daughters of Philip "were called prophetesses. Acts 21:9. They were teachers in the church. So says Dr. Clarke," he wrote, citing the foremost biblical commentary of the day to add further credibility to his argument.³³ He assessed the situation, noting: "Hence we see that God in giving his Holy Spirit, gave it equally to females as well as males, and said they should prophesy."

Fetterhoof then drew the readers' attention to the women who worked with Paul: "What did those women do, of whom Paul said that they labored with him in the gospel? How could they have labored with him in the gospel, if they did not join in the same work that he was engaged in, that is, urging the people to leave their sins, and receive Christ?" He argued that by knowing the work that Paul did, we can know something of the work that these women, his coworkers, did. Emphasizing that there were numerous women in this public ministry, Fetterhoof cited them by name for effect: "Phebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Euodias, Syntyche, and others." This information is important for the reader because "We learn from this that Christian women, as well as men, labored in the ministry of the word. In those times of simplicity, all persons, whether men

³²I. Fetterhoof, "Women Laboring in Public," *The Review and Herald*, August 8, 1871, 58-59.

³³Adam Clarke, *Commentary and Critical Notes: The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments: The Texts Printed from the Most Correct Copies of the Present Authorized Translation, Including the Marginal Readings and Parallel Texts, with a Commentary and Critical Notes* (Cincinnati, OH: Applegate & Co., 1856).

or women, who had received the knowledge of the truth, believed it to be their duty to make known to others the word of salvation, and it is the duty of the preacher to teach, exhort, edify, and comfort."

In this context of women's active involvement in God's work with Paul, Fetterhoof examined Paul's commands to keep silent and concluded that this injunction was directed against speaking in unknown tongues and usurping authority over men and did not include praying or prophesying (teaching and preaching). In his estimation, logic precludes such an application as would countermand Paul's instructions to women concerning proper decorum when praying and prophesying. "Would Paul contradict himself thus?" he asked, reminding the reader of Paul's declaration, "'You may all prophesy,' verse 31." Lest there be a lingering doubt, he supplied the answer, a simple but definitive, "No."

Fetterhoof closed his argument against those who would silence women in the church with an appeal to experience. He reflected: "Often have we seen the power of God manifested, under the pious labor and influence of holy women. . . . They have their influence, and may do good." This reflection on the work that women utilizing their spiritual gifts in public ministry can do for God led him to conclude, "Oh! that all, male and female, that have experienced the power of the Holy Ghost in their souls, would stand up for the Redeemer's cause, in the church, in the streets, in the social circle, yes, everywhere."

M. E. Cornell: "Woodland, Cal."

Merritt Cornell's missionary report on his evangelistic efforts in California transitions quickly from an account of success ("the cause here seems now to be established upon a firmer basis, and the prospect is bright") to a formal complaint against women who are reluctant to embrace their responsibilities for speaking publicly.³⁴ As he noted: "One of the greatest drawbacks here has been the prevailing idea that women ought not to speak in social meetings. Many seem more than willing to have it so—to believe the sentiment. Being unused to speaking, they regard it as a great cross." He was not willing to accept their tradition-based passivity, correcting their notions by referencing the biblical model. Reflecting the Adventist understanding of the matter, he remarked: "But the Scriptures seem clear on the point. Not one word in the whole Bible is ever found with which to oppose it, except in the writings of the apostle Paul. And a careful comparison of all Paul's statements on the subject shows that he had reference only to unbecoming conduct of women in the public assembly, such as contradicting, altercating, and assuming authority over men in business meetings of the church." To add authority to his point, Cornell supplied a quote from Clarke, the respected biblical scholar and commentator noted above, which argued that Paul's injunction was aimed against women's "'questioning, finding fault, disputing,'" and "'dictating in assemblies,'" not their speaking or praying.

Cornell contended that instructions that are given to the church generally

³⁴M. E. Cornell, "Wood, Cal." *Review and Herald*, June 3, 1873, 198.

(such as to assemble together and to exhort each other) apply to the sisters as well as the brothers, and warns that neglecting these directives is done at individual peril: "Paul speaks of the 'whole church,' being assembled in one place and says, '*Ye may all prophesy*, one by one, &c.' Now if the 'whole church' embraces the sisters, then 'Ye may all speak,' means the sisters also." Isolated phrases from Paul must not be used to negate clear testimony given for the conduct of assembled believers. Thus "We must not wrest the words of Paul, for we read that some will do so to their own destruction. See 2 Pet. 3:15, 16."

The article ends with encouragement to the sisters to abandon their reluctance to take up their responsibilities, for "with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation." He bade them to "*Fear not*, go forward, and not be found among the 'fearful' at last." He reminded the reader of Malachi's words, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it." Mal. 3:16." Challenging their total commitment to God, Cornell asked: "Do these timid, trembling sisters fear the Lord? Then may they speak often, and the Lord will hearken and bless them. Come right along, ye trembling souls; take up this cross also." Having stated his complaint and made his case against the misuse of Paul that would limit the witness of women in the churches, he left the women who must venture into public roles with the promise, "God will strengthen and help you."

John Nevins Andrews: "May Women Speak in Meeting?"

In 1879, Adventism's premier scholar, John Nevins Andrews, posted a refutation to those who wished to limit the participation of women in church gatherings based on Pauline texts, noting that 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2 are the two "principal passages cited" to make the case.³⁵ Andrews dismissed the arguments summarily: "But a careful study of the books of Corinthians shows that the passage first referred to can have no such application."

Andrews's article modeled the Adventist view of the proper method of biblical interpretation. He began with a sketch of the church in Corinth, establishing chapter by chapter the disorder and confusion that characterized the situation. The disorder extended to the assembled meeting, where "the women threw everything into confusion by talking among themselves, and acting with such indecorum as to be a matter of shame to them." He alerted the reader of the need to view any particular instruction in context and avoid universalizing directives given to remedy a particular circumstance: "So that what the apostle says to women in such a church as this, and in such a state of things, is not to be taken as directions to all Christian women in other churches and in other times, when and where such disorders do not exist."

The work continued with a comparison of the passage with and against other Scriptures touching the same topic. He cited Paul's instruction for women to

³⁵J. N. A[ndrews], "May Women Speak in Meeting?" *Review and Herald*, January 2, 1879, 1.

cover their heads when praying or prophesying (1 Cor 11:5) as “positive proof” that Paul was not against women’s full participation in worship services. Using Paul’s definition of prophesying from 1 Cor 14:3 (“he that prophesieth speaketh unto men, to edification, exhortation, and comfort”), he noted that “It was not a shame for women to do this work. Therefore Paul did not refer to such acts when he said, ‘It is a shame for women to speak in the church.’”

Andrews acknowledged the Timothy passage as “Paul’s *general* rule with regard to women as public teachers,” but immediately pressed the readers’ attention to other pertinent passages, including Pauline texts acknowledging women as gospel workers and church leaders. He supplied a weight of biblical evidence to demonstrate that both Testaments witness to God’s use of women in his work and referred his readers back to the multitude of texts naming women at work for God in various public capacities and responsibilities. Far from taking the position that women are second-class instruments utilized when there are no men willing to accept a task, Andrews noted that “In the time of Jeremiah, Huldah was a prophetess consulted instead of Jeremiah himself.”

For Andrews, who could read the Bible in seven languages, the matter was clear and obvious to any who would study Scripture for the purpose of seeking truth. The record of God’s calling and employment of women from Miriam to Priscilla testified to God’s will. He closed his argument by referring the reader back to Paul, the source of the “principal passages” being used to exclude women as an entrée into rethinking their stance on women’s role: “Paul, in Romans 10:10, says, ‘With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation:’ and this must apply to women equally with men.”

James White: “Women in the Church”

In 1879, White set forth a lengthy exposition on the question of the role of women in the work of God.³⁶ Opening with the Corinthian text stating that women should keep silence in the churches (1 Cor 14:34-35), White considered the meaning of this text set against the context of all biblical evidence and teaching on the issue of women’s spiritual roles. The bulk of the article is devoted to instructing the readers in the basic methods of biblical interpretation, the methodology modeled as White wrestled with the interpretation of the Corinthian text.

Immediately following the Corinthian citation, White established his credentials as a religious conservative as he noted that the “only safe and proper rule of Biblical interpretation is to take every passage of the Book of God as meaning what it says, word for word,” unless there is clearly a figure or parable involved. Since this text does not include a figure of speech, “his words should be taken as meaning just what they say.” He did not allow the examination of the matter to end there, however, pointing out that other texts in Paul “speak as plainly of the position of woman in the house and work of God as this one

³⁶James White, “Women in the Church,” *Review and Herald*, May 29, 1879, 172.

does. And in order to arrive at the truth of God on this subject, a position must be found that will harmonize all the texts"—this is the work of the serious biblical scholar or student. He added: "The word of God is not 'yea and nay,' but yea and amen, to the glory of its divine Author."

Having established the necessity of comparing all passages on a subject, White then turned to another step in the process: the exploration of the context of the specific verse under scrutiny. He provided an overview of Paul's intentions in the fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, "correcting existing errors and establishing order" in a situation where believers were exercising their spiritual gifts of prophecy and tongues in open assembly. At that point in the article, he related the chaotic Corinthian context with its need for regulation to what was then a contemporary illustration of religion that shocked and repelled conservative Christians: the meetings where the "notorious Victoria Woodhull," widely known advocate of free-love, spiritualism, and women's rights, preached principles and practices that diverged radically from acceptable Christian beliefs and mores. The reader could quickly conclude that Paul needed to establish "rules" concerning the behavior of the gifted but undisciplined women of the Corinthian church. He pushed the reader to further examine the context, referring them to other chapters in Corinthians where Paul addresses church conduct. He observed that in Paul's teaching about the proper head attire for both men and women in religious gatherings, "he places men and women side by side in the position and work of teaching and praying in the church of Christ."

Bringing the readers' attention back to the text originally in question, White pressed the readers to ask themselves again what Paul could have meant when he said, "Let your women keep silence in the churches," given what else Paul had said in the same epistle. White stressed the point that Paul cannot mean that "women should take no part in those religious services where he would have both men and women take part in prayer and in prophesying, or teaching the word of God to the people," and submitted to them his own conclusion: Paul must be referring to secular meetings "which can be managed quite as well by the brethren as the sisters." Further, the meaning must consider the entire verse and not just one part of it. Paul's statement continued: "And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." The article then called for a reexamination of the text to see if it could be understood to apply to anything other than a meeting from which a woman had been absent. He asked pointedly why a woman would ask her husband questions about a meeting she attended, as "The woman understands quite as well as her husband, sometimes better, all that is said." Since women not only attended, but had instructions on how to participate appropriately in worship services, these meetings must be the business meetings of the church which women did not ordinarily attend. According to White: "The only view that will harmonize all that the apostle has said of the position and work of Christian women, is that he is giving directions relative to meetings of the church to consider

secular matters." Other interpretations fail the test of common sense and internal coherence, and as he observed: "Consistency, thou art a jewel!"

After examining the command to keep silent in its particular context and harmonizing the passage with the other teachings of Paul to resolve inconsistency, White turned his attention to the role that women played in the history of God's people, demonstrating that God has always used women in leadership positions. He began with the example of Miriam, citing Mic 6:3-4, where God reminded Israel, "I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." He observed: "Here we find a woman occupying a position equal to that of Moses and Aaron, God's chosen servants to lead the millions of Israel from the house of bondage." He then highlighted the texts concerning Deborah to augment the case that God chooses women to lead his people. White revisited the Deborah narrative, emphasizing the point that God chose her—a woman—to receive divine instructions for the community, teach the people, and exercise judgment among them, concluding his presentation of her story with the pointed observation: "She was a judge in Israel. The people went up to her for judgment. A higher position no man has ever occupied."

After pausing to give "honorable mention" to Ruth and Esther, White turned his attention to the prophecy of Joel, and Peter's use of it in Acts, to make the transition from the leadership roles of OT women to those in the NT. His focus, particularly relevant to Adventists, fell upon Joel's picture of the latter days, when the Spirit of God is promised to men and women alike. He observed that "Here, too, women receive the same inspiration from God as men."

White found the fulfillment of Joel's pronouncement not only in the story of the prophetess Anna and the four prophesying daughters of Philip, but also in the list of church workers provided by Paul in Romans. He pointed out that Paul spoke of the women's labors "in the highest terms of commendation."

In many ways, the story of Simeon and Anna, the two prophets who greeted the birth of Christ, were to White a model for the way that men and women have been called to be collaborators in the gospel. He ended the article with a repetition of God's promise to pour out his "Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17) and his own evaluation of the matter: "The Christian age was ushered in with glory. Both men and women enjoyed the inspiration of the hallowed hour, and were teachers of the people. . . . And the dispensation which was ushered in with glory, honored with the labors of holy women, will close with the same honors."

George Starr: "Does Paul Contradict Himself?"

George Starr opened his discussion on the question of the Pauline treatment of women's part in worship services with the citation of the oft-quoted verse, "Let your women keep silence in the churches," from 1 Cor 14:34.³⁷ Significantly, however, rather than beginning with the injunction to silence, as

³⁷Geo[rge] B. Starr, "Does Paul Contradict Himself?" *Review and Herald*, December 16, 1880, 388.

was the general pattern, he connected the verse with its context by first citing the verse immediately preceding it: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (v. 33), thus setting the verse in the larger context of the epistle of which it was a part.

Taking the book as a whole, Starr established several points on the background of the verse to aid the reader in understanding the 1 Cor 14 passage: the "words were written to a people converted from heathenism, and who upon all points of their newly espoused faith were in need of instruction." In addition to being a group without established precedent to guide them when they gathered, they were a group with problems: "the church was in trouble. Chap. 3:1-3, 11:18." He then drew insight from information given in the first seven verses of the fifth chapter, and concluded that "they were retaining in their midst those who should have been disfellowshipped." Moving on to chapter 11, he introduced the question of head coverings during prayer, noting that Paul had been questioned on this, showing that "differences of opinion were entertained among them in reference to it." At this point, Starr stopped to note the significance of the Pauline instructions for women who were praying or prophesying: "In giving this instruction concerning prophesying, the apostle teaches that women were to speak in the meetings, for his own definition of prophesying in chap. 14:3 of the same epistle, is 'He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.'" He further added the testimonies of "the apostle Peter, and the prophet Joel, as quoted by him," citing Acts 2:16-18: "'on my servants and on my hand-maidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy;' *i.e.*, 'speak unto men to edification, exhortation, and comfort.'"

It is after establishing this context and Paul's teaching that women should exercise their spiritual gifts that Starr turned back to "Let your women keep silence" with the observation: "But, in chapter 14:34 occur the offending words first quoted, with reference to women's keeping silence, which, if they apply to *all* meetings, would make the apostle contradict and countermand his own orders in this one epistle." Starr did not believe that the apostle would contradict himself in such a way, as to do so defied logic and rationality, and created a paradox: how could women be silent, and simultaneously exhort and edify the community? He suggested that the answer to the problem lay in remembering the larger discussion at hand: the settlement of the difficulties and divisions that plagued the group, and as "the past chapters had given no instruction as to the part the women should take in the settlement of these difficulties, to let this scripture apply to meetings of this character will supply the needed instruction, and make harmony in his writings." He continued with a warning for the reader: "If the extreme view be taken, that silence in all meetings is enjoined, the epistle to the Corinthians remains to be harmonized on this important subject, not only with itself, but with the letter to the Romans, in which salvation is said to depend upon confession of Christ *with the mouth* (Rom. 10:10), a privilege of which this view would deprive all women." The reader is left to conclude that Paul

could not have meant to refuse women the opportunity for salvation.

Starr did not entertain the notion that the words of 1 Cor 14:34 had no meaning aside from their original application. It was possible that churches might again face situations where men of violent manners and dissenting opinions needed to be brought into submission to God's way of peace or else be dropped from membership, and "if this was written for our profit," then it could be applied to such meetings and leading men could settle the issue. He appears to be satisfied that he has made a strong case that Paul taught the full participation of women in the worship service and did not contradict himself in 1 Cor 14:33, as some would contend. He closed his reflection with a benediction and word to the women disciples to continue their work of public prayer, exhortation, and comfort for the edification of the community: "And may God bless the sisters, as they bear their part in the social meetings, and as they keep silence in meetings of another nature, such as the apostle refers to, should there be any, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

N. J. Bowers: "May Women Publicly Labor
in the Cause of Christ?"

The final article addressing the topic of women's spiritual leadership before White's death appeared in June of 1881.³⁸ The article title and introduction indicate that some were questioning the propriety of Adventist women engaging in public ministry, their concern stemming from the Corinthian text directing women to silence. In a lengthy essay, N. J. Bowers answered the question posed in the title of the article, beginning with the comment: "Some think not, because Paul says...." In the presentation that followed, he addressed the question of Paul's meaning in his apparent command (1 Cor 14:34-35) that women keep silence in the churches, and explained the hermeneutical principles necessary to discover the meaning of this text. Bowers, consistent with the other authors featured in the *Review*, noted the situation created for those who thought this text established the Pauline rule on the role of women: women who publicly labored in the cause of Christ defied biblical instruction. He conceded that this was a legitimate conclusion if these words were read without context and without consideration of other biblical texts and practices: "Standing alone, and severed from their connections and other related scriptures, these statements seem to justify such conclusion; but we must not forget to bring into the investigation what the author of the language has elsewhere said directly or indirectly touching the matter of Christian teaching and Christian labor, and also what the Bible elsewhere instructs us in regard to the question."

Bowers then presented fourteen points that needed to be considered in the investigation of what the Bible had to say "in regard to the question." The points took the reader on a brief overview of the Bible, adding dates to further clarify the historical context, and to demonstrate that "In the past ages of

³⁸N. J. Bowers, "May Women Publicly Labor in the Cause of Christ?" *Review and Herald*, June 14, 1881, 372-373.

inspired history, women have had important parts to act in spiritual matters." These included Miriam, who "held an equal position with Moses and Aaron as leader of Israel"; Deborah, who judged Israel, noting, as White had two years previously,³⁹ that "No man ever occupied a higher position"; Ruth; Esther; Huldah; and Anna, who provided "an instance of public teaching by a woman."

Bowers used the prophecy of Joel as the connector and transition from the OT to what he referred to as "the gospel dispensation." Concerning the prophecy of Joel ("Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy"), he noted that "'Daughters' as well as 'sons' are to prophesy." He expounded on the text:

Paul tells us that "he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." 1 Cor. 14:3. Then the Christian woman has the divine right to speak to men in an edifying and comforting manner. Does any one suppose the apostle would give directions contrary to, and in direct conflict with, the exalted privileges and offices conferred by this prophecy on the "daughters" and the "handmaidens"?

The rhetorical question Bowers posed assumed the harmony of Scripture. He understood Joel, Peter, and Paul as links in the chain of revelation that could not contradict each other. He saw the heritage of women's leadership in the OT continued in an unbroken stream in the NT. His seventh point focused on the four daughters of Philip, whom Paul found "exercising the gift of Christian teaching, and we do not read of his rebuking them for using it. This was A.D. 60, one year after he told the women of Corinth to keep quiet." His points immediately following this observation provide the data demonstrating that the whole career of Paul contraindicated any blanket injunction against women in public ministry. He then reviewed the long list of women who labored with Paul and whom Paul commends for their ministry. Priscilla is listed as one, who with her husband taught Apollos the way of God. "Here," he observed, "we have a learned teacher instructed in the things of God more fully by a woman." He pointed out that Paul commended the women "which labored with me in the gospel," calling them "fellow-laborers whose names are in the book of life." He remarked pointedly that "These were hardly silent in the churches."

In point 10, Bowers moved the argument from a review of Paul's practices to his writings, drawing the attention of the reader to the fact that Paul gave directions to both men and women on how they should dress when praying and prophesying in the church, which indicates that such functions "belong to the women no less than to the men." He then challenged his readers' thinking with a question:

Paul in 1 Cor. 14:23, 24 speaks of "the whole church" coming together, and *all* speaking with tongues, and *all* prophesying. Did *the whole church* consist of men only, or of men and women? Surely of both. Then the women spoke and exhorted as well as the men. The apostle never found fault with this.

Bowers left the readers to draw the logical conclusion for themselves: if Paul did not find fault with it, neither should they.

³⁹James White, "Women in the Church," 172.

It is only after an examination of all the points that Bowers saw as pertinent to the question of appropriate women's leadership that he was ready to go back to the problematic Corinthian text. His earlier work of laying out other Pauline writings prepared the reader to analyze this text as it related to the complete Scripture, including the whole of Paul's writings and practices. The text, given what Bowers demonstrated about the scriptural model of God's inclusive gift and call to service, stands as an anomaly and is presented by Bowers as a puzzle to be solved: What does Paul mean by the statement, "Let your women keep silence in the churches"? The next step in the process is to eliminate false or highly improbable meanings: "From the facts noted above, we may know to a certainty what he does *not* mean. He does not mean that women should take no part in the public services of the Lord's house. That would conflict with his own direction."

Reviewing the texts in Paul that relate to the promised spiritual gifts and their desirability, Bowers affirmed that women and men alike receive the gifts of the Spirit that were to be used to strengthen the NT church: "Paul must not be arrayed against Paul, nor must his direction be so understood as to shut off from individual exercise, or out of the church, the gift of prophecy in the majority of believers." According to Bowers, "He does not mean to forbid any kind of public exercise by which edification, exhortation, and comfort is given to the church." He ended the section with a clear word: "So the language in question can have no reference to the public exercises of prayer, testimony, exhortation, and expounding of the word, on the part of women."

Point 13 introduced Bowers's judgment on the case. The key to grasping what Paul meant lay in understanding the conditions he was addressing: "Paul is correcting wrongs and irregularities that existed in the Corinthian church." The church was threatened with disorder, and "There were times in which it was out of order for the men, even, to speak. (1 Cor. 14:27, 28)." Due to the acrimony and violence of the assembly, they were occasionally ordered to contain themselves and speak only to God: "This was of course not general. So in the case of the sisters. Both prohibitions had a special application only." Bowers referred the reader to the several chapters of 1 Corinthians that record the threat of disorder to the unity and survival of the church, and then looked at the role the women were playing in the turmoil. Bowers strengthened his argument by referring to Andrews's analysis of the text: "Now it appears from the fourteenth chapter that when they were assembled in meeting, the women threw everything into confusion by talking among themselves, and acting with such indecorum as to be a matter of shame to them; so that what the apostle says to the women in such a church as this, and in such a state of things, is not to be taken as directions to all Christian women in other churches and in other times when and where such disorders do not exist.'—*Andrews*."

Consistent with his own methodology, Bowers continued his exegesis in 1 Cor 14:34-35. Commenting on the next section of v. 34 ("for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law"), Point 14 began by quoting a commentary: "This shows

that the kind of speaking Paul does not permit is that which shows that the speaker *is not* under obedience." This is the point that Bowers picked up and argued. Paul had meant to forbid one particular kind of speaking: that which was against, or broke, the law. Bowers, reflecting the vocabulary widely used in the last part of the nineteenth century to discuss gender, interjected his commentary that both men and women must speak appropriately according to their "spheres," or socially assigned circles of operation. Women, assigned a sphere in which to operate, "cannot with propriety go out of it. She cannot go beyond the circle which nature and propriety have drawn about her. Neither can man go out of his, and invade hers."⁴⁰ Drawing from Clarke's widely circulated commentary, Bowers outlined women's appropriate sphere as understood in the synagogue of Paul's time, where women were not allowed to ask questions or debate with men. Quoting Clarke, he asserted, "It is evident from the context that the apostle refers here to *asking questions*, and what we call *dictating* in the assemblies." The commentary provided added information on Jewish law and custom: any man could argue, question, or object in the synagogue, but women were not allowed to do so. As it was considered inappropriate and shameful for women to enter the men's debate in the synagogue, Paul commanded Christian women to abstain from such activity:

"All that the apostle opposes here is their questioning, finding fault, disputing, etc., in the Christian church, as the Jewish men were permitted to do in their synagogues, together with their attempts to usurp any authority over the man, by setting up their judgment in opposition to them; for the apostle has in view, especially, acts of *disobedience*, *arrogance*, etc., of which no woman would be guilty who was under the influence of the Spirit of God."

Bowers quoted Clarke further to drive home the point that Paul's phrase, "it is a shame for women to speak in the church," applied only to inappropriate or disorderly behavior: "The apostle refers to irregular conduct, such conduct as proved that they were not under obedience." Thus Bowers concluded that there was a problem in the Corinthian church ("It was a local trouble"), and Paul charged women to cease their part in the confusion by conducting themselves publicly within the standards of obedience and not to compound the disorder by going against the accepted rules of society to join in the melee. While Paul was actively combating such "irregularity" in Corinth in his effort to restore the peace and unity that should be the hallmarks of Christian assembly, "there is nothing in Paul's prohibition," Bowers maintained, "that would silence the public testimony and teaching of a humble and faithful woman."

⁴⁰It is interesting to note that, despite the overwhelming attention given in the late nineteenth century to the subject of women's roles and place, Bowers's article is the only one that refers to women's "sphere" or talks about women as being in a subordinated role. Although his ultimate conclusions are aligned with those of the other *Review* writers, he is quite singular in his comments introducing Gen 3:16 as an argument that leadership and authority belong to men. Interestingly enough, he does not see that as precluding women's full exercise of every aspect of public ministry, including preaching, praying, exhorting, rebuking, and teaching men.

Conclusion

A thorough examination of issues presented in the *Review* between the years of 1863 and 1881 reveals the theology and practices of early, established Adventism. In this period of expanding mission, the labors of all were needed to accomplish the great work of the Third Angel's message. Calls for laborers were inclusive, citing the need for men and women to serve in various capacities. Women were regarded as coworkers, called by God, gifted with spiritual gifts in a process common to all. Women were regularly reminded that they were responsible for the salvation of others and that their own spiritual well-being and security depended on their willingness to exercise the talents entrusted to them.

As noted above, reports from women evangelists regularly appeared along with those of male workers. Letters were published that testified to the efficacy of women's ministry. While ministers were roving evangelists rather than pastors of a single church, which created a particular set of challenges for women in a time when women traveling alone were regarded with suspicion, women found ways to circumvent the obstacles and served as full-time evangelists. The *Review* regularly reported their selection as conference officers and licentiates.

The emphasis during this period was not on women's right to exert spiritual leadership, but on their obligation or responsibility to do so when called by God. Although the relatively small number of articles devoted to addressing the topic reflects that women's ministry was not a much-debated subject, the articles that did appear indicate that some members needed assistance harmonizing the practice with certain Pauline passages. The articles addressing this issue did just that and instructed the readers in Adventist hermeneutics. The various authors read each text in its historical context, examined the heritage of women's leadership throughout the biblical record, compared Scripture with Scripture, and demanded that the selected Pauline texts be harmonized with the whole of Paul's teachings and example to resolve inconsistency. The Paul that instructed women in proper attire when leading out in worship and who commended the evangelistic efforts of women could not be used to silence women on the basis of isolated verses taken out of context. Paul's instructions had to be viewed in light of the context in which they were given and his overriding concern to eliminate confusion and disorder.

Going even beyond this step, the authors insisted that Paul's teaching be harmonized with the rest of the scriptural record, which included numerous examples of women in public spiritual leadership. They reflected on God's freedom to select whomever he might choose, and the positive results of the work of biblical women. The authors repeatedly stressed Joel's promise, repeated in Acts 2:16, that the handmaidens would prophesy in the last days, and defined "prophesying" as "speaking edification, exhortation, and/or comfort." This was a promise that applied to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thus the gifts of the sisters should be cherished, not rejected.

Throughout this period, the writers and editors of the *Review* were forceful and unambiguous in their defense of the appropriateness, even the duty, of

women to engage fully in preaching and teaching in the church. The primary arguments, as shown above, were that God has always used women, as well as men, to lead and instruct his people, and that he has promised to pour out his spirit on all, both sons and daughters, in the last days. Far from being a problem or unscriptural, the presence of women who preach and lead was considered to be the very sign of God's presence among his remnant people.