

Southeastern California Conference Response to Doug Batchelor's Presentation on Women in Ministry

Voted by the Executive Committee on March 25, 2010

Introduction

Members of the Southeastern California Conference Executive Committee are deeply concerned about a recent presentation by Pastor Doug Batchelor of Amazing Facts¹ on the subject of women in ministry.

We believe that this presentation:

- Does not represent the position or practice of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- Should not be allowed to stand unanswered as speaking for the church.
- Does not represent the best of Adventist scholarship.²
- Is an insult to godly women who have devoted their lives to ministry and through whom God is working.
- Misuses and distorts Scripture in a variety of ways.

The topic of women in ministry is certainly one that is open to discussion, but we believe there are certain boundaries within which the discussion should take place. These include, among others, a spirit of Christian goodwill and the responsible use of Scripture.

We also believe that when these boundaries are violated by those whom the church credentials to minister for it, the following should take place:

- Church leadership needs to hold them accountable.
- Official church entities need to go on record disavowing the distorted content of such presentations.
- Media outlets that are controlled by the church and carry such presentations need to recruit credible voices to offer appropriate, biblically sound responses that show the church's true position.

¹ The sermon was given February 6, 2010, and is available on the Amazing Facts website at www.amazingfacts.org.

² Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998) presents the scholarship of professors at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. On the whole these articles present a far more balanced use of Scripture.

The following pages detail our concerns by showing how this particular presentation:

- Fails to show a spirit of Christian grace.
- Fails to respect colleagues and church authority.
- Fails to use responsible principles of biblical interpretation
- Fails to hold to strict canons of logic.

1. Failure to Show a Spirit of Christian Grace

To call those in the women's movement "angry lesbians who want to be men" and accuse them of trying to "emasculate men" seems to fall well below the bar of a spirit of Christian grace, even when it is couched as a quotation from Pastor Batchelor's mother. As Christians we do well to avoid *ad hominem* arguments and focus on issues.

2. Failure to Respect Colleagues and Church Authority

The same church that called and credentialed Pastor Batchelor to ministry has also called and credentialed women for ministry. These women are therefore colleagues of Pastor Batchelor in ministry. When he calls their ministries into question he shows a lack of respect for them and for the authority of the church that has called them. We have seen God use these women in remarkable ways and believe that they deserve the respect the church has given them in their roles.

When God poured out His Spirit on Gentiles as recorded in Acts 10, Peter asked, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47, NRSV). God is pouring out His Spirit on women who minister around the world. The church has called them to ministry. To denigrate them and their ministries shows a lack of respect not only for Adventist women in ministry, and women in general, but also for the biblical authority of the church.

3. Failure to Use Responsible Principles of Biblical Interpretation

A. By Ignoring the Biblical Context

1) Ephesians 5:22-25

Pastor Batchelor makes this passage the text for his presentation. When he lists it at the heading of the presentation and when he quotes it within the sermon he begins with verse 22, ignoring the fact that the sentence begins with verse 21, which says that Christians are to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. This verse serves as a heading for the rest of the passage. In fact, the word "submit" does not even appear in verse 22 in the original; it is assumed from verse 21. By omitting the mutual subjection of verse 21 Pastor Batchelor misunderstands the nature of the rest of the passage.

Paul is speaking of the mutual submission of each party in the relationship to each other. The specific shape of the submission differs, but Paul makes each responsible to the other.³

2) 1 Corinthians 11:3

Pastor Batchelor quotes this verse to show a hierarchy of God-Christ-men-women. He concludes from this that women are not to serve as ministers. Paul, however, draws no such conclusion. He forbids no activity to women at all, he simply requires that they be veiled when they pray and prophesy in church. Prophesying and praying are ministry functions. If we are to take Paul's argument, we need to follow it through to his conclusion. His conclusion does not forbid women to minister but confirms their ministry in the church as long as they are veiled. In addition, Pastor Batchelor does not refer to or include verses 11-12 of the same chapter, which speak to the mutuality of male and female in Christ:

"Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God" (TNIV). This statement of principle shows Paul's commitment to equality in Christ, the same point he makes in Galatians 3. It is interesting that Pastor Batchelor tends to de-emphasize or ignore the passages of basic principle, and focuses on specific statements for specific situations, while ignoring the contexts of those situations.⁴

3) 1 Timothy 2:11-14

Pastor Batchelor uses this passage as his primary passage to say that women cannot be pastors or be ordained. The passage, however, says nothing about either pastoral ministry or ordination. It simply forbids teaching or authority. Unfortunately, the passage does not give us sufficient information

³ In the original language Ephesians 5:18-6:9 is one structurally unified idea. It consists of a command, followed by four participles that show how to fulfill the command. The last of these four is submitting. What follows is the particular kind of submitting for each relationship. The structure looks like this:

"But be filled with the Spirit

Speaking to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs

Singing in your heart to the Lord

Giving thanks always on behalf of everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father

Submitting yourselves to each other in the fear of Christ

Wives...

Husbands...

Children...

Fathers...

Slaves...

Masters..."

Thus to be filled with the spirit is to speak, sing, give thanks, and submit. This submission is something that all people filled with the Spirit are to do in their own way. For a discussion of this mutual submission see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 166-192.

⁴ See W. Larry Richards, "How Does a Woman Prophesy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?" in Vyhmeister, pp. 313-332, especially p. 321.

about the historical context for us to know exactly what Paul had in view.⁵ From other passages in Paul, however, it does not seem that he banned women from all teaching. To take this passage as a general prohibition of women in ministry is not at all warranted from the actual wording of the text or from the context of the passage.

It is interesting that Pastor Batchelor does allow women to teach under the authority of men. Thus he does not take this verse literally. If he did he would have to disallow all teaching by women.

4) 1 Corinthians 14:33-35

It is not clear how Pastor Batchelor uses this verse. He reads from Adam Clarke's commentary concerning it in the course of discussing 1 Timothy 2:11-12. He seems to want it to give general support to the view women cannot be ordained, but he does not wish to use it to forbid all speaking by women. What he does not mention is that the entire context of this chapter is Paul's concern about speaking in tongues. Paul lays down rules about who may speak and what kind of interpretation needs to follow these manifestations of the Spirit. Therefore Paul's words here are most likely directed to that context. Perhaps he does not wish for women to speak in tongues at all.

It is clear that this is not a general prohibition against women speaking in church, for in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul allows women to pray and prophesy in church as long as their heads are covered. Neither praying nor prophesying would be done in silence. Therefore, Paul is not forbidding all speaking by women in church. It is an even further stretch to take it as forbidding women from participating in ministry.⁶

5) 1 Timothy 3:2

This passage assumes that the leaders of the local church were men and requires that they not have more than one wife. A basic principle of interpretation involves determining the intent of the passage, which in this case was to forbid polygamous leaders. It is improper to expand that meaning to hold that leaders must be men or must be married, for example. Paul certainly did not believe the latter, since he himself was single.

The assumption that leaders of the time were men in that context has no more prescriptive authority than the assumption that they also had slaves, which we find in the same letter. This passage

⁵ Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), argue that this verse fits with the anti-gnosticism of the Pastoral letters. They hold that the Greek verb *authenteo* does not mean to have authority over but to claim to be the originator of. Women in Ephesus with a gnostic bent were claiming that woman was the origin of men, as is often found in later gnostic writings. Paul combats them by saying, "I do not allow a woman to teach or to proclaim herself author of man." This is plausible, but not provable. For a different conclusion that also recognizes the gnostic nature of the situation behind this passage see Nancy Vyhmeister, "Proper Church Behavior in 1 Timothy 2:8-15," in Vyhmeister, pp. 333-354.

⁶ For a similar but not identical interpretation of this passage see W. Larry Richards, "How Does a Woman Prophecy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?" in Vyhmeister, pp. 313-332.

goes on to advise that deacons have wives who are worthy of respect (verse 11). Paul, however, calls Phoebe a “deacon” in Romans 16:1-2.⁷ He therefore did not interpret the passage in the same way that Pastor Batchelor does. Even though deacons are to have wives worthy of respect, deacons can nevertheless be women. Clearly Paul did not intend his instruction about elders and deacons being husbands of one wife to exclude women.

6) Genesis 3:16

Pastor Batchelor assumes that this prediction that women will be ruled over by men is prescriptive rather than descriptive—in other words, that men are to rule over women. However, this is part of a list of the results of sin and is better understood as descriptive. For example, the same list predicts that women will have pain in childbirth. Is this a prescription that means women must have pain in childbirth? Should we therefore forbid anesthesia for labor?

The whole purpose of God's grace is to restore to humankind what was lost through sin. Galatians 3:28 shows us that God's ideal is equality. Through Christ we can overcome the dominion over women which has so often been oppressive and hardly in keeping with God's ideals.⁸

In the Genesis account there is nothing that speaks of men ruling over women before sin. Pastor Batchelor seems to conclude this from the idea that Eve is Adam's “help” (he uses the KJV term “help meet,” which actually means a helper fit or appropriate for him). By relying on the English text he fails to see that the term “help” used here in no way implies Eve's subservience to Adam, for the most frequent use (at least 16 times in the Old Testament) of this term is for God as a “helper” for humans. This hardly implies that God is subservient to humans (see, for example, Exodus 18:4; Psalm 33:20; Psalm 46:1; Psalm 121:1).

7) Genesis 37:9

To draw the conclusion from Joseph's dream that because the sun represented Joseph's father and the moon his mother, men are to lead, and women are only to reflect their leadership, is not interpretation at all. This dream is not speaking to the issue of relationships between men and woman, let alone to pastoral ministry.

B. By Ignoring Important New Testament Principles

Pastor Batchelor takes the requirements for priesthood in the Old Testament and applies them to New Testament ministry, ignoring the important New Testament principle of the priesthood of all believers. This side of the cross we do not go through priests to gain access to God as they did in the Old Testament (see 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6 and Hebrews 9-10). Each Christian is a priest. Indeed we are

⁷ Even James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), who opposes women elders and pastors, admits that Phoebe is called a deacon in Romans 16.

⁸ See Richard M. Davidson, “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture,” in *Vyhmeister*, pp. 259-294.

a kingdom of priests with direct access to God.⁹ At one point he admits this, but seems to forget it when he applies priestly requirements to Christian ministry.

Pastoral ministry in the present is not analogous to the Old Testament priesthood. Pastors are shepherds, but they do not serve as mediators between God and humans in the way that the priests did in the Old Testament. There is no exact analogy in the Bible to our present position of church pastor. Elders were chosen for local congregations, not by conferences as in our system. Our church organization is consistent with biblical principles, but does not exactly mirror Scripture.

C. By Ignoring Passages That Show Women in Ministry

1) Romans 16:1-2

Paul calls Phoebe a deacon of the church at Cenchrea. When he sends her to Rome he expects that the saints there will assist her, presumably in her ministry to prepare for Paul's trip to Spain. Paul seems to give her a certain authority. It is especially interesting that she is called a deacon, for deacons, along with elders, were ministers who met the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3.

2) Romans 16:7

In Romans 16:7, Paul calls Andronicus and Junia apostles. In fact, he claims that they are outstanding among the apostles. It is clear that Junia is a female name.¹⁰ Therefore the office of apostle was open to women, contrary to Pastor Batchelor's assertion.

3) Women Prophets (1 Corinthians 11; Acts 21:9)

Pastor Batchelor admits that there were women prophets in the New Testament, yet he denies that women were to have authority. He claims they always had to operate under the authority of men.

Prophets clearly had a certain authority. If women were prophesying in church, as Paul allows in 1 Corinthians 11, they were exercising an authority that is not unlike what pastors do today. Paul's concept of prophecy seems to have been more general than we usually hold. It includes not just predicting the future, but also the preaching ministry of the church.

Throughout his presentation Pastor Batchelor picks and chooses passages to support his own view without looking at all the evidence. He does the same for the writings of Ellen White. For a more

⁹ See Raoul Dederen, "The Priesthood of All Believers," in Vyhmeister, pp. 9-27.

¹⁰ See Robert Jewett, *Romans*, "Hermeneia," (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) for a major discussion. He concludes, "The modern scholarly controversy over this name rests on the presumption that no woman could rank as an apostle, and thus that the accusative form must refer to a male by the name of Junias or Junianus. However, the evidence in favor of the feminine name 'Junia' is overwhelming. Not a single example of a masculine name 'Junias' has been found" (p. 961). See also Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

balanced picture of Ellen White's views see the article by Jerry Moon in the *Women in Ministry* volume.¹¹

4. Failure to Hold to Strict Canons of Logic

There are a number of logical fallacies in Pastor Batchelor's presentation. Here are a few examples. Pastor Batchelor suggests that the church could hardly have been wrong for 1900 years when it had an all male clergy. Could not the same argument be made for Sunday observance or slavery?

Pastor Batchelor's brief aside implying that only men should be in seminary since the word "seminary" comes from the root "semen," not only lacks logic but is also historically inaccurate. The root "semen" in this historical context did not have to do with male sexuality, but simply with the seeds of plants. The seminary was originally a garden where plants grew. It later came to refer to a school where young men and women grew and were nurtured. Even later "seminary" came to be used specifically for the education of clergy.

It does not follow that because the culture is moving toward more equality for men and women, that a movement toward equality within the church comes 100% from the culture and not at all from the Bible. How many times in history has the church been prodded by the culture to become both more equitable and more biblical? Issues of slavery, racial discrimination, equal pay for equal work, all come to mind.

Conclusion

In the light of these serious problems with the presentation, we recommend that:

- Appropriate conference and union committees go on record by affirming the church's recognition of the legitimate biblical role of women in ministry.
- Appropriate church leaders hold the presenter accountable to speak in ways that are biblically sound and represent the positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- Media outlets that aired this presentation arrange for responsible representatives of the church's position to present the evidence for that position.

¹¹ Jerry Moon, "A Power that Exceeds That of Men': Ellen G. White on Women in Ministry," in Vyhmeister, pp. 187-209.