

“Your Daughters Shall Prophesy”: James White, Uriah Smith, and the “Triumphant Vindication of the Right of the Sisters” to Preach

In 1861, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*,¹ featured an article written by J. A. Mowatt, “Women as Preachers and Lecturers,”² reprinted from the *Portadown News*. The *Review* carried the piece with an introduction written by the editor, Uriah Smith, that indicated the enthusiastic support of the official organ of the Sabbatarian Advent believers for Mowatt’s thesis that “neither Paul nor any other apostle forbade women preaching, or lecturing.” Mowatt had contended that “such a command is nowhere in the Bible, and I shall proceed to prove it; and, besides, I will prove that Paul taught the very opposite.” Uriah Smith, a respected Bible scholar and church leader, had this to say in his introduction of the piece:

[We consider the following a triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters to take part in the public worship of God. The writer applies the prophecy of Joel--- “Your daughters shall prophesy,” &c., to female preaching; but while it must embrace public speaking of some kind, this we think is but half of its meaning. We have nothing to say upon what the writer claims to have been done by certain females. That to which the attention of the reader is especially called is the argument by which he shows that they have a *right* to do this, or any amount besides in the same direction.--U.S.]

The topic of women’s spiritual leadership in the church had been a subject in the *Review* periodically ever since James White first formally addressed it in September of 1857.³ In the period between the beginning of the *Review* in 1850 and the formal

¹ This journal circulated among the scattered bands of believers who continued to hope for the imminent return of Christ, even after the Great Disappointment of 1844, and embraced the seventh-day Sabbath. The full name of the journal reflects these two key elements, the Sabbath and the Second Advent, which identified them as a group, though in popular usage it was frequently shortened to *The Review and Herald* or simply the *Review*.

² J. A. Mowatt, “Women as Preachers and Lecturers,” *Review and Herald*, July 30, 1861, 65-66. Extracted from the *Portadown News*, Ireland, of March 2, 1861.

³ James White, “Paul Says So,” *Review and Herald*, September 10, 1857, 152. James White was one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the earliest editor of the *Review*.

organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863, movement leadership took a strong stand on the inclusive nature of spiritual gifts and the Christian obligation to exercise them in public assemblies and religious meetings. This was not a rhetorical discussion: women were involved in the preaching ministry of the church. Women traveled to evangelize, spoke in the churches and gatherings of believers, wrote theological, devotional, and scriptural articles, exhorted the believers, and exercised spiritual leadership. In addition to the records of Ellen White's constant public addresses, references to individuals such as Sr. Lindsey and her evangelism in New York state and Sr. S. F. Shimper, who traveled with Brother W. Morse in Vermont teaching "the third angel's message," provide evidence of the practice.

In the Sabbatarian Advent Movement, the smallest of the Millerite siblings on its way to becoming a recognized entity in its own right, the expectations for women believers did not end with modest examples of pious and commendable lives and the support of the cause with financial resources and presence in meetings. Church leaders consistently exhorted women to exercise the full range of spiritual gifts. Elder Merritt Cornell, for example, noted that all members of the church were "licensed exhorters,"⁴ an established leadership position involving a commentary on and application of the sermon provided during the worship service after the sermon concluded. This expectation that women would address religious assemblies ran counter to traditional assumptions concerning the prescribed place of woman in society and church settings, silent and subordinated. It naturally encountered resistance and opposition from individuals indoctrinated into entrenched cultural attitudes.

⁴ M.E. Cornell and R. J. Lawrence, "Tent Meetings in Lapeer, Mich. Closed." *Review and Herald*, September 9, 1857, 133.

A careful screening of the pages of the *Review* yields a number of articles that address the question of women's public spiritual leadership in the church. Eight articles devoted specifically to the topic, all of them unambiguously supportive of women's preaching, prophesying, and exhorting, appeared during this thirteen-year period (White, 1857; Hewitt, 1857; White, 1858; Robbins, 1859; Anon., 1858; Robbins, 1860; Welcome, 1860; Mowatt, 1861). No articles, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, or theological expositions during this period endeavor to restrict women's preaching or speaking ministry. Additional pieces endorse women's public speaking roles indirectly or by inference, such as Joseph Clarke's appeal that all find and use their voices in "conference, or social meeting, or in the *Review*," which he characterizes as "a weekly conference of all the remnant."⁵ Writing for the *Review* during this time was to address the largest and most public gathering of the Sabbatarian Adventists, and women as well as men were regularly exhorted to speak through its pages.

"Let your women keep silence"

The eight articles focused on women's speaking ministry tackled the arguments given to exclude women from the preaching, speaking, and prophetic ministries in the church. The most ubiquitous objection focused on Paul's injunction found in 1 Corinthians 14:34, "Let your women keep silence in the churches." For a people who based their practice upon Scripture, this verse could not be ignored. A formal articulation of the group's understanding of the Scriptural warrant for such a departure from conventional religious practice was needed.

Any meaningful response had to respect Scriptural inspiration and textual integrity. The *Review* articles addressed the topic with a characteristic Adventist

⁵ J. Clarke, "Why," *Review and Herald*, December 8, 1859, 22.

hermeneutic: Scripture was compared with Scripture, the meaning of each verse nuanced by the general argument in which it is situated, viewed in the context of the cultural realities in which it was given, compared with other statements by the same author, and finally, understood in light of all the Scriptural information on the subject, a step mandated by their insistence upon the harmony of revelation. This was the careful hermeneutic that the movement demanded on all doctrinal issues and which served them well in a period when the prime objective of the group was to replace tradition, creed, and convention with a Biblically-based practice and understanding. This hermeneutic provided the foundation for their response to those who asserted that Scripture reserved spiritual leadership for men.

An examination of the eight articles, with attention given to the author's purpose, arguments employed to develop the positions presented, and the selection and hermeneutic of Scripture, demonstrates the serious intention of early church leaders to provide the movement with a well-articulated statement concerning the inclusive nature of spiritual gifts and the Christian obligation to exercise them publicly as well as a solid defense to offer those who claimed a Scriptural basis for the exclusion of women from the speaking (preaching, prophesying, public praying, or exhorting) ministry.

James White, "Paul Says So"

James White offers the first formal attempt to address the topic of women preaching.⁶ White's comfort with the role of women in spiritual leadership may be tied to his original affiliation with the Christian Connection, a group unusual in its acceptance of women preachers and exhorters, as well as his experience in the Millerite movement, where certain women were hailed as some of the most effective of the public evangelists.

⁶ James White, "Paul Says So," *Review and Herald*, September 10, 1857, 152.

White tackles the objections to women's speaking and preaching in the brief article, "Paul Says So," with the intention of answering those who would silence women in the church arena by quoting Paul. White's general tone is one of frustration and exasperation that some followers of God allowed isolated, uncontextualized verses to override the obvious Scriptural and practical evidence that God calls women into the ministry of the Word. His no-nonsense attitude displays no empathy for those who "do not like to hear the Marys preach." He responds to those who believe they have solved the whole issue by saying "Paul says so," with a question. "Says what?" he asks. "Let your women keep silence in the churches," is the definitive answer that comes back. Again, White answers with his own question, "But what does this prove?" He continues the dialog: "'It proves' say some, 'that women should not rise in social meeting and speak.'"

White's argument is that it is necessary to take a position on this text "which will harmonize with both revelation and reason." and that when Paul asked that women be silent and learn at home from their husbands he could not have meant to include all parts of church life. He suggests that Paul was probably referring to church business meetings, which he asserts, the men would handle. He reasons that if the injunction applied to religious meetings, there would be no reason for the women to attend as they should be learning what they needed to know from their husbands. Arguing from common sense, he says, "It is evident that if Paul meant that women should not speak in religious meetings, his words prove also that the sisters should not attend religious meetings."

White's offer to harmonize Paul's teachings for those "who do not like to hear the Marys preach a risen or coming Saviour," confers on preaching women the status of

disciple and evangelist, as the Mary of the Gospels was authorized by Jesus to take the good news of the resurrection to the male disciples. This reference to the Biblical precedent undermines the assertion that women could not speak with spiritual authority or have a Divine charge to instruct the church. It infers that individuals objecting to women's preaching did so in opposition to Biblical precedent and example. This also suggests that the problem with women preaching was located not in the gender of the "messengers" but in the unwillingness of some to accept the Word of God when it was delivered to them.

While neither a careful exegesis of the passage nor an exhaustive exploration of the objections, both the tone and the content of this initial essay on the subject provide the reader with an unambiguous understanding of the movement's official position on women's preaching. White's first excursion into this area reveals the basic hermeneutic that will be developed more fully in future articles.

D. Hewitt, "Let your Women keep Silence in the Churches"

The next effort to address the same issue appears a month later in Brother Hewitt's article, "Let your Women keep Silence in the Churches."⁷ In a more systematic treatment of the subject and the principles of hermeneutics to be used when addressing Bible topics, Hewitt marshals Scripture to establish that women have a legitimate place in the speaking ministry of the church. Acknowledging that "Many sincere and honest souls have been very much perplexed respecting this declaration of the apostle Paul," he asserts that there are "other declarations of the same apostle that must be brought to harmonize with this in order to get a clear understanding of the Apostle's meaning in 1 Cor. xiv."

⁷ D. Hewitt, "Let your Women keep Silence in the Churches," *Review and Herald*, October 18, 1857, 190.

Hewitt proceeds by reminding Bible students, “No one should found a theory on one single isolated passage,” and that “It is a custom with all Bible students to find all the important texts that bear on any one subject, and compare them together until they come to a satisfactory understanding of what the inspired penman means.” He then turns the readers’ attention to the Corinthian verses that instruct women to have their head covered when praying or prophesying and concludes that these texts demonstrate that “a woman can pray or prophesy in the church.”

Hewitt walks the reader through Paul’s general discussion on prophecy (a gift for the edification and comfort of the church with rules as to how it is to be exercised) as well as the specific verses in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 (“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak”) and 1 Tim. 2:12 (“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”) that are cited as determinative of women’s role in the church. He examines 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in the context of its time and place and determines that the counsel “appears to be a check on the women that were too forward in meeting in asking questions, &c.,” restricting the admonition to a local application. In response to the Timothy citation, Hewitt states that Paul “says that he suffers not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. Hence we discover that simply praying, or singing, or speaking in meeting would not be usurping authority over the man, but edifying the man, and pleasing the Lord.”

Finally, Hewitt reminds the reader of two additional Scriptural evidences that must be considered before conclusions on the matter are reached. “Phillip the evangelist, had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy; [Acts xxi: 8,9;] and if they were

forbidden to exercise their gift in meeting, their prophecies must have been circumscribed and very limited.” As a final argument, he turns the readers’ attention to Acts 2:17,18, where the Spirit of God is promised to be poured out upon all flesh in the last days, the very “last days” these faithful believed they were witnessing. As he notes, “These texts teach that daughters and hand-maidens shall prophesy. Please read on to the 21st verse, and you will ascertain that the point of chronology is just before the great and notable day of the Lord comes.”

In the course of the treatise, Hewitt compares Scripture with Scripture to dispute the claim that Paul’s instructions in Corinthians or Timothy disqualify women from exercising their spiritual gifts publicly. In addition, he ties the acceptance of women’s speaking to true belief that the world was experiencing the end times. The preaching and prophesying of women in their midst was evidence that the “day of the Lord” was at hand and that their community qualified as the remnant people. Hewitt’s use of Acts 2 that applies the prophecy of Joel to the end times becomes an important model for subsequent discussions. The promise, and the experience, of the gift of the Holy Spirit to both sons and daughters becomes the controlling metaphor for the group, and all other passages must be harmonized with it.

James White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4,”

In “Unity and Gifts of the Church, No 4,” which may be seen as a further development of Hewitt’s argument concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit, James White focuses specifically on the gift of prophecy, poured out upon women as well as men.⁸ The gift is a “glorious promise to the waiting, trusting people of God,” people who must neither despise nor quench the Spirit. Introducing the topic with the Scriptural example

⁸ James White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4,” *Review and Herald*, January 7, 1858, 68-69.

of Anna the prophetess' role in the story of Jesus, he offers a number of examples of the prophetic gift exercised within the New Testament. He is clear from his first example of prophetic gifts in the apostolic age that "we find both men and women having the spirit of prophecy."

White examines the source, nature, and purpose of prophecy, using as a model Paul's testimony before King Agrippa in Acts 26. Paul tells the story of his conversion on the road to Damascus when Jesus says to him, "*I have appeared unto thee* for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from the power of Satan unto God...." Using this passage as a foundation, White defines prophecy as the personal and direct communication of God to an individual for the purpose of making that person "a minister and a witness" to what they have seen for the purpose of redeeming the lost.

White is clear that prophesy is one gift among many, quoting Ephesians 4:11 that Christ "gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists," and the Corinthian admonition that God has given the church apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healers, etc. White uses Paul's writings to demonstrate the validity of the prophetic gift within the church. In an important move to establish the connection between Paul's writings about spiritual gifts and the church of the last days, White cites Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 5: 1-8 as having "direct reference to the Christians of the last days, who are looking for the Lord."

White emphasizes that the gift of prophecy needs to be valued and examined closely by “those who are watching for the day of the Lord.” He maintains that prophecy is a gift of the Spirit, and if the Spirit is grieved and not cherished, the fruit will be withdrawn. He directs the readers’ attention to Paul’s tri-fold admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21: “Quench not the Spirit;” “Despise not prophesyings;” and “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” At this point in his argument, he reasserts the inclusive nature of the gift, citing Joel 2:28, “I will pour out of my Spirit, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” He notes that those who “reject all that comes in the name of prophesyings” slight an important means of salvation provided by God for their benefit. White acknowledges the presence of false prophets and deceptions (such as Spiritualism), but answers that Scripture provides rules whereby prophetic claims may be tested.

After reviewing the Biblical principles given to test prophets, White turns the discussion once more to Joel 2:28-32 to consider it carefully. He quotes it completely and notes that “the Spirit is to be poured out” and that “under the influence of the Holy Spirit both sons and daughters will prophesy.” He stops to comment that, “Some have excluded females from a share in this work, because it says, ‘your young men shall see visions.’ They seem to forget that ‘man’ and ‘men’ in the Scriptures generally means both male and female. The infidel Paine would have been ashamed of a quibble involving such ignorance.”

White ends the discussion with the assertion that while the Spirit has always been given to God’s people, there is a promised abundance to be experienced by the remnant. He warns that prophecy is to be an expected part of the latter-day experience and is

indeed a sign of the remnant people. Further, the prophetic gift is given as an aid to salvation and should not be despised. Finally, he addresses the issue that creates the most discomfort for many: the prophetic gifts exercised by women. He is clear throughout the article that women as well as men have been granted the gift of the Holy Spirit and have throughout Scriptural history been selected by God to exercise the prophetic function for their communities. Women are given messages from God for the churches and these messages need to be accepted and embraced. Prophecy is not only a matter of revealing the future, but of relating messages to the community that God has impressed upon an individual for the edification and sanctification of the community. Clearly, women may be ministers to the church, and their ministry is rejected only at the risk of “grieving the Spirit” and its potential withdrawal.

B. F. Robbins, “To The Female Disciples in the Third Angel’s Message”

The 1859 Robbins’ essay is directed specifically to the “female disciples in the third angel’s message,” and applies the lesson from White’s “Gifts” article to women’s religious participation.⁹ The piece does not examine the Pauline texts, but instead focuses on the positive promises of Christ to the believer and the true disciple’s expected response. Brother Robbins suggests that women’s reluctance to exercise spiritual leadership is a sign that they have not fully consecrated themselves to God.

You will pardon my special address to you when I say it is because I have my *fears* that many of you who I believe are sincerely endeavoring to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, are lacking in that entire heart consecration to God and his cause which he requires of us all; and a want of the experience of the promise of the Father to his sons and daughters of the gift of his Spirit, the endowment of power from on high in order to their usefulness.

⁹ B. F. Robbins, “To the Female Disciples in the Third Angel’s Message,” *Review and Herald*, December 8, 1859, 21-22.

According to Robbins, the woman fully submitted to God will accept the spiritual gifts given and employ them for the edification of the church and the glory of God despite potential negative reactions. He asserts that God's promise of the Holy Spirit and the gift of prophecy was given "as much to the female as male disciples of Jesus."

Robbins recognizes that the cultural mores and religious training of the period discouraged women's leadership functions and he addresses the issue directly. After emphasizing that, "Here in the precious promise there is neither male nor female," he turns his attention to the prevailing sentiment against women's public ministry. "I know," he admits, "that the most of us have been gathered into the message of the third angel from the sectarian churches where we received our religious training, which we now, in the clear light of God's truth see was defective, both in doctrine and practice." The defects of these earlier associations included their teaching concerning the role of women in the religious arena. He then asserts that, "... in some of them the prejudice against woman's efforts and labors in the church, have crushed out her usefulness. This kind of training has in many of you caused timidity, and discouragement, and the neglect of the use of gifts designed to edify the church and glorify God." Robbins stresses that the female disciple must overcome "the embarrassing influence of our former associations," and "conformity to the world," and fully exercise their spiritual gifts.

He expands his argument for the obligation of women's spiritual gifts as callings with an invitation to "Go with me in imagination to the gathering of the few disciples of Jesus on the day of Pentecost. There with their brethren in humble expectation sat the faithful Marys." Using this scene as a backdrop, he sketches the Marys' faithfulness as disciples, and then draws the attention to the Pentecost moment. He asks, "And did not

the tongue of fire descend alike upon them as upon their brethren? Assuredly it did. And think you that their Spirit-baptized lips were closed in silence in that solemn assembly? No: the servants and the handmaidens prophesied there as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Robbins follows his discourse on the obligation of all believers to use spiritual gifts given for the edification of the church with a personal experience where a woman’s testimony “in a public assembly” increased his faith. He adds that he mourned the fact “that in our social religious interviews she is so prone to inactivity and silence, in prayer and exhortation, when by divine grace she may be so abundantly qualified to edify and encourage.” He encourages women to put away their reluctance to participate vocally in public worship services and “Seek unweariedly the endowment of the promise of the Father, the power from on high, which is alike the privilege of both the servants and handmaidens of God.” Exercising their spiritual gifts simultaneously strengthens the church and wins “the commendation of the Master, ‘She hath done what she could.’”

Throughout the article, Robbins utilizes Scripture to encourage women to identify with the female disciples of Christ who were empowered to assume the Gospel charge and participate publicly in the redemption of humanity through the gifts of the Spirit. A woman may be a “most efficient fellow-laborer in the gospel,” as she exercises the power for edification given to her by God. Robbins’ article offers an antidote to “the embarrassing influence of our former associations” that taught the public silence of women: the promise of the Father to give power and gifts to “both the servants and handmaidens of God.” And according to Robbins, only those who accepted the call and

responsibility of discipleship could expect to “receive the glad word, / Well and faithfully done! / Enter into my joy, and sit down on my throne.”

“On Keeping Silence: Ought Women to Keep Silence in the Churches?”

In the December 16, 1858, issue of the *Review*, the editors inserted a short column clipped from an exchange under the heading “On Keeping Silence.”¹⁰ The article, “Ought women to keep silence in the churches?” is identified as a query submitted by the wife of a Congregational minister and stands without the commentary that was offered when the editors ran an article for the sake of drawing the readers’ attention to what they considered heterodox or evidence of “end times.”

Written as a query, the reader is expected to answer the burning question of whether a woman should keep silence in the church, thereby eschewing spiritual leadership. The author leads the reader through a series of rhetorical questions concerning the authority of women mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments, women who wielded several different kinds of leadership positions. She calls attention to Miriam the prophetess, Deborah the Judge, Huldah the theologian, Anna the prophetess who preached of Christ in the temple, Paul’s co-laborer Phoebe and others, asking questions concerning who called and empowered them (obviously God), and whether they were considered “out of their place” when they exercised their leadership functions (obviously not).

In an allusion to Joel, the writer inquires, “Whose spirit was prophesied and poured out upon the sons and *the daughters*, the servants, and *the handmaidens*, that they might all prophesy?” She continues by querying, “And *what did they do* when they

¹⁰ “On Keeping Silence: *Ought women to keep silence in the churches?*” *Review and Herald*, December 16, 1858, 27.

prophesied?” The readers, supplying the answers to these questions, are led to her next series of questions concerning what various New Testament women did in their recorded church functions as cited by Paul. They are compelled to acknowledge women’s active role in “primitive Christianity,” the original church. Further, the readers cannot refute the implicit argument that the roles women played were a direct result of God’s intention and will. Finally, the author leaves the readers with the query that ties directly into the primary argument used to silence women in the church, “Did Paul forbid women to pray and prophesy in public, and then give them directions as to how they should appear to honor the gospel when they did pray and prophesy in public?”

Throughout this piece, Scriptural evidence is marshaled to demonstrate God’s calling of women into public ministry and leadership in all its various forms. The net impact of the rhetorical questions is to demonstrate the ridiculousness of the argument that women should be excluded from spiritual leadership because “Paul says so.”

B. F. Robbins, “The Promise of the Father, Luke 24:49”

B. F. Robbins provides further reflection on women’s role in the church based on the model found in Acts 2 that cites the promise of the Holy Spirit to both sons and daughters.¹¹ In this piece, Robbins focuses on the New Testament directive to repent and receive the Holy Spirit in order to be prepared for “usefulness.” This essay echoes his earlier one¹² both in the language and the appeal for “entire sanctification,” and so the concerns and objectives of this piece may be more fully understood in light of the first article. His primary intention here is to demonstrate that Jesus’ promise to the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come to them in power was not restricted to the first-century

¹¹ B. F. Robbins, “The Promise of the Father, Luke xxiv,49,” *Review and Herald*, January 5, 1860, 53.

¹² Robbins, “To the Female Disciples in the Third Angel’s Message.”

Christians, but applies to present times as well. He asserts that the accepted practice of denying the applicability of the promise is the cause of current religious worldliness and formality and must be renounced so that the baptism of the Spirit may ensue with its “endowment of usefulness and success.”

Robbins makes a point to ask who received the Pentecostal empowerment, so that he might answer: “The disciples, male and female, mentioned in the 13th and 14th verses of the first chapter [of Acts].” He cites the verses that note that cloven tongues like fire appeared and “sat upon each of them,” and “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” He notes that the effect of the outpouring was to give the power “which was to qualify them for the work to which they were called.” He adds that Peter’s sermon given at the time “was a simple application of the prophecy of Joel... a demonstration of his [Christ’s] exaltation to the right hand of God by the fulfillment of the promise of the Father in the pouring out of his Spirit upon his servants and handmaidens.”

At this point in the article, Robbins returns to the question of the current applicability of the promise. He answers that it extends to the end, to “embrace all the servants and handmaidens of God whom he shall call until the end, so that his called ones now are included in the prediction and promise.” He reiterates the nature of the promise, “the promise of the Father in the prophecy of Joel, the pouring out of his Spirit upon his servants and handmaidens as many as the Lord shall call.” Thus, Robbins underscores God’s ongoing empowerment of women as well as men.

Robbins concludes his essay with remarks upon the requirements for receiving the promise. He notes that such individuals must desire the blessing and consecrate themselves entirely to the service of God, as “holiness, usefulness and happiness are

inseparably connected.” Robbins warns that there is a price associated with the promised gift, “possessions, friends, reputation, life” must be set upon the altar. Only then “in the confidence of faith we may look with certainty for the ‘promise of the Father’ the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as an endowment of power from on high to qualify us for usefulness.”

Overall, Robbins’ treatise is a call to all the faithful to examine their experience and ascertain whether or not they have received the promised gift of the Spirit and if they are willing to pay the attached cost. He repeatedly uses the phrases “sons and daughters,” and “servants and handmaidens” to stress that women as well as men are the recipients of both the promise and the ensuing obligation to participate in public evangelism. This appeal has direct implications for the understanding of women’s religious leadership. The church as a whole must be willing to acknowledge the inclusive nature of spiritual gifts. Both men and women must be willing to sacrifice their pride and receive edification and blessing from women, while women must be willing to sacrifice their reputations to exercise socially forbidden gifts. The common challenge is to surrender all concerns outside that of discipleship. It is that sacrifice that allows God to make “his sons and daughters” useful and empowered witnesses to the world. For servants and handmaidens alike, complete happiness and holiness depend upon willingness to accept and exercise their spiritual gifts.

S. C. Welcome, “Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches?”

S. C. Welcome’s essay on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 was featured in the *Review* one month after Sister Hallock (later Sr. S.H. Lindsey, the evangelist) sent in a request that the sentiments of Robbins’ December 8, 1859, article on the leadership obligations of

“female disciples” be harmonized with 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11, the two texts most frequently cited to exclude women from a public role.¹³ This lengthy article inspects these verses along with the Timothy passage so frequently “construed as an objection to women’s speaking in public,” despite “the great amount of evidence which can be brought to prove that all who are made partakers of such love have a right to speak forth his praises.”¹⁴

Welcome intends to demonstrate that the silence enforced upon women is a result of the “false construction put upon these passages,” and that this silence has a negative effect upon the spiritual life of women and the church. He compares the situation of the woman forbidden to speak the message God has given her for the church to bondage (“she was an unwilling slave to the laws of the church”), compelling imagery at a time when slavery was a reprehensible reality. Welcome examines the passages used to defend women’s oppression in their cultural context. He then refers the readers to familiar Scriptural examples of women’s public roles in the spiritual life of the Old Testament, in Jesus’ lifetime, and in the early church. He then makes his final appeal bringing reason and revelation together. He concludes that the enforced silence of women grieves the Holy Spirit and must be halted.

In his initial efforts to deal with the Corinthian passage, Welcome points to evidence throughout the Pauline corpus that the first preaching of the gospel excited all sorts of astonishment and disputations. Concerning the command for silence, he understands “it to mean a troublesome asking of questions, which could be better answered at home than in their religious meetings.” To buttress his point, he draws from

¹³ Sarah A. Hallock, “A Query.—Bro. Smith,” *Review and Herald*, January 12, 1860, 64.

¹⁴ S. C. Welcome, “Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches?” *Review and Herald*, February 23, 1860, 109-10.

Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus to avoid and disallow "foolish and unlearned questions," asked primarily to engender strife and endless debates. He concludes that given the evidence, it is apparent that the asking of argumentative questions had become disruptive to their religious meetings and that "it is at least a fair inference that he designed to put a stop to this, but had no allusion to the exercise of a gift in the ministry or in exhortation."

Welcome alerts the reader that the instruction to ask questions at home could not be applied to the issue of speaking or exhorting in public. "What question," he inquires, "could a pious female ask at home, that would relieve her mind from the burden of a message she had received to deliver in the church?" The logical conclusion is that the passage "had no relation to the exercise of a gift which God had given them to use for the advancement of his cause." He further instructs the reader that verses that forbid women's usurpation of authority over men are not applicable as "preaching, prophesying, exhorting or praying in public, is not usurping authority and has nothing to do with it."

After a brief reminder that Paul "gave directions how the women should behave in the exercise of their gifts," which "he certainly would not have done had it been prohibited," and that Paul "mentions, with peculiar regard, certain women that had labored with him in the gospel," Welcome shifts the argument to a review of the Scriptural passages that detail women's public role and evangelistic efforts in both the Old Testament (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah) and the New Testament (Phillip's daughters, Anna, Elizabeth, the Samaritan woman, and the daughters at Pentecost). He makes a special point to comment that "it was a woman that first announced the glorious tidings of the resurrection of our blessed Lord; and let it be remembered that these 'glad tidings'

were preached to the apostles themselves, ... ” This section ends with the pithy reflection that “seeing that females were admitted to the high office of prophecy under the old dispensation, and in the promise of the more general effusion of this gift, the daughters and handmaidens were equally included with the other sex, that they were among the first messengers of the gospel, and after the churches were formed and settled received particular instruction how to conduct themselves in the church in the exercise of their gifts, it is strange that the privilege should have ever been called in question.”

The essay concludes with a reference to oneness in Christ, the breaking down of distinctions between male and female as well as those between Gentile and Jew, and an invitation to the readers to use their reason along with revelation. Welcome asks the readers to examine the evidence that women possess the natural qualifications for speaking God’s good news in public just as do men. His final sentence is an appeal: “Then let no stumbling-block be thrown in their way, but let them fill the place that God calls them to fill, let them not be bound down to silence by church rules, but let their tongues speak forth the praises of God, and let them point sinners to the Lamb of God, and grieve not the holy Spirit by silence in the congregation.”

J. A. Mowatt, “Women as Preachers and Lecturers”

The next article to address the issue of women’s right to preach, the final one before the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, emerged a little more than a year later in 1861.¹⁵ This article by J. A. Mowatt, which Uriah Smith, the editor of the *Review*, introduced as “a triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters,” was written as a response to a previous letter (signed “An Admirer of Woman in Her Proper Place,” and

¹⁵ J. A. Mowatt, “Women as Preachers and Lecturers,” *Review and Herald*, July 30, 1861, 65-66.

printed in the *Portadown News*) that argued that Scripture forbids women to be public speakers.

As mentioned above, Mowatt's response to "An Admirer" is that "neither Paul nor any other apostle forbade women preaching, or lecturing," and that, "I affirm such a command is nowhere in the Bible, and I shall proceed to prove it; and, besides, I will prove that Paul taught the very opposite." The bulk of the piece is devoted to considering the familiar Pauline "women" passages in the larger context of Paul's writings, demanding that all be harmonized. He makes a case, as well, on the basis of Paul's commendation of Phoebe as a church official and his directive to the men in Rome to respond to her directions. He then lists various Biblical women and the positions of spiritual leadership entrusted to them by God. The paper continually engages the "Admirer" in dialog, challenging his view of women as a suborned and silenced gender, and concludes that the case he presents is vastly ill informed and an insufficient basis for women to be "justified in ceasing to labor in his cause."

The work begins with the observation "that if a woman can effect good in a world like ours, where so much is yet to be done for its reformation, I would think twice before I would discourage her or throw any obstacle in her way." For Mowatt, "each individual in this world is morally bound to do as much good to others as he or she can." Mowatt reviews the work of several outstanding women of the day, including abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, Methodist holiness teacher Mrs. Phoebe Palmer, the English preacher Miss Buck, Salvation Army leader Catherine Boothe, and the noted temperance speaker Mrs. Theobald, as examples of women effecting great work for God that should not be stopped. He asks if such women are not to use their powers for the salvation of the

perishing and why the “Admirer” would “silence such an advocate?” He argues that since no one “would object to a woman rescuing his friend from temporal death” it is unreasonable to object “to a woman rescuing men from eternal death.” The Admirer is left to answer a difficult question: “Why object to woman going to seek and to save those that are pining in the dungeons of sin and iniquity?”

After this appeal to the argument of Christian moral obligation to effect good in the world, Mowatt turns his attention to the Admirer’s elevation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to determine women’s “place.” Mowatt responds with an appeal to logic: “Surely the fourteenth chapter does not contradict the eleventh, which was necessarily written before it.” He notes that in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul makes the statement “every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head.” Mowatt contends that far from forbidding women to perform church functions, Paul is instructing women on appropriate attire when they “conduct public worship—for that is what praying and prophesying mean.” He goes on to say, “whatever every man was to do in the church in praying and prophesying, woman was to do the same; and, instead of Paul forbidding the woman, he merely tells herself and the man how they are to dress---one with the head uncovered, the other with it covered.” He buttresses his exegesis by citing the recognized Bible authority Dr. Adam Clarke. Clarke, he notes, is “entirely in favor of female preaching, and contends that the verses quoted by ‘An Admirer’ bear no such meaning as that attached to them by those who oppose female preaching.” Further, Clarke contends that the prediction of Joel 2:28 “would not be fulfilled unless women prophesied, preached or taught.” He also puts Paul’s counsel in its cultural context when he notes that

for women of Paul's day, the uncovered head was associated with prostitution, "and this portion of his directions does not apply at all to our fashions."

Proceeding from the proposition that if Paul authorized women's preaching in chapter 11, he cannot be forbidding it in chapter 14, he turns to the meaning of chapter 14. He concludes from the information concerning instructions of how the men were to speak, by two's, in turn, "and let the others judge" that what is being described is not a regular religious meeting or service, but a church court. He sees the women as excluded from these sessions in order to "prevent much discussion." Women were to keep silence in the court proceedings and ask their husbands at home about issues they do not understand.

Once he has dealt with the Corinthians' passage, Mowatt turns to 1 Timothy 2:12-14, where Paul says that he does not allow a woman to teach or usurp authority. He argues that this injunction is not against public speaking, but the usurping of authority. Paul, he insists, has nothing against modest women adorning themselves with good works, including those of bringing the gospel to the perishing. He directs the reader to back up and read the previous verse, "The woman is to learn in silence with all subjection," and asks, "Subjection to whom?" At this point he refers the reader to another Pauline passage, Colossians 3:18, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." He states that "this is the subjection spoken of in Timothy, as is clearly shown by Adam and Eve--husband and wife--representatives of all our race of husbands and wives—being brought in by way of illustrating his subject, and the object which he had in view. A woman is not to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, that is, a wife is not to act so toward her husband." Mowatt reiterates his point so none could

miss it: “The passage has nothing whatsoever to do with regard to Total Abstinence lecturers, or gospel preachers. On the contrary, a woman is to pray and prophesy [1 Corinthians xi:5] just as the man, and with equal power and authority; and this is according to the prediction of the Holy Ghost. Joel ii, 28; Acts ii, 17.”

Once he has cited the case of Phoebe commended to Rome by Paul, Mowatt reviews the way in which God appointed Old Testament women as spiritual leaders in Israel, citing the cases of Huldah and Miriam and others, asking the “Admirer” how he would have responded to the leadership of those women. He also reminds the reader of the women referred to in Romans 16:12 as “having labored much in the Lord,” as further example of the active public ministry of New Testament women. He notes that Dr. Clarke contends that these women prophesied and therefore, they preached.

Before closing, Mowatt pauses to refute the “Admirer’s” proposition that women are denied spiritual authority because Eve sinned first. His response is to remind all that “If, through Eve, sin first entered into this world—and that too, with the hearty concurrence of Adam--- then let it not be forgotten that by woman, without the concurrence of man, a Saviour came to bring deliverance.” Developing the logic, he asks since redemption came by woman, “why should not women preach that redemption also?” It is no surprise that Mowatt closes with the final reflection that “judging by the results which have followed the labors” of notable women, “I rather think the Lord of the vineyard will require some more satisfactory excuse for even female timidity and backwardness in his service than the one given by ‘An Admirer,’ before they will be justified in ceasing to labor in his cause.”

It is little wonder that church leaders regarded this piece as a “triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters to take part in the public worship of God.” From first to last, Mowatt demands that the Scriptures used to disqualify and disenfranchise women be reappraised with an eye towards the integrity of the author’s intention, the Scriptural record of God’s appointment of women to a wide array of spiritual leadership positions, and the precious promise of spiritual gifts to God’s sons and daughters. Mowatt has skillfully and lucidly articulated the Sabbatarian movement’s position on the issue of women’s public role in the work of human redemption, using a recognizable and sound Adventist hermeneutic.

Conclusion

The *Review* addressed the issue of women’s public ministry in eight major articles during the formative period from 1850 to 1863 when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized. All of these articles, beginning with James White’s challenge to “Paul Says So” and closing with Uriah Smith’s “triumphant vindication,” supported the participation of women in the preaching ministry, often seeing it as a distinguishing mark of the Advent movement, setting it apart from the established churches which denied women an active role in preaching and teaching. Their conviction of the right of the sisters to publicly proclaim the word was based on their understanding of spiritual gifts as given to men and women equally according to the will of the Spirit. Their defense of women’s preaching, particularly against those who would cite the Pauline injunction that women should keep silent in the church, was based on their interpretation of the Bible and modeled the principles of Adventist hermeneutics used to establish the doctrines and practices of the church. Most specifically in this discussion, the principles of Biblical

interpretation used included comparing scripture with scripture, understanding the context of a biblical text, and examining the functions that women filled in biblical history. These principles led the early Adventist church to defend vigorously the right of the sisters to engage in public ministry against those who “do not like to hear the Marys preach a risen or coming Saviour.”