

# A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power

*Jimmy Carter | Reviewed by Emilina Guimont*

In his book, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence and Power*, former President Jimmy Carter gives readers a look into his fight for women's equality in his early life, presidency, and involvement in the Elders Organization. This book serves as an urgent message to both developed and developing nations regarding the inequality, oppression, and mistreatment women face which often goes unnoticed and unaddressed.

A major focus in this work is the struggle of women in African and Middle Eastern countries where male hierarchy is still deeply ingrained into customs and society. President Carter explains how the Carter Center has worked side-by-side with international leaders and human-rights activists to address issues such as honor killings, FGC (Female Genital Cutting), and HIV, and has made incredible progress in combating these concerns. President Carter also writes that despite differences in faith and customs, the overarching mission to fight for women's rights is able to bring together people from all backgrounds and personal tapestries.

President Carter often references Scripture and the Bible's message of equality when discussing concerns within particular sects of Christianity and their dogma pertaining to women's equality, primarily focusing on the Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Coalition. His central concern with the Catholic Church has been their rules addressing the prohibition of ordination of women as priests, despite strong efforts made by women's organizations, such as the Leadership Conference of Women's Rights, to allow women to be ordained. Concerning the Southern Baptist Convention, he focuses on their doctrine regarding women no longer serving as deacons, pastors, chaplains in the armed forces, or professors in Convention seminaries where male students would be present.

President Carter eloquently explains why he believes that Jesus was the greatest liberator of women despite interpretations of Scripture that suggest otherwise, and how his earthly ministry sent a message of equality that was dramatically different than the customs of the time. While President Carter argues against certain practices and interpretations some churches make, he maintains sensitivity towards these groups along with respect for Scripture and the message of the gospel.

I found one of the most emotional stories in the book to be that of a young Afghan woman named Khatera, who was manipulated into marrying a man twice her age due to him being a court judge in a case against her father. President Carter describes his own efforts in cooperation with the United Nations to give Khatera a safe haven, and gives readers an insight to the hurdles that are in place when trying to execute inter-country efforts for helping women in distress.

Throughout the book, President Carter references quotes from world leaders and activists fighting for the rights of women in many different situations of struggle, but one quote from Ritu Sharma, co-founder and president of Women Thrive Worldwide, struck me as eloquently in agreement with the egalitarian message of the gospel: "There is no religion that despises women. Hatred cannot

come from the heart of God. If there is hatred, its source is not the Creator. Only humans have the capacity to see and treat others as less than they truly are” (176).

*A Call to Action* is not a book primarily on Christian egalitarianism or women’s place in the Bible, but it is a book about egalitarianism spreading across all religions and the importance of women in societies across the globe. I would highly recommend this book to any person interested in the plight of women around the world, their struggles for equality, and the efforts to combat patriarchal oppressions disguised in false representations of Christianity and other major religions.

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