The Rev. Dr. Kevin Giles is a longstanding supporter of women in leadership. Over the course of more than forty years, he has written at least nine books on the topics of women, ministry, and the Trinity. Many of his books on women have been published in Australia (e.g., *Women and Their Ministry* [Dove Communications 1977], *Created Woman* [Acorn Press 1985], and *Better Together* [Acorn Press 2010]). Now he has written *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women* with a North American publisher (Cascade Books). It has been endorsed by renowned church leaders throughout the world. It begins with an explicit critique of complementarian theology (chs. 1–3); continues with a defense of gender equality in Gen 1–3 (ch. 4), in the Gospels (ch. 5) and in Paul’s letters (chs. 6–7); and ends with the related topics of slavery and social justice (chs. 8–9). After an annotated recommended reading list (231–35, for a fuller bibliography see 241–52), he includes the CBE International “Statement on Men, Women and Biblical Equality” (237–40), as well as subject, author, and Scripture indexes (253–65). His thesis is that “men and women have the same status, dignity, and leadership potential” in “the home, the church, and the world” (4–5). He sees no “middle ground” (5); the Bible teaches the “essential equality of the sexes” which is “the God-given ideal” (43, 67, 168, 223).

The word “actually” in the title suggests an implied subtitle: “Why complementarians are wrong in their view of women.” Giles establishes what the Bible actually teaches, not what complementarians allege the Bible teaches. The book is a critique of biblical arguments used in support of the permanent subordination of women; in other words, it critiques complementarian theology and methodology (xiii, 1, 12–20). That is Giles's strength. He is up-to-date in his data. His writing is bold, direct, clear, easy to read, accessible, and interesting. The key complementarian book on which he focuses is *God’s Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical Theological Survey* (Crossway 2014) by Andreas Köstenberger (NT scholar and longtime editor of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*) and his wife, Margaret Köstenberger (who has a doctorate focusing on Jesus and feminism) (10).

Giles considers himself a theologian more than an exegete or biblical theologian because he addresses the contemporary world (3–4, 11). He does so quite ably. Each chapter ends with questions for small group discussion, followed by up to three addendums which are more specific, yet quite important. Because Giles has served as a parish minister in the Anglican church in Australia for over forty years, his study shows his great passion: the health and wellbeing of the church today (xi). He seeks to speak to both the lay people and the academic scholars of the church.

It is hard to believe that, with so many excellent books on women and ministry, we need another one, but we do! At an introductory meeting of the female students where I teach, one student who had heard that I support women in church leadership said this was not what she had learned in her church, although she had no idea of the academic scholars who supported this view. Her view is that feminism is bad and egalitarian theology is feminism; therefore, egalitarian theology is bad. Giles might suggest she thought that, if she denied subordination of women, she would also deny differentiation of the sexes (223), which is not true. Similar to Gretchen Gaebelink Hull’s *Equal to Serve* in the 1980s and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis’s *Good News for Women* in the 1990s, Giles responds directly to the hierarchists’ arguments of the current decade.

He offers suggestions for both logic (methodology) and content (theology). Regarding methodology, for instance, he suggests that readers should differentiate between fact and inference/interpretation/implication, prescription and description, rule and principle, or explicit and implicit (5, 16, 43, 59, 75, 87, 117). The Bible has statements both of God's permanent ideal (of the new Christian order) and of temporary cultural accommodation (in the old fallen order) (164–65). Equality is ideal and subordination is cultural (67). Therefore, the Bible at times presupposes the ancient cultural setting, which took slavery (ch. 8) and the subordination of women (chs. 6–7) for granted. Paul may have tolerated some cultural norms, but he subverted them with his teachings (95). Giles concludes that pro-slavery arguments, pro-apartheid theology, and pro-female-subordination/complementarian defenses are parallel arguments and all have negative social and practical effects (201–4, 207). The consequences of one's teachings need to be examined (212). For example, men who are prone to be controlling hear headship teaching as giving them the right to demand obedience (xiv, 29, 211). Giles concurs that neither all whites who had slaves nor all whites who supported race separation were abusive, and now not all men who hold to male headship are necessarily abusive—but the systems allow for abuse. All these systems—slavery and patriarchy—are bolstered when the powerful find proof texts to keep their power (33, 187, 200, 223–25): “We will never understand why the debate over the male-female relationship is such a divisive and emotional matter for evangelicals unless we recognize that at root it is a conflict over power—who exercises it and who is to submit” (224). That is an important insight! Vehement complementarians and egalitarians may actually worship different gods: a god who first and foremost represents power versus a God who represents love (1 John 4:8, 16). In this regard, Giles's discussion of “role” is most pertinent. “Role” normally is a task or function or behavior that can change, but for today's complementarians “role” has become “fixed power differences allocated on the basis of gender” (13, 49–50, 54, 119).
Giles generally agrees with egalitarian consensus regarding interpretation of key biblical texts about the relationship of men and women. He also shows how the best of theologians, Catholic and Protestant, interpret key passages similarly (e.g., 43). He gives concise summaries (e.g., 1–9) as well as more extended explanations of his own views and his own history (e.g., 154–56). The only red flag I noted was his apparent bias against Reformed theologians. Once I started listing the pages that prompted my concern, the list went on and on (e.g., 91, 101, 165, 180–87, 193–95, 222, 228). Certainly, some Reformed theologians supported slavery, but some non-Reformed Baptist theologians and others did as well. Giles’s strong statements against Reformed thought are surprising since he also critiques some Southern Baptist preference for slavery and male headship. As a Reformed (Presbyterian) scholar myself, I found Giles at times unfair, especially since some Presbyterians were early supporters of women in ministry (e.g., the Cumberland Presbyterian Church ordained its first woman in 1889).

I concur with almost every biblical interpretation which Giles promotes. He often agrees with Philip Payne’s *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan 2009), although Giles adds his own helpful insights. For instance, if Jesus is the end of animal sacrifices and priests, why is the argument that women were not OT priests pertinent in today’s new covenant discussions (69)?

At times he argues from the perspective that egalitarian theology makes sense in today’s egalitarian world (27–29, 168). That may be true in some cultures. However, the same argument could be used to support practicing homosexuality (which Giles would not affirm). Although I am honored to be included in the celebrated list of renowned scholars who once were complementarian but have changed their minds (25), I was never complementarian or fundamentalist. I was reared in the Dominican Republic in a time and place when “fundamentalist” American Christianity was not known; there, simply being a Protestant Christian (as opposed to Roman Catholic) was radical in itself. When we moved to New Jersey, we attended a Presbyterian church that was evangelical and approved of female church leadership. I did not learn about those who interpret the Bible as supporting the subordination of women until college. (Nevertheless, I had never seen a woman preaching or giving communion until I was in seminary!)

These latter points are tangential. Returning to the main thrust of this review, Giles has boldly and clearly argued how the complementarian view on women and men is not biblical. What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women is a most helpful resource for those who want a critique of complementarian theology. I am sincerely thankful for his labors in this book as well his eagerness to travel and present his views around the world. I hope that this will not be his last book, but that he will continue writing for years to come!

Notes

1. In which both Giles and I are named as public endorsers.
2. “Exegesis has as its goal to give the historical meaning of texts in their literary context, and biblical theology has as its goal to give the historical meaning of what is said in the Bible or parts of the Bible in a holistic way . . . . Theology, in contrast, seeks to address the contemporary world of the theologian” (3–4).
4. E.g., “Many Christians, especially evangelicals of Reformed persuasion” believe in “power over those they lead” (91, italics original).
5. “This is almost certainly my last book” (xi).