

Call Me Blessed

By Faith Martin | Reviewed by Libbie Brooks

Faith Martin begins her book by stating: "In the eyes of the church, a woman's humanity is overshadowed by her being perceived as a sex. Woman is the spiritual equal of man, but the church teaches that a woman's sex prevents a practical working out of that equality...All of this contrasts with the Holy Scriptures. When reading the Bible I am no conscious of my sex but conscious of my humanity. And so I felt the women who flocked to Jesus. No man before or since has treated women as so completely human."

Martin provides us with an historical context for the issue of women's roles in the church. She begins by tracing the patterns of male authority in both Old and New Testaments. She also describes some of the more contemporary views on submission of women, and continues with a chapter on how we have actually made God in our image, especially our sexual image.

She discusses not only biblical women in authority (Deborah, Esther, Miriam, and Huldah but also the more "ordinary" women of the Bible. She concludes with an examination of Paul and his writings, including clear and perceptive discussions of 1 Timothy (women and silence) and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (man as "head" of woman, and the meaning of "head-covering").

Martin presents insights into the pagan cultures surrounding the biblical personalities. Old Testament believers often had grown up in paganism before being challenged by the powerful God of the Hebrews. Christians in the New Testament were all new to their faith, whether they were Jews or Gentiles. In their struggle to grasp the new Christian faith, first-century believers had to deal with Roman mythology and the Gnostic cults. Martin describes these struggles, how they are dealt with in the Scriptures, and their relevance to understanding gender issues.

She also discusses problems inherent in the common view of men and women as complements to each other, concluding that "the complementary understanding of men and women usually leads to a sense of woman's inferiority." In the same chapter, she discusses the words "male" and "female" and how they contrast with "masculine" and "feminine."

Martin takes a fresh look at the new life Christ provides for believing men and women. Her writing is both bold and humble, honest and exciting. The overall thrust of her book is to affirm that Christ offers us a completely new way of life.

Toward the beginning of *Call Me Blessed*, Faith Martin states that for women "there is a distinct advantage in not being responsible." But by the end of the book she shows us that the vibrant women of the Bible times took responsibility in their faith and in their lives. Women are equally included in the responsibility to respond to and proclaim Christ's Good News, and for that we can rejoice.

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