

# Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Ministry

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*A Feminist-Pneumatological Approach* | By Lisa Stephenson | Reviewed by Woodrow E. Walton

Lisa Stephenson relates the purpose of her book in her concluding chapter rather than in her introduction. Her purpose is to address the theological tenets “that have sustained and justified the subjugation of women in ministry within Pentecostalism . . .” (191). She writes as a Pentecostal (Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee) to Pentecostals and relies heavily upon Pentecostal scholars such as Gordon Fee, Cecil M. Robeck Jr., Roger Stronstad, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, and Edith Blumhofer. Wisely, she goes beyond them to rely on Linda L. Belville, Bernhard W. Anderson, Yves Congar, Rebecca Groothuis, Hans Conzelmann, Ronald W. Pierce, and James D. G. Dunn, who have written extensively on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and biblical equality.

From the Pentecostal perspective of Luke-Acts, Stephenson argues for the eradication of men being favored over women within ecclesial structures. She brings into her argument concepts of gender and ecclesiology forwarded by liberal feminist Christian writers Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Reuther, and Letty M. Russell. The impression is left upon this reviewer that Stephenson is more in step with Letty M. Russell. On page 151 of *Dismantling the Dualisms*, she identifies problems within Fiorenza’s paradigm of “a discipleship of equals” and Reuter’s “Exodus-community” and “Women-Church” (174–75). While seeing merits in both Fiorenza and Reuther, she chooses Russell’s “household of freedom.”

Stephenson, who received her PhD from Marquette University, argues well for an egalitarian relationship between men and women in full-time ministry. She leaves hints of an egalitarian sentiment up to page 57, where she first openly espouses her position. From that point on to the end of the book, the equality of men and women in ministry is very apparent.

Stephenson heavily footnotes her work. Nearly every page carries well-done citations displaying extensive breadth of research. She also exhibits care in her dealing with women in ministry as they appeared in the early years of the Pentecostal movement and became the topic of debate within the four Pentecostal denominations she examines: the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee; the Church of God in Christ; the Assemblies of God; and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

This reviewer has no hesitation in recommending this book, as it is excellent in dealing with the issue of women and men sharing equally and mutually in the ministry of the gospel. One part of the book could have been further developed. First, she could have considered the role of

Florenza's and Reuther's Roman Catholic backgrounds in influencing their eventual theological conclusions. Backgrounds do influence, whether acknowledged or left unacknowledged. She could have also gone beyond the lone liberal feminist Protestant, Letty Russell, whose long work with the East Harlem Protestant Parish in New York City from the 1950s into the early 1980s is known by this reviewer.

Missing is Suzanne de Dietrich, who, like Letty Russell, was connected with Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. In 1958, de Dietrich wrote a book entitled *The Witnessing Community: The Biblical Record of God's Purpose*, published by Westminster Press. It was first presented as a series of lectures to the faculty and students of that seminary. There are great similarities between de Dietrich and Russell despite their differences. De Dietrich was a noted biblical theologian strong on the witnessing "household" of faith without any distinctions.

An examination of the bibliography of *Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Women in Ministry* reveals the great depth of Lisa Stephenson's research. She delved into denominational files, journals, personal memoirs, personal histories, official manuals, biblical commentaries, specialized monographs on Old and New Testament themes, and theological journals. Among others, she consulted the works of Henry P. VanDusen, Grant Wacker, Martin Marty, Craig Keener, and Frank Macchia.

Stephenson's work is highly recommended by this reviewer as a resource for those involved in Christian ministry and the furtherance of men and women functioning as equals in the mission of the church of Christ Jesus. It should be must-reading for pastors, teachers, students, and anyone preparing for the Christian ministry.

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