Global Voices on Biblical Equality

Edited by Aida Besançon Spencer, William D. Spencer, and Mimi Haddad
Reviewed by KeumJu Jewel Hyun

Global Voices on Biblical Equality opens with a poem To Prisca and Aquila, which ends, “Gemstones of God, buried in stony, multicultural mines.” This book is about “gemstones of God,” women ministering together with men in the church worldwide. Global Voices embraces a wide range of cultures and traditions, examines the gender discriminations deeply rooted in those cultures and traditions, analyzes possible reasons why women are not equally granted leadership positions, and offers insights into improving equality of women and men to minister with their God-given gifts. The book is an anthology of “voices” from every continent.

The editors, the husband-and-wife team of William and Aida Spencer together with Mimi Haddad, are well-known scholars and advocates for promoting biblical equality. Aida Spencer is a professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, William Spencer is an adjunct professor of theology also at Gordon-Conwell and a pastor in an urban church, and Mimi Haddad is president of Christians for Biblical Equality. The contributors represent a wide range of ethnic groups comprising eleven different traditions and cultures.

In the introduction, Mimi Haddad advocates reformation movements for biblical equality for women. She draws a parallel between the abolitionists and egalitarians and asserts that, just as abolition reform was grounded on the correct interpretation of the Scripture, so the gender debate in the church must shift its focus to searching Scripture for its primary teachings, not its “attendant features.” Haddad states, “the egalitarian movement is a reform movement given by God” (20); thus, she elevates the subject of biblical equality to a hermeneutical issue rather than a mere debate.

Other contributors collectively testify that the status of women serving with men in the church is in various states. While some women have access to leadership positions in the church and other ministry organizations, some women are trying to find their own identities, not as a daughter, wife, or daughter-in-law, but as individuals whom God created in his image. Many women are seeking opportunities to exercise their gifts in the church only to find that they receive better recognition and respect at the workplace than at church. Male domination at home and at church is so prevalent that some women have withdrawn altogether with low self-esteem and accept gender discrimination as the norm. Many churches, across cultures and traditions, relegate women to children’s ministries or to the work in the kitchen.

The authors also reveal that Christianity makes a positive impact on changing traditional cultural biases against women. In spite of the inequality, many women faithfully minister in the church and other ministry fields and make an impact on society by becoming role models. However, the
majority of church leadership is predominantly male; many churches teach male-only leadership and bar women from holding senior pastor positions. Kevin Giles, renowned author on biblical equality, critiques the opposition to women’s ordination, noting, “Biblical arguments to support it have been tested and shown to be invalid” (194).

The authors present valuable insights in furthering biblical equality:

1. Promoting thorough study of the Scripture for better understanding of the biblical basis of women’s leadership and biblical definition of women’s roles in the church.

2. Encouraging men to respect and recognize women’s contributions in the overall ministries in the church, becoming intentional and proactive in commending women in ministry, and encouraging other men to support women.

3. Encouraging women to mentor other women to build up their confidence, help them take ecclesiastical responsibility, and increase their biblical and theological knowledge.

*Global Voices on Biblical Equality* is a remarkable book. It should encourage women who experience gender discrimination that improvements are being made and challenge and enlighten many men who are eager to help women find their voices.

Readers may note that the editors were not able to obtain any representation from the Middle East. Also, one chapter’s authors use “highest leadership” and “highest position” when referring to senior pastors, giving an impression that they view church leadership as hierarchical. In another place, a concisely summarized chart would have made a list of statistics more readable. Finally, one chapter observing women in ministry in the context of a husband and wife pastoral team is interesting; however, the approach seems different from the other chapters in the book, which examine women in ministry in general.

*Global Voices* is easy to read for a general audience, yet its substance is deep enough to be a textbook for seminary students. It is a must-read book for pastors and church leaders who desire to mobilize their congregations—the majority of which are women—to carry out the tasks of fulfilling the Great Commission. I highly recommend the book to all Christians to become aware that, for the church to be effective in proclaiming the gospel, women and men must minister together on an equal footing.

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