

The Quest for Gender Equity in Leadership: Biblical Teachings on Gender Equity and Illustrations of Transformation in Africa

Edited by Keumju Jewel Hyun and Diphus C. Chemorion

Reviewed by Rev. Heather Ann Martinez

When I first read the title of this book, I first thought that it was not really possible. As a female Anglican priest, I knew there were women in ordained ministry in Kenya. I did not expect to read an account of one woman's journey to the priesthood in Kenya nor of her determination to influence change within the Anglican Church in Kenya. I almost wouldn't call this a book. It reads more like a journal telling the stories of individuals and cultural issues on a continent that many people have not been to and the difficulties of changing cultures that do not honor women. There were moments where I wanted to throw the book across the room because it was difficult to read how so many people groups see women as inferior to their male counterparts. If you have a heart for change, for gender equity, and for loving others as we love ourselves, this is a must-read.

The book is divided into three parts and through these parts the authors give the readers their experiences of practicing gender equity in areas where it is virtually unheard of. Sammy Githuku identifies the root cause of the problems in practicing Biblical equity by looking at the proverbs of the Agikuyu tribe. These proverbs are often communicated to remind women of their inferiority. In the Agikuyu tribe, women are not to be trusted with confidential matters. They are not allowed to hold places of esteem.

Lydia Mwaniiki examines Biblical gender equity and women in leadership in the Anglican Church in Kenya. While there are more opportunities to serve in ordained ministry, there are not as many opportunities for women clergy to do as much ministry as their male counterparts. Diphus C. Chemorion takes a fresh look at gender equity in Genesis 1-3 reminding us that God created all of us-men and women- in God's image. Kabiro wa Gatumu says this: "In the New Testament, redemption points to a new creation in which men and women can be renewed to the measure and the fullness of the justice, equity, and sanctity which God provides." (P. 50). Keumlu Jewel Hyun reminds us that "Jesus empowered women and acknowledged their personhood in a culture where women were considered to be men's property, were identified only as mothers or wives, and had no voice of their own." (P.70)

Lois Semeye shares with us a synopsis of all of the female leaders named in the New Testament. Martine Audeoud introduces us as readers to two women in West Africa that are rising up to transform leadership. These women had mothers who already paved the way for them and modeled overcoming life's challenges in their West African countries.

Rangarirai Rutoro and Ester Rutoro explore gender equity in the Reformed Church of Zimbabwe. The Reformed Church has been ordaining women for over a decade however there are still more conversations that need to come in order to have gender equity amongst its leadership. The leadership of the Institutional Churches in Nigeria have also come a long way in overcoming cultural hindrances to gender equity. Similar to the Reformed Church, there are more conversations that need to be had.

While the majority of this book discusses the Biblical perspective of gender equity, the last chapter discusses gender equity in the family. The strength of this chapter is that it asks questions related to creating dialogue about gender equity. This chapter discusses three areas in which individuals within families can honor one another. Even though the questions are associated for the African context, these questions are generalized enough to be discussed everywhere.

This book offers a lot of hope for gender equity not only in Africa but everywhere gender equity is not currently practiced. This book offers a challenge to the Church in understanding that both Jesus and Paul were for women in leadership roles and not against. The authors' experiences gives us as readers a rich personal perspective of overcoming cultural and social challenges. Their stories give us hope.