

# Removing the Veil

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*Revealing God's Truth for Women | By Margaret English | Reviewed by John P. Lathrop*

*Removing the Veil* was written to affirm the place of women in God's economy. Author Margaret English gives special attention to the subject of women in ministry and maintains that women should be permitted full participation in ministry on an equal basis with men. The author draws from Scripture, her own personal testimony, and facts from church history as she presents evidence in support of equality in ministry. Anyone interested in the subject of women in ministry might read this book, but it was written with pentecostal/charismatic women in mind.

English is the senior chaplain of women at Orange County Female Detention Center in Florida. In this capacity, she oversees a ministry to more than three thousand women every year. While English's ministry brings her face to face with many women who are literally behind bars, this book is written in the hope that some of her non-incarcerated sisters in Christ who are currently "behind bars" will be set free to serve their Lord unhindered.

The book is divided into three sections consisting of four chapters each. Section 1, "Unveiling Our History," mentions some women who had significant ministries in the early pentecostal movement—women like Aimee Semple McPherson and Maria Woodworth-Etter. The author also addresses the issue of why the initial openness to the ministry of women during times of revival has subsided and how patriarchy came to be embraced. In addition, she discusses the matriarchal and patriarchal systems of marriage that existed in the Old Testament and how they impacted what we read in the Bible concerning women. Section 2 is called "Unveiling Our Hearts." Here, English addresses some of the issues related to passages that are often used to bar women from some types of ministry: texts like 1 Corinthians 14:33–38, 1 Corinthians 11:1–17, and 1 Timothy 2:9–15. English also gives some attention to the subject of elders on the island of Crete from the book of Titus. In section 3, "Unveiling Our Hope," the author gives considerable space to looking at the women described in Proverbs 31 and in Revelation 12. She also gives some attention to the creation account of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:26–28) and to details of the fall.

A brief look at the bibliography of this book will demonstrate that English is a very serious student. In the preface, she says that she studied the biblical passages that spoke about women for more than a decade.

English's work makes some valuable contributions. One of these contributions is supplying facts and figures about women in ministry. For example, in 1944, women made up 67 percent of the ordained clergy of the Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the pentecostal denomination started by Aimee Semple McPherson. In 1993, the percentage of ordained women in the Foursquare Church had dropped to 38 percent. English notes that, while this percentage may still seem high,

many of the women included in this figure are the wives of pastors, and very few of these women function as senior pastors of congregations. The figures of another pentecostal group, the Assemblies of God, are also revealing. The Assemblies of God began ordaining women in 1935; however, currently in the Assemblies of God only about 1.06 percent of all credentialed ministers are women who are senior pastors. English also tells us that the percentage of women ministers in the Church of the Nazarene, which was about 20 percent in 1908, has more recently dropped to around 1 percent.

Another interesting part of the book is the author's discussion of matriarchal and patriarchal marriage customs in the Old Testament. Most CBE readers will understand what the term "patriarchal" means. In a matriarchal marriage, the husband left his family to go to where his wife's family was; any children that he and his wife had were reckoned as part of his wife's family. The author goes into great detail to show how these two conflicting marriage arrangements impacted Sarah and Abraham's relationship. It makes for some interesting reading.

Some of the interpretations that the author presents in this book are questionable, for example, English's interpretation of the woman of Revelation 12. She can see in this woman Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Elizabeth, and Mary the mother of Jesus; in her view, the woman can be symbolic of all women. She also sees Sarah as being a prophet based on Psalm 105:14–15, a text that does not have a clear connection to Sarah at all. Some of her work in the Pastoral Epistles also seems a bit strained as she tries to show that there were women elders in the early church. While trying to validate the place and ministry of women, which is good and biblical, I think at times she tries too hard.

English does know what the obstacles are regarding women in ministry and she seeks to address them from a biblical perspective. While you may not agree with all of her interpretations, her book serves to remind us that there is still much work to be done with respect to securing full ministerial equality for women. As the denominational facts and figures that she supplies indicate, this is true even in places where women are given an "open door" into ministry.

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JOHN P. LATHROP is an ordained minister with the International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies and pastor of the Christian Pentecostal Church of Newton, Massachusetts. He is a regular contributor to *Vista Magazine*, the official publication of the International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies, and the Pneuma Foundation's journal, the *Pneuma Review*. He is also the author of *Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers Then and Now* (Xulon Press, 2008).

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