Theorizing Women and Leadership: New Insights and Contributions from Multiple Perspectives

By Julia Storberg-Walker and Paige Haber-Curran | Reviewed by William David Spencer

This latest volume in the International Leadership Association Series considers the leadership of women in multiple positions from multiple theoretical perspectives. The first impression is that the book’s emphasis lies outside the concern of men and women equally sharing in the ministry and mission of the church. The foreword is plain about its purpose of addressing “society’s unchallenged, tacit theories of women’s leadership (p. x).” Page xi states that the book intends to change “how we think about theorizing women’s leadership.” It proposes that a working theory will create social transformation in developing women leaders and will “restructure organizations to be more equitable and sustainable.” The focus of much of the book is on professional careers and the workplace rather than the church and its mission.

A redeeming feature of the book is that two of the contributors in the discussions are professors in Azusa Pacific University, and Concordia College. One contributor, Kathleen S. Grove, holds an MA in marriage and family therapy from Christian Theological Seminary, affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). These exceptions raise a question in the reviewer’s mind of gender equality as affecting Christian men and women within managerial or leadership positions in Christian associations and organizations. What concerns this reviewer though is that while the book is theoretical and paradigmatic, it lacks a solid biblical base and leaves out entirely any consideration of Jesus’ concerns regarding Christian service.

The role of women in pastoral, missional, educational, and evangelistic roles are simply not addressed. These are the roles that are mostly addressed when it comes to gender equality within the “work” of the church. There is a saving feature to the book in its focus on leadership models based on relationships instead of feminine traits. Also on the credit side, the volume addresses issues relative to administrative and managerial roles, racial typing, social work, and counsel be it legal, rehabilitative, medical, or other. These areas are also open to biblical and Christian insight, as well as “role-typing” as often crops up in businesses, corporations, and churches. One of the most interesting sections is chapter fourteen which deals with “women leaders at the nexus of roles and identities.” Michelle Shockness, a contributor from Redeemer University College, did an excellent job of exposing the “typing” of women leaders as less than male “leaders” (Ct. p. 258ff).

Despite this reviewer’s guarded review, this is still recommended reading, especially chapter fourteen, which carries both discussion and graphic tables. The participation of writers from Redeemer University College, Concordia, Baylor, Christian Theological Seminary, and other church-related schools, is a plus factor to the volume. It is also global in its treatment of women in leadership roles as ethnic and national backgrounds also lies within its purview.

WOODROW E. WALTON is an ordained Assemblies of God minister. Over a ministry of more than 53 years, he has served as pastor and educator (professor an dean), evangelist, prison and healthcare minister, and has served in mission programs in Africa. He is a writer and conference speaker and a member of the Evangelical Theological Society. He lives with his wife, Joy, in Shattuck, Oklahoma.