

Women as Risk-Takers for God

By Lorry Lutz | Reviewed by Frances F. Hiebert

The author of *Women as Risk-Takers for God*, Lorry Lutz, is currently the international coordinator of the Women's Track of AD2000 and Beyond. Her purpose for accepting this position was to be an advocate for women among Christian leaders so that women would be released to use their gifts for evangelism and discipleship.

In 1991 Lutz met with leaders of two other global women's movements, the Women's Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Women's Network, to see how they could work together. A book committee was set up to include representatives of the three groups, and Lutz was commissioned to do the writing. Their stated goals for the book were these:

- To show the variety of gifts God has given women.
- To demonstrate through models of women in ministry how God is calling out and using women to serve him.
- To encourage men and women to work together to build the kingdom.
- To encourage respect and acceptance of each other, even though we may hold different biblical interpretations of the role of women in ministry.

The book begins with a section on women from the past. Brief sketches include the third century martyr, Perpetua, the Anabaptist women of the Reformation, women in the 19th century missions movement, and Frances Willard, president of the Women's Temperance Union and co-evangelist with Dwight L. Moody. These women actively served Christ but have been virtually ignored by church historians.

The second chapter deals with historical obstacles faced by women, such as the attitudes of the early church fathers and the leaders of the Reformation. Lutz also notes that attitudes in almost all cultures of the world have been harmful to women.

Part Two, the main body of the book, presents the inspiring stories of twelve contemporary women around the world who serve in various kinds of Christian ministry. Most of these are in some kind of leadership position. The stories honestly present the obstacles they have faced as well as their own internal struggles with regard to God's call in the light of traditional attitudes toward the role of women in ministry. They are risk-takers both in answering a call that may be extraordinary for a woman, and in sometimes facing the danger of the ministry itself. No doubt is left, however, that they are being used of God.

In Part Three, the author challenges women readers to become all that God wants them to be. That, she writes, is the heart of the book. Then Lutz offers ten practical suggestions "that can help

you unwrap, assemble, and begin to use your gifts.” One of these encourages women to maintain a balance between their “femininity” and the strengths needed to exercise their gifts. Since femininity is mentioned in several other places without any clear definition, this leaves the word open to being understood in the stereotypical way.

A chapter called “What Have We Learned?” refers to the twelve women presented earlier and also includes sidebars with vignettes of other women. However, the sidebars (while valuable on their own) are not always easily connected to the rest of the text.

“Helping Men to Help Women Use Their Gifts” seems to be a misnomer for the chapter with that title because most of the advice addresses men themselves about what men should do, rather than showing how women can help men change. Harmony between the sexes certainly would be well-served if men would heed those suggestions. Perhaps the best suggestion advises men to start treating women as Jesus did!

Although there is no section of the book actually devoted to theological issues, there are several places where these are discussed. But it is with these theological issues that the book and the women depicted show a certain amount of ambivalence, although most illustrations lean to the conservative side. Some who are presented as examples of women in leadership still feel unsure whether they are doing “the right thing?” Nevertheless the author quotes World Evangelical Fellowship’s Theological Commission’s statement that, “We need to affirm the theological basis of the equality of women and men.”

In one sense, this book’s presentation of diverse opinions portrays the dialogue about women in leadership in which Christians are engaged. On the other hand, some readers may wish that the author, at least, had been clearer in presenting her own position. She leaves it up to readers to come to their own conclusions when she writes that women should know what they believe and hold fast to it in spite of those who disagree with them.

For me, one of the most valuable theological insights in the book is a long quote from the seminar “Gender of Giftedness” by Lynn Smith of Ontario Bible College and Seminary. Smith offers a new paradigm to replace the old one of hierarchy and dominance in the relationship between women and men in the church. In that model, there can only be tension when trying to find a balance of power between the two. In the new, gift-based paradigm established by the redemptive act of Jesus, equality is not maintained by one giving up power to another, but is an inherent value of the community that functions by giftedness and mutual submission. In this new worldview, the issue of dominion is replaced by concerns for development; authority is not “over” but “on behalf of.”

On the negative side, the format of this book is a bit like a patch-work quilt. Sometimes a woman is mentioned only by her first name, although she was presented much earlier, so it may be difficult to identify her easily. The chapters might have been arranged in a better sequence to

improve continuity. The individual essays, however, are certainly interesting and valuable in their own right. Consider these important bits and pieces:

- The secret of gender harmony is everybody truly wanting and releasing everybody else for God's will, not their own.
- “When will more women make it into Evangelical leadership? About the time men really understand the idea of ‘dying to the self.’ All their worldview on women and culture must die, and when they really understand that at the feet of Jesus there is neither male nor female—we’ll be in leadership” (quote from a Chinese woman international mission leader in Singapore).
- 75 percent of refugees in the world are women and girls, fleeing war and violence.
- “When it comes to saving the world or a part of it, street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood, women are the catalysts through whom the critical mass of social change will be achieved” (Aburdine and Naisbitt).
- Ministry is demanding... above all, the enemy is after us when we’re obeying God’s call.

Like a quilt, however, the book is practical. Lutz offers everyday, down-to-earth suggestions which women can use in their struggles to answer the call of God and become whatever God wants them to be.

The final chapter is titled, “What Does the Future Hold for Women in Ministry?” The people who are quoted show there offer a range of opinions about what women can and should do. Although Lutz believes there will be an increasing number of leaders who want to help women use their gifts in ministry, tension between those who believe women should be involved in policy and decision-making and those who do not remains high. Theological and biblical aspects of the role of women will continue to determine what women are allowed to do in a particular denomination or church. But, the Christian community must come to terms with the educated, qualified, and experienced 21st-century woman, whose opportunities for positions of leadership and administration are increasing in the marketplace and society at large. “What about the Church of Jesus Christ?” asks Lutz. And surely a waiting world is asking the same question.

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