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**“... speaking truth  
with love ...”**

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A major part of the ministry of CBE International is providing resources—blog, journal, magazine, podcast, book reviews, curricula. . . . CBE, however, does not shy away from promoting resources produced by other authors, even other organizations. As an example, my summer 2021 editorial listed five books and five articles or chapters published by members of our Peer Review Team, none of which were published by or reviewed by CBE. The previous editorial, spring 2021, listed nine books of interest to our readers.

As we read in Ecclesiastes, quoting from the KJV, “of making many books there is no end.” The author of Ecclesiastes bemoans the weariness of studying endless books. Though that weariness is palpable to me, it is not my point here. Instead, I continue to marvel at the vast egalitarian library arising around us and all the more at those who are creating it. Please read on for a few examples.

First, I want to call attention to the book *Grounded in the Body, in Time and Place, in Scripture: Papers by Australian Women Scholars in the Evangelical Tradition*, edited by Jill Firth and Denise Cooper-Clarke (Wipf & Stock, 2021). This book, which is available from CBE’s online bookstore ([cbe.today/bookstore](http://cbe.today/bookstore)), gathers excellent scholarship from nineteen women with a variety of specialties.

Second, Mandy Smith (also Australian) has published two important books. In both cases, the title aptly forecasts the content. Mandy first wrote a book about ministry and leadership, *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry* (IVP, 2015), which has been especially well received. More recently, she has written about Christian living in *Unfettered:*

*Imagining a Childlike Faith beyond the Baggage of Western Culture* (Brazos, 2021).

A collection of resources that is freely available online is *Leaven: A Journal of Christian Ministry*, published quarterly from 1990 to 2017 in cooperation with Pepperdine University in southern California (<https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/>). *Leaven* covers several topics, many of which reflect the editors’ commitments to unity, worship, and the ministry of women. Though its articles promoting women are too numerous to list here, I will single out a ministry resource for your consideration—a choral reading for public worship, written by Lee Magness, titled, “I Have a Name: Readings on Women Through Whom God Worked.”

Marion Taylor, a member of our Peer Review Team, has co-authored a brand-new book with Joy Schroeder: *Voices Long Silenced: Women Biblical Interpreters through the Centuries* (WJK, 2022). At least two other Peer Reviewers have books forthcoming from IVP Academic: Susan Howell, *Buried Talents: Overcoming Gendered Socialization to Answer God’s Call*, and Nijay Gupta, *Hidden Christian Figures: Bringing the Women Leaders of the Early Churches Out of the Shadows*.

I am constantly reminded that the high-quality resources that promote women in Christian leadership and stand against injustice toward women in its various forms are too numerous to all be reviewed by CBE. I wish you well as you are blessed by these many resources—those listed above and others as well.

*. . . greet you in the Lord.*

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Review Article  
***How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy***  
**Cape Town, South Africa: Spiritual Bakery Publications, 2022**  
**by Terran Williams**

Review article by KEVIN GILES

Terran Williams asked if I would review his book, *How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy*. I feel honoured to be asked because I consider it a first-rate book, a superb piece of work that should be widely read among evangelicals. However, for me to simply outline the contents of his book and comment on what he says is not adequate. I must first set his book in its historical context.

### **Historical Context**

#### *What Has Taken Place Since the Late 1960s*

From the late 1960s, the call to recognize women's equality in every sphere of life grew in strength and gained wide acceptance. At first, most evangelical Christians stood in opposition. They insisted that God had given men headship and to deny this was to directly contradict the Bible. In support of the traditional view that God had appointed men to lead, a number of well-known evangelical theologians put their minds to reformulating the historic position that gave precedence to men, called patriarchy, so that it sounded acceptable to modern ears. They rejected the historic position that spoke with one voice of the "superiority" of men and the "inferiority" of women, speaking instead of men and women as "equal" (a new idea for many) yet "role differentiated." Uncoded, this meant that men and women are spiritually equal, of the same value and dignity in God's sight, but also that some things are the domain of men and some of women—specifically, that leadership is the domain of men.

To make their case, they mined the Scriptures to find every text that could be read to say that God had appointed men to lead and women to be subordinate. The impact of their "biblical case" for this view, which became known from 1991 as "the complementarian position," it must be acknowledged, is impressive. It convinced most evangelicals that this was "what the Bible clearly taught." Thus, to argue for the unqualified equality of the sexes was to deny biblical authority.

From the 1970s onward, the few evangelicals bold enough to argue that the Bible made the substantial equality of the two bodily differentiated sexes the God-given ideal were denigrated as deniers of biblical authority. In hotbeds of complementarianism such as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, evangelical egalitarians had a tough time. They were "shunned" and shamed by the complementarian majority. Nevertheless, they kept working toward the biblical case for equality, and in 1988 Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) was founded. This united and gave voice to the many scholarly evangelicals who were convinced the Bible made the substantial equality of the two differentiated sexes the God-given ideal. At an academic level, CBE articulated its biblical case for the equality

of the two sexes in a new journal, *Priscilla Papers*. This meant the evangelical establishment so heavily invested in patriarchy could not silence their critics nor deny that many well-informed evangelicals believed the Bible taught the substantial equality of the sexes. CBE faced a long uphill battle, but gradually the evangelical egalitarian position came to be seen as a possible alternative to the complementarian position, and then as the position that most accurately reflects what the Bible teaches on the relationship of the sexes.

For reasons I will give below, I believe 2016 is the year that the evangelical egalitarian account of what the Bible teaches on the man-woman relationship gained ascendancy in the evangelical world. It was seen at that point in time to capture the teaching of Scripture on this matter most accurately. Sensing that complementarian theology was at the point of collapse, Andreas Köstenberger—the most trusted and theologically able second-generation complementarian—in conjunction with his wife, Margaret, published *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Crossway, 2014). Their effort was unsuccessful: refuted exegetical conclusions were rehashed, telling criticisms of complementarian arguments were ignored, and the book insisted the central issue is male-female differentiation, something evangelical egalitarians unambiguously affirm. The central and fundamental issue in dispute has always been, does or does not the Bible permanently subordinate women to men, never male-female differentiation. In my book, *What the Bible Actually Teaches about Women* (Cascade, 2018), I make professor Köstenberger my primary debating opponent, contesting virtually every claim and argument he makes.<sup>1</sup>

My book is only one of several written by evangelical scholars in the last few years rejecting the complementarian "biblical" arguments for the permanent subordination of women. In my opinion, the most important of these is *Discovering Biblical Equality*, third edition, edited by Ronald Pierce, Cynthia Long Westfall, and Christa McKirland (IVP Academic, 2021, reviewed on pp. 24–30 of this issue of *Priscilla Papers*). Every biblical text that complementarians quote in support of the permanent subordination of women is critically assessed by the most able of evangelical scholars and found wanting. The texts quoted in fact do not permanently subordinate women to men or exclude them from preaching/teaching in church. With great confidence, I believe no answer to this new edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality* will be attempted by complementarian scholars.

One part of the complementarian "biblical" case for the permanent subordination of women or "role differentiation" is the so-called "Trinity argument."<sup>2</sup> Just as the Father has authority

over the Son, so men have authority over women. The persons of the Trinity are ordered hierchically in heaven, and this prescribes how the man-woman relationship on earth should be ordered. First Corinthians 11:3–4 is quoted as proof for this belief. From the mid-1970s to 2016, this argument was an essential part of the complementarian position. Its importance to the complementarian case cannot be overstated. In 2004, Wayne Grudem, the *de facto* leader of the complementarians, said he believed how the Trinity is understood “may well turn out to be the most decisive factor in finally deciding” on the status and ministry of women.<sup>3</sup>

This complementarian hierarchical construal of the Trinity has insurmountable problems. To begin, 1 Cor 11:3–4 almost certainly does not speak of the hierarchical ordering of the divine persons or of men and women. For it to do this, the Greek word *kephale*, translated into English as “head,” must mean “head over” or “authority over.” This understanding of the Greek in this context makes no sense because Paul goes on to endorse men and women *leading* the church in prayer and prophecy. It is far more likely the Greek word in this context implies the meaning “source” or “origin,” as it usually does. The “source” or “origin” of the Son is his eternal generation by the Father to be equally God, and the “source” or “origin” of Eve, the first woman, is Adam, the first man (Gen 2:21–22). But the biggest problem with the so-called “Trinity argument” for the permanent subordination of women is that it directly contradicts and denies what the creeds and confessions of the church say on the Trinity. The creeds and confessions of the church give the historic, communally agreed interpretation of Scripture on the major doctrines of the Christian faith. They define orthodoxy. They unambiguously affirm that the three divine persons are the one God, differentiated as persons yet one in divine being, majesty, and authority. They exclude hierarchical ordering in any way. The divine persons are “co-equal.”

In 2016, suddenly and unexpectedly, some of the most theologically informed complementarians recognised this. They conceded that what some were teaching on the Trinity was a reworded expression of the Arian heresy. Evangelical egalitarians had been making this point for about thirty years. Civil war then broke out in the ranks of the complementarian army. In a very short time those arguing for a hierchically ordered Trinity completely capitulated. Complementarians have now abandoned the Trinity argument. Remember Grudem’s words, that how the Trinity is understood “may well turn out to be the most decisive factor in finally deciding” on the status and ministry of women. Because of the huge significance of the loss of the Trinity argument for the permanent subordination of women, I mark the year 2016 as the point in time when the debate between complementarian theologians and evangelical egalitarian theologians over what the Bible teaches on the man-woman relationship was won by the latter.

Another argument complementarians constantly made over the last forty or more years is that they represented the historic understanding of the male-female relationship; egalitarian evangelicals are the innovators. In arguing for the equality of the sexes, egalitarians simply embraced modern secular cultural

ideas. Evangelical egalitarians rejected this charge, arguing that until the 1960s virtually everyone spoke of men as “superior,” women as “inferior, and that no one had ever differentiated the sexes on the basis of differing “roles.” Complementarians either ignored or dismissed this reply. In 2021, new evidence came to light showing that in fact the church had never with one voice taught the subordination of women. This evidence was amassed by Beth Allison Barr, a onetime Southern Baptist and presently professor of history at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, in her book, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Brazos, 2021).

Barr begins by telling her readers of her own agonizing journey in breaking from complementarian theology and her Southern Baptist congregation, as it dawned on her that what complementarians are teaching is an historical novelty and lacks substantial biblical support. She shows that the complementarian “history argument,” on which she focuses, is false on two fronts. First, as I have just mentioned, until the 1960s virtually everyone spoke of men as “superior,” women “inferior.” “Equal yet role differentiated” is a novel description of the man-woman relationship. Second, and more importantly, as an historian she documents the evidence proving that in every century the full equality of the sexes has been upheld by one or more Christian scholars. This means that arguing for the equality of the sexes is not without historical precedent, a reflection solely of contemporary cultural ideas. What has happened in the last fifty or so years is that the minority opinion has step by step become the majority opinion. Following Barr’s book, to argue that complementarianism represents the unambiguous and the uncontested historical understanding of the male-female relationship is impossible.

In 2017, perhaps the greatest challenge to complementarian theology took place when the extent of the abuse of women in homes and churches where male headship teaching prevails was made public. Complementarians, from that time onward, had to face the fact that teaching that men have authority over women can, and often does, encourage and condone men abusing their wives and other women as well.<sup>4</sup> I have written a book, *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women* (Cascade, 2020), substantiating this assertion, drawing heavily on the scientific evidence and the testimony of many evangelical women who have travelled this road. This disclosure deeply wounds complementarianism. In a world where the safety of women is demanded, I cannot see a way forward for this theological opinion. The claim that God has given men authority over women is not “good news” for women.

#### *Complementarians on the Retreat*

The conclusion that complementarianism is now a lost cause is not unique to evangelical egalitarians. Some of the most informed complementarians have reached the same conclusion. In June 2016, Professor Carl Trueman, of Westminster Theological Seminary, a complementarian, wrote:

Complementarianism as currently constructed would seem to be now in crisis. But this is a crisis of its own making—the direct result of the incorrect historical

and theological arguments upon which the foremost advocates of the movement have chosen to build their case and which cannot actually bear the weight being placed upon them.<sup>5</sup>

More devastating is the conclusion reached by Aaron Renn in the *Masculinist* newsletter of February 2019—a surprising place to find a nuclear attack on complementarianism. He is a well-informed complementarian of long standing who now thinks complementarianism is at the point of collapse. He says, “the future of complementarianism looks grim,” it “has the air of a project in deep trouble,” it is a theological position no longer “sustainable,” it “has arrived at a place that is untenable,” and he refers to its “pending demise.”<sup>6</sup>

Possibly no one has so shaken complementarians in general, and Southern Baptists in particular, in recent years than Beth Moore. She is the best-known Southern Baptist. In 2010, *Christianity Today* called her “the most popular Bible teacher in America.” She has 990,000 Twitter followers. As a Southern Baptist, she is, of course, not ordained and mainly speaks to women. She is a self-professed complementarian. However, in the wake of the “MeToo” movement and the revelations of the widespread abuse of women in Southern Baptist congregations, and its acceptance by church leaders, she broke ranks and wrote on May 3, 2018, “A Letter to My Brothers” [of complementarian conviction].<sup>7</sup> In this she says she “learned early to show constant pronounced deference—not just proper respect” to evangelical male leaders, to accept frequent unjustified criticism from them, and to be ignored and talked down to by these men. But in late 2016, when it emerged that key evangelical leaders’ views of women “smacked of misogyny, objectification and astonishing disesteem,” she spoke up. She says,

I came face to face with one of the most demoralizing realizations of my adult life: Scripture was not the reason for the colossal disregard and disrespect of women among many of these men. It was only the excuse. Sin was the reason. Ungodliness.<sup>8</sup>

Moore has not embraced evangelical egalitarianism, but she certainly has inflicted a mortal wound on complementarianism. She has made it plain that complementarian theology reflects and propagates a low view of women. In March 2021, she left the Southern Baptist Convention.

## Book Review

Trueman, Renn, Moore, and numerous other evangelical theologians today recognise that complementarianism as a theological position is bankrupt, but they do not offer an alternative, let alone embrace evangelical egalitarianism. Terran Williams, in contrast, not only deconstructs complementarian theology, he also constructs a coherent and biblically grounded account of evangelical egalitarian theology. One of the many strengths of Williams’s book is that he tells *how* he came to be “converted.” This means his book is both biographical and theological. For some years, he was a pastor and teacher in a megachurch that took pride in its complementarian

theology. At one point, as the leading theological articulator of complementarianism in his church, he was tasked with writing a definitive defence of it. Much to his great surprise, as he carefully studied the biblical texts quoted in support and the many subsidiary arguments found in complementarian literature, he changed his mind. He found that the Bible does not permanently subordinate women to men, does not set God the Son eternally under the authority of God the Father, and does not ever speak of differing “roles” for men and women. It instead makes the subordination of women a reflection of the fall, something to be opposed by Christians. This led him to think long and hard about what, in fact, the Bible says about the sexes, about ministry in the church, and about the marriage relationship. Having told the story of his “conversion,” he then goes on to outline his new evangelical egalitarian theology.

It is in this context, where complementarian theology has collapsed, that Williams writes. He is not seeking a hearing for the biblical case for male-female equality, as I and certain others did for thirty or more years; he is putting the biblical case for male-female equality as it is now firmly established and deconstructing the post 1970s novel case for the subordination of women. If no evangelical theologian of complementarian conviction makes a substantial reply to him, then it is undeniable that complementarianism has collapsed as a theological position.

## “Mutualism”

On one matter, Williams takes his own path. He sees himself as standing firmly and unambiguously within the evangelical egalitarian family but prefers to call himself a “mutualist.” He points out rightly that complementarians say: 1) they believe in the equality of the sexes, 2) affirmations of equality can eclipse male-female distinctions, and 3) equality of the sexes is not the only issue in contention (22). But I ask, is “mutualism” a better and less ambiguous term than “evangelical egalitarianism”? I think not. The adjective “mutual” speaks of shared feelings or actions, something common to two or more parties. However, like the term “complementarian,” this word does not define the nature of the relationship between the parties in mind. A complementary relationship can be hierarchical or equal and so too can a mutual relationship.

Yes, the self-designation “egalitarian” has its limitations that require clarifying comments, but its strength is that it focuses on the central issue, on what is implied when the Bible speaks of men and women both being made in the image and likeness of God. I dissent from his innovative suggestion for a better name for the position he and I hold, but please note that this matter gets very little discussion in his book.

## The Foreword

Williams’s wife, Julie, writes the foreword to his book. It is a gem. She tells how she grew up as a dogmatic complementarian who only converted to evangelical egalitarianism after her husband, when she came to see that her marriage and her church ministry did not correspond with her complementarian theology. Her marriage was a profoundly equal relationship, and she preached and gave

leadership in her church. After her change of mind, she says, “now my theology matches with my lived experience” (13). What good news; becoming an evangelical egalitarian can set us free!

#### *Assessing the Book*

Now to the book, *How God Sees Women*. First, I note that Williams competently covers the biblical teaching on the status and ministry of women as it now stands after fifty years of debate. All the key texts that have been in dispute are dealt with carefully. He convincingly shows that there is not one verse that supports the complementarian position and much that supports mutualism/evangelical egalitarianism.

For evangelicals, lack of biblical support for a position means it cannot be binding on the Christian conscience and it may well need to be rejected. We may think nothing more needs to be said, but Williams recognises this is not the case. All the proof texts that complementarians appeal to have been long disputed, but to no avail. Complementarianism is a highly developed theological construct that is supposedly based on Scripture yet determines how Scripture is read and interpreted. To refute complementarianism, one must reject one by one the many interlocking elements that constitute this theological position, that make it sound plausible and form the basis of its problematic hermeneutic. The whole building has to be deconstructed. Williams does this well. He notes the following:

- Complementarians have until very recently consistently argued that the subordination of women is illustrated and grounded in the eternal subordination of the Son. The hierarchical ordering of the sexes is not a doctrine based solely on a few texts, but rather on how the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are hierarchically ordered in eternity. This argument almost won over the evangelical world, but in the last few years it has been almost universally rejected by Reformed theologians of both egalitarian and complementarian conviction. It is agreed that the argument introduces an Arian-like doctrine of the Trinity that all the creeds and confessions of the church make heretical.
- Complementarians for more than forty years have claimed that evangelical egalitarians are seeking to impose on the church a novel understanding of the man-woman relationship: Egalitarians were innovators and complementarians represented historic Christianity. Williams amasses the evidence, now well-established, showing this is simply not true. Until about the 1960s, virtually everyone spoke of men as “superior,” women “inferior,” an understanding of the sexes complementarians say they reject (29–39). They tell us they believe that men and women are equal yet “role” differentiated, an idea never heard before the late 1970s! What this means is that in the last fifty or so years both egalitarians and complementarians

have begun speaking of the man-woman relationship in different but novel ways. A change in culture has forced all Christians to change their thinking about the man-woman relationship. Williams writes, “The complementarian position, ‘equal but different roles’ is every bit of a departure from the historical position of the church as gender mutualism” (35).

- For complementarians, no word is more important or more used than the word “role.” Basic to their position, they tell us, is that the Bible teaches that men and women are “equal” yet have different “roles.” Williams outlines this argument well and concludes that nothing can be found in Scripture to commend it. In complementarian literature, gender “roles” are ascribed by God and cannot change. They speak of who rules and who obeys. Following dictionary usage, roles can change and are not gender specific. He concludes, “Though the idea of roles is compatible with equality, the idea of permanent power relations assumed at birth is a statement of inequality” (53).
- Complementarians argue that they affirm male-female differentiation and egalitarian evangelicals deny this. This is an “absurd” argument, Williams says (54). Complementarians cannot quote one example of evangelical egalitarians denying or even questioning male-female differentiation, and they have to blatantly ignore egalitarians’ consistent, unambiguous affirmations that God has made us man or woman, excepting in rare cases of genetic confusion.
- Complementarians argue that the parallel exhortations to husbands and wives and masters and slaves to be subordinate or obey those set over them are entirely different in nature. They are like “oranges and apples.” The former are based on God’s ordering of the sexes before the fall and are thus transtemporal and transcultural, and the latter are time-bound and culturally limited. They simply give practical advice to those living in a culture that took slavery for granted. Nothing in these parallel exhortations suggests this contrast and their close association implies otherwise. Moreover, the learned Reformed theologians of the Old South (Hodge, Dabney, Thornwell, etc.) vehemently rejected this contrast. They argued the exhortations to wives and slaves were of the same nature and force and were prescriptive for all ages and cultures.
- Complementarians cannot agree on the fundamentals of their position. They cannot agree if the Bible subordinates all women to all men, or simply wives to husbands; they cannot agree whether male headship applies only in marriage or in marriage and the church; and they cannot agree on what the husband’s headship

involves. Is he to make all the major decisions, have the casting vote when the couple cannot agree, be a servant-leader or the redeemer or the paterfamilias?

- Many arguments complementarians make to support their position are clearly special pleading. They have no force. I give one example of many that Williams discusses. Complementarians tell us the whole Bible was written by men. This, they infer, shows us that God has appointed men to be teachers of his people. In answer, Williams points out that several well-known Bible scholars have argued for the possibility that Priscilla and Aquila wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, but most tellingly he reminds us that until modern times almost all women could not read or write! This means they were not barred from writing because of some theological reason but rather because men excluded them from education.

### *The Lure of the Soft Complementarian Option*

Faced with the fact that classic complementarian teaching does not describe the profoundly egalitarian nature of the husband-wife relationship in the best of contemporary marriages, and that women preach in so many supposedly complementarian churches, Williams observes that in ever-growing numbers evangelicals speak of themselves as “soft complementarians.” This, they hope, will allow them to say they believe one thing and behave in another way. Williams says they would better call themselves “inconsistent complementarians” (61). He sees the insurmountable problem with this trend with absolute clarity. He writes, “If complementarianism is wrong [and he argues it is indeed wrong] then even a soft form of it is no more acceptable than merely a soft form of racism would be” (21).

### *Where to Now?*

In one of his six appendices, Williams asks “why facts might not change our minds.” This is a hugely important question to ask at this time when complementarians have undeniably lost every argument they have used—Williams’s book makes this undeniable—yet they are just as vocal as they have been for fifty years. They continue to dogmatically insist that the Bible clearly teaches that God has given different “roles” to men and women. They are equal before God, but men are to lead, women to be submissive.

Williams’s reply to this pressing question is the icing on the cake. He points out that resistance to changing our mind on matters that impact us deeply is not limited to the man-woman relationship. To be a fallen human being means we find thinking in new ways a huge challenge; we want to stick with what we have always believed and most of our friends believe, and more importantly, we do not want to accept ideas that might subvert our privileged status. For complementarians, then, to agree that what they have long believed the Bible clearly teaches on the hierarchical ordering of the sexes is in fact not what the Bible clearly teaches, but denies, is just too much.

Why is it that facts do not count? The answer is that complementarianism is an ideology. An ideology is a set of *ideas*

that aim to explain the world and seek to change it. Facts that do not support or counter the great idea are simply ignored or dismissed. Because complementarianism is essentially an ideology, a belief in how the man-woman relationship should be structured, it is not going to be abandoned simply because its biblical and theological foundations have been shown to be untenable. Complementarians are convinced that God wants men to exercise authority and women to be submissive, or in their obfuscating language, “role differentiated.” The arguments to support this belief may need to change, but the belief cannot change because it is an essential part, for some the most important part, of their Christian worldview.

### **My Final Word**

*How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy* is a great book. It is, in my opinion, the best book on the complementarian/evangelical egalitarian debate. Buy a copy, buy copies for complementarian friends, lend it widely. It highlights the truth that the gospel sets the oppressed free. The Bible from cover to cover is good news for men *and* women.

### **Notes**

1. I sent Köstenberger the manuscript before sending it to the publisher, asking him to critically read and comment on my work. I asked him specifically and more than once to let me know if at any point I had misrepresented his views. He made no reply.
2. For what follows see my book, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Cascade, 2017).
3. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Multnomah, 2004) 411n.12.
4. Of course, I am not claiming that every man who calls himself a complementarian abuses his wife. Most men who claim to be complementarians, the evidence suggests, have profoundly equal marriages.
5. Carl Trueman, “Motivated by Feminism? A Response to a Recent Criticism,” *Postcards from Palookaville* (blog), Mortification of Spin, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, June 14, 2016, <https://reformation21.org/mos/postcards-from-palookaville/motivated-by-feminism-a-response-to-a-recent-criticism#.W8TfuHtKiUm>.
6. Aaron Renn, “Newsletter #30: Complementarianism Is a Baby Boomer Theology that Will Die with the Baby Boomers,” *Masculinist* (newsletter), Feb 14, 2019, <https://themasculinist.com/the-masculinist-30-complementarianism-is-a-baby-boomer-theology-that-will-die-with-the-baby-boomers/>.
7. Beth Moore, “A Letter to My Brothers,” *The LPM Blog*, May 3, 2018, <https://blog.lproof.org/2018/05/a-letter-to-my-brothers.html>.
8. Moore, “A Letter to My Brothers.”

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# Seven Needed Revisions within Complementarianism

JOHN MCKINLEY

*Editor's note: This article was presented at the 2021 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) and then published in slightly revised form by Fathom Magazine (<https://fathommag.com/>) under the title, "The Need for a Third Way Between Egalitarianism and Complementarianism." It is reprinted here with permission from the author and from Fathom. Dr. McKinley is not egalitarian, and we are grateful for his contribution to Priscilla Papers. ~Jeff Miller*

*Publisher's note: "Evangelicals and Women"—a study section of the ETS—hosted Dr. McKinley's presentation, published below, in 2021. As I was privileged to moderate his paper, I can attest to the crowd he attracted, the pressure he faced, and the courage, grace, and obedience to Christ he displayed. Prompted by the Holy Spirit to address these issues, John also spoke of his profound love and respect for his wife and daughter. His responsiveness to God is undeniable and a model to us all. ~Mimi Haddad*

Complementarianism is a theological model of women and men that faces two problems.<sup>1</sup>

The first problem is the perception that this theology demeans women. When many people hear the discourse about role distinctions of women and men, they hear an emphasis on inequality. Some people also hear an implication that women are ontologically inferior, or they are more vulnerable to deception than men are (since many prominent proponents of complementarianism insist that God excludes women from teaching the church or functioning as pastors or elders). Many women have been hurt by complementarian institutions.<sup>2</sup> I know that many proponents of complementarianism do not intend these impressions and experiences. We should all deplore this impression that complementarianism makes some women feel diminished, inferior to men, and less valuable to God. To meet this problem of perception, I propose six items below that should be emphasized because they are ways to affirm women in church practices. I expect that many who identify themselves as complementarian will agree with most or all these six emphases. Some who bear the label of complementarian will disagree, which is another problem.

The second problem facing complementarianism is that many proponents of the position disagree so strongly with the six emphases presented below that they do not belong to the same position, despite the way that both sets of proponents embrace the label of complementarianism. The two competing definitions for one label causes confusion that could be fixed by pursuing a distinct position that is neither egalitarianism nor normative complementarianism (restriction of women from teaching men and from leadership functions in churches). To address this second problem, the seventh proposal is to articulate a Gender Humility theology of women and men which affirms the ideas already embraced by many who otherwise identify themselves as mild or soft complementarians. An alternative to normative complementarianism and egalitarianism is needed to continue

the work on thinking about sex distinctions, relationships, and God's calling to individuals.

The seven proposals are listed as follows:

1. The goal of humility
2. Jesus is our goal, instead of restrictive gender stereotypes and roles
3. Women are the image of God alongside men
4. Paul's meaning of the head-body metaphor according to his actual use of it
5. Update theological discourse and Bible translation
6. The metaphor of the church as a family
7. Distinguish a third way of Gender Humility

## 1. The Goal of Humility

Humility is a lowly posture brought about by God in a person so he or she can serve others.<sup>3</sup> God the Son humbled himself into human life and served people. He brought divine revelation down to the level of his students' understanding. He accommodated himself to their needs for healing, instruction, reminders, and friendship. Everything he did was for their benefit, to serve their needs. Jesus reversed himself from rabbi and Lord to be a slave for his students and suffer for their redemption. He urged this same humility to his apostles. He warned them *against* taking up a position above others the way that people normally do in leadership, pointing them instead to serve each other as he served them.<sup>4</sup>

The humility of Jesus is God's goal for each person, so complementarianism should promote the humility of men and women toward each other above concerns for authority, rights, and power. Christians are called and moved by God in a race to the bottom for humble service that can only be humble because no one keeps track, like the left hand not knowing what the right hand is giving. Love does not keep a record of wrongs, and humility does not keep a record of *rights*—neither personal privileges nor good deeds that might be praised. The largest ideas of leadership supplied from our culture are authority and power, but Jesus has displaced that mistake by supplying himself as the contradiction—humility and service. We can know we have been humble when others feel supported by us, but we are relatively anonymous.

Rachel Green Miller warns that we “. . . need to be careful not to let our appropriate discussions on authority and submission in the home and church become the lens through which we see all male-and-female interactions.”<sup>5</sup> Instead of seeing everything according to authority and submission, our lens should be the humility of Jesus toward one another. He possesses all the authority as Lord of creation and the sole head of the church, and Jesus operates by serving the others around him constantly. He worked to lift others up. His work was to equip, encourage,



sustain, comfort, and provide for others to be able to respond to God. Complementarianism has the reputation among some as calling women to support men in leading. A better reputation is available in calling women and men to support each other, according to the humility of Jesus.

## **2. Jesus is Our Goal, Instead of Restrictive Gender Stereotypes and Roles<sup>6</sup>**

Aimee Byrd writes that “. . . there are no exhortations in Scripture for men to be masculine and women to be feminine,”<sup>7</sup> and “. . . men and women are often assigned roles that align with conventional beliefs and hinder their ability to grow.”<sup>8</sup> Preston Sprinkle is right to recognize that “The Bible’s primary invitation to every Christian is not to act more like a man or to act more like a woman, but to act more like Jesus.”<sup>9</sup> Just as Jesus’s humility is the Christian’s path for serving others instead of pursuing one’s own ambitions, Jesus is also the Bible’s clearest revelation of biblical womanhood and manhood. No better godly models are available for either gender.

Some complementarian emphases on gender roles and stereotypes function as alternatives to the pattern of Jesus, which is misleading. For example, Ruth is not a better model for women than Jesus is; Abraham is not a better model for men than Jesus is. If we focus on these others for gender types (that is, patterns or models; further explained below), then we divert ourselves from the clearest human example of what God wants people to be.

Jesus is the savior of all people, women and men, and Jesus demonstrated many episodes of responding to God and caring for the people around him. He shows us how to love God and love others. The gift of biblical revelation is to train us how to think about being a human and to engage with God as his children. The lesser goal of how to think about being a female or a male requires God’s guidance to us in our unique gendered experiences in a particular culture. If we look to the Bible for the lesser goal of gender types and roles, then we risk missing the Bible’s gift of presenting Jesus to us. Our identities as women and men with distinct ways of experiencing life are important, but not so much as our identity in Christ.

Another problem of gender stereotypes and roles is that these are too narrow for the actual range of behaviors expressed by men and women within cultures. The biblical accounts of men and women doing various things have a mixed presentation of alignment with and contradiction to the gender expectations of the ancient world.<sup>10</sup> The accounts show that there is a complicated range of different ways men and women behave. The accounts are not sufficient to be guides for people to repeat in modes of being women and men. Many biblical statements are ancient descriptions, not prescriptions that stand above history and culture.

Absent from the Bible are statements commending these descriptions as transcultural gender types for men and women to emulate. Many gender statements are analogies drawn from historical descriptions and ancient cultural norms. Examples of hair styles, head coverings, clothing styles, tattoos, cosmetics, descriptions of marital interactions, greeting others with a kiss, and parenting practices are accounts that are all deeply rooted in ancient cultures. The possibility of drawing transcultural gender norms from these examples is difficult to establish.<sup>11</sup>

Gender behaviors have patterns across cultures because of physiological differences in women and men. Some of these patterns are expressed in the Bible descriptively. Cultures develop gender types that can be helpful and harmful to individuals and societies, depending on how closely a culture’s norms allow for some individuals’ preferences and gifts for operating as women or men. Clothing styles, roles of work, hobbies, and behavioral traits vary among cultures according to what men and women in that society do. For example, the kilt is masculine clothing in Scotland, which to some looks like a woman’s skirt, and the skirt is feminine clothing in France. Many gender types are consistent across cultures because women and men are broadly similar from physiological experiences.<sup>12</sup>

When complementarian theology defines gender stereotypes and roles for women and men, the result is praise for marriage and family, but this praise has the bad effect of putting people down for not being married, for not being parents, or for being called to a career. With Jesus there is liberty to fulfill all of one’s gifts and talents. With Jesus as the model for all human lives, we see that God values our uniqueness and distinctive gifts as women and men. With Jesus there is freedom to be a woman or a man as God might engage a person individually, without regard for the cultural distortions about gender. His maleness and cultural context of first-century Israel do not disqualify him from being the model of God’s call because God’s agenda is clear: to present Jesus as the model of loving others and loving God in humility.

## **3. Women Are the Image of God Alongside Men**

Both women and men are the image of God.<sup>13</sup> We should emphasize the collaboration of women and men in unity and interdependence with each other, like the internal life and external works of the triune God. Complementarian theology is perceived as diminishing women, so we have an opportunity to emphasize the biblical revelation that women are the image of God. Ancient cultures viewed women as inferior to men and denied women many of the rights and responsibilities reserved for men.<sup>14</sup> Were complementarianism to weave into our theology an indelible notice that women are the image of God, then it would be more difficult for some women to imagine they are inferior and of lesser value to God and the church compared to men. God has chosen to express himself visibly in the creation by making humanity in two kinds: women and men. We reflect God in many ways, including our gender (from sex distinctions) as an aspect of our personal life.

A related opportunity is to emphasize the way God has revealed himself by many feminine qualities and women in the Bible. Complementarian practice gives the impression to many people that God is more aligned with the masculine form than the feminine, and some people directly limit God as being more like a man, according to the concepts of authority, protection, and provision. Instead, we should emphasize that God is above human gender and inclusive of both human genders.<sup>15</sup> Both genders are expressive of God and reflect him in creation. God’s traits are not a more natural fit with male human beings. God’s authority is not a masculine trait. Miller is right that “Leadership isn’t uniquely masculine, and submission isn’t uniquely feminine.”<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. Paul's Meaning of the Head-Body Metaphor According to His Actual Use of It

The complementarian use of the biblical term “head” needs to be revised to fit Paul’s actual use of the metaphor on a case-by-case meaning. The complementarian interpretation also takes the head metaphor as a gender role of authority for men in relation to submission by women. Since Paul exhorts wives to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22, 24, 33) the conclusion appears natural for “head” to refer to a husband’s authority. The concept of a husband’s headship in relation to a wife has been extended to male headship in four additional spheres: the family, society, government, and church. None of these four is mentioned in the Bible as further aspects of the husband as head, so the complementarian interpretation of male headship must be pulled back to application in marriage and according to Christ’s humble service.

A normal argument in complementarianism is to draw parallels between the husband as head in marriage, the male-only qualifications for elders and overseers of churches, the chronological priority and naming activity of Adam in the original creation, the male leadership for Israel’s priesthood and government, and the twelve apostles of Jesus who are all males. These parallels may be adding up to something, but they may be given by God for different reasons separately from a unified program to declare male authority in all matters of home, church, and society.<sup>17</sup> Complementarianism identifies and connects these dots in a way that adds up to male authority, but the dots are not connected by Scripture.

I have two concerns about the interpretation of “head.” First, an illegitimate totality transfer of meanings may be obscuring the complementarian vision of the metaphorical meanings in Ephesians 5. We have uses of the head metaphor for Jesus’s relation to the church as his body (Eph 1:20–23; 4:15–16; Col 1:18; 2:18–19) and in relation to all humanity (1 Cor 11:3). The meanings of “source” and “authority” are both possibly in view in these five other uses, as context can confirm in each use. The temptation is to read these uses and extrabiblical use of the metaphor into every use of “head,” but this would deprive Paul the option to use a single term in various ways and for a unique meaning according to his detailed explanation in Ephesians 5. Michelle Lee-Barnewall has explained that the head-body metaphor was well-known to Paul’s readers in the Greco-Roman world for a meaning of authority.<sup>18</sup> Surprisingly, Paul appeals to the metaphor in Ephesians 5 and invests it with new meaning that was abnormal and shocking. Paul reverses from the conventional usage of “head” as “authority” by contradicting it with Jesus’s actions of humility.

The revelation in Ephesians 5 is that Paul creates an entirely new meaning of the head in relation to the body, according to Jesus’s self-giving love for his church-body in the cross. Paul has flipped the normal use of the metaphor because the cross turns everything upside down.<sup>19</sup> The theology of the cross that Paul provides for his use of the metaphor is self-giving love because of Jesus’s solidarity as head with his body. This shocking injection of new meaning is about the head’s service for the benefit of the body. Instead of marking the normal meaning of distinct roles

of a husband and wife as corresponding to the head’s primacy in relation to the body’s service to the head, Paul re-orientates the head as called by God for service to the body. This re-orientation is what Jesus does for the church, and naturally what all people do for their own bodies. Paul’s meaning of head here is different than in his other uses and the conventional usage of the metaphor in the ancient world. Paul’s point is not at all about male authority.

The ancient world already positioned men in authority over women, so it is no revelation that wives submit to their husbands.<sup>20</sup> Paul’s start in the passage with exhorting mutual submission in 5:21 would have been shocking to all his readers. Wives and husbands are obviously obligated to each other by mutual commitment, service, and appropriate sharing of the diverse work of marriage and family. Paul’s exhortation for a new kind of headship goes against the cultural norm of the ancient world. His reversal is to dignify wives as collaborators living in unity with husbands (head and body are unified). Husbands are pointed to Jesus’s example to serve their wives instead of expecting to be served by them as lords at home.

#### 5. Update Theological Discourse and Bible Translation

Translations should properly show women as included in the intended audience of biblical statements and as essential members of collective humanity and the church. Unfortunately, readers of our most popular translations (especially the ESV) hear an unintentionally distorted biblical voice that God speaks primarily to men and about men, leaving women to the margin as less valuable and less important to God (the marginalization is false). Likewise, all theological discourse of sermons, lectures, and writing can be adjusted easily to speak with pronouns, examples, and varied terms for addressing the whole audience.

Just as successive generations move beyond some skills and technology of their parents, so also the current society has moved beyond using masculine collective terms in an inclusive way. The result is that English translation done in earlier decades now speaks in a distorted way about the intended audience and subjects of many biblical passages. This unintended translation slippage makes the Bible unnecessarily difficult for a female reader to use. The Bible is hard enough with all the features of the ancient cultures and God’s own strangeness as compared to our intuitions and philosophy. We should be highly concerned about producing biblical translations that speak in modern English usage without using archaic forms that can be barriers to many readers.

One example is the use of “man” or “mankind” to translate the Hebrew *adam* and the Greek *anthropos*. These ancient terms were (mostly) intended to communicate as collective terms of humanity, human beings, a human being, and refer broadly to women and men. English usage of the male collectives carried the broad meaning for several centuries. To readers in the present day, the collective meaning is diminishing quickly. The term “man” has become specific as a reference to males only. Many female readers know to decode the usage in the Bible translations that is different from normal discourse, but this is an unnecessary barrier for women reading the Bible. English usage has changed for many reasons, such as dropping the archaic *thees* and *thous* of earlier translations. Along with translating

collectives accurately for the intended broad reference, singular collective terms “he” and “him” also require updating so they speak about all human beings.<sup>21</sup>

Another example is the Greek term *adelphoi*, usually translated as “brothers” or “brethren.” This term carries the rich family metaphor of sibling bonds for the church in a way that made sense to the ancient readers. The original usage referred to women and men. Some English versions have adjusted translations of the hundreds of uses of *adelphoi* with the intended ancient meaning brothers and sisters.<sup>22</sup>

## 6. The Metaphor of the Church as a Family

The surrogate family metaphor of the church is important because interdependence and shared life make a new essential relationship of sisters and brothers. In the ancient world, this model helped the church members to understand how to love one another.<sup>23</sup> Complementarian churches normally limit leadership and teaching of the whole church and many ministries to men, particularly those men who are elders. The result is that women’s contributions are limited to ministries that are neither teaching nor considered to be leadership of the church. These limitations can make churches function as male-dominated, like families without mothers.

Unfortunately, the limitations on women can be broad. For example, women are often blocked from leading worship or speaking before the whole church. Since many ministry roles may be considered pastoral, and since women are not to function as pastors, then women are excluded from doing many ministries, such as teaching teenage boys or organizing a ministry with supervision over male staff or volunteers. Other examples are disallowing women to facilitate a small group discussion of a sermon, serving as ushers, collecting the offering, or distributing the Lord’s Supper. The impression given by limiting women from serving or speaking to the whole church is that women are not trustworthy or valuable as compared to men.

In contrast to the limiting practice of many churches, the instructions and examples in the New Testament describe the church as a new sort of family. Individuals belong to each other as children of God who care for their siblings, pray for each other, and contribute from the Holy Spirit as sisters and brothers. Aimee Byrd observes, “Scripture has about sixty ‘one another’ passages to help direct us. They are not gendered.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the lists of ministries given by the Spirit are not gendered, including the ministry of pastors.<sup>25</sup> The siblings’ solidarity with each other flows from belonging to God as their Father. Jesus called all believers his sisters and brothers in Mark 3:31–35, indicating a new belonging and close involvement with each other.

Family can teach us how to do church, particularly with the unity and collaboration of women and men contributing to each other in the ways urged upon us by the Bible. In the home, mothers and fathers contribute to the life of the family according to gifts from their gender. The collaboration of both genders leads to well-being for the family in balance and unity. Men and women need each other, as the Spirit works ministry in the church through our personality and life experience, including our gender.

## 7. Distinguish a Third Way of Gender Humility that Partitions Complementarianism

The last several decades have seen a development of views within the position of complementarianism, showing disagreement among proponents who otherwise are agreed with each other in contrast to egalitarianism. I propose that a third way is already in circulation among these proponents who wish to distinguish themselves from both positions.<sup>26</sup> Sandra Glahn has identified six different complementarian positions.<sup>27</sup> I propose the Gender Humility model of women and men without the concerns for power, authority, and rights that obscure gender collaboration.<sup>28</sup> The main idea is that men and women are called to care for each other as friends, allies, siblings, spouses, and co-workers conditioned by humility to support each other.

First, Gender Humility follows the biblical emphasis on unity and collaboration of women and men with their shared and differing strengths and perspectives (instead of modern concerns for authority and equality).<sup>29</sup> Marriage, family, church, and society are relationships of people collaborating with each other according to their personal and gendered gifts. The battle of the sexes is a painful distortion of God’s positive intention that men and women should serve the other and work for the other’s good in unity. God wants women and men to be involved with each other, even as the church is repeatedly described as a family of sisters and brothers. Galatians 3:28 shows the identity provided by Christ that is deeper and more important than all other identity markers, leading to unity in the diversity. The genders are not the same or interchangeable, so the commonality and differences in strengths, gifts, experiences, and perspectives bring unity when each person lives by Jesus’s humility.

Second, Gender Humility embraces the collaboration that God shows by the term *ezer* to describe the woman in original creation (Gen 2:18, 20). The traditional translation of *ezer* as helper should be updated to recent scholarship that has recognized *ezer* to mean “ally.”<sup>30</sup> The term is used repeatedly in the Bible to refer to God’s support for Israel in the sense of military support and rescue from enemies. In the context of the woman and her relation to the man, *ezer* refers to her as a *necessary* ally because the commission from God to rule creation is impossible without the collaboration of women and men. The shared work leads to the unity of different members. Gender Humility is a label reminding us that we are given by God to each other in many sorts of relationships where God provides for us through the other kind of human. Women and men will do best when they work together in all the ways God has gifted them, according to humility.

Third, eschatology should shape the Christian vision and practice of our sex distinctions because the resurrection is humanity’s permanent and perfected condition.<sup>31</sup> The Bible is clear that the resurrection continues sex distinctions and the accompanying gender differences because Jesus was bodily raised as a man. Marriage and family do not continue in the resurrection. The ways women and men relate in marriage and family are temporary and limited. Many people are called to other work, as Jesus was. Gender Humility looks to the future

of humanity in the resurrection when humility will be constant. God's design for distinctions and unity goes deeper than the temporary relations of marriage and family. Life together in the resurrection involves people in friendship and collaboration of a sort that can be anticipated now for mutual benefit. Humans were created to need each other in many ways beyond the vocations of family building and marriage. Concerns for power, roles, equality, rights, and authority distract from the humility of Jesus and the unity and collaboration that will be characteristic for all people in the age to come.

Fourth, Gender Humility affirms women to teach the Bible and do other ministry to all the church. Scripture presents women contributing to the church by speaking to the public assembly. Luke and Peter identify women functioning as prophets (fulfilling Joel 2:28–30), and Paul emphasizes women prophesying and praying in the public gathering at Corinth (1 Cor 11:3–16; 14:31). Descriptions of the churches in the New Testament show women and men teaching each other in ministry provided by the Spirit (1 Cor 14:26; Col 3:16; Eph 5:18). The example of Priscilla explaining theology to Apollos at Ephesus stands out as a declaration of women's contribution to men in the ministry of teaching (Acts 18:26). Other examples are the many cases in the biblical narratives of wise women and female prophets guiding, encouraging, instructing, warning, and teaching men. Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection. Since God has worked through women to contribute by his word, then we should embrace the continuing ministry of the word through gifted women who teach in the church.

Israel lived with a limitation of the priesthood to men in the tribe of Levi, but the church has been ordered by Christ so that all share in his priesthood to serve one another by the work of the Spirit through them. Martin Luther recognized this gender-inclusive reality in the church by affirming women to minister the sacraments to others and teach the Bible in the church. All Christians share in the priesthood of Jesus to do ministry to each other (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 5:10), so Luther argued that “all Christians are priests in equal degree,” that “the ministry of the Word . . . is common to all Christians,” and that “all Christians . . . even women, are priests.”<sup>32</sup> The lists of ministries in the churches embrace both genders, including the ministry of pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11).

Many proponents of complementarianism restrict women from teaching men in churches because of reading 1 Timothy 2:12 as a rule and limitation for all ministry by women, instead of seeing it as an exception to the pattern of women and men collaborating in the home, church, and society.<sup>33</sup> The continuing use of the label complementarianism may apply to this model that limits women from teaching men and affirms male authority and female submission. Accordingly, the difference of the Gender Humility position from restrictive complementarianism is to support women to teach and serve the whole church and detach from a theology of gender stereotypes and roles. The difference from egalitarian views is that proponents may yet view church oversight as limited to qualified males, however that is worked out in a particular congregation.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

Let us not limit women where God has not told us to do so. Women and men need each other because God intends to make contributions from the diversity of human beings, including sex distinction and gender differences. Misleading are the warped concerns for rights and power that continue to shadow egalitarian and complementarian views. The good purposes of God in designing women and men to benefit each other must be promoted according to humility without the distracting concerns for authority, roles, and equality that frustrate our encounter with gendered community. Redemption should extend to gendered experiences and relationships in which women and men are free to fulfill all the God-given purposes of our diverse and gender-rich humanity. One way of keeping focused on Jesus in the ways we live and interact with others is to keep his model of humility in view for our own mindset (Phil 2:3–11). The seven proposals introduced here aim constructively at a way forward so Christians may be the church in a clear demonstration of humility and love for one another.<sup>35</sup>

## Notes

1. One theologian has defined the model as “men and women have different roles and responsibilities, thus, they complement each other.” Octavio Esqueda, “Much Ado About Gender Roles,” *Christianity Today* (August 22, 2018), accessed at <http://christianitytoday.com> on 21 October 2021.

2. The trend has been identified in a study of 2,234 women of an average age of 47 using surveys from the last fifteen years that more women suffer health problems when they attend complementarian churches compared to inclusive churches. Patricia Holman and Amy Burdette, “When Religion Hurts: Structural Sexism and Health in Religious Congregations,” *American Sociological Review*, 2021, Vol. 86 (2): 234–55.

3. Andrew Murray, *Humility: The Path to Holiness*, first published 1895; rev. ed. (Morgantown, KY: Tole, 2018).

4. Matt 20:25–28 || Luke 22:25–27 || Mark 10:42–45

5. Rachel Green Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church, and Society* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019) 246.

6. *Gender* refers to culture-specific concepts of masculinity and femininity.

7. Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020) 111.

8. Aimee Byrd, *Why Can't We Be Friends? Avoidance is Not Purity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018) 39.

9. Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible has to Say* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021) 69.

10. Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities in the Church*, 59–62. Sprinkle gives a helpful illustration of this contradiction with several examples from King David's life, exhibiting the emotion, poetry, weeping, and same-sex friendship as atypical for a man in his own culture and contemporary American society. More extensive examples of contradictions in the presentations of women and men are given by Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 105–52.

11. Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021) 49–50. “[P]eople mistakenly speak

of the masculine and feminine attributes of Jesus. Some examples of his so-called feminine side are Jesus's washing the disciples' feet, healing the sick, showing compassion to the Syrophenician woman, weeping over dead Lazarus, and gently treating children. But servanthood, a healing touch, compassion, lamentation, and gentleness aren't properties that pertain exclusively to women or to men. Rather, they concern all human beings. To repeat: there are no particular capacities and properties that belong exclusively to women or exclusively to men. There are, instead, common human capacities and common human properties that are—indeed, will naturally be—expressed in gendered ways.”

12. I have in mind these examples: bearing children, breastfeeding babies, differing hormonal influences by sex type, differing muscular strength, differing skeletal proportions and height averages, differing voice pitch, males grow facial hair, and different sets of organs for sexuality and reproduction.

13. Gen 1:26–28. Emphasis on women as the image of God is also noted by Esqueda, “Much Ado About Gender.”

14. Miller, *Beyond Authority*, 50. One example is the ancient Greek view: “Men are rational; women are irrational. Men are strong and courageous; women are weaker and nervous. Men were made to rule; women to obey. As Aristotle wrote, “The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying. . . . All classes must be deemed to have their special attributes. . . .”

15. Allison, *Embodied*, 48–49. Notice that gender is connected to embodiment, which God lacks (Incarnation aside).

16. Miller, *Beyond Authority*, 245.

17. Adam is never called head of humanity or of Eve. The twelve apostles are judges for the remnant of faithful Israel, following the twelve sons of Jacob, and the role of Adam as created first can have more to do with the role of Jesus in salvation than a divine intention to align authority with the masculine (1 Cor 15:45–49).

18. Michelle Lee-Barnewall, “Turning *KEPHALE* on Its Head: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Ephesians 5:21–33,” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 599–614.

19. Lee-Barnewall, “Turning *KEPHALE* on Its Head,” 609.

20. Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021) 46.

21. I agree that messing with singulars, plurals, and personal pronouns makes a mess of the text in a way that can carry the reader far away from the original intention. Translators lament that English lacks a third-person neuter personal pronoun alternative to *he*, and the substitute of *he or she* is cumbersome. Better options in some cases are *person* or *people*. In some occurrences, demonstrative pronouns can work as collectives: *that one*, *those*, and *one who* instead of the original text that gives a third person pronoun *he*, *him*. *One's* also works as a third-person possessive instead of *his*. The change from male collectives shows in NET, but not NASB 2020 or NIV 2011.

22. E.g., NRSV, NET, NLT, CSB, NIV 2011, NASB 2020. Other options are *siblings* and *family members*.

23. Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 221. Hellerman explains: “. . . [T]hose who had the most to gain from the image of the church as a family were the poor, the hungry, the enslaved, the imprisoned, the orphans, and the widows. For brother-sister terminology in antiquity had nothing to do with hierarchy, power, and privilege, but everything to do with equality, solidarity, and generalized reciprocity.”

24. Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 228.

25. Rom 12, 1 Cor 12, Eph 4, 1 Pet 4. Thanks to Octavio Esqueda for pointing out to me that *pastor* is a ministry of the Spirit and not necessarily identified with the functions of elder and overseer.

26. In addition to the label *soft complementarianism*, Craig Blomberg in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 124–25, distinguishes his position from egalitarianism and what he calls “classic complementarianism” and also identified his view as “neither hierarchalist nor egalitarian.” Donald Bloesch distinguished his view from complementarianism and egalitarianism, calling it “. . . covenantalism, in which man and woman agree to submit to one another in the Lord and to become one flesh, though allowing for a relative autonomy in the recognition of real differences,” Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 224. Also, a position partitioned from more restrictive versions of complementarianism shows in Michelle Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian: A Kingdom Corrective to the Evangelical Gender Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

27. Sandra Glahn, <https://blogs.bible.org/eight-views-of-women-in-the-church-home-and-society-within-the-inerrancy-camp/>, 9 September 2018, accessed on 22 October 2021.

28. I thank Rebecca McKinley for this observation and the corresponding need for humility.

29. Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*. Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 176.

30. Both John Walton and Tremper Longman argue for the meaning of *ezer* in Genesis 2:18, 20 as *ally* instead of “helper.” See John McKinley, “Necessary Allies: God as *ezer*, Woman as *ezer*,” presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 18, 2015 (Atlanta, GA).

31. Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 127.

32. Martin Luther, *On the Ministry* (1523), in *Luther's Works, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 21–23. I recognize that despite his argument for the priesthood of every believer, Luther was not consistent and affirmed male authority over women in the church and home in the typical pattern that is repeated by complementarianism today. Luther's practice of honoring his wife's many contributions in Table Talks and other areas of life, and his theology of the priesthood of every Christian were better than some of his restrictive devaluing comments about women.

33. Robert L. Saucy has argued that 1 Timothy 2:12 is exceptional and limited to functioning as elders. Robert L. Saucy, “Paul's Teaching on the Ministry of Women,” in *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*, eds. Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. TenElshof (Chicago: Moody, 2001) 291–310.

34. 1 Tim 3:1–8 and Tit 1:4–7 are considered normative for many who would fit in a Gender Humility position.

35. I thank my friends, students, and colleagues (too many to list by name!) who contributed abundant feedback.



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# Elizabeth Johnson's God-Talk Thirty Years Later: A Critique

KIMBERLY DICKSON

Elizabeth Johnson embarked on bringing feminine language into God-talk through her book *She Who Is* thirty years ago. As she explained, though theologically all agree God is Spirit and beyond gender, the language of God is male in preaching and instruction, which supports “an imaginative and structural world that excludes or subordinates women” (5).<sup>1</sup> Through both classical tradition and theology, Johnson uncovered the ancient use of wisdom/Sophia as a feminine description of God, which she appropriated toward a new naming of God, Sophia. Her book unpacks the significance and orthodoxy of naming the one God-Sophia, in three persons Spirit-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia, and Father-Sophia, with surprising life-giving results.

Since the publication of Johnson's book, her thoughts have shaped and guided the conversation on God-talk. This article will critique her position on each of the three divine persons. Following her order, it will first consider the avoidance of Pentecostalism in Johnson's writing, and how its inclusion in her understanding of the Spirit-Sophia can greatly empower those for whom Sophia is preferentially interested, poor and marginalized women. Second, it will consider Jesus-Sophia and the evangelical critique, specifically from Kathryn Greene-McCreight, that Johnson lost sight of the biblical narrative, which itself has the power to overturn the oppressive pattern in favor of freedom and equality. Third, it will consider Johnson's use of Mother-Sophia which not only essentialized gender, but by rejecting Jürgen Moltmann's suffering father who determined his Son's sacrifice, also undermined traditional atonement theology.

## Spirit-Sophia

Johnson finds that in the Hebrew Scriptures and early Syriac Christianity the Spirit was construed as female and named in OT wisdom writings as Sophia (51, 89–91). Among the diverse attributes of the Spirit, the Council of Nicaea recognized the Spirit as the giver of life (141). Like the life-giving Spirit, women uniquely “know the power and pain of bearing and birthing new life, and caring for it even to the point of exhaustion or death” (128). Thus, women uniquely experience the Spirit-Sophia in recognizing that wherever life exists, there too is the Spirit of God. Johnson elaborates that the vivifying power of the Spirit is found in renewing, healing, and freeing, and when human destruction is held at bay or overcome, new possibilities emerge (142). “The Spirit's renewing power thus manifests itself historically in shaping the praxis of freedom, those myriad forms of people's struggle toward more peaceful and equitable circumstances; a stunning example being women's struggle against sexism” (144).

Already alluded to is Johnson's conviction that Spirit is experienced. As she says, “To this movement of the living God that can be traced in and through experience of the world, Christian speech traditionally gives the name Spirit” (131). Thus, Johnson places the work of the Holy Spirit first, because only

through experiencing the Spirit can we begin to understand the other two persons.

There is a sense in which we have to be touched first by a love that is not hostile (the “third” person), before we are moved to inquire after a definitive historical manifestation of this love (the “second” person), or point from there toward the mystery of the primordial source of all (the “first” person). (129)

As the world first experiences the Spirit, so too should we first discuss the Spirit.

Though Johnson details the many life-giving, experiential moves of the Spirit—especially for the disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed—she fails to recognize a key way the Spirit is working in these groups, specifically by giving voice through ecstatic Pentecostalism. As Andrea Hollingsworth states, “Johnson speaks to the importance of contemplation and prophecy for an ecofeminist spirituality. She does not, however, connect these practices to Charismatic forms of spirituality.”<sup>2</sup> Johnson sees Pentecostalism as individualistic with an “emphasis . . . on the emotional effects of life in the Spirit with undirected enthusiasm” (136). In noting resistance of feminist theologians to engage Pentecostalism, Hollingsworth narrows in on Johnson's reticence, saying it is likely due to a fear that the emphasis could “promote an oppressive ‘pie in the sky’ form of spirituality and Spirit doctrine in which women are encouraged to passively endure their daily suffering and subordination, but cope by escaping regularly to Charismatic prayer.”<sup>3</sup> Johnson is not interested in escape, but rather in the experience of the Spirit-Sophia bringing action against oppression.

Hollingsworth makes the point that Pentecostalism in Latin America is bringing action that aligns with how feminist theologians understand the vivifying power of the Holy Spirit. Hollingsworth notes R. Andrew Chestnut's research as significant:

Ecstatic Pentecostal experiences of the Holy Spirit are often vocal and public. . . . Women are more often endowed with vocal spiritual gifts than men. *Glossolalia* is speech for those whose tongue is tied by official society, particularly for poor women of color. . . . In addition, he names prophecy “an essentially female phenomenon that ‘transforms believers who are deprived of official means of communication, such as regular postal and telephone service, into divine messengers, God's spokeswomen.’”<sup>4</sup>

This aligns with Johnson's emphasis on prayer and the Spirit's “call to utter the dangerous, critical words of prophecy” (144). Pentecostalism agrees with Johnson perhaps more than she herself appreciated when authoring *She Who Is*.

Hollingsworth provides evidence that women publicly using their voice before the congregation brought new life, empowering

them to cope with and transform domestic conflict. It provided the women with “moral authority in the home to challenge their husband’s drinking, gambling, and/or adultery. When husbands were converted (often a result of their wives’ prior conversion) they were more likely to give up their *machismo*.”<sup>5</sup> It also provided autonomy outside of the home through service associated with religious activities such as teaching, visiting and assisting the sick, and running social service programs.<sup>6</sup> In fact, “women have been encouraged to exercise official spiritual leadership and to give prophetic voice through formal ministerial and theological training and ordination,” so that by 1990 there was an upsurge in Latino-Pentecostal clergywoman in the Assembly of God.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Janice Rees recounts research in Latin America where women’s agency is created through their Pentecostal experiences. As an example, she cites “embodied experience of ritual within Pentecostal communities in Salvador” being linked to empowerment, where “women often become reference points in the neighborhood, religious specialists who are frequently sought for guidance and healing.”<sup>8</sup>

The development of women’s agency over the past thirty years in the Latin American Pentecostal world speaks to Johnson’s core concerns of the Spirit’s empowerment through women’s embodied experience. Her inability thirty years ago to appreciate the move of the Spirit in Pentecostalism speaks more to her own social location than to prejudice against a move of the Spirit. As she said, her own social location was shaped by her being a “white, middle-class, educated and hence privileged citizen of a wealthy North American country,” and deeply formed by Catholic community and feminist liberation theology (11). To this point Patrick Oden explains, “The [Catholic] church opted for the poor, but the poor opted for Pentecostalism,” explaining that liberation theology remained hierarchal and distant from the poor, whereas the Pentecostal movement, especially for women, provided everyone with a voice from the ground up.<sup>9</sup> I suspect Johnson now values these empowering Spirit-filled developments, as she herself said, “new instances of women’s creativity, leadership, and prophecy today signal that by the power of the Spirit of God, the history of women’s empowerment has not ceased” (65).

### Jesus-Sophia

Johnson understands Jesus as a Spirit figure precisely because he was “conceived, inspired, sent, hovered over, guided, and risen from the dead by her power.” As a historical figure, the Spirit became “concretely present in a small bit of it; Sophia pitches her tent in the midst of the world; the Shekinah dwells among the suffering people in a new way” (159).

Johnson mines Scripture, church history, and philosophy, where she finds that *Sophia* and *logos* were scriptural equivalents, whereby the Gospel of John makes use of the wisdom/Sophia tradition in the prehistory of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in John 1:1–18 Jesus is “present in the beginning, an active agent in creation, descending from heaven to pitch a tent among the people” (100). The word choice of *logos* rather than *Sophia* was to simply contextualize the faith in a Hellenized world where *logos* was a key philosophical

tenet. Further, *Sophia* was becoming problematic because of its use by growing gnostic groups. Unfortunately, according to Johnson, this choice of words, combined with philosophic sexism, ensured that the female Sophia/Spirit of Jesus would be suppressed (100–102). Writing later than Johnson, pneumatologist Clark Pinnock reached her same conclusions regarding Spirit-Christology and called for its recovery, saying, “At least the early church had an excuse for favoring Logos Christology. There was an apologetic advantage to Logos Christology then, but not today. There is no reason for us to continue to let Logos Christology dominate and marginalize other dimensions.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, Johnson resurrects the Jesus-Sophia and asks:

What does it mean that one of the key origins of the doctrine of incarnation and trinity lies in the identification of the crucified and risen Jesus with a female gestalt of God? Since Jesus the Christ is depicted as divine Sophia, then it is not unthinkable—it is not even unbiblical—to confess Jesus the Christ as the incarnation of the image in female symbol. (103)

As Harold Wells comments, this shows that Jesus’s maleness is “not theologically determinative for his identity as Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

Johnson’s logic also addresses the feminist concern summarized by the early church father Gregory of Nazianzus, “What is not assumed is not redeemed.” As she says, “if maleness is essential for the christic role, then women are cut out of the loop of salvation, for female sexuality is not taken on by the Word of flesh” (162). Despite appreciating the historic particularities of Jesus’s human identity and the challenges of his ministry that would require a male to have any impact on oppressive structures, his maleness is “not theologically determinative of his identity as the Christ” (165–66).

Greene-McCreight directly critiques Johnson’s stance, addressing feminist concerns from a narrative approach where she finds the maleness of Jesus critical to salvific overturning of oppression. She begins at the Garden of Eden, where “being human is to be created male and female, in the image of God.”<sup>13</sup> This sexual embodiment is reflected in Gen 3:16, where male rule over female is one of the many results of their disobedience to the Creator, and all that had been declared “good” is now cursed.<sup>14</sup> Greene-McCreight argues that contrary to Johnson’s stance, Jesus’s maleness is directly related to his ability to save and transform the fallen order to a new Creation.

Since Jesus was a Jew who fulfilled the promises to Israel and offered up once and for all the perfect sacrifice, he had to be male. If he were not male and a Jew—indeed, a free Jewish male—how could the baptismal promise of Galatians 3:27–29 have been granted? . . . The three sets of opposition in Galatians 3:28—Jew-Greek, slave-free, male-female—correspond to the categories in which Jewish election is cast. . . . Paul is saying that what has happened in Jesus has turned this election on its head: now in the new “time zone” inaugurated by Jesus’ Resurrection, there is no distinction in God’s

electing grace between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Jesus's maleness, his Jewishness, and his status as free are the specific attributes needed to overturn Gen 3:16 and mark a new order where "the old has passed away and the new has come."<sup>16</sup> Greene-McCreight's powerful argument, looking at Jesus's maleness through Scripture's entire narrative, makes one wonder if Johnson and other Christian feminists are correctly interpreting Gregory's statement, "What is not assumed is not redeemed." Perhaps it is the specificity of his incarnation that allows all to be assumed.

### Mother-Sophia

In exploring the possibility of replacing God the Father with Mother-Sophia, confusion abounds. Throughout history "God the Father" has been used to also designate the One God, who Johnson initially introduces as Spirit. The NT understanding of God the Father, as clarified by Athanasius, is Father *in relation* to the Son. The distinction is important, as the terminology "Father" is used precisely because of its relational aspect, rather than as a metaphor for the male essence of God. Athanasius, in response to the Arian controversy that sought to demote Jesus to a created being, specifically emphasized that the first person of the Trinity was named Father to *emphasize relation rather than function*.<sup>17</sup> Johnson notes the importance of this herself (34). Yet in replacing Father with Mother, Johnson lost this relational focus and instead focused on the functionality of woman's body to create life, as Mother (180). This harkens to Spirit-Sophia who creates and essentializes the function rather than the relation of Mother. As Cristina Richie states:

Sophia-as-mother can harm women by setting up a normative pattern of emulation for all women. The image of woman as biologically and/or theologically

bound to procreative sexuality has long been used as evidence of women's social and physical inferiority. Because the "office" of motherhood is seen as natural and unchanging, women are directed towards activities that help them fulfill this destiny and away from activities that might hinder reproduction—for example, education, work, and singleness.<sup>18</sup>

To Johnson's credit, she also called out the same historical and contemporary problems of gender essentialism in using the term Mother-Sophia (186–87).<sup>19</sup> In noting the problem, however, she did not change the name.

Interestingly, Johnson reveals her agreement with Athanasius's relational definition of Father to Son in his rebuttal of the Arian controversy. In this context she recognizes that the Trinity undermines gender essentialism in favor of "differentiation." Endorsing Moltmann and Leonardo Boff on the social Trinity, she says:

There is no subordination, no before or after, no first, second and third, no dominant and marginalized. . . . There is only a "trinity of persons mutually interrelated in a unity of equal essence." The Trinitarian symbol intimates a community of equals, so core to the feminist vision of ultimate shalom. It points to patterns of differentiation, that are nonhierarchical, and to forms of relating that do not involve dominance. It models the ideal, reflected in so many studies of women's ways of being in the world, of a relational bonding that enables the growth of humans as genuine subjects of history in and through the matrix of community, and the flourishing of community in and through the praxis of its members. In this the personal uniqueness flourishes. . . . (231)

Ultimately, Johnson does not believe in gender essentialism. But just as early theologians tried to grasp one aspect of the Trinity

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and missed another, so too does Johnson momentarily slip into gender essentialism with Mother-Sophia.

However, there is another aspect of Johnson's characterization of Sophia-as-Mother where she takes issue with both Moltmann and the classical view of atonement. Moltmann in *The Crucified God* asks, "Why did [God the Father] keep silent over the cross of Jesus and his dying cry?"<sup>20</sup> He answers this through his definition of love. Only one who suffers can love another. Through suffering, God loves the unlovable and through that love, makes them loveable.<sup>21</sup> And for Moltmann, this love is best expressed in the Trinity:

The son suffers in his love being forsaken by the Father. The Father suffers in his love the grief of the death of the Son. In that case, whatever proceeds from the event between the Father and the Son must be understood as the spirit of the surrender of the Father and the Son, as the Spirit which creates love for forsaken men, as the spirit which brings the dead alive.<sup>22</sup>

But Johnson argues the offering of the Son by the Father is inexcusable and is the opposite of love. She says of Moltmann's thesis:

This is to blame Jesus' Abba . . . for what rightly should be laid at the doorstep of the history of human injustice. It leaves us with a repellent view of a sadistic God rather than a God who loves life and hates injustice. One can imagine a loving father or mother suffering the grief of the loss of a son due to an unjust death . . . but to imagine the parent takes the initiative in arranging the sacrifice—here the imagination reaches its limits and the humanistic values rise up in protest. (218–19)

Instead, Johnson embraces that the death of Jesus is solely due to historical injustices. In rejecting Moltmann's thesis, she also rejects the theology of atonement and does not offer an alternative.<sup>23</sup> This is surprising, considering her preservation of the key tenets of classical theology.

Other voices are emerging from marginalized and oppressed peoples who have mined the depths of liberation theology while, like Johnson, seeking ways to stay within orthodox Trinitarian tradition. I believe their voices can speak into the space that Johnson could not bridge. Like Johnson who recognizes that, "despite [Christian tradition's] sexism [it] has served as a strong source of life for countless women throughout the centuries and continues to do so today," Esau McCaulley, an African American theologian, represents those who have clung to their faith in the face of unjust treatment by the very ones who gave them their Christian traditions (65). In agreement with the ethos of Johnson's historical attribution of Jesus's crucifixion, he says, "we have decided to trust God because he knows what it means to be at the mercy of a corrupt state that knows little of human rights." But he argues that this is not enough, stating that, "If that were the full message of the cross, Jesus would merely be another in a long line of martyrs. Jesus stands out as the one truly innocent sufferer who had done nothing wrong." For in the mystery, McCaulley recognizes that though the Black population was "not slave

owners, nevertheless we have in ways large and small participated in the harm of others. We have also damaged ourselves and rebelled against our Creator . . . we are all sinners. . . . Jesus' profound act of mercy gives us the theological resources to forgive. We forgive because we have been forgiven."<sup>24</sup> He reminds us of Miroslav Volf's insight that the ones who have been sinned against become sinners. Though quite unfairly, the victims now have to deal with their own anger, bitterness, and revengeful urges that make them perpetrators against a new set of victims.<sup>25</sup> Volf's powerful insights stem from his own experience as a native Croatian who suffered under the brutal Serbian invasion that he characterizes as, "sowing desolation in my native country, herding people into concentration camps, raping women, burning down churches, and destroying cities."<sup>26</sup> Both McCaulley and Volf's analysis consider the sin and anger of oppressed populations that need to be dealt with in order to bring community. "It is only by looking at our enemies through the lens of the cross that we can begin to imagine the forgiveness necessary for community."<sup>27</sup> It is ironic that Johnson misses this given that community is her ultimate aim.

Atonement theology is hard to embrace, for the reasons articulated by Johnson. But even the oppressed are sinners and need atonement for there to be any chance of community. This is a mystery; as Johnson says, "It is abundantly clear in classical theology and its contemporary retrievals that human words, images, and concepts with their inevitable relationships to the finite are not capable of comprehending God, who by very nature is illimitable and unobjectifiable" (116).

## Conclusion

Johnson's work was a groundbreaking step of correcting the sexism inherent in religious God-talk, due to the male assignment of the three persons of the Trinity. Her careful application of classical theology, her research into the early Johannine contextual choice to name Jesus the *logos* rather than the equivalent *Sophia*, and her thoughtful concern to not essentialize gender but instead to release women in all of their difference from oppression, have succeeded in changing the conversation around God-talk. This article looks at developments that have emerged since Johnson's work. We can now see where Latin American Pentecostalism, through the gifts of charism in their embodied voices, have found new empowerment against oppression. Greene-McCreight demonstrated through scriptural narrative that Jesus's status as an elect Jewish, free, male enabled him to overthrow oppressive structures. And finally, new voices speaking out of oppression and marginalization embraced Johnson's historical reasoning for Jesus's crucifixion while also preserving the classic atonement theory, simultaneously adding deeper nuance and explanation.

## Notes

1. Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (Herder and Herder, Crossroad, 1992, 2002) 5. Subsequent citations to this book will be in the text, rather than in endnotes.
2. Andrea Hollingsworth, "Spirit and Voice: Toward a Feminist Pentecostal Pneumatology," *Pneuma* 29 (2007) 192.
3. Hollingsworth, "Spirit and Voice," 194.

4. Hollingsworth, "Spirit and Voice," 202–3. Compare Kristina LaCelle-Peterson's recounting of Melania, a fourth-century desert mother, who performed two miracles on women "who were gripped by demons that had closed their mouths. They couldn't talk or eat and were consequently in danger of starving. This we might note, was precisely what the advice of church fathers for women tended toward; it is the logical conclusion of their instructions to be silent and to fast as signs of being closed, pure, and virginal. Melania's miracle? To open their mouths again." LaCelle-Peterson, *Liberating Tradition: Women's Identity and Vocation in Christian Perspective* (Baker Academic, 2008) 165–66.

5. Hollingsworth, "Spirit and Voice," 199.

6. Hollingsworth, "Spirit and Voice," 200.

7. Hollingsworth, "Spirit and Voice," 201.

8. Janice Rees, "Subject to Spirit: The Promise of Pentecostal Feminist Pneumatology and Its Witness to Systematics," *Pneuma* 35 (2013) 50.

9. Patrick Oden, "Unit 6 Lecture, Spirit in Global Theologies," TH 559 Theologies of the Holy Spirit, Fuller Theological Seminary, Winter 2022.

10. Johnson is not alone in her discoveries on this topic. Veli-Matti Karkkainen summarizes Julie Hilton Dana's research into rabbinic literature regarding the *Ruach-ha-Kodesh* (Holy Spirit) where Hellenized and biblical concepts of Wisdom of Torah are used as personifications of God. Veli Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit: In Ecumenical International, and Contextual Perspective* (Baker Academic: 2002) 162.

11. Clark A Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (IVP Academic: 1996) 91.

12. Harold G. Wells, "Trinitarian Feminism: Elizabeth Johnson's Wisdom Christology," *ThTo* 52/3 (Oct 1995) 336.

13. Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford University Press, 2000) 107.

14. Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 110.

15. Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 109.

16. Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 110.

17. Athanasius, in "Against the Arians I, 30–4 [Ed W. Bright (Oxford, 1873) pp. 31–5]," in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, ed. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer (Cambridge University Press, 1975) 30.

18. Cristina Richie, "Engaging Women with a Suffering Sophia: Prospects and Pitfalls for Evangelicals," *Priscilla Papers* 34/3 (Summer 2020) 18.

19. Johnson recognizes that aligning childbearing with the essence of women has led to subjugation throughout history, and that factually there is much more to women than childbearing and rearing.

20. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 40th Anniversary Ed. (Fortress, 2015) 273.

21. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 309.

22. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 362.

23. Wells emphasizes that Johnson is right to protest an "understanding of atonement that depicts God as angry Father and Judge demanding a blood sacrifice before he will forgive." But he also critiques Johnson for not providing an alternative. Wells, "Trinitarian Feminism," 341.

24. Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (IVP Academic, 2020) 130–31.

25. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abingdon, 1996) 79–85.

26. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 9.

27. McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 131.

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Book Review  
***Why Can't Women Do That?***  
***Breaking Down the Reasons Churches Put Men in Charge***  
Vinati Press, 2021  
By Philip B. Payne and Vince Huffaker  
Reviewed by KRISTIN S. LASSEN

We long for connection. We are drawn to love. The book *Why Can't Women Do That? Breaking Down the Reasons Churches Put Men in Charge* introduces the reader to two conversation partners—an uncle who has changed his mind about women's roles and a nephew who is curious yet cautious. The book delivers content from NT scholar Philip B. Payne in the succinct style of computer programmer Vince Huffaker, who condenses Payne's 500-page exhaustive exegetical book, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan Academic, 2009), into a 175-page readable conversation. I am amazed at the high-level content packed into so few words, all in the style of personal and respectful conversation.

Communication characterized by love leaves the door open for entry and retreat, with an invitation to stay. Payne and Huffaker hope the reader will reexamine commonly held ideas about what women "can't do." A pervasive scriptural undercurrent of the Holy Spirit's gifts, a call to humble unity, freedom in Christ within the preeminence of Christ, and the imperative to spread the gospel—these combine to form their outlook (16). In addition, the authors are concerned that the church loses credibility when women lead well in "every possible role in society" outside the church yet are "ignored, or even limited" in using their gifts to advance God's kingdom (16–17).

### **What Is the Book Like?**

This review will comment on the book as a whole before walking briefly through each section. The prologue eavesdrops on letters between "Theo" and "Uncle Johnny." Theo has sincere concerns about women leading at Johnny's church, given the Bible's "plain" teaching of male responsibility, the "slippery slope" of compromise, and the "natural" leadership gifts of men. Uncle Johnny sets the premise by explaining his own path for change and affirming their shared faith in God and the inerrancy of Scripture. "Nothing I write matters if it contradicts the Bible," assures Uncle Johnny (47). The biblical interpretation presented serves to position the church to live out God's truth in a way that best advances God's kingdom by fully employing the gifts of women as well as men in God's mission (16).

The book is inviting, not intimidating! This breath of fresh air summons busy people and others who simply prefer concise reading to take a quick glimpse into a view of Scripture that may be new to them. The manageable length, short chapters, uncrowded layout, and easy-to-read language leave the reader feeling they can both understand and finish the book quickly and conveniently.

This is a different book from Payne's *Man and Woman, One in Christ*—especially regarding extensiveness and readability—

yet surprisingly equal in soundness of content. Footnotes provide page numbers from *Man and Woman, One in Christ* in order to guide readers who desire detailed Greek-based exegesis. Each book has its place.

### **Part One: Leadership Concerns and Church Tradition**

The book first addresses cultural and scriptural ideas as well as the "slippery slope" related to sex and gender. In response to assumptions about men as naturally better leaders, facts are presented based on data, leadership traits, and socialization into leadership. While respecting hesitancy to change, examples where women in leadership have enhanced the church's perspective are given "from Peter's ministry in Acts to the modern era" (35).

Just as Part One answers sincere questions, short chapters on Gen 1–2, Gen 3, Deborah, Gal 3, Eph 5, 1 Tim 2, and Titus 2 conclude with answers to common objections. Some common questions are answered by straightforward explanations of key Bible passages. As an example, the book explains that the NT teaching that Christian men and woman comprise a "kingdom of priests" had been foreshadowed in the OT (65–66). In some cases, the book's characters go further, proposing or pondering common objections to egalitarian teaching. For example, Uncle Johnny counters a common objection when he writes, "But if [Priscilla] explaining something more accurately is not teaching, what is?" (143).

### **Part Two: Old Testament Passages**

Proper exegesis begins at the beginning. As the book approaches Gen 1, the authors provide this foundational statement: "Let me start by stating clearly that I believe that the original text of the Bible, properly translated and interpreted, affirms the shared leadership, authority, and gifting of both men and women" (51).

Genesis 2 highlights the woman as man's "helper suitable." "A strength corresponding to him" would be a more apt translation of the Hebrew phrase, for "helper" is used of God's action "as his people's rescuer, strength, or might" sixteen times in the OT (53).

In Gen 3:13–16, God directly addresses the woman regarding her sin using the same word meaning "desire" in 4:7. Payne explains that this desire will be "to master, control, or manipulate"—both Eve to her husband and sin to Cain (57). Various patriarchal interpreters agree with this aspect of Payne's view.

Respectfully, in light of the intersection of my experiences as a woman and my study of the Hebrew text of Genesis, I believe this "desire" is to grasp the full attention and devotion of the other. In the case of woman to man, it is to desire that he focus his full self

on her just as she turns her full attention from God onto him.<sup>1</sup> Despite our divergent interpretations of “desire,” the authors and I converge again with consensus that all “effects of the Fall are clearly contrary to and distortions of God’s intent in creation” and should be “overcome . . . rather than foster[ed],” including man’s rule over woman (58).

Regarding Deborah, the authors emphasize that “Israel was blessed because of her leadership” (62). More space is spent answering common objections than explaining the text itself because there have been so many attempts to explain away what Scripture states in no uncertain terms.

Kings and priests were male; today God’s design for his people as a “kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6, Isa 61:6) has been realized (1 Pet 2:9) (65–66). After a short bullet-point description of the woman of Proverbs 31, Uncle Johnny asks, “Theo, does this line up with your beliefs about the roles of women?” (68). This OT section concludes with praise of “many other women—including wives and mothers—who exercised leadership over men,” “with no hint that their gender should disqualify them” (69).

### Part Three: New Testament Passages

“Jesus in all his words and deeds left us an example to treat women as equals with men, never subordinated or restricted in role. His treatment of women as equals defied the judicial, cultural, and religious customs of his day” (73). For many who read this claim, warning lights are flashing wildly. This is an invitation to read this book and consider women in light of Jesus’s choice of twelve *free Jewish* men as his disciples, the Spirit’s work at Pentecost, and Sapphira’s partnership with Ananias in Acts 5 (75–78).

Romans 16 lists *seven* women in a list of *ten total* people whom Paul identifies along with their ministry role. Here we find explanation of the biblical text surrounding Phoebe and Junia as well as Paul’s relation to these women (79–82).

First Corinthians 7 is “Paul’s longest and most detailed treatment of marriage,” and Paul writes at length to emphasize equality between wives and husbands (83). A length of only two pages left me wanting more yet evoked appreciation for the pointed brevity of the authors.

Chapters 8–10 of 1 Corinthians place Christ over other concerns (87).

First Corinthians 11’s discussion around heads and head coverings is deeply contextual and exceedingly difficult for modern readers. It is helpful to remember that Paul addressed head coverings in the first place because “men and women were participating equally in the life of the New Testament churches” (96). Payne explains various meanings for “head”—including the body part—concluding that the covering refers to hair and explaining what this means for application (89–107). Andrew Bartlett agrees with this assessment of hair as the covering,<sup>2</sup> yet I encourage readers to also consider Cynthia Westfall’s extensive research arriving at a “veil” understanding for the covering.<sup>3</sup> I suspect it was a combination of both meanings, using allusions and cultural inferences that the original hearers would have known how to decode. Despite competing conclusions on Paul’s

referent, the celebratory point is that, once again, these scholars agree on the text’s broader meaning.

First Corinthians 11:10 is best translated that a woman “ought to have authority over her own head,” which has often been altered into “a sign/symbol of authority on her head” (NIV 1984, ESV), thus conveying the *opposite* of Paul’s intent (101–2).<sup>4</sup> This creative addition to the text—adding “a sign/symbol of” before “authority”—was not introduced to English translations until the 1881 Revised Version.<sup>5</sup> This period in Western civilization involved a newly industrialized culture redefining societal roles for men and women. Patriarchal bias was inserted into the translation of 1 Cor 11:10, leaving far-reaching destruction in its wake over the next century. Payne’s assessment fits the context of the passage and the whole of Scripture without creating apparent contradiction—which placing women unilaterally under men’s authority actually does. Another key in 1 Cor 11:12 is that both women and men “owe respect to the other as their source” via creation and childbirth respectively (104).

First Corinthians 12 makes no gender distinction regarding the Holy Spirit’s distribution of gifts. Neither does this passage hint at a gender distinction in using these gifts (109–10).

The authors’ inerrantist position (15) is vital to understanding their approach to 1 Cor 14:34–35 (111–20). In this chapter, Payne presents “crucial evidence,” including evidence based in the investigation of ancient hand-copied manuscripts, to support his view that these two verses are not original to Paul’s letter. He argues that they originated instead as a scribal comment in the margin.<sup>6</sup> The authors also reveal that the ways most churches get around applying this passage are not biblical (112).

Galatians 3:28 receives much acclaim as it “asserts a radically new understanding of relationships in Christ” (121). A misunderstanding is that everyone is identical and can do the same thing. This is absolutely *not* Paul’s (or egalitarians’) point, as explained on pp. 121–23. Pages 123–26 address whether this verse applies strictly to salvation or also to social interaction.

Ephesians 5:21–33 hails back to v. 18’s command to “be filled with the Holy Spirit” (129). The radical new life and power provided by the Spirit set the basis for husbands and wives to “fully surrender their lives” to one another (131).

In Colossians 3:18–4:1, Paul taught people entrenched in culture and used their familiar framework to introduce a marriage entrenched in Christ. Colossians 3:18 must be set in the context of 3:12–17 as well as Paul’s longer sections on marriage in 1 Cor 7 and Eph 5 (135–37).

First Timothy was written to address false teaching, both due to willful blasphemy and to ignorance, in which case “a woman should learn” (1 Tim 2:11) (139, 144). Paul’s work alongside Priscilla, men and women returning to humility and Christ-focus, the pagan goddess Artemis, Gen 3, and childbirth are all addressed in Paul’s words of correction (139–49).

First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 offer guidance for “whoever” desires to be an overseer (151). Do not be misled by English translations that insert “him/he/his” into these discussions up to seventeen times (151)! The fourth-century Greek-speaking



theologian and archbishop John Chrysostom states that the phrase “men of one woman . . . is appropriate to say regarding [monogamy for] women deacons also” (156).

The book concludes by addressing what Titus faced in Crete, instructions to men and women elders, husbands and wives, life in a pagan culture (1 Pet 3), and leadership choices from Jesus to Billy Graham.

## Conclusion

Loving relationships can quickly take a back seat when firmly held convictions about biblical interpretation and callings to ministry are at stake. Payne and Huffaker seek to begin again on a different foot. Their love for people and Scripture shine forth the joy of the Lord.

“A biblical view of manhood and womanhood is one that encourages all people, regardless of gender, to develop their God-given gifts to their fullest potential” in order to “complement each other” and “build a unity that reflects the love and unity of the Trinity” (22). The goal should be seeing one another as true and equal partners in God’s kingdom with “common sense, respect, and personal integrity” overtaking suspicion and distrust (174).<sup>7</sup> Healthy identity grows when we conform to Christ, and this kind of discipleship fosters healthy male-female relationships (175).

Do you want love to guide the discussion of God’s truth? Are practical concerns as well as the full context of the Bible’s teaching holding you back from fully affirming women? Do you want top quality with a readable style and manageable word count (that doesn’t take a degree in Greek to follow)? You have found the right book!

## Notes

1. One reason this desire is harmful is that it does not respect personal boundaries, growth, and agency. Much like codependency, it is a desire that the man abandon other (healthy) interests to be consumed in reciprocal desire. See Kristin Lassen, “A Ladder Leans ‘Against’ A Wall—and more about Genesis 3:16b,” *CoffeeWithKristin.wordpress.com*, posted Oct 22, 2020, updated Mar 19, 2022, <https://coffeewithkristin.wordpress.com/2020/10/22/a-ladder-leans-against-a-wall-and-more-about-genesis-316/>.

There is also a sense of “turning” in *teshuqah*, as shown in the Septuagint’s rendering it as *apostrophe*. See Marg Mowczko, “Teshuqah: The Woman’s ‘Desire’ in Genesis 3:16,” <https://margmowczko.com/teshuqah-desire/>.

2. Andrew Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts* (Inter-Varsity, 2019) 115–59.

3. Westfall discusses Roman law and culture, Greek philosophical schools, sexual behavior of women in Corinth, class distinctions, the symbolism of modesty and rank by veiling, and even head coverings for men (25–43). She points out textual ties between 1 Cor 11 and 1 Esdras 4:14–17 that shed light onto Paul’s allusions and the qualification “nevertheless” in 1 Cor 11:11 (67). She discusses male control and women’s own self-perceptions related to veiling (96–99). Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Baker Academic, 2016) 25–43, 66–70, 96–99.

4. If taken out of context, this verse could be read as ambiguous regarding whether a woman ought to have authority over her own head, meaning her husband, or over her physical head, but only the latter fits with the reciprocity of vv. 11–12.

5. See Andrew Bartlett’s guest post at *Jesus Creed: a blog by Scot McKnight*, “Worst NT Translations Relating to Women, 1” (Oct 26, 2020) <https://christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/october/worst-nt-translations-relating-to-women-1.html>.

6. Payne is well-published on this topic; see for example “Is 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 a Marginal Comment or a Quotation? A Response to Kirk MacGregor,” *Priscilla Papers* 33/2 (Spring 2019) 24–30. Historian Beth Allison Barr provides a helpful quotation from the Roman senator Cato the Elder: “Could you not have asked your own husbands the same thing at home?” Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Brazos, 2021) 59. While Barr differs from Payne by suggesting that 1 Cor 14 here may be a quotation-refutation by Paul, this citation offers evidence for what was written in the margin and why: it was a popular saying.

7. Payne and Huffaker here quote Leanne Weber, “Moving Beyond the Billy Graham Rule,” *Mutuality* (Jan 29, 2020) <https://cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/moving-beyond-billy-graham-rule>.

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## Book Review

# ***Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives***

3<sup>rd</sup> edition, IVP Academic, 2021

Edited by Ronald W. Pierce, Cynthia Long Westfall, and Christa L. McKirland

Reviewed by DAWN GENTRY, JAMIN A. HÜBNER, DOROTHY A. LEE,

JEFF MILLER, AND KAREN STRAND WINSLOW

### **Introduction, by Jeff Miller**

This third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality (DBE)*, which gathers over thirty essays, is positioned to contribute significantly to the fortifying and flourishing of evangelical gender egalitarianism. Several of its endorsements affirm the earlier editions of *DBE* and go on to express optimism about this edition as well.<sup>1</sup>

Several chapters are wholly new (e.g., “Mutuality in Marriage and Singleness: 1 Corinthians 7:1–40” by Ronald W. Pierce and Elizabeth A. Kay, “Gender Equality and the Analogy of Slavery” by Stanley E. Porter, “Human Flourishing: Global Perspectives” by CBE President Mimi Haddad). Certain other essays have been updated (e.g., those by Linda L. Belleville and Aída Besançon Spencer). A few essays remain unchanged, or largely so, from the previous edition. Key examples of unchanged contributions are “Equal in Being, Unequal in Role: Challenging the Logic of Women’s Subordination” by Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (1954 – 2018) and two articles by Gordon D. Fee (“Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16” and “The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry”).<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the second edition still has value, for some of its essays have not been retained (e.g., Richard Hess covered Gen 1–3 in the second edition, but Mary L. Conway shoulders that responsibility in the third; I. Howard Marshall [1934 – 2015] originally addressed Eph 5 and Col 3, but Lynn H. Cohick does so in the third edition).

The editors have written an introduction and a conclusion. After the conclusion is a list of the twenty-seven contributors (sixteen women and eleven men). Their paragraph-length bios can be especially helpful since most of the authors have written much more on the topic(s) of their respective chapter(s) than this essay collection has space to include. The book ends with name, subject, and Scripture indices.

The opening chapter stands outside the book’s four major sections, which are each reviewed below by different scholars. This chapter, “History Matters” by Haddad, asks “Who represents evangelicals?” It begins with a critique of the recent lack of appreciation for women’s scholarship and leadership in certain evangelical sectors.<sup>3</sup> It then gifts the reader with a sweeping overview of women throughout church history. Thus, the tone is set for over 600 more pages of scholarly investigation of the foundations and ramifications of egalitarianism.

### **Part One, Looking to Scripture: The Biblical Texts Reviewed by Karen Strand Winslow**

Conway’s chapter, “Gender in Creation and Fall,” opens Part One, “Looking to Scripture, the Biblical Texts.” Viewing Gen 1–2 as the ideal theological foundation for relationships between women and men, she finds “mutuality, equality, harmony between men and women” (52) and no biblical grounds for gender hierarchy or the patriarchy that is entrenched in so many cultures.

Conway’s contribution has much to commend it. She emphasizes that “humanity” should be used to translate *adam*, except when it becomes the proper name for the male, man, and husband referred to in Gen 4:25–5:3 (see the NRSV translation of these chapters). In Gen 1:28, humanity, defined as male and female, are equally tasked with multiplying and ruling other creatures God had made before them. Conway rightly claims that *Yahweh*’s original intention for humanity included *no* distinction of authority or roles—male and female, united and made in the image of God, are to reproduce and rule other created creatures.

Nonetheless, Conway’s use of the term *Yahweh* here betrays her tendency to collapse Gen 1 and Gen 2, even while admitting that the first and second creation stories have “differing focuses, genres, and functions” (35). But *Yahweh* (typically rendered “LORD”) is not used for God in Gen 1; only *Elohim* (“God”) is. *Yahweh Elohim* is used for the creator of both the Garden and the couple in Gen 2–3, and is one example of the many differences between these stories which include setting, vocabulary, order, scope, and purpose.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, she names her discussion of the Garden story, “Genesis 2:4–25: A Detailed View of the Creation of Humanity,” and reads it as an expansion of Day 6 of Gen 1. She says the second story “overlaps the first, extends it, and unpacks events *in more detail*, especially in regard to the creation of humanity” (39, italics added).<sup>5</sup>

However, we cannot read the Gen 2 story of marriage and farming through the lens of Gen 1. With Gen 1 and 2 we have *two* creation stories that support the unity, correspondence, intimacy, and fit of the two sexes: male and female in Gen 1, husband and wife in Gen 2. In Gen 2, the man was formed to till the soil (Gen 2:5–8); the woman was made because it *was not good for man to be alone* (not to reproduce, as Conway claims [41, 43]). The reason animals were made—after the man—was to find one that would match the man. God realized that man’s *ezer*

*kenegdo*, his perfect (but not identical) match, must come from his own body. Conway is clear and correct that nothing in this process indicates the man/husband is superior to the woman/wife, who was formed so that he would not be alone.

In her discussion of Gen 3, Conway uses the woman's addition to the command forbidding their eating from one tree, "neither shall you *touch* it" (Gen 3:3), to insist that the woman was "inadequately taught" by the man. She assumes the man added this, and, on this basis, claims the woman's later sin was inadvertent. However, she claims, the man sinned "defiantly" (44–46, 50, 52), so the woman is "less guilty" than the man. In Conway's view, the woman's theology was mistaken because she was inadequately taught by the man, who added, "neither shall you touch it." However, Genesis is completely silent on whether God, the man, or the woman (in responding to the serpent) added "neither shall you touch it." Thus, it cannot form the basis for Conway's interpretation.

Conway's discussion of this addition strains under the weight of her conclusion, which also controls her discussion of 1 Tim 2:11–14. Although the woman's "do not touch" elaboration must be noted, it does not demonstrate the woman was less culpable than the man, or that he failed to teach her properly. This addition—even if it originated with Adam—does not weaken the command, but enhances it, putting "a fence around Torah" (a secondary regulation, in this case not touching the tree, intended to guard the core command, in this case not eating from the tree).

For Conway, the failure that led to the sinning ("the fall") was the man's because he told his wife not to touch the tree. This disrupted the mutuality and harmony between women and men and *caused* millennia of male domination in the church and in marriage (52). Sinning in the Garden, of course, disturbed their intimacy and led to alienation and struggle, but the disobedience in the Garden illustrates their equality in sinning, as well as in their creation. He was no more defiant than she was. Certainly, Conway's concluding remark on 1 Tim 2 is sound. Men can no more teach without proper instruction than women; a person's preparation, not gender, is the issue. "With appropriate teaching . . . both men and women can now be full participants in the ministry of the church" (52). But this is based on reason and not upon the assumption that sin came into the world because the woman was inadequately taught by the man.

The next chapter in this section is "The Treatment of Women under Mosaic Law," by Conway and Pierce. It is an interpretive move from the notion that all biblical laws originated with God, so the secondary status of women the laws sometimes display must be divine. The authors recognize the patriarchal bias of Israel's context—and therefore of some of the laws attributed to Moses—while noting the overall concern for justice and compassion for the marginalized. They discuss examples of laws focusing on women, while attending to the changing nature of law as the Bible demonstrates increasing emphasis on redemption and that law is one stage in that process (54).

Belleville, in "Women Leaders in the Bible," details numerous examples of female heroes, paying particular attention to Deborah

the judge, the prophet Huldah of King Josiah's time (mid- to late-seventh century BC, when the prophet Jeremiah was also active), and to Junia, an apostle whom Paul mentions in Romans, while celebrating the fact that Paul always describes women and men coworkers equally (88). She cites recent research that demonstrates women held authority in Greco-Roman culture and were not cloistered in the household, although they are also often described as heads of households in the literature of this time. This chapter is extremely useful for providing biblical foundations for women in ministry.

Spencer's chapter, "Jesus' Treatment of Women in the Gospels," appropriately emphasizes that Jesus sent Mary Magdalene as the first witness of his resurrection, and that other women followers fulfilled his commands to preach the gospel, which they had witnessed by being with Jesus. Thus, women are apostles in the true sense of the term. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit "equipped every believer to be a priest and proclaimer before God" (107). She concludes that if Jesus, the Bible, or the ecumenical councils did not in any way restrict leadership based on gender, why should we (106)?

Chapter 6, "Mutuality in Marriage and Singleness," is an extensive treatment of 1 Cor 7:1–40, Paul's call for mutuality in marriage, a study that earlier editions of *DBE* did not include. The authors lament its neglect by most evangelicals (although they cite the significant exceptions, 108–9) and demonstrate that this passage constructs a balanced theology of gender roles (117) and is a comprehensive statement of gender mutuality in marriage and society. It is the only passage that directly, explicitly addresses authority in marriage. Here Paul stresses "functional unity and mutual submission . . . in the bedroom" (113), which can serve as a paradigm for other marital concerns. This portion of Paul's letter to the Corinthians also promotes mutuality in divorce (117–20) and is gender-inclusive regarding celibate singleness (122–23). Pierce and Kay successfully endorse 1 Cor 7:1–40 as a text that "shines the positive light of gender-inclusive mutuality on other statements in both contemporary and later gender texts in the Bible" (124).

In ch. 7, "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies," we come to Fee's interpretation of the difficult passage, 1 Cor 11:2–16. It discusses the meaning of "head coverings," "head," "authority," and "because of the angels." The chapter gives attention to first-century worship customs as well as honor and shame. Although interpreters tread through murky waters, Fee emphasizes that *this text* is clear that women were "praying and prophesying" in Paul's churches, which helps us to assume that women were also teaching in the gathered assembly (133). Although Fee posits contextual (within 1 Corinthians) explanations for Paul's reference to angels as a reason for veiling women in the assembly, it is puzzling that Fee does not include evidence that the residents of Qumran—and probably other Jews—assumed that angels joined them in worship and that veils were a mark of submission to these heavenly worshippers.

"Learning in the Assemblies" (ch. 8) focuses on 1 Cor 14:34–35, ". . . women should be silent in the churches. For they are not

permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.” Craig Keener asks, “How silent must women be?” and explores various positions of other scholars. He recognizes these verses seem intrusive to Paul’s discussion on orderly prophesying, except they are also concerned with order in the assembly. Relying on his extensive research into Corinthian culture of antiquity, Keener dismisses those interpretations that try to make this a transcultural rule, recognizing that they could be a later scribal insertion, especially given clear references to women prophesying in this same letter. However, he notes that Paul also is known to digress and here addresses the problem of women asking questions in the assembly, advising them to ask their husbands at home (147–48). He stresses that such advice is limited to that particular context in which women—in general—were not as educated as men and it may have been considered shameful for women to question men in public (154). Keener cannot identify any biblical law that urges women to be silent (v. 34), because such a law does not exist, but recognizes Paul was concerned with social propriety and order, as well as learning before speaking (158).

In “Male and Female: One in Christ,” Cynthia Long Westfall treats the refreshing, equalizing, and redemptive passage, Gal 3:26–29, within its context as an address to the *Galatian* church, not to Greco-Roman political structures (160). Being clothed in Christ through baptism gives his followers the status of children of God equally, across racial, cultural, class, and sexual boundaries. This inclusive statement cannot be seen as any less than subsuming all differences under the identity of being “in Christ” (167). She stresses the significance of this Pauline affirmation for Gentiles becoming the people of God without circumcision; they are just as “in Christ” as Jews, and such is also the case for slaves, free, male, and female. Distinctions obviously exist, but they are not of primary importance and must not correspond to male authority and dominance (181). Being in Christ is the most “salient” identity (175, 180). Westfall convincingly concludes that this passage “sets an agenda for sweeping changes in racial, social, and gender relations in the church . . .” (182).

Chapter 10, “Loving and Submitting to One Another in Marriage” by Cohick, reminds all of us who receive the Bible as *Scripture* that, to understand and apply it, we must also fully recognize the significance of its particularity—it was written at and for a certain time in history, with social and cultural contexts that are different from our own. Nonetheless, today we have similar concerns about our place in the family, church, and world. In her study of marriage in Eph 5:21–23 and Col 3:18–19, she provides the background for these letters to new Christians, including Roman social codes and their view of virtue, which included social roles for modest women (188–91). Thus, Christian women, like Nympha (Col 4:15), who host churches in their homes were not breaking social norms. Yet the advice given in Ephesians and Colossians is counter-cultural in its attention to love and submission in marriage and equality in Christ for all in the household. She highlights the body as the primary metaphor here; differences among people must not be seen as hierarchical,

but each person is like a body part, equally valuable in working together in unity, showing the wisdom of God and the hope of resurrection (204).

Belleville’s “Teaching and Usurping Authority” (ch. 11) is a thorough analysis of 1 Tim 2:11–15, the passage complementarians and their predecessors have most often used to restrict women from teaching, preaching, and leading in churches. She analyzes the historical and literary contexts, Greek terms like *authentain* (which is not used in the Bible outside of this passage), and essential practices for proper interpretation of this letter for the church in Ephesus. She does not address the Kroegers’ suggestion that the false teaching referred to throughout 1–2 Timothy may have been a notion similar to the Valentinian demiurgical creation account (found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt) that claims woman was created first and was wise to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge (*gnosis*) of Good and Evil. Thus, “I do not allow a woman to teach *that* she was the author or originator of man.”<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, Belleville’s translation/interpretation of 1 Tim 2:12, based on her careful study, is also compelling: “. . . I do not, however, permit her to teach with the intent to dominate a man. She must be gentle in her demeanor” (227).

Chapter 12, “A Silent Witness in Marriage” by Peter Davids, is slightly updated from the second edition of *DBE*. This final chapter in the “Looking to Scripture” section is a study of 1 Pet 3:1–7, which is directed to Christian wives of non-believing husbands in a mostly Gentile context (229). Thus, Davids also attends to the Greco-Roman world of the first century. The context of the passage shows concern to disprove that Christianity was subversive and disturbed the peace of the household (235). Thus, this passage is part of a strategy to “minimize the tension between Christians and surrounding society” (239). Davids does not address its immediately preceding context that explains “In the same way,” which refers to Jesus accepting the abuse of his torturers and killers. Unfortunately, Peter’s wording here has been used to advise women to endure abuse by their husbands. Davids concludes by insisting that 1 Peter urges those given power by their culture to humbly give it up like Christ did and for husbands of every era to follow the way of the cross and treat their wives as equals (244).

The chapters in the biblical section of *DBE* are by scholars whose primary research lies with the passages examined therein. It thus provides an excellent contribution to the body of literature that interprets the Scriptures as a foundation for women and men as equal servants of Christ in the church and the world.

## **Part Two, Thinking It Through: Theological and Logical Perspectives** **Reviewed by Dorothy A. Lee**

The eight essays in Part Two focus largely on theological issues that flow from the fundamental conviction that the equality of women and men in home and ministry is firmly grounded in Scripture. Each makes a significant contribution to the debate, often in disagreement with complementarians. The result is a diverse collection of articles that confirm, theologically, core biblical teaching on Christian anthropology as embodied in Jesus Christ.

Three of the articles belong together in the sense that they direct their attention to the nature of Christian ministry as revealed in the NT and practised in the contemporary church. Thus, I will group the essays rather than review them in chapter order. Fee argues, in “The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry,” that gender is irrelevant in the Spirit’s granting of the needed gifts for ministry in the NT writings. The issue is not gender but rather how the Spirit works in the generous giving of gifts. Gender is thus no barrier to ministry, and women are in no way excluded from full participation in the work of the Spirit within the community of believers.

Likewise, Walter L. Liefeld’s “The Nature of Authority in the New Testament” argues for a fully inclusive presence of women and men in the work of ministry. For him, the priesthood of all believers is a vital theological principle, challenging hierarchical and exclusively male models of ministry that have moved far from Jesus’s servant leadership. The church is to be a new community that understands authority not as a fixed office but rather as a form of servanthood in radical opposition to Greco-Roman models of domination and authoritarianism.

Stanley J. Grenz is similarly concerned with the NT implications for ministry in ch. 16, “Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry.” In his view, the linking of pastoral leadership with the OT priesthood is a fundamental error of interpretation that leads to a hierarchical model of ministry from which women are excluded. Instead, the NT offers a vision of mutuality in love and care, in which the Spirit’s gifts have prominence for the church’s ministry. It is not, therefore, only a question of including women in ministry but also of developing a new and authentically biblical understanding of how ministry is to be exercised in the community of faith as the priesthood of all believers.

In addition, three further essays argue for women’s full participation in ministry, using different perspectives to confirm biblical teaching. Christa L. McKirland speaks cogently for the elimination of gender essentialism: the view that women and men have fixed, defined roles and traits to which they must adhere. On the contrary, she sees such essentialism as denied within the biblical text. Based on the *imago Dei* in Gen 1:28, McKirland argues that personhood in Christian understanding is determined first and foremost by Christ who is the true Image of God. Maleness and femaleness are secondary. In creation, human beings are formed to reflect the presence of God through the benign “dominion” granted them. Here they are formed to be royal priests to creation itself. The essay also takes note of the destructive effects of gender essentialism, not only on women and men, but also on those who are intersex and who are co-equally called to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Although not arising from an essentialist view of gender, Pierce and Erin M. Heim explore feminine imagery for God within the biblical text. These images, across both Testaments, connect to all three Persons of the Trinity and also to Christian leadership. Both God and Jesus are depicted with mothering symbols (as is Paul). These metaphors are substantial and have power to transform the reader spiritually. There is no intention here of introducing gender into the life of God. Instead, the

images emphasise the tenderness of the divine maternal and paternal love, giving new insights into the nature of God and encouraging us to minister to others with the same compassion.

In ch. 20, Groothuis promotes full egalitarianism from a well-reasoned logical and theological perspective that is rooted in Scripture. She argues that contemporary complementarianism, in its desire to confirm both the equality of women and men and also their differentiated roles (e.g., the authority of men and the submission for women), is participating in a logical fallacy that goes against the teaching of Scripture. Belief in the subordination of women to male authority as an ontological aspect of female nature cannot be held alongside the conviction of women’s equality. Despite the superficial rhetoric of gender equality, modern complementarianism is simply ascribing female inferiority to men. This is contrary to the biblical witness and is also a logical fallacy that its proponents fail to perceive.

The two other essays in Part Two shed a significantly different light on the issue of biblical egalitarianism. Kevin Giles tackles head-on the complementarian view of subordination within the Trinity. Despite the biblical portrayal of Jesus as the co-equal Son, and later creedal confessions that argue strongly for equality of divinity within the divine Persons, earlier complementarianism saw the subordination of the Son to the Father mirrored in the subordination of women to men in church and home. For Giles, this view moves dangerously close to Arianism, declared heresy by the early church. However, as a consequence of the doctrinal work of theologians such as Giles himself, a number of complementarians have abandoned their trinitarian subordinationism—though not, ironically (and unfortunately, as Giles argues elsewhere<sup>7</sup>), their gender subordinationism.

Finally, in ch. 17, Porter carries out a singularly important service by examining slaves and slavery in the NT as an appropriate analogy to its presentation of gender. Porter examines the NT evidence carefully, particularly the writings of Paul, arguing that while there is no outright condemnation of slavery within the text, there is a powerful theological basis for its demise. Indeed, in many ways, slavery is already overcome within the fictive family of the church, the new covenant community which stands over against the power-laden values of the ancient world. Paul himself, Porter argues, does not condone slavery but looks for its elimination in the way he constructs community. The same applies to gender subordination. Like slavery, this too no longer has meaning within the life of the church. Sadly, it has taken the church a long time to implement the NT vision on issues of both slavery and gender, and in some places the battle is still not won.

These eight essays are all well worth reading and have a vital role to play in ongoing debates about women’s worth, gifts, and ministry. They argue from different angles for the full equality and mutuality of women and men in ministry, reminding us of the radical nature of the early Christian community in its approach to gender. In each essay, the perspective is grounded in Christology and in the conviction that Scripture has much to teach us in advocating for the full equality of women as made in the divine image and re-made in Christ.

### Part Three, Addressing the Issues: Interpretive and Cultural Perspectives

Reviewed by Jamin A. Hübner

Part Three of *DBE* contains five chapters on the following topics: Paul and hermeneutics, gender and the social sciences, gender in translation, gay marriage, and abortion.

The first of these is “Interpretive Methods and the Gender Debate” by Westfall. She has published extensive scholarship in Pauline and NT studies throughout her career, and so she deftly navigates the issues in this chapter and concisely summarizes them for a popular audience. She provides some of the basic interpretive scaffolding for how one might both understand and apply biblical texts, particularly those in the NT. Given evangelical theological presuppositions, part of this means interpreting within a consistent and coherent framework. She ultimately concludes that “Paul did not share the Greco-Roman view of women that the church later adopted, nor did he teach or wield hierarchical authority and power within his churches that was comparable to the authoritative power structures that developed in Christian traditions” (450); and the interpretive methods about Paul within his socio-economic and cultural context need a “robust reworking.”

The next chapter, “Gender Differences and Biblical Interpretation” by M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, looks at what contemporary social science offers to questions like, “what does it mean to be a man or woman?” The chapter is particularly interesting since it depends, more than many other chapters in this section, on the most up-to-date research. Indeed, much of it amounts to empirically debunking stereotypes. In examining the evidence, she says that “it is unwise to assume generalized differences between genders based on our own experience” (454). There are all kinds of caveats in both conducting and interpreting such social science as well. For example, “A gender difference in the brain in no way indicates that the difference is not learned; in fact, all learned behaviors will in some way change the brain. . . . brain studies are not *explanations* for gender differences and should not be used as such” (462)—though the “brain differences” end up being insignificant, anyway. (“There simply is no such thing as a male brain distinct from a female brain” [464].) Similarly, “men and women largely do not differ in their cognitive capacities” (465). Readers come away with far less certainties than traditional religious culture would imbibe—and using Martin Luther’s changing views on the subject as a case study, Hall suggests that this is a good thing.

Jeffrey Miller, in “A Defense of Gender-Accurate Bible Translation,” then argues that English translations have actually *amplified* androcentric and patriarchal bias in Bible translations. In his words, “such translations are indeed more androcentric than the Greek text” (474). The essay contains meticulous research to defend this somewhat eye-opening thesis, especially as it reveals needless translational bias—sometimes in the extreme. For example, he concludes with a chart of masculine renderings in Rom 14. The CEB and NRSV have none, ESV has 22, HCSB has 26, and the KJV has a whopping 45. Reading such texts

obviously instills patriarchy where there often isn’t any. Miller also looks at phenomena like “a mishandled feminine plural expression” in Luke 8:1–3. The phrase “many others” is feminine plural, so they are necessarily “many other women.” But virtually no English translation properly renders it as such. Having taught Greek, authored a Greek grammar, and (like Miller) published in *The Bible Translator* myself,<sup>8</sup> I appreciate both the depth and originality of the study and re-affirmed my own preference for the CEB and NRSV.

Pierce then looks at “Biblical Equality and Same-Sex Marriage” in ch. 24. He recapitulates the arguments and exegetical studies of affirming and non-affirming positions in a way similar to other books published in the last two decades and explains his non-affirming view. While there may not be much “new” information in that regard, Pierce’s tone and approach is marked by rare generosity, non-combativeness, and a thorough knowledge of the surrounding issues. Similar remarks can be made for ch. 25, Heidi R. Unruh and Ronald J. Sider’s “Gender Equality and the Sanctity of Life,” which recapitulates a pro-life position on abortion, complete with a framework of “full embrace of the sacredness of human life” (513). Among other issues, they show the various feminist and pro-woman strands of traditional pro-life positions. And again, their tone is marked by understanding and mutuality; “Advocacy should not depend on naming others as our enemy,” they write toward the conclusion. “We show love as we are willing to listen to one another’s stories and perspectives, not primarily to persuade but to seek to connect on a human level. We may grow in understanding and respect for the cry of another’s heart. We may even find common ground on shared values: respecting women’s bodies and minds, empowering women to flourish, enabling more control over the timing of pregnancies, offering adoption as a viable choice, dedication to parenting postbirth children well, compassion for women facing pregnancies in unimaginably difficult circumstances” (534).

All the essays are well-written, pertinent to the issues they address, and competent to speak to and help the intended audience. As with anything, I had a few comments, questions, and concerns here and there. To be brief: (1) Arguments for traditional marriage can be marked by an uncritical perspective when it comes to “God’s creational, male-female design for marriage” (503)—that is, not recognizing that this model/construct (as with sexuality in general—something recent works on both purity culture<sup>9</sup> and evolutionary biology<sup>10</sup> have indicated<sup>11</sup>) is, at least from a historical perspective, not as constant and unchanging as imagined even within biblical history. (2) If one enjoys Miller’s essay, they would do well to also read Samuel Perry’s “The Bible as a Product of Cultural Power: The Case of Gender Ideology in the English Standard Version.”<sup>12</sup> (3) Given the decline of conservative White evangelicalism in the United States,<sup>13</sup> I wonder if this volume will speak to millennials and Gen Z in the US who do not identify as evangelical or do “normal church” or to Christians who are more committed to the spirit and teachings of Christ than to being “committed to the authority of the Bible” (434) and engaging in other debates coming out of the 1970–80s.<sup>14</sup>

In the meantime, evangelicals will be enlightened by this needed revision of a book that has helped many see gender debates in Christianity from an alternative perspective.

#### **Part Four, Living It Out: Practical Applications** *Reviewed by Dawn Gentry*

Part Four emphasizes the importance of understanding theology in the context of lived experience. The editors recognize that biblical exegesis, historical and theological assumptions, and cultural and interpretive issues alone will not change how we embody women's equality in our churches, communities, and relationships. It is not enough to get our theology and exegesis right. We must lean into right actions. In this section of the book, practical next steps are suggested in various life contexts.

In the first essay, "Helping the Church Understand Biblical Gender Equality," Haddad examines how new ideas take hold in social settings and encourages church leaders to hold to Scripture's truth while favoring "simple, direct, and rich" language rather than complexity (540). She notes how women's equality improves lives and relates it to other shared core values like healthy families and the centrality of missions. Haddad uses gifts-based ministry as her starting point and offers several practical ways to model equality in churches. She suggests that gendered assumptions about specific tasks may limit opportunities for both men and women and negatively affect outcomes. Finally, she recognizes that women may first have opportunities in business or community leadership. When giftings are observed and recognized in those contexts, church leaders may see their assumptions challenged, recognize those gifts may benefit Christ's mission, and finally invite women to serve the family of God.

As trusted scholars and marriage partners, Judith and Jack Balswick bring great experience to gender equality within marriage. In ch. 27, they offer three definitions of "authority" in marriage and relate these definitions to the use of power within each relationship. The Balswicks reflect on human tendencies that lead to domineering husbands or manipulative wives, recognizing these characteristics contrast with Jesus's example described in Scripture. They highlight the value of interdependence, recognizing each spouse's unique strengths that benefit the relationship (recall Haddad's affirmation of "gifts-based leadership," above). They offer practical suggestions for dual-earner families and parents who partner in childrearing. While not every egalitarian will agree with all their views of sexual and emotional intimacy, their overall discussion of authority, power, and partnership is a helpful addition to this volume.

Complementarians would have us believe their focus on loving, servant leadership would eliminate abuse in Christian settings. In ch. 28, however, Kylie Maddox Pidgeon shares data indicating high similarity in statistics between church and non-church men's abuse against women. While most pastors believe their churches are "safe havens" for those abused, stories from survivors suggest otherwise. Pidgeon asserts (and the World Health Organization agrees) that "gender inequality . . . is a primary foundation for domestic abuse" (573). She draws several correlations between the story of David and Bathsheba and complementarian theology,

listing factors that either predict or drive levels of violence against women. These include victim blaming, limits to women's agency, rigid gender roles, and disrespect toward women. Pidgeon also links power and violence, discusses various types of bias, and provides a helpful definition of "gender equality." The visual of The Duluth Power and Control Wheel, a tool illustrating "varied ways that power and control can manifest in an abusive domestic relationship," is extremely helpful (585–86); Pidgeon also suggests a practical and theologically based resource called SAFER, available at <https://SaferResource.org.au> (587–88).

While conversations about gender roles have abounded in the past century among the privileged class, Juliany González Nieves, in "When We Were Not Women: Race and Discourses on Womanhood," asserts that Black and indigenous women's experiences have been largely excluded from these discussions of "womanhood." Modern complementarian assumptions have much in common with the "cult of true womanhood," failing to account for singleness, poverty, or even women's agency. González Nieves notes that egalitarians are also guilty of this bias, calling us to question race, class, and gender assumptions through a robust intersectionality. González Nieves shows how John Piper centers whiteness in his assessment of women's bodies, demeanor, and virtuosity and she pointedly asks why men, often White men in the Reformed tradition, enjoy "the privilege and power to judge what is true, beautiful, and feminine, and what is not" (607). In contrast with most White, middle-class women, Black and enslaved women were often forced to work outside the home, including in the fields, and developed physical strength—characteristics counter to those assumed to be "feminine." González Nieves encourages us to recenter our discussions of gender equality in the gospel, where all nations will be represented at Christ's table when the kingdom is fully come.

In the next essay, "Human Flourishing: Global Perspectives," Haddad notes that violence, poverty, illiteracy, and abuse disproportionately affect females. As gender equality becomes more intentional, data from humanitarians show how these social ills decline. In many nations, women lead the way on solving these problems, and Haddad shares examples of women across faith traditions empowering women toward education, self-sufficiency, and community leadership. Women are also most likely to serve in what Haddad calls the "second shift," bearing the physical and mental load of running a household, including managing children's education and healthcare. The common power imbalance between men and women causes her to ask if complementarians can even address suffering without questioning this underlying status quo. Haddad also highlights Christian organizations that include women's equality in social development initiatives, and notes that institutional barriers and economic disparity continue to be obstacles to women, even in the United States. Finally, she calls attention to the link between patriarchy, pornography use, and sex trafficking, urging readers to live into God's ideal for the flourishing church.

Opposing views on the topic of gender equality have become so entrenched that healthy dialogue is less common than



argumentative debate. When we tightly protect our vision of what is right theologically, we may fail to consider what is best spiritually. In the final essay, Alice P. Mathews calls us to listen to various perspectives and ask good questions to foster biblical reconciliation. Through what lens do we view Scripture? Do we assume the best of each other? Mathews notes that some have accused the other side of not valuing Scripture, or of using unclear language and false generalizations. These temptations cause us to substitute red herring arguments for the spiritual disciplines of prayerful listening and understanding. When we recognize that the gospel is central to our message and motive, with God’s kingdom as our priority, we will seek reconciliation with those who disagree with us in order “that the world may believe” (John 17:21).

## Notes

1. Including Scot McKnight, Nijay Gupta, and Cherith Fee Nordling (pg. i).

2. Both Groothuis and Fee served as editors of previous editions of *DBE*. This third edition is dedicated to her (pg. v and footnote 1 on pg. 1). See the tribute to Groothuis in *Priscilla Papers*: Douglas Groothuis, “Rebecca Merrill Groothuis’s Contribution to Biblical Equality: A Personal Testimony and Lament,” 29/3 (Summer 2015) 3–6. Fee announced his Alzheimer’s disease diagnosis to the scholarly community in 2012.

3. See also Haddad’s more recent comments in “Come Let Us Reason Together: ETS 2021 Annual Meeting Recap,” posted on Dec 8, 2021, in CBE’s *Mutuality* blog.

4. Gen 2:4b–25 is the beginning of the “Yahwist” Garden story that concludes with 4:26, the end of the Cain story. Gen 5:1 picks up to follow Gen 1:1–2:4a (known as the Priestly version). To follow scholarly convention and call these chapters Priestly and Yahwist is not always necessary, but recognizing their distinctions is crucial.

5. Conway’s melding of the two accounts is especially apparent when she suggests that the reason it is not good for the man to be alone (Gen 2:18) may be that the man is unable to reproduce alone—claiming that this is suggested by the call to be fruitful and multiply in Gen 1:28, thus regarding the stories in temporal sequence, even though she recognizes this is not strictly the case (39).

6. Catherine and Richard Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Baker, 1992). They point out that *didaskain*, “to teach,” elsewhere refers to the *content* of teaching, never the *activity* of teaching. Like Belleville, they stress that *authentain*, often translated “have authority over,” means to dominate or to claim authorship and ownership (185).

7. See especially Kevin Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Cascade, 2017).

8. Hübner, *A Concise Greek Grammar and A Concise Greek Grammar Workbook* (Hills Publishing Group, 2018); Hübner, “The Emphatic Hypernegation That Was(n’t): Revisiting οὐ μὴ and New Testament Translation in Light of Research and Contemporary Linguistics,” *BT* 72/1 (2021) 61–84; Miller, “The Long and Short of *Lectio Brevior Potior*,” *BT* 57/1 (2006) 282–88; Miller, “Breaking the Rules: *Lectio Brevior Potior* and New Testament Textual Criticism,” *BT* 70/1 (2019) 82–93.

9. See Tina Schermer Sellers, *Sex, God, and the Conservative Church: Erasing Shame from Sexual Intimacy* (Routledge, 2017); Kay Linda Klein, *Pure: Inside the Evangelical Movement That Shamed a Generation of Young Women and How I Broke Free* (Simon and Schuster, 2019); Matthias

Roberts, *Beyond Shame: Creating a Healthy Sex Life on Your Own Terms* (Fortress, 2020).

10. See William Cavanaugh and James K. A. Smith, eds., *Evolution and the Fall* (Eerdmans, 2017).

11. Kate Lister, *A Curious History of Sex* (Unbound, 2020); Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (Penguin, 2006), in conjunction with Peter Gardella, *Innocent Ecstasy: How Christianity Gave America an Ethic of Sexual Pleasure* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

12. Samuel Perry, “The Bible as a Product of Cultural Power: The Case of Gender Ideology in the English Standard Version,” *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 81/1 (2020) 68–92.

13. Jamin Andreas Hübner, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism* (Hills Publishing Group, 2020) 15: “6,500 people who identify as ‘Christian’ stop identifying as such every 24 hours. Over 3,000 churches close their doors every year. The largest and fastest growing religious group in the United States is ‘non-religious.’ The bulk of this whole movement is in North America, and it mainly applies to the two dominant strands of institutional Christianity—Roman Catholicism and conservative evangelicalism. A recent article for the *Washington Post* noted that ‘About 26 percent of Americans 65 and older identify as white evangelical Protestants. Among those ages 18 to 29, the figure is 8 percent. . . . evangelical leaders are tidying up the kitchen while the house burns down around them.’ Wheaton College, or ‘evangelical Harvard,’ is having to hunt for students for the first time in decades.”

14. Would a trans person, for example, be helped by these paradigms of “biblical gender equality”? See Austin Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Westminster John Knox, 2018).

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# CBE INTERNATIONAL (Christians for Biblical Equality)

*CBE International (CBE) is a nonprofit organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and women of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Scriptures such as Galatians 3:28.*

## Mission Statement

CBE exists to promote the biblical message that God calls women and men of all cultures, races, and classes to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world. Our mission is to eliminate the power imbalance between men and women resulting from theological patriarchy.

## Statement of Faith

- *We believe* in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons equal in power and glory.
- *We believe* in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- *We believe* that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- *We believe* the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- *We believe* the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- *We believe* that women and men are equally created in God's image and given equal authority and stewardship of God's creation.
- *We believe* that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.

## Core Values

- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin.
- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from females what God has given them: their dignity, and freedom, their leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.

- Christ's redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
- God's design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a man and a woman, celibate singleness and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women's gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world.
- Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

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