



Women and the World: Biblical Equality in Brazil

The relationship between women and men and their leadership (or lack thereof) in the home, church, and world has been a subject of discussion in the American church for a number of years. CBE was founded in 1988 in response to the “biblical premise used by churches, organizations, and mission groups to exclude the gifts of women” and to be a resource that provides “education, support, and leadership about biblical equality.” Thanks to the number of resources now available, English speakers have access to a wide range of materials that explore biblical equality for women and men. Material is so readily available that some may take the issue for granted, treating it as a secondary issue or the subject of purely academic pondering. Those who suffer under theological patriarchy, and particularly those that don’t have the resources or support in their own languages to follow their calling, however, find themselves in a different position.

In Brazil, the conversation on the biblical equality of women and men has, for years, been almost entirely one-sided. The best-selling books on marriage and family feature complementarian positions, and bookstores are full of books on “biblical” femininity, devotional studies, and programs for women which portray them as unilaterally submissive, often passive, focusing solely on marriage and family to the exclusion of all else.

While there are denominations and churches in Brazil that permit women to be in leadership, they do so without the robust support of biblical resources that are available in other languages. Thorough explanations of the egalitarian position and commentaries that provide in-depth studies of the passages that address submission or women’s participation in church have not been translated on a large scale into Brazilian Portuguese. When challenged, leaders from these groups often refer back to their historical tradition of shared leadership rather than exegesis. As a result, there are a lot of misconceptions about biblical equality and the full partnership of women and men in the home, church, and world.

This has slowly begun to change. A small number of Christian publishers have begun to invest in books that push back on patriarchy and promote biblical equality between women and men. The publication of the book *O Grito da Eva* (Eve’s Outcry), a thorough study of domestic abuse within Christian homes, has brought

Brazil’s staggering problem of violence against women to the forefront of the church. More and more people are finding the traditional hierarchical position and focus on specific gender roles to be problematic, and are beginning to look for other options.

Thanks to a providential connection made at a previous conference, this year’s CBE International conference was held in São Paulo, Brazil. Our goal was to help “set the record straight” and restore the biblical view of women and a clearer reading of Scripture in the context of the Brazilian church. Following that theme, we invited a mix of Brazilian and American speakers to lecture on Scripture, worldview, identity, and abuse, among other topics.

Cynthia Muniz Soares starts this issue of *Mutuality* with a detailed look at the women in the Gospels and their oft-overlooked participation in Jesus’s ministry. Cynthia Long Westfall then takes us through a study of some difficult passages that seem to support gender-based hierarchy in the home and church, which is so thorough it had to be abridged for our print issue. Be sure to see the full article online! After this, Viktoriya Zalewski Baracy demonstrates the problem of treating culture-based guidelines as universal and brings us back to Scripture as our best guide. Kathy Myatt then helps us to find our identities in the image of God. The 2023 Conference featured a roundtable session which gave participants the chance to submit questions for speakers to answer. As always, there were more questions and more discussion than there was time in the session, so we have adapted a selection of these for a Roundtable Q and A feature. Finally, Mimi Haddad shares the process that took CBE International to Brazil and her experience at the conference there.

As we seek to support and empower women throughout the world, connecting with them in their contexts and cultures is foundational. Biblical equality between women and men is not an American ideal, but a scriptural teaching—one that transcends cultural norms. May we hear the voices of our sisters and brothers affected by theological patriarchy throughout the world, whatever language they may speak.

1. "History of CBE," CBE International, https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/cbes-history/.
2. Marília de Camargo César, *O Grito da Eva: A violência doméstica em lares cristãos* (São Paulo: Vida Melhor Editora, 2021).