

Conclusion

The search for precedent should be rooted in the NT examples of women recognized by Jesus, as well as Paul and other NT authors, as functional leaders. A historical framework is also valuable for contextualizing current debates and recognizing definitions and structures that continue to sideline or suppress women in church ministry. “Understanding why and how women, once leaders in the Jesus movement and in the early church, were marginalized and scapegoated as Christianity became the state religion is crucial if women are to reclaim their rightful, equal place in the church today.”²⁵

Notes

1. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1997) 109.
2. John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) 33.
3. Priscilla is named first in Acts 18:18 and 26, where the context is ministry. Earlier, in 18:2, Aquila is named first when the couple is introduced. In Paul’s writings, Priscilla is named first twice (Rom 16:3, 2 Tim 4:19), and Aquila is named first once (1 Cor 16:19).
4. Philip B. Payne, “Is It True That in the New Testament No Women, Only Men, Are Identified by Name as Elders, Overseers, or Pastors, and that Consequently Women Must Not Be Elders, Overseers, Or Pastors?” 1, <http://pbpayne.com/?p=501>.
5. Jeffrey D. Miller, “What Can We Say about Phoebe?,” *Priscilla Papers* 25/2 (Spring 2011) 17.
6. Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Eerdmans, 2002) 166. See also Dennis J. Preato, “Junia, a Female Apostle: An Examination of the Historical Record,” *Priscilla Papers* 33/2 (Spring 2019) 8–15.
7. Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Fortress, 2005) 32.
8. John Howard Yoder, “Is There Such a Thing as Being Ready for Another Millennium?,” in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor*

of Jurgen Moltmann, ed. Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, and Thomas Kucharz (Eerdmans, 1996) 63.

9. Antonio Gonzalez, *God’s Reign and the End of Empires* (Convivium, 2012) 274.
10. Karen Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*, reprint (HarperOne, 1995) 155–56.
11. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*, 157.
12. Kate Cooper, *Band of Angels: The Forgotten World of Early Christian Women* (Overlook, 2013) 140.
13. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*, 156.
14. Gonzalez, *God’s Reign and the End of Empires*, 275.
15. Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (Yale University Press, 2015) 20.
16. Cooper, *Band of Angels*, 140.
17. Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) 210.
18. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*, 157.
19. Carrie L. Bates, “Gender Ontology and Women in Ministry in the Early Church,” *Priscilla Papers* 25/2 (Spring 2011) 6.
20. Bates, “Gender Ontology,” 7–8.
21. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*, 158.
22. Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry*, 7th ed. (IVP Academic, 1995) 218.
23. Grenz and Kjesbo, *Women in the Church*, 230.
24. Cooper, *Band of Angels*, 11–12.
25. Ian Jones, Kirsty Thorpe, and Janet Wootton, eds., *Women and Ordination in the Christian Churches: International Perspectives* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2008) 50.



SHELLEY SIEMENS JANZEN holds a BA from Columbia Bible College and a graduate diploma from Regent College. She is currently completing a Master of Arts in Theological Studies at Regent College in Vancouver, BC, where she lives with her husband, Tony.

Book Review

Valiant or Virtuous? Gender Bias in Bible Translation

by author Suzanne McCarthy and eds. Jay Frankel, Christy Hayhoe, and Ruth Hayhoe (Wipf and Stock, 2019)

Reviewed by MICHAELA MILLER

In the last years of her life, Suzanne McCarthy dedicated herself to offering a helpful and accessible text on the sometimes-complicated topic of gender and Bible translation. She passed away in 2015 as this book neared completion, and members of her family brought it to completion and publication.¹

McCarthy approaches this important matter from an egalitarian perspective in a systematic and thorough way, addressing not only the biblical text but also the history behind many translation trends. While she presents a significant amount of technical information, readers with or without academic training in biblical studies or Bible translation will find this book understandable and informative.

Section 1: Gender Attributes

Valiant or Virtuous? Gender Bias in Bible Translation is organized into four distinct sections, the first being Gender Attributes. McCarthy dedicates four chapters to this discussion, each addressing a different adjective used for both men and women throughout the Bible. She notes that the same descriptors are often translated differently for men and women, providing a detailed survey of each word and its usage. In these chapters, rather than only offering a list of where each word appears in the biblical text, McCarthy provides a wealth of background material that illuminates the historical development of translation practices and traditions regarding each term. While her treatment of the biblical

text is thorough, she broadens her study to include other historical texts and languages, introducing further insights to support her arguments for equality in translation.

In ch. 1, McCarthy explains that the Hebrew word *chayil* is classically translated “strong” or “valiant” in relation to men but is almost exclusively translated “virtuous” or “excellent” in relation to women (4–5). She goes on to provide historical background, surveying varying translations, ancient and modern, and building the case for truly “valiant” women. Chapter 2 includes a similar treatment of the Hebrew word commonly translated “beautiful.”

In her discussion of wisdom in ch. 3, McCarthy opens with a concise explanation of grammatical gender and its bearing on translation (23). Building upon this information, she conducts a thorough study of how wisdom is personified through the OT. She then offers a unique perspective on Eve and her desire for wisdom, casting new light on the various interpretations of this story, as well as an examination of women who displayed wisdom in political settings throughout the biblical text.

Chapter 4 launches with an extensive study of *teshuqa*, commonly translated “desire” in Gen 3:16. McCarthy presents a wide range of information regarding the difficulties of this Hebrew word and how it has been translated throughout history, as well as how varying translations affect our understanding of Eve and the fall in Gen 3.

Section 2: Gender Roles

The second section of the book, Gender Roles, consists of chs. 5–7. In these chapters, McCarthy couples her study of the biblical text with examples of Christian women who worked outside of traditional gender roles in groundbreaking ways. She also interacts with the opposing views of notable complementarians, carefully explaining and countering their arguments.

In ch. 5, she discusses the phrase often translated as “help meet” or “helper . . .” in Gen 2:18–20 (*ezer kenegdo*), noting that this phrase has frequently been translated in a way that subordinates women. She makes the case for including “champion” or “defender” when translating this phrase, and she encourages us to consider how our understanding of various women throughout the Bible might be altered by this translation.

In ch. 6, McCarthy explores the word commonly translated “seed” and its relationship to women in the biblical text. She illustrates how an accurate understanding of this word in its contexts makes women and mothers essential as ancestors and founders of God’s people. She then discusses the Hebrew word sometimes translated “fathers,” explaining that “ancestors” is more historically accurate.

McCarthy turns her attention to women as providers for their families in ch. 7. She focuses on 1 Tim 5:8 and the ways it is often mistranslated to give the impression that only men are meant to be providers. She also notes the many times that masculine pronouns are unnecessarily included in translations of the biblical text, drawing attention to how this practice directly excludes women. Throughout this chapter, McCarthy carefully addresses the ideas and arguments of prominent complementarians by exploring the implications of their views and analyzing the resulting problems and pitfalls.

Section 3: Gender Terms

In the third section, McCarthy turns her attention to gender terms. In chs. 8 and 9, she addresses the use of masculine plural words, such as “brothers” and “sons,” to refer to groups that contain both women and men. She gives an overview of the controversy of translating such words inclusively (e.g., “brothers and sisters,” “children”), dialoguing with dissenting views. In both chapters, she thoroughly explores the linguistic and historical support for inclusive translations as well as the effects of excluding women, both past and present.

In chs. 10–12, McCarthy discusses words and phrases in both Hebrew and Greek that have often been translated “man” or “every man” when “human,” “person,” or “everyone” are more accurate options. She offers a wide study of word usage in each chapter, carefully constructing her argument for inclusive translations of these words. As in other chapters, she is careful to address opposing views and explain the weaknesses of those views, both linguistically and exegetically. The final chapter of this section reviews words that have sometimes been translated as “manly” or “be manly” (e.g., Josh 1:9, 1 Cor 16:13), but which McCarthy argues should more accurately be translated as “courageous” or “be courageous,” especially in relation to women.

Section 4: Gender of the Divine

The final section is entitled Gender of the Divine and is unfortunately incomplete, for the editors opted not to add to the author’s work after her death. Chapter 14 contains a discussion of a gender-neutral term meaning “the Eternal One” used in French translations and the historical setting in which it arose. Says McCarthy, “French Protestant and Jewish Bibles all translate YHWH as *L’Éternel*” (170). Chapter 15, though incomplete, begins an analysis of God as mother, including comments on a few ancient texts which refer to the Holy Spirit with feminine pronouns.

Conclusion

Suzanne McCarthy has offered a unique and valuable resource for egalitarian readers who are interested in the nuances of gender in Bible translation. She not only provides extensive information about the biblical text itself, but also enters the ongoing conversation by interacting both with translations throughout history and with current dissenting opinions. In her thorough examination and explanation of this topic, she demonstrates why gender inclusivity in Bible translation is not only reasonable but is vital for an accurate understanding of the text.

Notes

1. The book’s front matter gives more information about Suzanne. See more of her writing at <http://powerscourt.blogspot.com> and <http://abecedaria.blogspot.com>.

MICHAELA MILLER earned a master’s degree in New Testament from Emmanuel Christian Seminary and studied linguistics, translation, and intercultural studies at Johnson University, both in eastern Tennessee. She is affiliated with the American Saddlebred industry, both as a competitor and as an equine physical therapist.

