

Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry. By Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995, 284 pp., n. p.*

"[H]istorical, biblical and theological considerations converge not only to allow but indeed to insist that women serve as full partners with men in all dimensions of the church's life and ministry" (p. 16). This thesis is developed in seven chapters: (1) Women in the Church (contemporary American denominations), (2) Women in Church History, (3) Women in the Faith Community (OT, gospels, Acts), (4) Women in the Writings of Paul, (5) Women in Creation, (6) Women in the Church and the Priesthood and (7) Women in the Ordained Ministry. The stakes are raised high when it is asserted that the question of women in ministry "is central to the gospel" (p. 142) and that nonegalitarians who "categorically deny women the opportunity to obey the Spirit" are "acting unjustly toward women" and "standing in opposition to the work of the sovereign Holy Spirit" (p. 16). In the following review we will trace and critique the argument at significant points and conclude with some general comments regarding the work's overall approach and thesis.

In the first two chapters, D. Kjesbo seeks to substantiate the thesis that Church history evidences a pattern moving from "charismatic ministry" (with full female participation) to institutionalization (with the marginalization of women). Though this pattern may be characteristic of various stages of Church history, however, the question remains whether it also applies to the period of the early Church. At this point Kjesbo provides virtually no evidence but merely assumes an egalitarian reading of the NT. At the end of her survey she concludes that history indeed bears out the egalitarian view. Here it should be remembered that history itself cannot "prove" any position, be it egalitarian or otherwise. Another notable point in Kjesbo's portion of the book is the casting of the issue of women in ministry as an all-or-nothing proposition: To oppose women's ordination is to deny them any ministry whatsoever. Also, Kjesbo believes to have established women's God-given right to exercise their callings free from any restrictions by showing that women historically were engaged in learning, teaching and leadership roles. Her treatment here would need a more disciplined focus: How does the evidence she adduces show that women functioned in roles of ultimate responsibility over the Church before God?

The major portion of the book contains S. Grenz's survey of the Biblical and theological data. He uses a phenomenological approach that interprets the Scriptural data with a view toward their significance for the issue of women in ministry. His treatment of the OT therefore does not start, as might be considered appropriate, with Genesis 1–3, but with ancient Hebrew society. Acknowledging merely in passing the lack of women priests in OT Israel, Grenz points to the leadership of Miriam, Deborah's role as a judge, and Huldah's prophetic office as examples of authoritative functions fulfilled by women in OT history. From this data the rather ambiguous conclusion is drawn that "Scripture offers no evidence that the Israelites ever rejected a woman's leadership simply on the basis of gender" (p. 67). But what about the fact that all OT priests were male? Does this not qualify as evidence?

The author's survey of the NT data likewise fails to persuade at significant points. Espousing a strongly realized eschatology, with Gal 3:28, "Paul's Charter of Equality," as his theological center, Grenz maintains that "[o]ur position in Christ carries us beyond creation. . . by lifting creation to God's redemptive intent" (p. 105). But arguably redemption reaffirms God's creative purposes rather than supplanting them, as if the Creator's original design needed improvement or alteration. Grenz considers Jesus' appointment of twelve male apostles to be merely a function of salvation historical realities that are superseded by concerns of the kingdom. As in the case of the lack of women priests in the OT, Grenz fails to consider the significance of the lack of women among Jesus' apostolic circle. Priscilla represents a "clear indication of authoritative teaching by a woman in the church" (p. 83) and the NT "nowhere directly prohibits the appointment of women to [the] office [of elder]" (p. 90). Yet the former assertion does not adequately acknowledge that Priscilla did not function in a

permanent authoritative teaching role in a local congregation, while the latter contention presupposes an egalitarian reading of 1 Tim 2:12. Concerning this passage, Grenz contends that the expression *authenthein* constitutes an "unusual term that generally carried negative connotations" and addresses a situation in which "unlearned women are usurping authority" (pp. 133–134). In light of recent syntactical studies of 1 Tim 2:12, however, not to speak of lexical and background research, this interpretation has now been rendered virtually untenable. The point of 1 Tim 2:13–14, according to Grenz, is "that rather than fulfilling God's intention to complete the creation of humanity by delivering the male from his solitude, the female actually became the agent of the opposite result. She led him into the bondage that brought a more profound loneliness — alienation from God, each other and creation" (p. 169; cf. p. 138). Unfortunately, this novel interpretation of 1 Tim 2:13–14 is not related to v. 12: Is Paul not permitting a woman to teach or have authority over men because she failed to deliver man from his solitude? This hardly seems to make sense. Yet despite these incongruities, Grenz is able to draw from his Biblical survey "one significant conclusion: in view of the practice of the early church, the burden of proof now rests on those who would bar women from full participation with men in all dimensions of the gospel ministry" (pp. 140–141).

In the theological section of the book, Grenz expresses his conviction at the outset that "a biblical understanding of creation, the community of Christ and the ordained offices all lead to the conclusion that women ought to be full participants with men in all dimensions of church life and ministry" (p. 143). In perhaps the most questionable theological portion, Grenz, relying on the German scholar W. Pannenberg, argues for "a more nuanced, somewhat [?] symmetrical model" of the Trinity than the traditional subordinationist view. According to Grenz, the persons of the Trinity are mutually dependent, so that the "Father is dependent on the Son," not merely for his Fatherhood but even "for his deity" (p. 154). Apart from the fact whether this model is true to nature (Is the relationship between father and son really best described as a relationship of "mutual dependence"?), it is doubtful whether a reader not already armed with an egalitarian agenda would derive this understanding from an inductive study of Scripture's portrayal of Jesus' relationship with God the Father (cf. e.g. the gospel of John). Grenz' treatment of God's image in man and woman and the ordination of women is marred by a serious misrepresentation of opposing views. It is misleading and inaccurate to claim that "complementarians . . . conclude that in the final analysis men more completely reflect the divine image than do women" (p. 169). R. Tucker's attribution of such a view to J. Hurley in *Women in the Maze* is insufficient evidence for such a generalization. Regarding ordination, Grenz charges complementarians with violating the ecclesiological principle of the priesthood of all believers. But it is questionable whether his claim that "this ecclesiology leads to an egalitarian view of the ordained office" (p. 186) reflects an accurate understanding of this Biblical-Reformation doctrine.

Despite the above-noted lapses, Grenz and Kjesbo must be credited with a serious effort at establishing a Biblical theology of women in ministry that will form an important point of reference for future such ventures. Generally, the authors' language does not always come across as irenic as the back cover claims: According to Grenz, complementarians "skirt implications," seek "to salvage the complementarian interpretation" by "impos[ing] an artificial dichotomy," etc. Repeatedly one also finds the insinuation that the complementarian position is fueled by a male quest for power (e.g. pp. 49, 218), which, in *ad hominem* fashion, imputes improper motives to those with whom the authors disagree. Regarding the general approach of this work, it should be noted that, although the authors attempt to give their work an inductive flavor, the procedure is actually deductive. In fact, the book may best be described as an effort to provide an apologetic for the egalitarian position. Both Grenz and Kjesbo rely heavily on secondary literature. This is particularly limiting in the historical section; in the exegetical portion, one frequently finds a rapid survey of others' views without a clear attempt to argue for and substantiate Grenz' own view. His discussions of the meaning of *kephale* and of 1 Timothy 2 in particular fail to wrestle with the pertinent issues.

Hermeneutically, it is troubling that the authors tend to "read off" normative theology from narrative portions, as if the mere mention of a phenomenon automatically constituted its general applicability. Also, the fact that the roles of men and women in marriage and the Christian home are excluded from consideration artificially severs the Scriptural tie between God's design for the home and the church (cf. e.g. Eph 5:21–33; 1 Tim 3:4, 15). On a definitional level, the authors do not adequately frame the issue: Is it the ministry of women, the ministry of women in leadership, the ministry of women in positions of assuming ultimate responsibility for the Church (and hence local congregations) before God, "male vs. shared leadership" (p. 16), or something else? Grenz' style of argumentation likewise tends toward ambiguity. Repeatedly, what starts out on the level of bare possibility is by the end of Grenz' discussion presented as a firm exegetical conclusion, on the basis of which major conclusions are drawn. An example of Grenz' procedure of merely asserting his view while proceeding as if his position had been established on the basis of evidence is his acknowledgment of male-female differences on p. 160 followed by the claim: "However, these differences do not bar women from leadership positions in the church, as complementarians claim. On the contrary, differences between the sexes compel us to encourage women and men to serve together at all levels of church life." But why? The frequent repetition of this assertion does not render it true or even more plausible. Grenz does not seriously consider the possibility that a complementarian model might facilitate an adequate representation of the divine image and of individuals' spiritual gifts.

In the end, Grenz has not demonstrated that any women functioned, in the Pauline churches or anywhere in the NT, in a role that connoted the bearing of ultimate responsibility for God's Church. Where are the women pastors and elders? Paul's reference to particular women as his "coworkers" may indicate a genuine partnership in the gospel ministry, with significant contributions made by women, without indicating that women functioned in positions of ultimate responsibility. The incidence of female "patrons" of house churches in the NT era, likewise, must not be construed as proof that women bore ultimate spiritual responsibility for the Church before God, since there is no indication in Scripture that patrons, be they male or female, functioned necessarily, or even usually, as pastors of house churches. Overall, the authors' effort to impose an egalitarian grid of gender roles on the entire sweep of Biblical history and teaching must therefore be judged a failure. When eschatology, ecclesiology and even theology proper need to be recast to fit the egalitarian paradigm, one may legitimately wonder whether the implementation of such an agenda for the Church is worth the price such reform would require.

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