



Book review: "Women, Leadership & the Church"

Description

"Women, Leadership & the Church"
Jim Reiher (*Acorn Press 2006*)

The Appellate Tribunal has removed the barriers to the ordination of women as diocesan bishops – but, if we are to believe Archbishop Peter Jensen, many evangelical Christians in Sydney are disappointed. Should they be? Are Australian Anglicans departing from Scripture's teaching on authority in the church? Well, Jim Reiher has done a great job and given us a concise (121 pages), easily readable exploration of the Scriptures and what they have to say about women's leadership in the church and in the home.

Jim was until recently a lecturer in New Testament and Church History at Tabor College, Victoria. He starts by inviting the reader to be willing to let Scripture, reason and the guidance of the Spirit direct their thoughts and conclusions. He continues with an overview of the key Bible teachings on women in ministry and leadership and then carefully examines these passages, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

How should we view and interpret the Bible teaching on women in ministry and leadership and on women in relation to their husbands? The summary of passages in the book's opening chapter is comprehensive and the explanation of "foundation texts" particularly helpful for those who struggle to move beyond arguments that are simply exchanges of favourite proof-texts.

The author's writing is thoughtful and well documented, but for me its most attractive characteristic is its open and honest approach to all the hard questions. In fact, many of the chapters have questions as their titles eg. "Why didn't Jesus make women apostles?" "Doesn't Paul prohibit women from leadership and teaching?" "Bowing to society?" Jim's style is personal and friendly – he puts himself in the place of the questioner and then stands alongside them to explore the Scriptures. For two passages (I Corinthians 10:31 – 11:17 and I Timothy 2:8-15), he offers a free paraphrase, where he suggests the reader should "get a cup of coffee, sit back, relax and try to grasp afresh what Paul is saying..". I found these approaches, as well as the more rigorously argued paragraphs, very illuminating.

His helpful, sensitive style doesn't mean that Reiher is sitting on the fence with these questions – far from it! He makes no secret of his view that the teaching of Scripture supports full equality between men and women in both being and function. In fact, he challenges critics of women in ministry and leadership to get back to what Jesus and Paul really taught – “Paul would scream with indignation if he knew what some theologians have done to his radical teaching here” (Galatians 3:28,29) – and then to think hard about whether “society does occasionally get it right – even if we should have got it right first!”

I would warmly recommend this book to Christians who take seriously both the teaching of the Scriptures and the working out of that teaching in their lives and relationships.

Jenny Davis

Jenny is a committed Christian who worships with the Ormond Anglican Church. She enjoys playing her flute with the church musicians and participating in the “Kids” Talk roster. Jenny is a microbiologist at the Microbiological Diagnostic Unit Public Health Laboratory, University of Melbourne. She specialises in the identification of unusual bacteria.

She is an enthusiastic communicator and has taught practical microbiology to tertiary students, as well as spending time with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 1998 as an ABC Science Media Fellow. Jenny was Chairman of The Leprosy Mission Australia (TLMA) from 2000-2006, and is still a member of TLMA’s Board. She also serves on the International Board of The Leprosy Mission.

Jenny is married to Rob and they have two adult sons and one grandson.

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