

11-1-1989

The New Eve in Christ: The Use of the Bible in the Debate about Women in the Church

Phyllis D. Airhart

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Airhart, Phyllis D. (1989) "The New Eve in Christ: The Use of the Bible in the Debate about Women in the Church," *Consensus*: Vol. 15 : Iss. 2 , Article 11.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol15/iss2/11>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

The New Eve in Christ: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in the Debate about Women in the Church

Mary Hayter

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987

In this very thoughtful study of what the Bible says (and does not say) about women's ordination, Mary Hayter presents a constructive analysis of an issue which continues to divide large numbers of Christians. One of the striking features of her study is that she is as critical of the approach of radical feminists to Scripture as she is of conservative traditionalist writers. Noting that the two parties disagree about the *value* of biblical teaching about women, she argues that they share common assumptions about its *content*: a male God and a patriarchal priesthood.

It is those assumptions about the content of biblical teaching which Hayter challenges by raising three questions: Is it true to say that the God of the Bible is a male deity who demands to be served by a male priesthood? Is the patriarchal ordering of church, society and family absolutely concomitant with the expression of biblical faith? Is it correct to assume that the Bible clearly and consistently casts woman in the role of subordinate partner and permanently excludes her from the exercise of ministerial authority?

Drawing on her own exegesis and a thorough reading of the work of other scholars, Hayter focuses on Old Testament texts to examine a number of issues related to gender, sexuality and woman's place, including ideas of God and Goddess; feminine, masculine, and androgynous images for the divine; priesthood and patriarchy; the theological status of woman as "Imago Dei"; and the implications of the Fall. One chapter deals with the relation of the New Testament to the Old Testament texts. A final chapter presents her proposal for a way of distinguishing between the culturally-conditioned teaching of the Bible and the trans-cultural: what she calls the culture-critical method.

This is a thought-provoking book that defies easy summarization. On the question of the ordination of women, her conclusion is that a properly critical examination of the New Testament discloses no "normative" tradition that excludes women permanently from priesthood. But to look to the book simply for her answer to that immediate question only scratches the surface. Her confidence in culture as an interpretive guide, with the affirmation that God not only speaks to the world through the church but also speaks to the church through the world, is intriguing.

There is also much to consider in the three principles which she offers as the basis for her approach to biblical interpretation: that the church should be ordered in a way that will glorify God and edify the whole congregation; that everything in the life of the church should be designed to promote the proclamation of the Gospel; and that christology puts anthropology in its proper perspective. Not all will be satisfied with her insistence that

what is best for "the whole congregation" take precedence over the rights of individual persons; history is replete with examples of injustices defended in the name of a Christian majority. On the matter of how the church decides what is best she gives little direction, yet polity can be as divisive an issue as doctrine of practice.

Those who are still wondering about God's gender will find this a helpful book not only in considering the question of women's ordination but in thinking about the use of inclusive language in the church. The very complete bibliography provides an excellent resource for pursuing issues at greater depth. Even for those who have resolved the problems related to women's ordination and inclusive language the book may be worthwhile, for it has something to say to anyone who has wondered how to make sense of those biblical texts which to the twentieth-century reader appear to be irrelevant, unjust or even contradictory. Suffice it to say that the book raises many questions to spark a lively debate.

Phyllis D. Airhart
Emmanuel College, University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario

A Promise of Hope—A Call to Obedience, A Commentary on the Books of Joel and Malachi. International Theological Commentary

Graham S. Ogden and Richard R. Deutsch

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1987

120 pp.

The goal of the International Theological Commentary series, say its editors, George A.F. Knight and Frederick Holmgren, is to help "ministers and Christian educators" make the Old Testament come alive in the church today. They write that they hope to accomplish this by producing commentaries that will move beyond "the usual critical-historical approach" to a more careful consideration of the underlying *theological* significance of the books of the Hebrew Bible and their relevance for the New Testament and the church. At the same time they want these commentaries to reflect the needs and challenges of the worldwide international church, not just the church of the West, and to be sensitive as well to the fact that these Scriptures are important not only for Christians but for Jews—and important too for an understanding of the Jewish origins and roots of Christianity.

How well do the two commentaries on Joel and Malachi in this slender volume measure up to these laudable goals and ideals? Far from moving