

## Women & Worship: Another Look

**Women & Worship: Their Places in Today's World**  
by Herman Hoekstra; Brentwood Christian Press,  
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Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder

Despite the decision of the Synod 1992 not to ordain women the Christian Reformed Church is still divided over the issue. Some churches have even gone ahead and ordained women to the office of elder. Other churches are reported to be planning similar actions in the near future. One church in Toronto has actually hired a woman to serve the church in a pastoral/preaching (exhorting) position. They claim that they can't find Scriptural evidence for Synod's position. And the burden of proof now seems to rest on those who oppose their position.

For nearly two thousand years the church did not ordain women. And for good reason. No support for it could be found in Scripture. The ordination of women controversy is no minor matter. Our view of Scripture determines our position. Since people view Scripture differently, Rev. Hoekstra, minister emeritus in the CRC, begins his book with a clear statement of his position. He refuses to be swept off his feet by the prevailing winds of fashion. He does not bow down before the altar of political correctness. He approaches Scripture as the verbally inspired Word of God. He believes in organic inspiration, the different authors using their own means and resources and vocabularies to convey the message of God. In his study of Scripture he wants to think "God's thoughts after Him." And so Hoekstra looks to the Word of God for a solution for the conflicts men and women face in today's world. In his thorough, straightforward, easy to follow Bible study, he shows the important role women played in the history of Israel. They had much greater freedom than the women of the surrounding nations. In the New Testament we see that women play an important role in Jesus' life and in the life of his disciples. Women are engaged in the social life of their times and are active in the church. Both men and women are image bearers of God. There is no superiority. But equality doesn't mean that there are no differences. Adam and Eve were created to complement each other. The Creator also made men and women to differ physically. Yet both are called to serve. And whether male or female, they share in God's blessings. Though men and women are equal before God, the leadership in the church is given to males. Says Hoekstra: "These leaders must give an account to the Head of the church. His orders for building his church place this responsibility upon a few male members. This historically has been the case. It is true in biblical history. It has been true for centuries in the history of the church. There have been no new instructions given from the Head of the church. His orders remain the same.

Charles Simeon (1759-1836) of Cambridge, Anglican evangelical leader, wrote in a letter to his publisher: "My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there." Hoekstra keeps this basic rule in mind as he traces the role of women in Scripture. He lets Scripture speak for itself. He

shows that both men and women participated in the spiritual life of Israel and were responsible for the welfare of their children. Yet God chose male priests, prophets and Levites for special service. They were not superior to the rest of the nation. God had given them different responsibilities. They were to represent God to the people. Our Lord's choice of twelve male apostles is not different from the Old Testament pattern of male worship leaders. The apostles were unique. After their death their office ceased to exist. During their ministry they appointed male elders as leaders. Says Hoekstra, "The early church had many capable women who served. They were used by the Lord. They received praise for their hard work. Yet they were not appointed to the office of apostle or elder." And he observes that the male leadership pattern is consistent throughout Scripture. "He chose and still chooses men to govern his church."

Leadership is not a power structure. Elders do not set up a hierarchy. They do not lord it over the flock. They are servants, accountable to God for their actions. They are under the authority of the Word of God. Leadership is not a matter of privilege but of service and accountability. This fact should be kept in mind as so often the question of ordination is couched in terms of power and authority. Hoekstra rightly states: "The idea of power is foreign to the Spirit of the Lord. There is a misconception of the work of the elders when it is perceived as a position of power or prestige by those in the office or those aspiring to it."

The discussion concerning the role of women also includes often the name of God. Should God be addressed as male or female? The Bible is clear. We are taught to call God our Father.

Hoekstra's book on the role and place of women in Scripture, written for the people in the pew, should be in every church library. A welcome addition to the abundance of literature available on the subject.

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