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Dzubinski and Stassons' "Women in the mission of the Church" (book review)

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Book Review



Dzubinski, L. M. & Stasson, A. H. (2021). *Women in the mission of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 239 pp. ISBN 9781540960726

This book by Dzubinski and Stasson is a well-researched, engaging blessing in disguise. This three-part book begins with an inspirational preface and introduction. This book was written to raise awareness of women's contributions to Christian ministry throughout history. The authors' interpretive framework discusses the opportunities and the obstacles women in ministry encounter.

This book is well structured and easy to read. Following the preface and introduction, the book is divided into three sections. The first section examines the early church from the time of Jesus to the fifth century. Both Dzubinski and Stasson employ and utilize theological evidence and biblical scriptures to highlight and analyze women who risked their lives to assist in the spread of Christianity.

In chapter one, the authors discuss women's roles within the newly emerging church, such as disciples, patron, missionary, evangelist, widow, teacher, and martyr. Dzubinski and Stasson review the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Lydia's impact on Jesus' ministry. The authors also detail the political, philosophical, and cultural pressures which led to the active opposition and removal of women in leadership roles within the early church.

Chapter two further explores the leadership roles women adopted to minister to the people of God. These roles were celibate virgins, scholars, desert mothers, and deacons. Like the first chapter, chapter two delves into the ways women overcame obstacles to their involvement in early Christianity and explains the differences in the ways words in Paul's letters regarding the apostle Phoebe have been translated from Greek into English, specifically noting possible translator gender bias.

The second section investigates women's leadership in Christianity from late antiquity to the Middle Ages. Chapter three begins by exploring the positive impact of the mothers and sisters of the early church fathers and the influence of empresses and queens on the spread and acceptance of Christianity. Dzubinski and Stasson state that "these women also shaped the developing church's theology, practices, and landscape" (pg. 61). Chapters four and five further delve into how medieval nuns, mystics, and beguines helped lead the Christian church, despite cultural and societal restrictions.

The third and final section reviews women's leadership in Christian denominations in the United States from the Colonial era until the 1920s. It broadly touches upon women involved in social justice movements, female missionaries, and female global Christian church founders.

This book is strongly recommended. Additionally, this book expands upon the existing literature and the readers' understanding of the significance of women's involvement in Christianity. Dzubinski and Stasson assert that "Sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and class matter. They shape people's experiences of the world. Stories of men and women, of Christians from different races and ethnicities, and of Christians from different social classes are part of the full story of Christianity" (p. 213), and for those who choose to marginalize and ignore those differences, ultimately does a disservice to God's kingdom.

Reviewer

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