

## Book Reviews



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DUTKO, JOSEPH LEE. (2023) *The Pentecostal Gender Paradox: Eschatology and the Search for Equality*.

New York, NY: T&T Clark. 297 pages, \$167.95, ISBN: 9780567713681

*The Pentecostal Gender Paradox* examines Pentecostal approaches to Gender from the ground up. Pentecostals have had a complicated history with women pastors and leaders over the more than a century of the movement. Women have often been celebrated, criticized, minimized, or tolerated in ministry. The basis of *The Pentecostal Gender Paradox* is the key conviction that the titular “gender paradox,” where women in Pentecostal churches and denominations are affirmed in theory, but not in practice, is fundamentally an issue of eschatologically-driven hermeneutics.

Dutko posits that the gender paradox is not merely a question of doctrine, policy, or application, but rather a fundamental issue of hermeneutics; the way Pentecostals read their Bibles shapes them towards enacting the gender paradox, despite their affirmed positions. While Pentecostals originally affirmed women in ministry, they later shifted to hermeneutical models which prioritized texts that stood against gender equality. Statements and affirmations are good but ultimately fail to make any difference when the unquestioned assumptions of how to interpret the text remain. Thus, Dutko explains, since the paradox originates at the level of eschatology and hermeneutics, the only way to move beyond the paradox is to work at the level of hermeneutics.

*The Pentecostal Gender Paradox* accordingly moves from problem (introduction and chapter one) to history (chapters two and three) to hermeneutics (chapter four) to praxis (chapters five and six). This approach centers on the importance of hermeneutics to the discussion. While there is constructive engagement with past thinkers, including feminist and womanist theologians, Dutko emphasizes how they interpreted scripture, tracing the loss of the Pentecostal eschatologically-driven approach. Only then, after proving how hermeneutics has led Pentecostals astray, does a constructive work through Genesis 1-3, Galatians 3:28, and Acts 2:17-18 begin in chapter four. Finally, the book ends with a framework for conceiving a solution and proposes how change can be made in tangible ways that dismantle eschatological and hermeneutical assumptions.

The hermeneutical challenge inherently confronts the dispensational framework Pentecostals (particularly Canadian Pentecostals) have recently been moving away from. The argument claims that the move to dispensational and restorationist frameworks encouraged interpreters to look back to the first century and recapture the inherent social issues just as much as they provided a method of explaining their experience of the Spirit. The resulting literalism from such readings created confusion regarding exactly what women could do within the church. Instead of this line of thinking, Dutko proposes that looking to the past should cause readers to look to the future. Texts such as Genesis 1-3, Galatians 3:28, and Acts 2:17-18 exist not to be relived in the present, but point to eschatological realities which should be implemented in contemporary practice.

Some readers may be surprised by the statement that Genesis 1-3, Galatians 3:28, and Acts 2:17-18 are texts with eschatological orientations and implications. However, in decoupling these passages from the larger, often convoluted, arguments about gender and the church, their eschatological vision and egalitarian trajectory show through. The details of these passages are handled delicately in chapter



four, and it becomes clear that together they demonstrate a trajectory from initial equality, to fallen hierarchy, to the renewal of equality in Christ and participation in the church. Dutko consistently interrogates the question of hermeneutical priority while working through these passages and shows why they ought to take a place of priority compared to more difficult passages.

By far, the standout chapters within the book are chapters five and six. While many authors within the field of systematic theology emphasize the theoretical, and only tangentially mention practical application, these chapters wisely emphasize that “the biblically inspired eschatological imagination *leads to participation in those eschatological realities in the present.*”<sup>1</sup> By “pre-imagining” eschatological realities, Pentecostals can effectively live out a praxis which transforms themselves, their communities, and their organizations towards an egalitarian ecclesiology. The practical application is wide-ranging but specific. Numerous concrete examples, such as having women preside at the Lord’s Supper, incorporating female authors into theological training, and emphasizing women’s voices in sermons (among other examples, which are helpfully grouped from the denominational level to the local church level) all are explained and advocated as simple but transformative praxis.

While readers of all backgrounds can benefit from reading *The Pentecostal Gender Paradox*, pastors have the most to gain from this work. The depth of the issue, integrated as it is within history and hermeneutics, will not be easily understood by those unfamiliar with the broad strokes of the Pentecostal movement. Similarly, some may find the more abstract discussion of gender and eschatology rather arcane. However, this in no way detracts from the emphasis on praxis and tangible actions. Readers will find that the praxis which follows from embracing an eschatologically-oriented hermeneutic which promotes gender equality has the potential to cut the Gordian knot of endless discussion and move towards further action and ministry for both genders as we joyfully anticipate the eschaton.

**Reviewed By:**

COLIN BOYD is a graduate of an Undergraduate Institution and serves as Next Gen Pastor at a Church in Urban Center, BC.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Lee Dutko, *Eschatology and Women’s Equality: Resolving the Pentecostal Gender Paradox* (T&T Clark, 2023), 205.