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# After Eden: facing the challenge of gender relations

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versus uprisings in the empire stands in contrast to the messianic peace of Jesus expecting the advent of the kingdom of God. This peace with its care of the poor had a non-violent element, resisting tyranny. Yet Pax Romana and Jesus Messianic peace were completely at odds!

Another duality is elaborated by H. Franke Molle in his chapter (11, II) on "Peace and the Sword" in the New Testament. "Sword" signifies depressions and tensions, economic, political, etc. Palestine under Rome was not a "healthy world". Molle's analysis of this theme in Luke is instructive. Luke is aware of the old Jesus Movement of peace anchored in the kingdom of God beyond this world (John 18:36), but also advocates sword realistically influenced by the A.D. 70 war.

A final chapter (12, II) by U. Luz talks of the biblical witness for church peace action. Whatever occurs must be rooted in God's will as given through Christ.

The book concludes with an abundant bibliography and many references from the Bible and later Christian writings. The chapters are translated from the German making available generous materials on the peace theme for English readers. The chapters demonstrate that discussions on peace are not final conclusions but must continue. The book is of value for seminaries, university religion departments, students and society groups dedicated to peace movements.

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## **After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation**

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Project Editor)  
Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993  
651 pp. \$29.95 U.S.

This book is the product of the Gender Study team at the Calvin Centre for Christian Scholarship. The team was comprised of 12 persons (11 female, 1 male), five of whom were the writers of the book and in residency for the academic year, 1989-90. The preface states that, "Our histories included the experiences of rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, physical violence, discrimination in housing and waged work due to femaleness, singleness, or single-parent status, and the struggle of having to deal with problem pregnancies." Their histories also include the joy of reconciliation, of marriages and friendships, creativity and meaningful living.

The writing, from a Reformed Christian tradition, illustrates the effect of the biblical account of the Fall upon gender relations. The book seeks to

give evidence of shalom in gender relations through an adherence to Jesus' life, through a more vigorous adherence to biblical teaching and through showing some encouraging signs of redirection in our social structures. A feminist is defined as, "... a person of either sex who works to restore social, economic, and political justice between women and men in a given society. This work is motivated by the conviction that the devaluation of women and their activities is wrong, and that the systemic disempowering of women in relation to men is unjust." A distinction is made between the first wave of feminism (in the late 1800s), and that of the second wave (since the early 1960s). The differences of liberal, socialist and relational feminism are made, and the merits of each are acknowledged. Brief mention is made of the relational expression of feminism by evangelical reformers in the first wave. The 22 pages which describe feminism from 1800-1960 only whet the appetite for more understanding of the work of Christian feminists during this period. The subsequent chapter deals with more contemporary times, giving greater detail to liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist and postmodern feminism. This chapter, though again brief, is a notable contribution.

The most significant contribution of the book lies in its case studies of the conditions and problems of women in India and Cairo. Western readers are sensitized throughout much of the book that a Christian perspective of feminism cannot be satisfied with the stance of middle class America or Europe. Women in developing countries do not readily empathize with western feminism. The concerns and problems of women in third world countries are more complex: class, tradition, economics, the low status of their own husbands, and non-democratic structures. Christians are urged to move out of our own parochial environment of experience. Privileged femininity of the middle and upper class in America is clearly identified.

The book has a good scholarly base. Concepts of critical theory, discourse, hegemony, and deconstructionism are carefully presented. The writers urge the reader to be radical in critiquing the present social structure and to think radically in terms of reconstruction. Such a trend is not yet in vogue for social scientists, but secular feminists are unrelenting and unapologetic in recognizing inequality among children and women and are activating change. The Reformed writers of this book take the same position, but clothe their words in the spirit of reconciliation.

In the tradition of Reformed theology, Calvin, Kuyper, Boesak, and Wolterstorff are mentioned, though not often directly in regards to feminism. Elizabeth Achtemeier's work is the most prominent Reform feminist writer referenced. Other Christian feminists are also identified, but it is not always clear whether their position is Reformed, or near-Reformed. In many cases a social scientist's categories are not as precise in real life as they are analytically.

One is not clear about the purpose of the chapter on Gender Relations and Narrative. It may be that narrative is important to understanding, a method not universally accepted in the social sciences. On the other hand, the focus may be much more in keeping with the Christian Reformed

Church between 1957–1990, in which case the reader outside this tradition may be bored with unnecessary particulars.

The section on the Cultural Construction of Gender Relations (160 pages) deals with male power and position, the body, language, and dress (complete with the only [20] pictures in the book) which extends over the last 800 years! The next section deals with Social Institutions and Gender Relations. The public life of the husband and the private life of the wife within the family are challenged. Biblical justice is seen where both parents share home and childrearing responsibilities. Current expectations of a wife and mother being a financial provider and the one with the major domestic responsibilities is clearly identified as unequal and unjust. Women's pay as being less than men's pay is documented, and the case is reinforced with sound sociological theory.

The book offers much that has been written in sociology, psychology, family studies, women's studies, theology and development studies over the past ten years. For readers who already have an understanding of feminism, this book will be wanting. However, if such exposure has not been the experience of the reader, we have a good resource of contemporary feminism between the covers of one book. More than this, we have a Christian consciousness throughout the book that integrates the concerns of these more secular concerns. These Reformed writers urge us to think and act in a holistic manner on these very deep-rooted social and economic problems in our global community. They see hope in reconciliation.

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### **The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem**

James Newton Poling  
Nashville: Abingdon Press  
224 pp.

Poling courageously provides a healing space for the "silent voices" of victims and survivors and for the stories of those "few men trying to recover from the addiction to power".

The strength of the book is the use of personal testimonies of victims, survivors, perpetrators and the author's own personal story. The case studies honour the experiences of pain, tension and ambivalence. The author at the same time challenges the reader to examine her or his own beliefs, values and myths about the use of power as expressed in relationships found in societal and church communities. His use of living human testimonies provides the backdrop for theological reflection on the central issue—the abuse of power.