

A BOOK REVIEW
"COMPLEMENTARITY/DIGNITY, DIFFERENCE, AND INTERDEPENDENCE"

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TITLE OF BOOK: *"Complementarity, Dignity, Difference and Interdependence"*

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I approached this book with great expectations since I have a huge interest in the ongoing debates about whether or not the roles of women in Christian Ministry are restricted solely by reason of their gender. I have previously authored an extensive paper entitled *"Are Women Scripturally Barred From Occupying Certain Positions or Performing Certain Roles in Christian Ministry Solely by Reason of Their Gender?"*. That paper should be found on the TEI Website. As will be apparent from that paper, I have a substantial interest in the debates about whether or not women who are otherwise qualified, are, solely by reason of their gender, Scripturally Barred from occupying positions such as those of elder or Senior Pastor in a Christian church or from performing certain roles in such a church, such as the public delivery from the pulpit of the primary sermon or message at a Sabbath service, or the teaching of men. So, when I was handed this book, the one which is the subject matter of this Review, and was asked to review it, I approached it with great expectations. Were those expectations fulfilled? Yes, to some extent, but not in others. I found this book to be extremely helpful in its extensive information and analysis of: 1) the ancient philosophical treatment of men vs. women, 2) the historical treatment of men vs. women, 3) the early church history of the treatment of men vs. women; 4) the evolution of feminism; and 5) the definitions of, the guiding principles of, the biblical arguments for and against, and the theologies of a) male/female complementarianism, b) male and female egalitarianism, and c) male and female complementarity (the view which the author espouses). In these respects, this book was and is extremely enlightening and helpful, and well worth reading and retaining for future reference. However, this book was very disappointing, at least for me, in that it did not (or at least for me did not) provide: 1) any true resolution of or compromise for the ongoing debates about the proper roles of women in Christian Ministry and whether or not women are barred from, or limited from occupying or performing some of those roles, or 2) practical advice for pastors and church leaders who are wrestling with defining the proper roles for women in their church, or 3) a clear, understandable description of how men and women should relate to each other, or be involved with each other in the four arenas described by the

author, those being: a) their relationships with each other, b) the home or family, c) vocationally, and d) the church. So, in these respects, this book was major disappointment for me.

Let me expand further on these personal views of this book:

A) EXPECTATIONS WELL SATISFIED IN PART:

In some respects, my expectations were fulfilled in that I found good, solid information in this book which enlightened and educated me about a number of topics which are of great importance in what I will refer to as the "Women's Debate". Those topics included:

1) *The Greco-Roman Philosophical Views of Men and Women*, Views which were prevalent among at the times of Jesus, and among the citizens of those cities and areas who were confronted by Paul and the other apostles and evangelists who were trying to advance the Gospel in the Roman Empire. (At least, in my view, these views, which were widely held, demonstrate the huge barriers and problems encountered by the Apostle Paul and other early Christian Leaders in their missionary activities and account for some of the instructions given by Paul and Peter in their epistles. So, I found the wonderful, detailed information about these views, as it appears in this book, to be of great personal interest.)

2) *The Extensive Reviews and Information About The Historical, Philosophical, Modern and Postmodern Views of Men and Woman* (Which are very helpful in helping lead to an understanding of how we have gotten to where we are today).

3) *The Continuous Outlining of a Five-Fold Historical Categorization of the Sex-Identity Question (i.e. where men and women stand with respect to each other in their relationships, and with respect to their roles and possible hierarchies), this being: 1) Traditional (and long standing historical, particularly in ancient Israel and the Greco-Roman world and for many centuries) Sex Polarity (men are generally superior to women, and, at one time, females were even considered to be a mistake of conception and birth, with men to, in effect, govern women and all affairs), 2) Sex Neutrality, 3) Sex Unity, 4) Reverse Sex Polarity (women are superior to men in most respects and really don't require men for much), and 5) Sex Complementarity.* (Throughout the book our author places the various evolving views of the relationships between men and women in these categories, sometimes wholly and sometimes partially. For example, some current day feminist positions would be Reverse Sex Polarity.)

4) *The Authors Very Helpful Definitions of the Current Day Categories Which Are Relevant to The Ongoing Debates About the Proper Roles for Women in the Home, the Marketplace and the Church, those being:*

a) *Contemporary Complementarianism: The view that men and women are complementary to each other or as they correspond with and relate to each other in various ways, being equal to each other in several ways, but as being significantly differentiated from one another in certain relationships and roles.* (Men and Woman are equal in three principal ways: 1) They are each created in the image of God, and are of equal essence, the same essence before God, 2) They enjoy equal access to salvation through Jesus Christ, and 3) They are equal in receiving the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, what we refer to as Spiritual Gifts. That is that men and women alike bear the divine image, sharing equal dignity and honor, and they, alike may be rescued from sin by Christ and, united together, may be incorporated into one body, the Church,

and receive the full range of Spiritual Gifts. However, at the same time, men and woman are significantly differentiated from each other in relationships and roles and this differentiation might appear in several realms: 1) in the home, husbands lead and their wives submit to them, and 2) in the Church, certain roles and senior positions and leadership, including Senior Pastor and Elder are reserved to men, and certain responsibilities are reserved to men (sometimes including any teaching of men). While most complementarians do not hold for any significant differences in the roles of men and women in society or the marketplace or in certain secular vocations, others hold that women may not be placed in positions of authority, and are, for example, relegated to being teachers but not principals. It should be noted that the author finds that there are several different gradients of complementarianism, which he identifies and describes in detail.)

b) Contemporary Patriarchalism, to which the author gives very short shrift (Men are Superior to, and must Lead Women in every realm, particularly the church).

c) Contemporary Egalitarianism: The perspective that men and women are complementary or correspond to each other as being equal in essence and nature, relationships and roles, while still significantly differentiated from one another, but not as complementarians project these differences. (Up to the point of the projection of the significant differences between men and women in certain roles, Egalitarians and Complementarians find themselves in significant agreement. It is at this point, the differentiation between men and women as it reflects upon the various roles in the home, the church and the secular market place, that there are significant disagreements between complementarians and egalitarians. With respect to the home, husbands and wives share equal authority and responsibility, and must mutually submit or defer to each other. In the church, all roles and positions, including those of Senior Pastor, and Elder, and all positions of teaching are equally available to qualified and properly called men and women. In society, men and women may each hold governmental roles, executive roles and leadership roles. Again, the author identifies and provides detailed descriptions of various levels or gradients of egalitarianism.)

5) The Author's Extensive Outlining and Discussions of the Philosophical, Biblical, and Theological Arguments For Each of Complementarianism, and Egalitarianism, and his contrasts of those Views with his View of Complementarity of Men and Women. (The author, sets forth, at length, the Philosophical, Biblical, and Theological arguments of complementarians and egalitarians for their respective positions and views about the roles of men and women, particularly in the church, and then provides some contrasts with his view of Complementarity of men and women. He takes each of the Biblical passages which are relied upon by those in each camp in order to justify their positions, and outlines and describes, at length, the arguments of those in each camp about such passage. Candidly as you read the author's analysis of each camp's arguments, you will, as I have, concede that "well that does make some sense, and is a reasonable argument with which I might disagree but which I must, humbly, respect.")

B) DISAPPOINTMENT IN SOME EXPECTATIONS.

All of the information which is described above, and which is set forth, at length, in the clear, highly readable writing of our author has been found by me, your Reviewer, to be

extremely informative, enlightening and helpful, and I think that you, Dear Reader, will find it to be equally helpful for you. So, at this point, I find this book to be a wonderful book, which can shed very valuable light upon the ongoing debates about the proper roles for women in the various arenas in which men and women must interact with each other, including the home/the family, vocationally and the church. It is at this point that I now find myself to be Extremely Disappointed in this book, and to have reached a conclusion that, unfortunately, this book doesn't do a great deal (at least in my view) towards either: 1) Achieving a possible resolution of the issues of this debate, or 2) providing helpful advice or counsel to Pastors, or Church Leaders or others who are wrestling with the issues of the debate, sometimes bitter debate, about whether women are Biblically Restricted, are Restricted by God from holding certain positions or performing certain roles in God's Church, the Church founded and led by Christ, solely by reason of their gender, meaning the fact that they are women and not men. I will expand upon my views of this book in the following Section of this Review.

WHAT IS THE AUTHOR DOING OR TRYING TO DO WITH WHAT THE AUTHOR IS SAYING?

As stated at the outset of Chapter 1 of this book, our author, Dr. Allison, wants to bring some peace, if you will, or unity among what he refers to as the "many divisions" of evangelicalism by his call to what he refers to "COMPLEMENTARITY". He wants to "arrive at some consensus about male image bearer and female image bearers in relationships to one another, such that both women and men may flourish individually and their churches may flourish corporately". The author's proposal to achieve this consensus "*focuses on complementarity, which (he) define(s) as God's design for his male and female image bearers to fill out and mutually support one another relationally, familially, vocationally, and ecclesially for their individual and corporate flourishing*". While I have been unable to find in this book, what I think is a clear definition "complementarity" (probably my fault, but believe me I have searched) the author states that "Complementarity embraces three principles: Equal Dignity, Significant Differentiation, and Flourishing Interdependence". It First, "affirms that both male image bearers and female image bearers are the highest beings that God created and are divinely accorded dignity before him and before one another (even though this latter aspect is no actualized or actualized poorly in a fallen world). Second, complementarity affirms that, by divine design, woman and men are SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT IN THEIR GENDERED BEING, GENDERED CONSCIOUSNESS (OR SELF-AWARENESS), GENDERED RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND GENDERED RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD. Third, complementarity affirms that equal dignity and significant differentiation propel/compel men and woman to fill out and mutually support one another in the four arenas mentioned above" (i.e. relationally, familially, vocationally, and ecclesially). (Emphasis added, and candidly I don't know what this means, and its meaning is not, in my opinion, made particularly clear in this book. If, as the author asserts, men and women are "significantly different from each other" then what are these differences, and to what extent do these "significant differences impact or affect the roles of men and women in Christian Ministry?")

(Personal Note: Candidly, at this point, I struggle to find much difference between the author's definition of, and guiding principles of "Complementarity" and those of "Complementarianism" and "Egalitarianism". It appears to me that each of these views shares definitional terminology and guiding principles with each of the other views. The rub or difference comes when individuals who hold these competing views apply the definitions or principles of that view to the question as to what the respective roles of men and woman should be in the four arenas described by the author (i.e. relationally, familiarly, vocationally and ecclesially). Those who hold each of the three views (i.e. complementarianism, egalitarianism, and complementarity) of the relationships of males and females agree that both males and females are divine image bearers and are of equal stature and essence in this respect. The holders of each of the each of these three views agrees that males and females are of equal stature with respect to seeking and achieving salvation through Christ. The holders of each of the three views agrees that males and females are equally recipients of the Spiritual Gifts. The holders of each of the three views agrees that males and females are significantly different, as they are created by God. The Question: What, specifically, is this divinely created difference (other than divinely ordained and created biological, physical sex differentiation, which each of them would agree is the case), and how does this divinely created difference, whatever it might be, whether it is physical, mental, emotional, etc., affect or define the respective roles which men and women should occupy in each of the four arenas described by our author?. How does it affect the current day debate and struggle in the Church about whether or not certain roles in Christian Ministry must be occupied or performed by men, and cannot be occupied or performed by women? It is these questions which I thought our author would answer. It is the sometimes-bitter debates which go on about these questions as to which I thought our author would lessen the heat and provide some peace. I do not find that this book responds to these expectations. I am not even sure that I understand just what the author's definition of "complementarity" is. It is for these reasons that I find myself being very disappointed in my expectations and hopes for this book.)

The author provides a very detailed and cogent outline and explanation of the philosophical, biblical and theological arguments for each of complementarianism and egalitarianism, and then provides a very detailed and cogent contrast of these arguments with his arguments for his complementarity views. A summary of some of these discussions by the author is as follows:

1) "The church has embraced-either explicitly as a studied conviction or impliedly by its repeated mistreatment of women-traditional sex polarity, considering men to be superior to women. Complementarity, while occasionally occurring and exerting an influence, has largely been a contemporary development and is still questioned in some quarters....".

2) "The overall conclusion that arises from this consideration is that the Western philosophical/theological/ecclesiastical concept of women is demeaning and disparaging toward women, whom men consider to be inferior in terms of nature, procreation, wisdom and virtue."

3) The author's conclusion is that "...this perspective continues to dominate our contemporary Western ecclesial and social context...."

4) The author engages in an extensive discussion of the proper hermeneutical analysis of those biblical texts which are most often cited by the individuals who hold the respective views of men and women, meaning complementarianism, egalitarianism, and (for the author) complementarity, (the New Testament texts of which are included in those discussed by your Reviewer in my earlier paper mentioned above, *Are Women Scripturally Barred From Occupying Certain Positions or Performing Certain Roles in Christian Ministry Solely by Reason of Their Gender*). Those biblical texts which are discussed by the author being:

A) The Old Testament texts analyzed by the author are: Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 22:7-8, 18-25 (i.e. the creation of males and females), Genesis 3 (the Fall, and the respective roles of Adam and Eve, Eve was deceived by the serpent, etc.), and the Old Testament passages and narratives, and their female characters of: Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebekah; Jacob and Rachel and Leah; Judah and Tamar; Joseph and Potiphar; Moses, Shiphrah, Puah and Jochebed (Moses's mother); Moses's Sister and Pharaoh's daughter (all women who saved Moses); Moses and Zipporah (there were seven women who saved Moses); Miriam, Aaron, and Moses; Rahab and the Spies; Hannah and Samuel; Phinehas's Wife; Deborah, Barak, Jael, and Sisera; David, Abigail and Nabal; Tamar, Amnon, Jonadab and Absalom; Joab and the Two Wise Woman; Jehosheba; Ruth, Boaz and Naomi; Esther and Mordecai; Huldah; and Proverbs 31:10-31 (the Nobel Woman or Ideal Wife).

B) The New Testament Texts analyzed by the author are: The Gospels and What they demonstrate about the compassion and respect of Jesus for all human beings, men and women, and the sympathies of Jesus for women who demonstrated huge faith, and the attitudes of Jesus towards women, and the respect for women demonstrated by Jesus, and the roles played by women in the life of Jesus; the Book of Acts and the descriptions therein of important roles played by women in the advancement of the Gospel; 1 Timothy 2:11-14 (TRULY A VERY IMPORTANT TEXT THAT IS MOST OFTEN CITED BY COMPLEMENTARIANS, and this text, and the arguments and positions of Complementarians, Egalitarians, and the author for Complementarity as to these texts are extensively, very extensively reviewed and outlined and this text is extensively discussed in my earlier paper); 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 1 Corinthians 14:26-40; Ephesians 5:22-33; Galatians 3:26-28; Colossians 3:16; Titus 2:1-6; 1 Peter 3:1-7; and Romans 16.

Each of these texts is very extensively discussed by the author. He outlines and describes, in great detail, the arguments and positions of each of Complementarians and Egalitarians which use each of these texts, and his positions as to how these various texts reflect upon his Complementarity views. THIS PART OF THIS BOOK, CHAPTERS 15 THROUGH 19, and PAGES 223 THROUGH 456 (MORE THAN HALF OF THE BOOK) IS WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD for several reasons: First, it describes proper methods to be used for biblical hermeneutics; and Second, it demonstrates how one's Reading Culture (as described in a book of Kevin Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, which your Reviewer reviewed earlier) dramatically affects the ways in which a Bible reader goes about interpreting Scripture (in other words the pre-conceptions or biases which one cannot help but bring to his or her biblical reading and interpretation); Third, it demonstrates that, while one might disagree with, perhaps strongly disagree with the conclusions reached by Complementarians or Egalitarians with respect to one of these important

texts, he or she will find that such conclusions are far from being unreasonable (in other words, while one might be strongly persuaded that his or her Complementarian or Egalitarian or Complementarity views and conclusions and positions might be as to one of these texts or as to Complementarian, Egalitarian, or Complementarity generally, he or she must humbly confess the possibility that he or she could be wrong, and must at least respect the contrary views or positions or, maybe more importantly, Traditions of others).

5) The author then argues, from his Theological Considerations, that, among other things the Offices of Prophet, Priest and King were and are merged into Christ, and that there is no longer (if there ever was) any requirement that such offices should be occupied only by men.

While, at least to me, the author's Complementarity position and views, and his arguments for those views, and his hermeneutical biblical interpretations with respect to such views, appear to stand for the proposition that, while men and women are divinely created and ordained by God with significant differences, those differences do not bar women from occupying certain positions or performing certain roles or require their submission to men in the family, or in their relationships with men, or vocationally, or in the church. I don't want to put words in the author's mouth, but, at least to me, he seems to just be saying that men and women must, and should work together and complement each other, using their respective skills, gifts and unique perspectives in all arenas, those being: the family, their relationships with each other, vocationally and the church. Yet, for some reason, he just does not come out and definitely say that such should be the case. Unfortunately, I conclude that ongoing debates in the church about the proper roles of women, which I thought he wanted to answer, remain.

HOW SHOULD YOU TRY TO READ THIS BOOK?

In answering this question, I have to raise a question. Why do you want to read this book? If you want to engage in a thorough analysis of the respective positions and views of Complementarians, and Egalitarians, and as to whether or not there is some possibly alternative position, Complementarity, or if you, like me, hold a strong position in favor of Complementarianism, or Egalitarianism, and want to be sure that you understand the contrary views of those who hold a different view, then you should study and read this entire book. For example, while I have been somewhat disappointed by this book, as described above, I have found that I am personally benefitted by this book because it has greatly aided me in understanding why those who argue for complementarianism argue against my egalitarian views. I need to be prepared to address their positions, which compete with mine. However, if you just want to know what is in this book, then read: 1) Its Introduction, 2) the Following Overview, 3) the opening 3 pages of Part One ("Definitions, Proposals and Foundations"), 4) the Contents, pages ix and x, and 5) possibly, Part Six (Arenas of Application, although I find this Part to be disappointingly imprecise and unhelpful). You will then have a good understanding of what is in the book, and can put it on the shelf for future reference as needed. Hopefully, this Review will also give you a decent understanding of what is in this book. As pointed out above, I do consider Chapters 15-20 (basically Part Four of the book) to be chapters which provide a very valuable analysis of the various Old Testament and New Testament Texts which reflect on the

Complementarian vs. Egalitarian (and possibly vs. Complementarity) positions on the men/women question.

SHOULD THIS BOOK BE RETAINED IN THE TEI LIBRARY? WOULD THIS BOOK BE USEFUL IN ANY TEI/ECLI CLASS OR SEMINAR OR GROUP STUDY OR PRESENTATION?

This book should absolutely be retained in the TEI library as a solid reference book which can be referred to any Pastor, Church Leader or individual Researcher who has an interest in, or who is struggling with the questions relating to the proper roles or positions of women in the church, or in their particular church or in the family. While this book might well not provide one of these TEI patrons with a definitive answer as to how he or she should approach this “women’s issue”, it will surely help him or her to understand the arguments, views and positions of those on all sides of this issue. I do not think that this book has a use in any TEI/ECLI Class, although it can be referred to or cited as providing an excellent example or case study of proper methodologies for a Systematic Theological analysis of Biblical Texts which are relevant to a difficult theological issue. If TEI holds some seminar or panel discussion or presentation or group discussion of the “women’s issue”, then this book will be highly relevant for such an event.

Thank You! Your Reviewer:

Dan Simon