

JOHN MARK HICKS' *WOMEN SERVING GOD:*
*MY JOURNEY IN UNDERSTANDING THEIR STORY IN THE BIBLE*¹

In this book, Dr. Hicks draws from his experience in *a cappella* Churches of Christ about the biblical role for women in the public realm of the assembled local church. He outlines three general models for women's participation (i.e., none, limited, and full) and shares his personal journey of adherence to each of these models. He comes to the conclusion that, based on a proper reading of the biblical text, "to deny women the exercise of their gifts in the assembly . . . harms the congregation, deeply wounds women, and dishonors God" (p. 210).

Hicks begins with "How I Once Read the Bible" (i.e., a blueprint approach) and ably highlights the problems created when applying this hermeneutic to the role of women in the church (see his "practical questions," pp. 40-42). Next he describes his "Growing Awareness" based on a more careful examination of what American Restoration Movement notables, such as Tolbert Fanning, Benjamin Franklin, and C. R. Nichol (*God's Woman*, 1938), thought about the role of women in the church. This caused Hicks to rethink key passages on the subject (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11.2ff; 14.26ff.; 1 Timothy 2.1ff.). And this reexamination led Hicks to shift his position on the matter ("My Move to Limited Participation"). His description of this shift is perhaps the most difficult part of the book to follow, presumably since it depicts his own grappling with issues of interpretation, the inconsistencies of the different approaches, and the residual problems left by any way of explaining key texts. But his conclusion about the

¹*Women Serving God: My Journey in Understanding Their Story in the Bible* (Nashville, TN: John Mark Hicks, 2020), 270 pages, with three responses and afterword by Christian sisters, works referenced, and suggestions for further reading.

“Corinthian Situation” is clear, “Paul authorized the orderly use of gifts by both men and women, both Jew and Gentile, and both enslaved and free in the assemblies of God’s saints” (p. 103).

Then Hicks describes “My Move to Full Participation” and describes the Pentecostal incorporation of everyone, both male and female, into the calling of God by his Holy Spirit to proclaim the mighty works of their Creator. And in “From Creation to New Creation: The Balance of the Bible,” Hicks gives us a credible biblical *Weltanschauung* of the full and equal participation of male and female in the divine redemptive story. From the Bible’s testimony about creation, the people of Israel, the ministry of Jesus, the early church, and the new heaven and the new earth, Hicks asserts compellingly that “the gifts of women throughout Scripture echo God’s intent in creation and serve as signposts for new creation itself. . . . [This] biblical drama provides a framework for applying a theological hermeneutic to the assemblies of God” (p. 120). Arguably, this theological overview by Hicks is the best part of *Women Serving God*.

To conclude, Hicks wrestles with “My Firewall,” an exegesis of 1 Timothy 2.8-15 that examines ten difficulties in the text, two basic approaches for understanding Paul, five important questions for interpretation, and a segment on the contemporary church and Paul’s instructions in this difficult passage. He reasons that Paul’s restrictions on the women at Ephesus in 1 Timothy were situational not universal. He writes, “The problem with some women in Ephesus was not that they were teaching *per se*, but that they were *promoting ungodliness*. They spread the ideas of a *different doctrine*. Their dress, behaviors, and words brandished that *ungodliness*” (p. 206).

This book, no doubt, is evidence of the continuing trend toward empowerment of women in church and society in Western nations and the world. *Women Serving God* by Dr. Hicks, who is Professor of Historical Theology at Lipscomb University, is a welcome addition, based on the

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biblical tradition, to the literature of women's empowerment and is certain to provoke much discussion among those in Churches of Christ and other conservative Protestant communions.

The book is the second in a trilogy by Dr. Hicks, the first being *Searching for the Pattern: My Journey in Interpreting the Bible* (2019), and the third a promised book about church polity.