

***Man & Woman in Christian Perspective*, by Werner Neuer**

Reviewed by Virgil Warren, PhD

Werner Neuer. *Man & Woman in Christian Perspective*. Trans. from the 2nd German edition by Gordon J. Wenham. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991 [1981]. 224 pp. pr

Neuer begins by placing the relevance of his topic in the contemporary challenge of secular feminism, an important point because the church, in being biblical, should not be needlessly countercultural. Subsequent chapters on male-female differences reflect the natural assumption that in the family and in the church God has assigned role emphases correlated with sex in keeping with the way he has gifted males and females. Five chapters deal with the view of man and woman found in the Old Testament, the gospels, the epistles of Paul, the rest of the New Testament, and in church history. Two chapters address the continuing validity of the biblical viewpoint and the urgency of practicing it. The volume concludes with a summary of main points. Along the way, five *excursi* expand on texts and issues that call for more extended treatment than the ongoing presentation itself allows.

Man and Woman . . . exhibits a fine spirit, avoiding the extremes and false issues that continually plague studies on this subject. Neuer covers all the important passages on male-female relations in the home and in the church. In women's ministry he correctly identifies the issue as the ministry of the word in an authoritative sense, that is, what the free-church tradition associates with eldership or its equivalent. Other areas of service for women are not at issue. He does a good job of showing that interpersonal theory stated in Galatians 3:28 does not eliminate hierarchical structuring for practical purposes.

The wide-ranging scholarship does not come off "heavy" even in translation. The study integrates insights from sociology, psychology, and physiology with its theological-biblical treatment because all these disciplines bear on the contemporary discussion. His analysis of the cause for the feminist extreme is particularly well-taken: "*At bottom feminism is the consistent unloving answer to men's lack of love*" (p. 106). The book is well-indexed by scripture and topic and nicely documented with endnotes. The bibliography is extensive, predominantly German (over 80%).

One line of thought in evangelical feminism could be responded to more deliberately. Readers need to hear adequate responses to the plausible-sounding comparison current writers are making between the way the New Testament argues for female deference in the home and in ministry, on the one hand, and the way it argues for observing cultural practices like veil-wearing and hair styles or the way it deals with slavery. Presentations favoring a more traditional view of women's roles can seem convincing considered by themselves. But people get confused when these other issues come in as control cases to test the validity of the argument pattern for male-female order (parity of reason). The false comparison misleads believers into agreeing that female deference must have been another first-century cultural issue like dress code and slavery. Although the book speaks to the matter (pp. 113-14, *e.g.*), it could be more compelling in the

way it treats the parallel with veil-wearing. It apparently does not address the parallel with slavery at all.

One case of apparent “over interpretation” appears in Neuer’s otherwise helpful treatment of Genesis 3. In agreement with other male and female writers cited, he understands Eve’s involvement in the fall as a lack of deference—a taking over of leadership from Adam (pp. 75-78). The approach seems to betray a common confusion between influence and authority. Leadership has to do with responsibility, hence, authority to help fulfill responsibility; consequently, deference has to do with respecting that responsibility. But respecting authority does not remove the propriety of shedding influence. In fact, good leadership should listen to those being led. The first problem with Adam was not abdication of leadership responsibility but yielding to temptation (note 1 Timothy 2:14a). Eve’s act was sinful because she shed bad influence (albeit while deceived), not because she was insubordinate. Otherwise, a woman would not be free to think for herself on religious issues, which she must do to fulfill responsibility for herself. Adam’s act was sinful because he yielded to temptation and because he failed to fulfill responsibility in the process. Whenever a leader sins, he does two things: he sins and misleads. One would not expect Neuer to take the position he does on Genesis 3 since elsewhere he seems to identify leadership as responsibility reinforced by authority (pp. 112-29); so submission would be acting in ways appropriate to the recognition of another’s responsibility. Influence (vs. authority) would harmonize with that recognition.

Neuer speaks of the ministry in “priesthood” terms, which may weaken his position for Christians that do not see ordination as a validation of ministry or conceive of ministers as priests. One wonders what adjustment he would make if he were operating in a non-clerical, free-church approach to “the ministry of the word.” These features of the presentation, however, do not change the assessment that *Man & Woman in Christian Perspective* does a commendable job of dealing with the diverse elements of the current women’s studies debate within the church.