

Book Review

The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation

By Amanda W. Benckhuysen (InterVarsity, 2019)

Reviewed by ALLISON M. QUIENT

The gospel is indeed good news for women. However, as Dr. Amanda W. Benckhuysen observes, it also “tends to come to women with strings attached.” Men may be free in Christ, yet “women assume the yoke of a new law—restrictions and requirements assigned to them” by virtue of their gendered status as the “weaker vessel.” To depart from this gender ideology “is to reject God’s divine commands and undermine the authority of God’s Word, the Bible” (1–2).

Yet not everyone, and certainly not the female interpreters this book surveys, agrees that the Bible teaches that women are the weaker vessel. The strengths of *The Gospel According to Eve* are that it makes the interpretive insights of numerous women accessible and gives attention to how women have challenged the way Eve has been viewed as archetypal for all women. Although Eve has predominantly been interpreted as a negative representative for all women, this has not been without dissent.

This book provides a sampling of female interpreters, primarily from the Christian West, ranging from the fourth to the twenty-first century and, secondarily, interacts with some of the influential interpreters or interpretations from their time. While not all interpretations presented are uniform or “feminist,” reading about centuries of interpretation makes it evident that each generation of women interpreters has had to reinvent the interpretive wheel, arriving at many similar, yet independent, female-friendly conclusions. Toward the end of the book, readers are presented with a woman’s representation of Eve and an “alternative reading of Scripture, reflected in the voices of women and their interaction with Genesis 1–3” (2).

The Gospel According to Eve, as well as works such as the *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*,¹ are necessary in the quest to overcome the neglect of female voices in biblical interpretation. One cannot help but wonder what further interpretive and theological reflective insights could have been possible if each generation were aware of the women who came before them. And one can only consider what sorts of reflection could have been possible if others also shared the keen awareness that these women were indeed approaching the Bible with particular lenses, a human phenomenon that is not unique to women (231).

However, despite what one might expect from the title, this work gives only minimal attention to two major historical interpretive trends regarding Eve: 1) her perceived typological connection to Mary,² and 2) the influence of the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:11–15 on the figure of Eve and women generally. The latter is a dominant interpretive influence that is not merely confined to a few churches in the present (109), yet there is sparse focus on how women have interpreted the Eve of 1 Timothy in relation to Genesis. When there is coverage, it is frequently incidental.

Eve’s typological connection with Mary has served as a crucial counterbalance to otherwise thoroughly negative interpretations of Eve (and women) throughout the centuries.³ Without Mary also informing how predecessors, both male and female, perceived female nature, one is left with a picture that is not altogether complete or accurate for interpretations of the time. “The rehabilitation of Eve in light of her virtuous counterpart, Mary, is one way of redressing what many have thought to be the worst effect of the story of the Fall: the preponderance of blame was pinned on a woman.”⁴ The Mary-Eve parallel functioned to further illuminate and expand the identity of Eve⁵ in ways similar to, yet perhaps somewhat disjointed from,⁶ how a Christ-Adam parallel furthered the identity of what a person could be in light of the work of Christ.

Further, there is disparity throughout the book; some interpreters receive notably more detailed treatment than others do. There is also more attention given to female interpreters in the nineteenth century (though perhaps they were more numerous at that time) than, say, the Renaissance or Reformation. Still, the strength of this book is its readable syntheses of various female interpreters and, by extension, the resulting questioning of some of our own interpretive assumptions.

Critiques aside, *The Gospel According to Eve* is a valuable resource for any egalitarian to have in their library. I also recommend it as assigned reading as part of a larger treatment or course on the history of interpretation.

Notes

1. Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Baker, 2012).
2. There is a brief mention of this from Sojourner Truth on p. 189.
3. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (Yale University Press, 1996).
4. Gary A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Westminster John Knox, 2001) 99.
5. Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection*, 16.
6. Benjamin H. Dunning, *Christ without Adam: Subjectivity and Sexual Difference in the Philosopher’s Paul* (Columbia University Press, 2014) 98.



ALLISON QUIENT holds an MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, a ThM from Fuller Theological Seminary, and is a PhD candidate at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland) in the areas of NT studies and systematic theology. She and her husband, Nick, co-manage an online repository of ministry and academic resources at SplitFrameOfReference.com.

Start reading The Gospel According to Eve on your Kindle in under a minute. Don't have a Kindle? Get your Kindle here, or download a FREE Kindle Reading App. Amanda W. Benckhuysen (PhD, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto) is Johanna K. And Martin J. Wyngaarden Senior professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary and a researcher in biblical interpretation and reception history. Customers who viewed this item also viewed. Page 1 of 1 Start overPage 1 of 1. This shopping feature will continue to load items when the Enter key is pressed. In order to navigate out of this carousel please use your heading shortcut key to navigate to the next or previous heading. Back. Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationship The Secret Dowry of Eve: Woman's Role in the Development of Consciousness by Glynda-Lee Hoffmann. Rating: 0 out of 5 stars(0/5). Eve: If I Had Known: Eden: The Battlefield by Lady Pastor Nora Osei-Bonsu. Over the centuries, there have been innumerable interpretations of the story of Adam and Eve. This week on the Daily, Stephen Greenblatt, the author of The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve, retells some of these legends in modern idiom, and invents a few. JOY Magazine. The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation. Amanda W. Benckhuysen. 5.0 out of 5 stars 3. Essential for understanding the history of sexism, mysogyny and so many other problems in our culture this book should be required reading in high school and again in college. Wonderfully written, with amazing information Karen Armstrong has an amazing knowledge of history. Be sure to take notes and come back to them on occasion. Read more. A brilliant study of how formal christianity has not only marginalized women, but criminalized them. A unique look at Church history and practice and what it meant for women. Highly recommend. Read more. As Eve was a woman, so all women were Eve, the conditions of her creation and her involvement in the Fall often serving as a justification for limitations placed on women and for their subordination to men. Over the centuries, women themselves have read and interpreted the story of Eve, scrutinizing the details of the text to discern God's word for them. Often their investigations led them to insights and interpretations that differed from dominant views, shaped as they were by men. Start your review of The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation. Write a review. Nov 09, 2019 Bob rated it it was amazing. Shelves: christian-academic, christian-bible-study. Amanda W. Benckhuysen The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. Available at IVP and Koorong. The book traces the way women interpreters from the fifteenth-century to the present day have read and applied the narrative of Genesis 1-3, centring on how the character of Eve has been understood. Benckhuysen begins by setting the scene, tracing the "traditional" reading of Eve within patristic and medieval thought. The following chapters go on to tell the story of how a veritable army of intelligent and faithful women throughout multiple centuries engaged deeply with the story of Eve: in their defence of the worth of women (ch. 2), their efforts to promote the education of women (ch.