

A COSMIC DRAMA

Men, Women & The Church

2nd Edition

by Chuck Gianotti

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To my wife and life partner, Mary.

Thank you for the joy of
dancing through life together
in the great Cosmic Drama,
glorifying God
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The roots of this book began a number of years ago with a yearlong personal study on the subject of gender roles in the church. Beginning with a clean slate (as much as is possible), I desired to study afresh what the Scripture had to say about this important but fast becoming controversial and divisive subject. Churches everywhere were wrestling with it and in some cases dividing. Since becoming a Christian in 1972, I have fellowshiped mostly with conservative groups that have held a traditional view of the role of men and women. But for intellectual as well as spiritual integrity, I felt it important to study carefully all sides of the controversy. I sought out the best of writers of the main competing views, even those who held views different than my own, in order to make sure I was not being blinded by my own presuppositions or the “herd think” of those with whom I regularly fellowshiped. The result was a stronger than ever conviction for a somewhat traditional view of gender roles (with a few caveats), but also a serious and growing concern for the drift I see in evangelicalism, symptomatic of which is the egalitarian (or feministic) view of gender roles. So I appreciate all those who have gone before—both those with whom I agree and those with whom I disagree. My thinking has been honed on all sides.

Out of that original study, grew a series of sermons that I had the privilege to present at a variety of churches in Canada and the US, as well as lectures in

contemporary theology at Kawartha Lakes Bible College in Ontario. This has been subject to continual feedback. Over the last 15 years, there has been a steady stream of literature on this subject from just about every imaginable perspective, and I have followed it sometimes closely, sometimes from a distance. Having served as an elder and in pastoral ministry in various churches for over 20 years, I have gained a sense of the importance of this subject, not just for the sake of right doctrine, but also because it touches every man and woman in the church. Ultimately, it affects the very heart of the body of Christ. Thanks go to the many women and men who have interacted with me, challenged me and put up with my feeble efforts to articulate the perspectives written herein.

The work on this has been tedious and long. I have been sustained by my wife, Mary, who has shared this journey with me, patiently interacting with just about every detail of what is presented here. Nothing here is written without the good conscience of knowing she stands together with me and celebrates with me our “differences.” Thanks are given to my students at Kawartha Lakes Bible College who have given valuable feedback on the various drafts and lecture notes. Not to forget, thanks go to my son Jason and daughter Shannon, who have demonstrated that children can grow up in a complementarian household and church and become well-adjusted, committed followers of Jesus Christ. One of my greatest joys, now that they are adults, is having them both as my friends. Jen, my new daughter-in-law, also has spent hours reviewing and editing the draft—thanks. Thanks also to Ruth Rodger, dear friend and meticulous editor. Jim Mayer has been a valuable help in reviewing the manuscript and providing helpful suggestions. Ron Brancato has added his editorial skills and once again has lent his artistic talents to the Lord for the cover—thanks. Many others have interacted with me at various times over the years to help hone my understanding of this subject. Thanks to you all. Your help has been immeasurable.

There will inevitably be some omissions and oversights, all of which are solely my responsibility. My prayer is that this book will not add fuel to the controversy, but rather provide light for those who seek to enjoy the differences between male and female in the church.

To God be the glory,

Chuck Gianotti

ABBREVIATIONS

cf.	“see further”
f.	“and following verse”
ff.	“and following verses”
OT	Old Testament
NT	New Testament
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Bible
KJV	King James Bible
NKJV	New King James Bible

READ THIS FIRST!

Perceptions and images abound on the subject of gender-based roles. Abuse, privilege, power, oppression, culture, archaisms, sexism, patriarchal, freedom, empowerment, feminism, liberal, accommodation—these are all emotive words involved in heating up the discussion. The issue of gender in the church has long been debated and many books have been written on this subject. So why another book? What would possess this author to step into the line of fire and potentially take shots from all sides? The answer is that the subject will *not* go away; as long as there are men and women striving to understand this wonderful subject, there will be discussion and debate. Scholarly and popular works have proliferated, roughly lining up on one of two sides: the complementarian viewpoint and the egalitarian viewpoint¹. Complementarians are those who see male and female as equal but different, having some distinct roles in church, home and life. Egalitarians are those who view male and female as equal and their roles largely interchangeable in social, spiritual and familial contexts (except for the obvious roles related to physiogeny such as ability to bear children). Much of what has been written remains inaccessible to the average Christian because of 1) the technical or voluminous nature of some writings, 2) the sectarian or pejorative flavor of some writings, or 3) the shallowness of some writings. Few are prepared to do the required work to sort through both the rhetoric and the passion presented by both sides.

It would be arrogant of this writer, to say the least, to think that I have discovered the final or clearest word on the subject. In fact, I do not lay claim to high scholarship that will compete in the learned and academic circles with what has been written before. Indeed, many great minds have wrestled with this subject and with each other over this subject. But having studied and preached on this issue over the past 20 years, and having been in church leadership, on the front lines of implementing my convictions, I can say clearly that the subject is still front and center in the minds of many people who sit in the pews Sunday after Sunday. In addition, I believe the position any given church takes on this issue will have an impact on that church's ministry and how people view and relate to the opposite sex. How the church deals with this issue will also have a direct affect on the health and welfare of the Christian family.

In terms of interactions with the larger church body, we dare not let ourselves be satisfied with "agreeing to disagree" on this subject, because it cuts to the core of who we are as individuals. Sexuality is essential to our nature as human beings created by God. Within our churches, we must be clear about what we believe and straightforward in how we teach it, for the roles of God's people, whether men or women, really *do* matter to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. We dare not glibly follow a favorite teacher or denominational perspective without embracing the Berean mindset. Remember, the Bereans were commended by Dr. Luke in the book of Acts for,

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

In our sexually confused society, the non-believing world needs to have a clear compass from Christians who not only have a cogent, biblical perspective

on the sexes, but who can provide a demonstration of the beauty, satisfaction, practicality and sexual affirmation of that biblical lifestyle.

My own sense is that there is need for a defense of a conservative viewpoint on the subject of the sexes, which *also* recognizes and corrects the faults of what I would call a *wooden* conservatism. Too often unbiblical extremes have been codified beyond scriptural warrant. Likewise, the role of men and the concept of authority has been distorted to the point of causing unnecessary tension and burden on women. I believe a proper biblical understanding of the sexes leads us to celebrate the differences—not to be embarrassed by or fearful of them. As men and women discover God’s wonderful variety and glory in their lives and ministry together, the Lord will indeed be glorified, for we grow in our understanding of His magnificent creation.

I submit this book for the glory of God and for the encouragement of men and women to enjoy the differences and the balance of their roles in ministry.

N.S. Each chapter has extensive endnotes to give extra detail, for those who care for more detail. However, these are not necessary for the flow of the text.

¹ While we recognize that labels can oversimplify a discussion, these descriptive terms are generally accepted as helpful in referring to the two main views of this subject.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Chapter One

The subject of masculinity and femininity is one of the most fascinating teachings in Scripture. God's diversity in creation is nowhere seen more poignantly than in this wonderful area, touching the very core of our being. Male and female sharing humanity—yet every cell of our bodies unmistakably proclaims either maleness or femaleness.¹ The Scripture declares God's delight when after He² created man and woman on the 6th day, He "...saw all that he had made, and it was *very good*" (Gen 1:31 emphasis mine).

The *mystery* of sexuality is for us to enjoy, with all its attractions, intrigues and delights. Many have found through God's grace the rich, relational "dance" that takes place when men and women embrace their differences and see their divergences as complementary, healthy and enjoyable!

Yet there is another sense of mystery concerning the sexes: few issues have spawned the plethora of books, debates, laws, policies and feelings (negative and positive) as the issue of the relationship of the sexes? Forces pull in different directions—feminism, homosexuality, bi-sexuality, "political correctness," widespread acceptance of pre-marital sex—and shout from every direction. What God has designed as *very good* has become a source of intense conflict today.

If ever there was a time to let the Creator and Author of our very existence speak, it is now. His Word addresses the nature and the relationship of the sexes! And who better than Christians to study carefully what God has to say about this subject and then to share this with (and demonstrate it to) the world. If lived out well, this truth will provide both men and women the personal *satisfaction* and sense of *fulfillment* in the masculinity or femininity for which they were respectively created. God's design for the sexes, if followed in the spirit which God intends, leads toward healthier marriages and families which, in turn, helps provide children with a real sense of who they are as God's ultimate creation.³ Further, God's design will lead to healthier churches.

Yet, human civilization has failed in this essential aspect of life—the relationship between the sexes. World history is stained with conflict, wars, hardships and evils of every kind, including the conflict of the sexes. Women have often been suppressed, oppressed and abused by men in a power struggle through the ages.⁴ Analyzing the reasons for this would consume volumes. Physical size may have something to do with it, although that cannot be the only reason—unless one is a strict evolutionist or materialist. The *power* of men over women and the associated exploitations must find their source in something other than just anatomy. Women have often been denied rights and have been considered “lesser” beings than men. Even in the “noblest” of times gone by, women were to be protected and cared for, but not given “fully equal” status.

Even in our present day, the cacophony of voices cry out that gender discrimination is not just a thing of the past, but an on-going reality. Feminism has failed to provide the promised *equality*. Instead, premarital sex, extra-marital pregnancy and abortion have become more prevalent along with their psychological difficulties. This is hardly a success for feminism, despite the