

CLOSING THE LEADERSHIP
GAP: WHY WOMEN CAN AND
MUST HELP RUN THE WORLD

BY: MARIE C. WILSON

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"Of the nearly 12,000 people to serve in the legislature since the founding of the nation in 1776, only 21.5 (18.8 percent) have been women . . . and it gets *worse* at the state level" (4-5). More than 60 percent of women have jobs, but only six women run Fortune 500 companies (4). These and other similar statistics set the stage for a new look at an ongoing problem. In *Closing the Leadership Gap: Why Women Can and Must Help Run the World*, Marie C. Wilson addresses the leadership gap in gender representation in politics, the business world, the entertainment field, and in non-profit leadership. As President Emerita of the Ms. Foundation for Women and the current Founder and President of the White House Project, Wilson articulates her commitment to bringing about cultural transformation. "Our business is no longer just gender equity," she states, "but the more sweeping industry of societal transformation" (xvii).

Backed by research from the White House Project and the Ms. Foundation, Wilson writes from experience. She shares the lessons learned from her experiences, and also the stories of women who are seeking to close the leadership gap in their respective fields. Wilson argues that to bring about change, transformation must occur at the cultural level. It must start in the home and in our communities, and should be carried into our places of work. She organizes her book around the "scarlet A's" in the lives of women, words whose meanings are used to keep women in their place: authority, ambition, ability and authenticity (29). These words need to take on new meaning before this gap can be diminished.

Marie Wilson does a wonderful job of painting a picture of the status quo, both nationally and globally. One senses the urgency and necessity of bringing the voices of women to the table across the lines of various disciplines. Throughout this book, she shares the stories of powerful women who have worked hard to obtain positions of authority from which they

can now be heard. However, not all women are called to be CEO's, or managing partners, or presidents. Often missing are the stories of those women who are making a difference in their everyday lives, stories of women who are fighting local school boards to bring about change, or those who face the everyday challenges of struggling to work while trying to further their education. Wilson seeks to champion the voice of all women, and these other stories need to be heard alongside the stories of the more prominent voices. A calling to leadership comes in many shapes and sizes.

As mentioned earlier, this book isn't about gender equity. The goal isn't to have more women in leadership positions. It's not just that women are equal to men and can do just as well. There isn't one kind of leadership that all people need to possess to be effective. Women are different from men and these differences should be sought out and celebrated. It is precisely because of those differences that women and men need to be working together in leadership. "Men *and* women must be in power to moderate the influence of masculinity on all of us. It is this power sharing that will provide a different voice at the table, giving women the opportunity to shape policy in line with our values and giving men any permission they need to bring all of themselves to leadership, including their softer side"(xii). Both groups bring needed gifts to the table. This book helps us look at leadership from this new perspective. It allows us to approach the gap both in terms of the glass ceiling and from the grass roots. While gender isn't the only issue facing leadership today, it is an important one. The importance of increasing the presence of women's voices carries over into religious circles as well. Historically, the role of women in religious leadership has not been very prominent.

It wasn't until 1970 that the number of denominations ordaining women began to significantly increase (see *Women's Path Into Ministry: Six Major Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2002). Yet, today there are still many denominations that refuse to ordain women. And in the denominations that do ordain women, women continue to face challenges entering into situations where authority, ambition, ability, and authenticity have been defined historically. The need for societal transformation exists in all arenas.

Elizabeth Johnson, in her book *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroads, 2002), states that, the goal of feminist theology is "transformation into new community . . . not to make women equal partners in an oppressive system," but to transform the systems (31-32). As pastors, educators, mentors, parents, and friends, we can encourage and invite new leaders from multiple places, with diverse experiences to consider a call to ministry. We need to look at the kind of role models that are available and where intentional opportunities for mentoring should be occurring in our seminaries, in our congregations, and in our homes.

This book is an important read for men and women alike. It is for existing leaders as well as those involved in the process of developing new leaders. It is for those who want to be a part of bringing about a cultural transformation. We need to all stretch our imaginations about what changes need to be made to help foster this kind of transformation. "When the culture of one institution starts to change," says Wilson, "it can spread like a brushfire" (39).

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