

# Women in Ministry

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## Roots, Trunk and Shoots

Towards an integrated  
ecosystem for developing  
women's ministry.

### WOMEN'S MINISTRY

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Ridley is seeking to build greater female participation among its student body and faculty, but it is a complex undertaking to become a more representative community. Why are fewer women found in evangelical colleges in full-time theological study, higher degrees and faculty positions? If we imagine women's ministry as a tree, we are invited to look at the tree's roots, trunk and shoots. We can work together to promote women in academia and ministry by addressing the whole ecosystem of women's ministry in churches and Christian organisations.

### ROOTS

A tree's trunk is fed by its roots, and theological students come to Ridley from our churches. Women are half as likely as men to enrol in three year theological degrees, so twice as many men are trained for careers as pastors or ministry leaders. Even fewer women enrol for postgraduate research degrees<sup>1</sup>. If we want to see more female students, lecturers and ministers, churches need to be on the lookout and encourage theologically able women to register for training. Encouragement to study theology can begin in Sunday School and Youth Group programs, presenting women as role models to both genders. University Christian groups can target women in career counselling for pastoral and academic ministry. Pastors can affirm women's gifts and give women opportunities to practice leadership, teaching and preaching.

### TRUNK

Theological colleges are the pipeline for training for ministry and academia, so can be viewed as the trunk of the tree. Female students often lack role models in theological study. The issue, 'there are no women in my bibliography!' can be addressed by adding female authors to bibliographies, and by discussing biblical, historical and contemporary women in lectures, ministry classes and chapel sermons. A Ridley women's writing group has recently begun to enhance writing and publishing skills, and the women's preaching network focuses on public speaking.

Colleges such as Ridley typically require faculty to have a PhD, teaching and ministry experience, a publishing record, Christian faith and character, and personal maturity. Women's participation can be encouraged by targeted PhD recruitment

and offering teaching experience. Ridley has recently created an Associate Lecturer position to train entry level scholars, including women, for tenured faculty positions.

### SHOOTS

The ministry of women is supported by the tree's roots and trunk, and may be likened to shoots or branches. Women are often appointed to voluntary or part-time ministries, or to precarious ministries which lack resources. Women are more likely to commit to substantial theological education if there are more robust ministry pathways for them including career development, job security and appropriate remuneration.

Theological education is part of a whole ecosystem which includes the roots, trunk and shoots of ministry. Churches, Christian organisations and theological colleges can work together to create a healthier ecosystem where women's ministry can flourish, with fruit that contributes to the healing of the nations and branches upon which the birds of the air can nest.

<sup>1</sup> Based on research by Kara Martin, Megan Powell du Toit, Jill Firth and Moyra Dale, 'Women in Theological Education in the ACT in 21st Century Australia,' *Theological Education in Australia: Foundations, Current Practices and Future Options*, edited by Andrew Bain and Ian Hussey (forthcoming, Wipf & Stock, 2017).

Jill Firth is a Lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament on the Faculty at Ridley College.

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## For The 2017 Calendar

### September 4

Marketplace Institute Lecture  
given by Mark Stephens

### October 6

Annual Dinner  
Held at Melbourne Zoo  
Keynote speaker Richard Condie

### October 18

Ridley Open Day and Evening

### October 26 – 27

Life @ Work Conference  
co-hosted by the Ridley Marketplace Institute

### September 21

Evangelical History Association Lecture  
given by Meredith Lake

### November 8

Gospel Coalition Lectures  
by Brian Rosner and Rhys Bezzant  
at Cross Culture Church, Melbourne

### December 9 – 21

Israel Study Tour

Check the Ridley website for times & locations:  
[www.ridley.edu.au/events](http://www.ridley.edu.au/events) or join our events  
mailing list: [j.daw@ridley.edu.au](mailto:j.daw@ridley.edu.au)

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## At the Feet of Jesus

Everyone at Ridley agrees that we need to encourage more women to undertake theological study at every level to train for Christian ministry, writes **Brian Rosner**.

### TRAINING FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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'Men and women are equally made in God's image, given authority by God in his world, and called to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ and to be conformed to his likeness.' So begins the Ridley College *Gender and Ministry Policy*. It goes on to affirm that Ridley College is committed to the equal provision of identical training for women and men, for any and every ministry and leadership role to which they may be appointed in the church or in the world. We also welcome both women and men as students, faculty, staff, and Board members. Currently we have three women on the faculty and have hosted some outstanding women scholars giving guest lectures in recent years.

The roles of women and men in ministry is a controversial subject in evangelical circles. And there are a variety of views represented among the faculty and in the student body at Ridley College. But everyone at Ridley agrees that we need to encourage more women to undertake theological study at every level to train for Christian ministry.

As recorded in the Gospels, Jesus affirmed the place of women as disciples, a remarkable fact given how countercultural this move was in first-century Palestine. A good description of what we are aiming for at college is to have students 'sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus and listen to him speak'. Indeed, this was the typical posture of a disciple before a rabbi in Jesus' day. Tellingly, these words are taken from Luke 10:38–42 where Jesus affirms Mary's desire to learn: 'She has chosen well [to learn from me] and it will not be taken away from her.' Jesus loved to teach female disciples.

One of the many exquisite features of the Gospel of John is the conversations Jesus has with individuals. Five of the seven conversations in John are with disciples. Remarkably, of these, three are with women! In each case the women concerned learn profound truths from Jesus. The woman at the well in John 4 learns that Jesus is the Messiah and the Saviour of the world and many Samaritans come to faith because of her testimony. In John 11 Martha converses with Jesus about the resurrection from the dead and learns that he is the Christ, the Son of God, which is the central message of John's Gospel. And in John 20 Mary Magdalene learns that Jesus is alive and is the first person in the Gospel to proclaim his resurrection when she announces to the disciples: 'I have seen the Lord!' (John 20:18).

In the last couple of years three encouraging grass-roots initiatives for women have taken root at Ridley College: a women's writing groups, a women's preaching group, and an annual conference to encourage evangelical women in academia. Each of these initiatives tap into the deep desire of many women to learn from Jesus, and each is bearing valuable fruit. Let's pray that more and more women will come to Ridley to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him speak.

Brian Rosner, Principal



# Evangelical Women in Academia

Uncertainty in career paths and outcomes for women who study at Ridley and other colleges propelled a day conference to discuss and support evangelical women in academia, coordinated by Ridley's own, **Jill Firth, Anthea McCall, Diane Hockridge and Denise Cooper-Clarke.**



Above: Delle Matthews, Lynn Cohick and Jill Firth

## NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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On Saturday 22 July over 100 women gathered at Ridley for the inaugural *Evangelical Women in Academia Conference*. Participants came from every state of Australia and included lecturers, students and graduates from over 20 colleges and universities.

The event was first conceived at Ridley College, with an invitation to Lynn Cohick of Wheaton College, Illinois to headline the conference with a talk on evangelical women in academia. It was supported by funding from the Australian College of Theology and coordinated by a team of female faculty from the College, Rev'd Canon Dr Jill Firth, Rev'd Anthea McCall and Diane Hockridge, with the assistance of occasional lecturer Dr Denise Cooper-Clarke.

The conference was held to promote evangelical women's learning and teaching in academia, and to help develop the pipeline to women's PhDs, women's publishing, women lecturers and academic training for women in ministry. 'We wanted to gather evangelical women in academia, to encourage them, to hear excellent academic papers and recent research affecting evangelical women in academia and to build networks for support', says Jill. 'There are challenges for women in academia generally, which are also faced by evangelical women. Evangelical women also have much to benefit from and much to offer to theological academia'.

At the conference Lynn Cohick also presented a paper on *Learning and Teaching in the First Century* in which she outlined a biblical case for women leading and teaching. Her paper included a detailed examination of recent scholarship on the interpretation of several complex texts. She shared her own story and proposed a three pronged approach to the flourishing of evangelical women in academia: solid exegesis, commitment to mentoring women, and addressing the systemic issues preventing women from exercising leadership. Lynn's presentations modelled her recommendations

Delle Matthews, Dean of Melbourne School of Theology, presented findings based on her DMin research, *Women in Theological Education: Thriving and Surviving*. In her research, Delle has identified key factors for women's persistence in study: having clear goals and a commitment to graduate, finding ways to manage the work/life/study balance, developing and maintaining supportive relationships, and experiencing positive spiritual growth all contribute to persistence in study. Delle concluded that theological colleges have the opportunity to support women by clearly identifying future ministry and career options for them and developing flexible modes of study that enable women to pursue study around work, ministry and family constraints.

A band of women including, Maria-Brand Starkey, Denise Nichols, Gina Denholm, Sharon Valentino, Gillian Asquith, Elizabeth Culhane and the conference organising team led three workshops providing robust panel and group discussions.

The workshop, *Thriving and Surviving as a Theological Student* highlighted the variety of pathways taken by panel members. Small group discussion highlighted the need for clearer communication of potential pathways and career options for women theological students. *Staying Theologically Sharp in Ministry* shared obstacles and top tips related to staying sharp in ministry. Participants had the opportunity to share their own observations and ideas, before writing down concrete action plans. *Flourishing as a Theological Researcher or Lecturer* provided the opportunity for participants to discuss challenges to flourishing in theological research and teaching and strategies to contend with the challenges.

The energy from the conference is reverberating through the College and a further two conferences are being planned. Several women expressed interest in pursuing PhD study and further colloquia. Participants thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to network and are keen to stay in touch with each other. The 2018 and 2019 conferences will address pipeline issues and gather evangelical women in academia.



# Reflections on Gender at Ridley

**Karen Winsemius** is a Master of Divinity student and an Anglican Ordination candidate. Here, she writes about her experience on campus as a woman.

## CURRENT STUDENT

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This is my first year full time at Ridley and I wasn't quite sure what to expect. I'm about half way through my Master of Divinity, having completed my first year part-time as a Grad Dip Div about 4 years ago. At that time I didn't really think much about the distinction of being a woman at Ridley as most of the first year classes have a fairly even gender balance.

However, this year feels a little different, being full time, heading for ordination and doing 2nd and 3rd year subjects. There are some excellent things and some things which are a bit harder.

I have found the staff very supportive of the women at Ridley. At both a faculty level in hiring decisions, and at a student level, they are working towards making Ridley a supportive place for women. I'm sure this

can be hard at times, but I'm grateful for their commitment to encouraging women to succeed at Ridley.

I've personally been encouraged both in individual conversations with lecturers over lunch about my plans for ordination, classes when the teaching has turned to topics such as 'Is this masculine Greek word really masculine in English?', and in making sure we have a commitment to gender inclusive language in our services. There are many more little examples, and the little examples all add up.

Ridley has been supportive of me growing in my leadership skills towards ordination by providing opportunities to attend the *Women in Academia Conference* and the *Preachers' Conference* this year. With opportunities like



these, plus my Ridley studies and placements, I'm continuing to be formed in Christlikeness, as someone who can serve in vocational ministry for a lifetime.

As an ordination candidate, it's hard not to notice the gender imbalance in the Anglican Institute group at times — I'm the only woman in my Life and Ministry Group on a Monday. This in and of itself is not a problem, except it does cause me to think, 'Where are all the women?' I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for people having actively spurred me on. Can I encourage you to look around and see who you could encourage to consider full time ministry as a vocation?

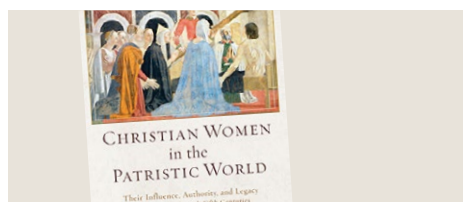
# Women Who Shaped the Church

## *Christian Women in the Patristic World: Their Influence, Authority, and Legacy in the Second through Fifth Centuries*

by Lynn H. Cohick  
and Amy Brown Hughes,  
Baker Academic, October 2017

## BOOK REVIEW

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Following her book, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Baker Academic, 2009), that explores the life of Christian women in the first century, Lynn Cohick, Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and Ridley Online Lecturer, has teamed up with Amy Brown Hughes, also from Wheaton, to produce a compendium of extant evidence

about Christian women in the second to fifth centuries in a new book, *Christian Women in the Patristic World* (Baker Academic, October 2017).

From facing wild beasts in the arena to governing the Roman Empire, Christian women influenced the shape of the church in its formative centuries. Through a careful examination of literary and material evidence, the book highlights the social and theological contributions women made to shaping early Christian beliefs and practices, integrating their influence into the history of the patristic church and showing how their achievements can be edifying for contemporary Christians.

'Amy and I wanted to explore the ways in which Christian women contributed to Christianity', says Lynn. 'Women are a key part of the story of Christianity and fundamental to its intellectual, theological, devotional, and ecclesiological development. They were preachers and philosophers, martyrs and empresses, virgins and mothers from various backgrounds and lived in different regions.'

Lynn has also seen a shift in theological discussions. 'Greater attention is now paid to the role and influence of women in theological conversations and controversies. Recent scholarship has provided important methodological insights that allow today's readers to navigate the early Christian texts' rhetoric concerning women and the category

of female. I think the fearless testimony by female martyrs is astonishing and compelling. It means that the public face of Christianity was that of a martyr, whether male or female. This might provide a guide for women and men working together in churches today, regardless of a church's ordination practices. The bishop was martyred alongside the slave woman and both equally testified to the reality of the resurrection of the body.

Amy was particularly interested in the implications for women in the church when embarking on her research. She was asked by a friend, 'What is my role now in the church as a single, young adult woman? Where do I fit?' Her friend's earnestness confirmed for Amy that part of her journey as a theologian was to address this question. 'This book gave me the opportunity to tell some stories about women in early Christianity and how they were instrumental in constructing the church and its teachings in various ways', says Amy.

'This is a book for every pastor's and teacher's bookshelf', says Scot McKnight of Northern Seminary, 'because it not only tells stories about women but also shows how the early church, which has often been maligned for its reputation when it comes to women, was more formed by women than many know.'

*Christian Women in the Patristic World* is due for release in October this year.