

Douglas J. Heidebrecht, *Women in Ministry Leadership: The Journey of the Mennonite Brethren, 1954–2010* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2019), 326 pages. ISBN: 978-1894791533.

In 2013 I read Douglas J. Heidebrecht's doctoral dissertation (completed at IBTS Prague) with a focus on how he interpreted discernment in the processes of women in ministry leadership, in which he gave several insights that helped me to look at congregational processes in the Netherlands. In this book, *Women in Ministry Leadership*, emanating from his doctoral thesis, Heidebrecht provides a thick description of many years of searching for discernment concerning women in ministerial leadership with the Mennonite Brethren in Canada and the United States. Heidebrecht critically examines how the Mennonite Brethren have dealt with the question of whether 'all avenues of ministry and leadership are open to women as well as men, or are women restricted from certain roles and subordinated to male authority on the basis of gender alone?' (p. 17). He identifies three threads that emerge in the conversation: understanding the Scriptures regarding the question; the praxis of communal discernment; and living faithfully amid contextual voices.

Heidebrecht gives an in-depth description of the ways in which the question of whether and how women can function in church leadership was engaged. Starting with an emerging conversation (–1973), via challenging tradition (1971–80), discerning belief and practice (1978–87), unravelling consensus (1988–93), to conflicting convictions (1992–2002) and finally seeking consensus (2001–10) — a road of almost 60 years. Heidebrecht analysed minutes of different conference meetings, columns and articles in periodicals, and symposia, which all provide insight into how the question of the place of women in ministerial leadership was influenced.

Only after a detailed description does Heidebrecht move on to reflections and conclusions on each time period. He identifies three recurring areas of tension: the tension between 'congregational autonomy and interdependence'; between 'biblicism and interpretive discretion; and between the role of authoritative leadership and the value of community participation' (p. 62).

Heidebrecht observes the situation of the Mennonite Brethren in Canada and the United States. This context is specific, and Heidebrecht describes key actors such as Katie Funk Wiebe, John Toews and Valerie Rempel. However, at the same time, several developments he describes are

also recognisable in other contexts: the influence of the broader evangelical gender debate; the previously mentioned areas of tension; men dominating the conversation at conventions; the importance of role models in practice and discussion. That is why this work of Heidebrecht transcends the situation and context of the Mennonite Brethren and — despite all the differences — calls for recognition in different contexts. This thick description provides insight into how processes in Conventions and Unions run, and that is valuable for everyone involved in these lengthy discernment processes.

Reviewed by Ingeborg te Loo — Co-ordinator of Learning Network, IBTS Centre, Amsterdam.

Andrew J. Kirk, *Being Human: An Historical Enquiry into Who We Are* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 404 pages. ISBN: 978-1532664199.

In this book Andrew Kirk focuses on the question of what it means to be human. This author is well-known for his contribution on the subject of mission and relevant aspects of missiology of Western culture. *Being Human* is a fruit of Kirk's sustained interest in the aspects of secular culture and how these are related to the Christian mission and message. The book is unique in that it offers an account of the views on humanity and human nature from the Renaissance, including the Reformation, through the Enlightenment to the present. It is motivated by the intention 'to grapple afresh with the notion of being human' (p. 3). The book encompasses a timespan of five centuries, different intellectual milieus, many authors and various topics.

After introducing the foundational presuppositions of the enquiry (ch. 1), Kirk proceeds to a description of the Renaissance shift towards humanism (ch. 2) and its consequences for the external authority in politics represented by John Locke (ch. 3). Chapters 4 to 9 explore the Enlightenment humanism exemplified by such figures as Hume and Diderot, Darwin and 'masters of suspicion' Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Kirk argues that the Enlightenment has departed from the yet theocentric Renaissance humanism and that this has resulted in what he calls 'secular humanism' (ch. 10), which denies any reality beyond the natural world (p. 277). In two final chapters the author outlines the perspectives of some prominent Christian theologians who have dealt with the issues relevant to human existence and identity. He summarises the key topics of the enquiry and in chapter 12 proposes a method of abduction for 'dialogue in the context of truth' (p. 379).