

Book Review

Bischoff, Claire; Gandolfo, Elizabeth O'Donnell; Hardison-Moody, Annie (Editors). *Parenting as Spiritual Practice and Source for Theology: Mothering Matters*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. ISBN 978-3-319-59653-2 (e-book). 300 pp. € 91.62

The existing literature on mothering in the areas of spirituality and theology is indisputably limited. This is an observation which renowned theologian Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore acknowledges alongside the editors of this book (vii). Since the publication of Miller-McLemore's foundational book more than two decades ago about her theological reflections on mothering as an academic professional, not much has been written in theology about mothering nor from the perspective of mothering. This edited volume is a welcome contribution to the area of mothering studies in theology. It is a compilation of essays written by mothers-scholars from the disciplines of motherhood studies, religious practice, theology, spirituality, and pastoral care. Readers can expect to encounter various voices who reflectively and theologically tackle the diverse realities of mothering. Equally competent and experienced as the contributors are the editors of this volume, Bischoff, Gandolfo, and Hardison-Moody, who are mothers and academics in the fields of theology, religion, and gender studies.

The book commences with a comprehensive introduction that gives its readers a clear background of what has been done in the field of mothering and theology and the reasons and circumstances that led to the birth of this book. The introduction lays out the goal of the book to present how experiences of mothering contribute to one's theologizing and appreciation of spiritual practices, as

well as the editors and contributors' common advocacy for an ethic of care that is just and inclusive of the caregiver. In terms of organization, the essays are grouped together in four sections according to topic that makes for an emphatic and fluid reading.

In Part I, "Why Mothering Matters," the essays that are put together attest to the significance of mothering. This section serves as the foundation upon which the book is built as it delves into mothering in the context of inhumane and oppressive realities, in how the sacred unfolds in such experiences, and in the centrality of embodiment in mothering coupled with the unique kind of knowledge that this activity generates.

Part II, "Contemplating Categories of Mothering," is appropriately titled as the essays in this section challenge the common understanding of and suppositions on mothering. The essays deviate from popular images of mothering portrayed in mainstream media. They tackle mothering as follows: a spiritual and transgressive practice that questions systems that undermine human rights, a complex endeavor as exemplified by infant feeding and the oppression that comes from the related generalized expectations on mothers, a mutual relationship of giving and receiving between mother and child, and a challenging feat made evident through a womanist reading of Revelation 17-18.

In Part III, "Breaking Silences, Bearing Witness," the essays cover the diverse experiences of mothering that are commonly not talked about such as dealing with pregnancy loss, battling mental health challenges, and parenting elders. As these women courageously share their experiences of such silenced realities, they create an opening for people to acknowledge them and, as such, to make participation in God's grace possible.

The final section, "Rethinking Theology and Ethics," offers theological and ethical reflections that developed

from everyday lives of mothers. These essays grapple with certain realities that mothers face, such as vulnerability vis-à-vis the invulnerable power within us as *imago Dei*, the experience of mental health challenges that shape one's understanding of Christian ethical concepts, and the willful struggle and courage of mothers amidst pain and suffering as theodicy in practice.

This volume is a valuable exemplar in the field of mothering studies and theology as it brings together distinct and various voices who, through their essays, invite the readers into reflecting further on the embodied experience of mothering as a rich source for theologizing. The editors' attempt at collating works that demonstrate how our conceptions of mothering must expand and develop to accommodate the growing manifestations of the practice of mothering is commendable. The diversity and breadth that this volume offers would have been enriched by the inclusion of essays from different geographical areas. All the contributors convey experiences which are situated in the U.S. that consequently limits this work to the North American context. Perhaps, a second edition can make room for contributions from other parts of the world. Drawing inspiration from Sara Ruddick's description of mothering in *Maternal Thinking* as a kind of child care work which can be done both by men and women, the editors could have considered including an essay or two that depict the experience of "mothering" of men. On balance, this book is a rich source not only for scholars navigating the waters of mothering studies and theology but also for anyone who is engaged in mothering or benefits from it.

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