

GOD—HIS AND HERS, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel & Jürgen Moltmann SCM Press, London 1991, pp.94, £6.95

The unfortunate title of this collection reminds one of a twee towel set. Nevertheless, it adequately describes six chapters, five of which are joint public addresses given during 1981 and 1989. Those who are familiar with the authors' works will not find anything new, but will revisit old materials in a most accessible manner. This then is the strength of the book: to introduce readers to the writers and send them off to read their longer works. Another strength of the book is to hear a conversation going on between husband and wife (who are referred to by first names throughout) about the male and female in church, society and God, each acutely aware of their gender context. Their interaction is fruitful, although they are perhaps too much in agreement to make for an exciting critical dialogue. Strangely neglected are matters regarding sexual ethics, an issue closely related with the gendering of God and related social gender roles.

In chapter 1 they discuss the process of socialization by which gender is acquired and the way in which gender roles determine all forms of church life and spirituality. The work of Gilligan and Schaef are a seminal influence. This chapter, although interesting, is weak, partly because it seems to be addressed to the converted and is often loose and at times smug. For instance, there seems little critical edge in their wide affirmation that whatever affirms women's developments within the church is the work of the Spirit. Not every woman, *per se*, can claim any innovation as the work of the Spirit and the only control on such a criterion is that "Whatever could stand before the crucified Christ was the divine Spirit". (15) Stated thus it is not enough. Also, there is a dangerous essentialism in some of Elisabeth's rhetoric, when we hear about what "women want" and that "women have a culture of their own" and so on. "Women" as a category seem to have an ideological homogeneousness which often tends to be a curiously white western feminist view as is exposed by Gaytri Spivak. But such criticisms are hardly entertained, let alone affecting the resultant theology.

Chapter 2 is a conversation between Elisabeth, Jürgen and an interviewer. Here we find: Elisabeth's indebtedness to the United States where she learnt her feminism (17); Jürgen noting that the main difference between European and Latin American liberation theology is that the former deals with the oppressor and the latter with the oppressed; and his passionate suggestion that the soldier dealing with nuclear weapons is no longer in a state of salvation. It is a sketchy interview and it is curious that Jürgen could locate only this one difference when some Latin American theologians see the European political theologies as in different worlds altogether.

Chapter 3 is fascinating and we witness an implicit critical dialogue. Elisabeth notes how images of one's earthly father shape ones associations and responses to God as heavenly "Father". In fact, her

own experience is very positive and although her father died when she was seven she refused to replace his positive image and thereby does not have any difficulties with calling God father except when the term is imposed dogmatically. (I'm not sure what she means by dogmatically, or whether it is used colloquially). Then follows an interesting meditation on the misuse of the term father. My concern was her lack of consideration that the power of definition was so unidirectional. Could it be that we can see the failings and shortcomings of our own earthly fathers (and mothers) in the light of the radical parental image presented by God as father of the son, Jesus, who addresses his father: 'Abba'? Jürgen then addresses the question of God as Mother and his piece is far more intellectual (in comparison with the personal testimony of Elisabeth). Given his early confrontations with Marxism and Freud he says he was always sceptical of the inherent dangers in "father" terminology. Hence, he begins with Jesus' use of the term and writes "I never thought of my physical father, but always only of Jesus and his 'Abba' prayer" (35). Jesus' relationship exclusively defined "father" in reference to God. But God, while being personal, has no gender. Moltmann therefore opposes exclusive gender attribution to God. His trinitarian comments are suggestive but not always clearly worked out. Here readers should go to his book on *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*.

The bible study of chapter 4 is extremely good where Elisabeth deals with Martha's confession (Jn 11) and Jürgen, with Peter's (Mk 8). Chapter 5 is far too short and is a reflection on Lk 13, about the bent woman being made straight. The most exacting part of the book is the final chapter where Jürgen in effect summarises the argument of *The Crucified God*. It is tightly presented, although I have difficulties with his treatment of Psalm 22 (66–7), the extent to which he allows impassibility (as God not suffering a lack of being—72), and most of all whether the cross for Moltmann (in this essay) is anything more than an exemplary atonement. Elisabeth addresses the possibility of a feminist theology of the cross and does so by criticising certain limitations in three recent feminist rejections of traditional atonement theologies, while acknowledging certain strengths. Then, she goes on to state three feminists dimensions of the cross: solidarity in suffering (related to the women who remain under the cross with Jesus); suffering from structural sin; and most creatively, the cross as a paradoxical symbol of life such that the fleeing of the women in terror at the resurrection (Mk 16.8) suggests even "the letting go of traditional feminine patterns of life" (90). This essay, as with many of the others, is provocative and invites closer inspection of the more sustained and carefully constructed arguments from the longer works of this husband and wife team.

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