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The Challenge of Forgiveness

Cindy Jacobsen

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The Challenge of Forgiveness

Augustine Meier and Peter VanKatwyk, Editors

Toronto: Novalis, 2001

327 pages, \$21.56 Softcover

The Challenge of Forgiveness is a collection of thirteen thorough and interesting essays, each examining forgiveness in particular contexts, including First Nations peoples, adult survivors of incest, youth suicide, post-affair couples, abortion, disabilities, and adoption reunions. While the spiritual perspective is an important component throughout, a range of psychological approaches is also presented, including object relations theory, narrative, and family systems theory.

As a collection, the essays can be likened to a large choir of individual voices making music on the therapeutic and theological "tune" of forgiveness. Although the voices vary, a unifying sound is heard throughout the book: forgiveness benefits the self and relationships with others, even when that healing comes by way of a long and arduous process. Because this assumption has been challenged in the past by the therapeutic community, I appreciated the essayists' renewed affirmation of the benefits of forgiveness, undergirded by solid theology.

I particularly enjoyed Augustine Meier's essay on adult survivors of incest. He used object relation's understanding of splitting "good" and "bad" parts and the need for individuation to create a space for forgiveness to happen. The survivor's capacity for empathy determines the kind of healing work that can occur through the forgiveness process.

In his essay, "Reconciliation and Forgiveness: A Practice of Spiritual Care," Peter VanKatwyk helps to locate the concept of forgiveness in an interdisciplinary arena. I found it surprising and refreshing to read that forgiveness need not be confined to theology, that it can have a home again in pastoral care; for there was a time when, in order to legitimize their work, pastoral caregivers wholeheartedly adopted psychological perspectives bereft of theology. VanKatwyk relates how Anton Boisen, father of the hospital chaplaincy and the Clinical Pastoral Education movement, worked hard to marry the two disciplines.

As with any such edited volume, not all the contributions are equally helpful. Nonetheless, this is on the whole an excellent

collection of essays that would be useful for the beginning student as well as the seasoned professional.

Cindy Jacobsen, Pastor
St. Peter's Lutheran Church
Kitchener, Ontario

The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God's Family

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003

134 pages, \$17.14 Softcover

In this is a wonderful, touching, timely and informative book, Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner writes a theological reflection and interpretation of God's involvement in adoption. Noting that the literature on adoption lacks an articulation of the spiritual dimension, she posits faith as a resource which can motivate, undergird, and sustain the "adoption triad": birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents. This book, then, is a theology that encompasses the entire experiential spectrum of the adoption process. Her intention is to identify and explore the feelings people live through and with during the process of birthing a family through adoption.

The book includes interviews with adoptive families and developing adoptees. Stevenson-Moessner documents the ecstasy and excitement as well as the agony and pain of the adoption process for all participants in the adoption triangle. Through her use of fifteen interviews with adoptive parents, she takes us on a journey through the very real lives of families: their feelings, wants/desires, disappointments and excitement. She parallels the preparation process of adopted couples with those of expecting couples, and she also reflects an acceptance-of-differences between a biologically constructed family and one designed through adoption.

Through an inter-weaving of biblical stories and contemporary experiences, the author shows how faith serves as a resource. But she also critiques patriarchal language for God, and calls on practical theologians, pastors and Biblical exegetes to reconsider traditional images. She then presents a way to develop a new image of God.