

John W. Miller. *Calling God "Father": Essays on the Bible, Fatherhood, and Culture*. 2nd Ed. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

In *Calling God "Father": Essays on the Bible, Fatherhood, and Culture*, John W. Miller has updated and added to the collection of essays first published under the title *Biblical Faith and Fathering: Why we call God "Father"* (Paulist Press, 1989). The new edition contains some minor revisions, a new essay and some bibliographic updating. It is organized into four sections: Theoretical Considerations, God as Father in Biblical Tradition, Human Fathering in Biblical Tradition, and Contemporary Issues. There is also a concluding chapter and appendices.

Miller's goal in republishing this collection is, he writes, the same as it was ten years ago. The author wants to draw attention to "omissions and distortions" in the ongoing discussion of biblical patriarchy and the language used in reference to God. Miller is concerned about what he sees as the "refutation of 'the "Father" in God' in contemporary feminist theologies" and its implications for the maintenance of father-involved families (xvii). Chapter ten, a new essay, is particularly directed toward this end.

What propels Miller's work is his belief that there is a fundamental harmony between the Bible and psychoanalytic theory when it comes to the importance of fathering and the impact of fathers on healthy child development. Miller sees a link between Israelite faith in a father-god (in contrast to the mother-gods or son-gods of other eastern traditions) and the development of a strong pattern of father-involved families. Christianity, arising out of a Jewish context, also emphasized the importance of good fathering, and Miller goes on to suggest that there has been great benefit to all cultures which have embraced the idea of God as a gracious father. Since God as "Father" provides the ideal model for human fathering, feminists who seek to downplay the importance of this name and the role it represents risk doing further harm to modern families and particularly to children.

Miller begins his defense of "the 'Father' in God" with an examination of how the two-parent family came about in history and the changes this development brought to human culture. Father-involvement, he suggests, could only arise as humans began to understand the role that males play in human reproduction. This led to the creation of specific male-female pair bonds and

ultimately to the father-involved family. In his view, fathering is "the definitive cultural artifact that lies at the foundation of all other cultural achievements" and is the primary factor in distinguishing humans from other life-forms (17). Yet, because human fathering is a cultural construct, it is inherently more fragile than the biological bond that shapes the relationship of mother and child, and is thus more at risk.

Miller argues that the very name Yahweh implies fatherhood and that throughout the Old Testament God's actions demonstrate the nature of God's fatherhood. Patriarchy, he suggests, is best understood as good fathering and not simply masculine power or supremacy. This is fundamentally important for both males and females, who need a healthy father in order to develop secure gender identities.

Miller is aware of earlier criticism directed toward these essays and tries to refute the critique that his focus is too directed toward fathers and sons. He attempts to argue that it is also girls and women who need both a strong father figure in God and good human fathering in order to develop healthy identities. That may be so, yet many readers will object to Miller's strong reliance on Freudian psychoanalytic theory to develop this point. This is a major weakness of the book and betrays a rather narrow and dated understanding of human developmental theory. In addition, Miller's reluctance to fully grapple with the implications of the New Testament's reorientation from biological family to spiritual family is problematic. It is not enough to say that Jesus and Paul were both single and therefore naturally drawn to the community formed by the early church. Surely this NT orientation and its concern for widows and orphans have much to offer a society beset by rising divorce rates and single-parent households.

Because these essays grow out of lecture material and previously published articles, they are somewhat repetitious. Nevertheless, Miller writes in a clear, organized, and generally accessible fashion. Readers seeking to understand the biblical arguments in support of God as "Father" should find this a helpful resource.

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