

Review of Björn Krondorfer (ed.), *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism. A Critical Reader*, London: SCM Press 2009, xxi + 489 pages, ISBN 978-0-334-04191-7.

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First of all a confession. I was really excited to review this book, and yet when I initially opened it I found myself rather astonished. ‘Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism’ – and *prima facie* no original statements by Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Maimonides? No Thomas Aquinas, no Luther, Calvin, Schleiermacher or Barth around? Did they send the wrong copy to me?

Indeed, the ‘Critical Reader’ has a somewhat misleading title. In actual fact, it does *not* provide any primary sources, documenting debates on men and masculinity during the history of theology, but ‘a selection of *contemporary* writings from religious studies scholars who address men as gendered beings within the Jewish and Christian tradition’ (p xii, emphasis mine). Hence, the book is on ‘(Critical) Men's Studies in Religion’ – an academic venture which since the 1980s has emerged to some degree as a distinct subfield, interconnecting gender and religious studies/theology. Björn Krondorfer, Professor of Religious Studies at St. Mary's College of Maryland, has put together a fine collection of writings which offers a representative overview of the development, methodologies, main positions and relevant topics of this multifaceted domain.

In his succinct introduction the editor characterizes the theoretical framework which underlies the book's composition and informs many of its

contributions too. In a basically constructivist move 'gender' functions as an 'analytical category' (cf. p xii) here. 'Men' as well as 'religion' are considered as overall unstable categories. Accordingly, the mutual relations between the two come into sight in their cultural and historical variability. Moreover, the religious traditions the book is dealing with, namely Christianity and Judaism prove to be rather ambivalent. They are potentially both: an expression of or coercion into normative gender assumptions as well as a source of subversion in quest of alternative masculinities (cf. p xif). Ultimately, Krondorfer insists that for the benefit of sophistication research on men and religion should be pursued in a consciously critical mode (cf. p xiiif). In short, it has to question rather than simply reaffirm implicit and explicit structures of male privilege and domination. This undertaking, aside from the profoundly academic orientation of men's studies in religion, marks the new field's literally *critical* difference to more conservative agendas, such as the mythopoetic movement.

The volume contains 34 articles which were chosen in a complex process (cf. p xix) and edited very carefully. Mirroring the current status of research, they mainly originate from the US and cover the last three decades. In general, the editor's high sense of diversity appears worth mentioning. His selection of texts allows for a broad range of methodological approaches, displays a decent proportion between 'gay' and 'straight' perspectives, among themselves pretty diverse, and includes even the voices of some 'women' and 'men of colour'. Only in one aspect the exemplary balance turns out to fail: the two religious traditions in question – Christianity and Judaism – are in no way equally represented, as only four contributions deal with Jewish topics. Surely this is due to the state of the art, but again the book's title turns out to be a bit too bold. Given the present political situation it also seems unfortunate that Muslim perspectives are missing entirely – perhaps a future subject?

The articles are arranged in seven parts. The first three ('In the Beginning', 'A New Field Takes Shape' and 'Theorizing and Theologizing Alternative Masculinities') trace roots and development of critical men's studies in religion and its further differentiation. Here one finds famous names such as feminist (theologian) Mary Daly and French cultural theorist Michel Foucault, in addition to seminal pioneers like James Boswell and Stephen B. Boyd, completed by a series of contemporary voices from Jewish Talmud expert Daniel Boyarin to Graham Ward, an Anglican protagonist of the theological school of Radical Orthodoxy. The other four parts are structured according to theological discipline. Part 4 ('Biblical

Musings') offers predominantly hermeneutical reflections on the Hebrew Bible resp the Old and New Testament, while part 5 ('Masculine Ideals in the Jewish and Christian Traditions') contains historical case studies from late antiquity to the present. Part 6 and 7 ('Spirituality and the Intimate Body' and 'Gender, Justice, and Community') focus on more systematic and practical issues. In these final sections one finds topics as diverse as contrasting imaginations – popular, historical, patristic, gay – of the sexuality of Jesus Christ (Dale B. Martin), the patristic use of theological metaphors in (re)defining a Christian ideal of transcendent yet ambiguous manhood in the fourth century (Virginia Burrus), recent Jewish grappling with circumcision – yes or no? (Harry Brod), critical reflections on machismo as a specifically Latino paradigm of male supremacy over the 'other' (Miguel De La Torre).

Each of the seven parts starts with a brief 'introductory narrative' by the editor who also familiarizes the student with every single article and its author. Read together these small prefaces give a first survey of the field as a whole. Debates are contextualized and the contours of positions and trajectories are highlighted. A list of publications by the respective author plus suggestions for further reading complete the sourcebook.

Certainly, the disciplining and canonizing effects of a formerly 'savage' field of knowledge that regularly accompany the emergence of sourcebooks and textbooks, encyclopaedias and so on are debatable – and should be debated constantly. However, from a more functional point of view this critical reader doubtlessly fills a gap and is highly recommended to everyone involved or interested in gender and/or religious studies/theology. It will make it a good deal easier to solidly introduce (critical) men's studies in religion to the classroom as well as a wider audience. Moreover, it might encourage further research *outside* the US. Krondorfer himself mentions the German-speaking area (cf. p xviii) where the interconnections of religion and masculinity have attracted academic attention only recently. Scholars there and elsewhere do not need to reinvent the wheel (and thus the rhetoric of self-marginalization, popular among some non-Anglophone representatives of the field, should eventually come to an end). Instead they can build on, contextualize and advance what has already been done in the vibrant area of (critical) men's studies in religion.