



Review of Björn Krondorfer (ed.), *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader* (London: SCM Press, 2009), xxi + 489 pp.

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Björn Krondorfer locates this reader on the subject of men and masculinities in Christianity and Judaism within the discipline of “critical men’s studies in religion” (p. xiii). The nomenclature used to define this subject is important. Historically, the term “men’s studies in religion” has been popular, due in large part to the AAR group of the same name. A good number of those working in and around this group employ very progressive political, theoretical and methodological frameworks; however, there is some truth to the pro-feminist critique that “men’s studies” can accommodate a certain “backlash” mentality couched within politically ambiguous terms such as “gender equality” and “men’s rights.” Krondorfer is aware of this problem, and the use of the term “critical” makes clear the position of the book: “a reflective and empathic stance toward men as individual and communal beings trying to make sense of their lives within the different demands put upon them by society and religion, but it must also engage these issues *with critical sensitivity and scholarly discipline in the context of gender-unjust systems*” (p. xvii; my emphasis).

Krondorfer’s context of gender-unjust systems makes for a far broader reader than one might expect, which has two interesting and important effects: first, it extends the boundaries of “men’s studies in religion”; second, it opens up the possibility to researchers of other related fields that they are also working within critical men’s studies in religion. Following a trajectory that is both thematic and chronological, Part 1 of the reader, “In the Beginning” lays the foundations, demonstrating the historical debt critical men’s studies in religion owes to studies of feminism and sexuality, via Mary Daly, John Boswell, Michel Foucault and James Nelson. Part 2, “A New Field Takes Shape” looks at some early formulations of men’s studies in religion (while blurring the gay/straight binary) via Stephen Boyd, J. Michael Clark and Laurel Schneider. Part 3, “Theorizing and Theologizing Alternative Masculinities” broadens the field further into theology and sexuality via Daniel Boyarin, Graham Ward, Philip Culbertson, Jay Johnson, Robert Goss and Stephen Moore; Part 4 “Biblical Musings” does a similar job with a biblical twist via Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Dale Martin, Ken Stone and Jeffrey Staley. Part 5, “Masculine Ideals in the Jewish and Christian Traditions” offers an historical turn via Mathew Kuefler, Michael Satlow, Virginia Burrus, Mark Jordan, Sean Gill and Charles Lippy. Part 6, “Spirituality and the Intimate Body” offers further discussion of sexuality via David Brakke, Harry Brod, Donald Capps, Scott Haldeman, Robert Long and Donald Boisvert. Part 7, “Gender, Justice, and Community” concludes by laying down the gauntlet of personal political responsibility via Krondorfer, Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, Miguel De La Torre, André Musskopf and James Newton Poling.

These contributors are listed here at some length to provide a suitable indicator of the content. Many of these names will be familiar to anyone working broadly in the area of gender and religion, and to explore this content in any depth would be to revisit old territory or require either a very long review or some rather arbitrary cherry-picking. Instead, I want to pass some comment on the way the book has been edited, as this will provide some insight into the suitability of the book as an introductory text for the subject.

It is worth noting that there was a far easier way to compile this book. If Krondorfer had stuck specifically to what most people perceive as “men’s studies in religion,” used a third of the contributors, and simply included their contributions in full, no one would have batted an eyelid. However, Krondorfer opted for a much more ambitious project, which proves to be of considerably higher value. First, as already noted, the selection of material is broad and reflects more closely the nature of the literature anyone working in the area of masculinities and religion must use in order to do justice to the subject. Second, Krondorfer has gone to the significant extra effort of editing many of the contributions in order to tighten them in line with the context of the book, and simply to fit more contributors within the covers (the use of bracketed ellipses usefully indicates where the original text has been pruned away). Third, Krondorfer has written a brief introduction not only for each of the seven parts of the reader, but also *every single contribution*, locating each text within both the book and the broad subject, and also providing a list of publications by the author and further related reading. One small gripe (for the sake of completeness): the book would be better if it contained an index.

As such, *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader* is an indispensable introduction to the study of critical men’s studies in religion. Between the selected texts and Krondorfer’s editorial introductions, the book is a course in itself. Hopefully, it will also kick-start other taught courses in this subject which are woefully underrepresented at the present time, as well as offering some extra depth to the large number of gender and religion courses out there which have a habit of glossing over masculinities. Furthermore, Krondorfer’s framing of critical men’s studies in religion should help put to rest feminist, pro-feminist and queer concerns that it conceals a masculinist agenda.

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