Both Remedy and Poison: Religious Men and the Future of Peace

Joseph Gelfer

The following address was delivered at the Parliament of the World’s Religions on 6 December 2009 in Melbourne, Australia.¹

In one of Plato’s dialogues between Phaedrus and Socrates, we are faced with the paradox of the “pharmakon.” The pharmakon is alternatively or simultaneously beneficial and maleficent; it is both remedy and poison; at once fascinating and abhorrent. I find Plato’s pharmakon a useful tool in understanding how men and masculinities function in all religions, both in their histories and futures. Without a doubt, in the name of numerous divinities, men have wrought great turmoil on the world: on women, children, less powerful men, animals, and the earth on which we live. We tend to think in these allegedly post-feminist times that many of the ills men have performed in times past are in some way solved, but they are not. Patriarchy and its damaging effects are alive and well, even among those people who speak about masculinity in spiritual terms. I want to plot a brief course of these masculine spiritualities in recent times: via the mythopoetic men’s movement, the Christian men’s movement, and how what might be described as an “alternative spirituality” men’s movement expresses itself today. These offer us an insight into the poison of the pharmakon. I will then conclude with a different vision for men and spirituality: the remedy.

When most people think of the men’s movement, the image they conjure in their minds is usually one of the mythopoetic men’s movement. It is an image of partially clothed, bearded men, smeared with mud in the woods. It is an image of men getting in touch with their feelings, weeping in the company of brothers or releasing a primal scream. It is an image of storytelling, sweat lodges, drumming and talking sticks. For many, the mythopoetic movement is synonymous with Robert Bly’s Iron John, which recreates a Grimm Brothers’ tale about a wild, hairy man, “Iron John” who becomes a mentor to a young boy. The experiences shared by Iron John and the boy are intended to reflect the stages of masculine development.

There were lots of good intentions behind the mythopoetic movement: its leaders and participants understood that there was something wrong with masculinity in society. Men appeared to be dysfunctional, and something quite rightly needed to be done about it. However, the movement made a crucial mistake. They assumed that there was some better way of doing masculinity that could be recaptured, something from the past, something that dwelled inside men which needed to be rediscovered. They did this primarily via the adoption of archetypes: Iron John, or the “wild man” was the first of these archetypes, which was followed soon after by others such as the king and the warrior. We were told that these archetypes existed whether we liked it or not. Some said, following Jung, that they
dwellled in the collective unconscious, others that they were hard-wired into the reptilian brain. And if we ignore them, we were told, problems occur, and this is why modern men were in trouble.

But the problem with these archetypes was that they promoted a certain type of masculinity. The wild man required an earthy, hirsute individual who belonged deep in the forest. He demanded challenging initiation rituals that transitioned boys into a certain vision of authentic and mature masculinity. The king archetype demanded that men see themselves at the center of their own mini kingdom, the people in their lives as subjects who need to be directed, resources to be secured and exploited. The warrior archetype demanded that men see themselves as soldiers on some kind of crusade. Life is to be framed in militaristic terms: battles are to be fought and won. All these archetypes, for all the noises about thinking of them in terms of myth and metaphor, promoted a type of masculinity that is at best oppressive, and at worst pathological and violent. Anyone thinking this interpretation is rather excessive is gently reminded of the recent tragic deaths of three people in a sweat lodge at Sedona who were involved in precisely this thing: seeking the spiritual warrior within.

The mythopoetic movement was part alternative spirituality, part pop psychology. But traditional religions also perpetuate similar problems. Around the same time that Iron John was released we saw the establishment of Promise Keepers which sought to re-establish male authority in the home. Promise Keepers is just one of many thousands of men’s ministries operating around the Western world. Today, Christian manhood has once again been realigned with biblical manhood, where the husband and father is the intermediary between his family and God. Even academics have begun to speak about this in positive terms with the identification of “soft patriarchs” who are more involved with family life than non-Christian men due to their “symbolic” headship of the family. Presumably soft patriarchy results in soft oppression.

Other men’s ministries revolve around the theme of sport. Training manuals for these ministries are laid out like playbooks, and talk about life in terms of sporting metaphors and how men must lead their families in the way a coach leads his team. Other men’s ministries base their whole identity around military themes such as Band of Brothers, BattleZone ministries and Top Gun ministries. They read books such as John Eldredge’s Wild at Heart in which the author dances around his house wielding replica swords and defining masculinity by battles that must be fought. Again, there are real-world ramifications of this, and not just by families damaged by the assumption of a patriarchal male figure. Recently, it has been discovered that John Eldredge’s book is used by the violent Mexican Christian drugs cartel, La Familia, to provide a model of masculinity to which to aspire which results in being, quite literally, murderous.

Like the mythopoetic movement, the intentions of the Christian men’s movement are often good. They want to think more closely about masculinity, and they want to support their families and communities in which they live. But their answer to this is to promote rather unsavory masculinities: male authority in the home, whether it be biblical patriarch or sports coach. Where is the mutuality and respect here? What signals are young boys being sent in these families about the role of women in society? Or, as with mythopoetic archetypes, masculinity is aligned
with violence. Why? Where is the inspiration for men who do not want to lead families, who may not even be part of a family, or who do not like sport, or playing real or imaginary war games? And we tend to think of the men’s movement as historical, but there are more and more men’s ministries every year. And new forms of men’s movement adopting themes of male power and archetypes are appearing right now.

For example, alternative masculine spirituality today looks quite a lot like previous forms of masculine spirituality. One popular book is David Deida’s *The Way of the Superior Man: A Spiritual Guide to Mastering the Challenges of Women, Work and Sexual Desire*. Deida presents himself as a kind of Buddhist sexual radical, but his message is anything but. Deida promotes a very muscular way of being a man: of taking control, making decisions and generally being a success with women. Deida is very popular in the pick-up-artist community, which provides techniques for men to seduce women, which seems rather at odds with the kind of spiritual development Deida promotes. Old ways of doing masculinity in new spiritualities appear in other venues such as Andrew Cohen’s *EnlightenNext* magazine. A recent edition focusing on the “new masculinity” kicks off with an interview with Harvard professor Harvey Mansfield, author of the book *Manliness*, which paints a picture of a feminized society that could benefit from learning about the history and virtues of traditional manliness stretching all the way back to roaming the savannah. The next article, "Beyond the Rambo Mentality" sounds much more promising; however, it speaks of "authentic" masculinity, archetypes and initiation, which could have been lifted directly out of Robert Bly’s *Iron John*. Next is an interview with Erwin McManus, a Christian minister popular at Promise Keepers events whose book *The Barbarian Way* wants men to engage with "the ancient, primal, and dangerous." This is followed by the story of Nathaniel Fick, an Ivy League graduate who learned how to be a man in the Marines. Later we read about how Scandinavian men lost their Viking spirit, the "confessions of a formerly sensitive New Age man" in which a Californian generation-Xer laments being feminized by his psychotherapist mother, and finally Cohen and the "integral philosopher" Ken Wilber bemoan postmodernity which "creates weak, inauthentic men" who have overly bought into the myth of patriarchy. It seems that even at the glittering edge of alternative spiritualities, when men are referred to we come back to the same old story: power, control, strength, the poison of the pharmakon that has got us in the hole we are in today. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

Consider this quote from a leader of a particular form of men’s movement, outlining the attributes of its participants:

- They are not, by nature, territorially aggressive and do not impose their political claims on others.
- They are not, by nature, competitive but are passionately interested in sharing with others.
- They are not interested in conquering nature but are interested in harmonious living with all of nature.
- They are not interested in denying bodiliness and carnality but are passionately involved in celebrating all aspects of human sexuality.
That sounds like quite an interesting complement to the previous forms of masculine spirituality I’ve been discussing, doesn’t it? Not aggressive, not competitive, harmonious with nature. This is actually a quote from Harry Hay, the unofficial leader of the gay men’s movement. What I find interesting about this quote, and I’ll out myself here as a straight man, is that there’s nothing specifically “gay” about it. There’s nothing in it that should unsettle even the straightest of men. Gay spirituality is a useful example for all men. I’m not suggesting that straight men should all go out and try and adopt a different form of sexual orientation, rather there are things that can be learned from the way that gay men see masculinity, and the way they express themselves spiritually.

The key issue is multiple masculinities. All the other forms of masculine spirituality assume masculinity to be a certain, fixed type of thing: specifically, a married, rather conservative man who should provide for, protect, and lead his family. Gay spirituality assumes there can be any number of ways of being a man: maybe married, maybe not, maybe tough, soft, competitive, whatever. These different types of masculinity offer complements to traditional masculinity. And as traditional masculinity in spiritual contexts has tended to be rather unfortunate, I’d suggest gay spirituality offers better types of masculinity.

But the gay issue is just a jumping off point, not the focus. I started by saying that without a doubt, in the name of numerous divinities, men have wrought great turmoil on the world: on women, children, less powerful men, animals, and the earth on which we live. Yet at the same time, many of the most peaceful and divinely inspired individuals of all religions have been men. Clearly, there is nothing inherent in men that demands destruction; clearly there is something in men that also seeks peace. The future of peace requires the mobilization of men in all faiths who reclaim what is naturally peaceful about being a religious man. It is a process of healing within each faith, between different faiths and with those who choose no faith. And it is not simply men’s work, but a partnership between men, women, children, less powerful men, animals, and the earth on which we live.

But we cannot achieve this while masculine spirituality is defined by a patriarchal nature and restrictive treatment of gender: I would go so far as to say we should reject masculine spirituality as a term because it does not seem capable of shaking these critical issues. But, importantly, this does not close down in any way men discussing religion and spirituality in terms which resonate with being a man. It opens up a conversation which resonates with any number of ways of being a man (or masculine) that rejects patriarchy. It is a pro-man conversation because it is pro-person, which by necessity must involve the liberation of all people. Feminist and queer theories and theologies have done most of the work in making way for such a conversation. What is needed now is for predominantly straight men to step up and play their part in a process which will benefit the vast majority of people. This is hardly a new or radical suggestion, but its realization remains elusive. Such is the insidious nature of patriarchy. But, as the saying goes, the bigger they are, the harder they fall.
Notes

1 This is drawn largely from the book *Numen, Old Men: Contemporary Masculine Spiritualities and the Problem of Patriarchy* (Equinox Publishing, 2009) and the article “Pray Like a Man” (24 March 2009), *The Guardian* [http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/mar/23/christianity-religion-mens-ministries].

Joseph Gelfer, School of Political and Social Inquiry
Monash University/AUSTRALIA
e: joseph.gelfer@arts.monash.edu.au
On Being Here with Others: Space, Identity and Justice

Stephen Boyd

The American Men’s Studies Association promotes ethical values of equality and inclusivity across such social barriers as race, ethnicity, and class. I explore two practices, characteristic of hegemonic masculinity—a focus on time as an organizing principle and maintaining an individualist self-identity—that undermine these values. Reflecting on the spatial orientation and communal identities of indigenous peoples, I argue that these provide helpful correctives on the way to more adequate visions of and work for justice.

From its beginnings as an academic component of the National Organization of Men Against Sexism and then as it separately incorporated in 1991, the American Men’s Studies Association has embraced ethical values promoting equality and inclusivity, seeking “the participation and membership of all men and women irrespective of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical abilities, nationality, or religious identity” (AMSA, 2000). As a board member of that organization, committed to inclusivity and equality, and as a scholar and activist in my own community, I have become aware of dynamics endemic to the particular practices and performances of masculinity shaping me that hinder that work for equality and collaboration with others who are on the other side of social barriers erected around race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, physical ability, national identity and religion.

Two particular practices involve the organization of my personal and professional life around the exigencies of time and a habit of thinking of myself primarily as a discrete, bounded individual, rather than as a member of a larger, human group. These two practices shape how I understand my ethical responsibilities in ways that may well deepen chasms between me and those different from me with whom I would collaborate. In addition, they disable me from making significant challenges to the institutionally supported power differentials based on those differences.

These practices initially came to awareness as I began to relate to the Apache of the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona, and they have been explicitly challenged by indigenous perspectives encountered in the course of my teaching. I offer here, several narratives and some initial rumination about the problems these practices cause for both seeing injustice and acting in more just ways. In addition, I want to indicate some directions toward alternative ways of being and acting.

I start with two vignettes.

A few years ago, I took a walk with my graduate school mentor, George H. Williams—at the time he was 82 years old, had served as the Winn Professor of
Ecclesiastical History at Harvard for forty years and had been retired for seventeen. He knew and routinely used more ancient and modern languages than anyone else I’ve ever known, lectured brilliantly on every period of the history of Christianity, and had the respect, and often the fear, of the graduate students I admired. But he also was one of the most ecumenical, dear spirits I have ever known. His book, *The Radical Reformation*, in 1962 gave careful, meticulous attention to marginal sixteenth century groups and brought them and their ideas, including pacifism, conscientious objection, and the separation of church and state into the mainstream of historical studies. In his fifties, he spent a research leave in Poland and learned Polish, in order to write the sixteenth century story of the Polish Brethren. Late in his career, he considered resigning his academic position to join a group dedicated to save the whales, but was advised he could do more from his academic position of influence, so he continued as a professor. He was not an elitist, distant, isolated academic.

The walk and conversation took place at an academic conference in Fort Worth; he had just given a keynote address. I was telling him about men's studies and a paper I had given on St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, too, was driven, keeping up to four scribes busy as he dictated Bible commentaries, critical editions of Aristotle, sermons, and his magisterial *Summa Theologiae*. Near the end of his life, Aquinas had a mystical experience that led him to stop his feverish work, because, as he said, “all that I have written seems like straw to me, compared to what I have seen.” Because the only thing he wrote from then to the end of his life was a brief commentary on the erotic Song of Solomon, I argued in the paper that something, perhaps, got through to him and brought this life-long celibate friar to an awareness of the beauty of the body and the wisdom in listening to it. As I spoke, Professor Williams got real quiet; when I finished, he said, “So, this men's studies approach helps us understand the imperialism of the project?” Stunned, once again, by his acuity and penchant for coining marvelously suggestive phrases, I answered, “Yes, I think so.” He looked wistfully off into the distance and said, “Oh, Stephen, I could tell you many, many things about that in my own life … but I am speaking next week at a conference at Baylor and I must return to my room and work on my lecture.” I put my arm around his shoulders and said, “It must be hard to be a Harvard professor.” “It is,” he responded as he trudged off to the dorm. He couldn’t help himself, even as he became aware of his own bondage.

The “imperialism of the project”—that sense that we must do something now, in a hurry before someone beats us to it or we are judged to have come up short—can drive us hurtling into the future. Time, then, becomes a taskmaster or—to follow Professor Williams’ metaphor—an emperor, a ruler that commands our attention, energies, and gifts. Those people, places, animals and things around us can get a little blurry and out of focus as we speed from one project to the next.

The second vignette took place during a sweat ceremony on my first visit to the San Carlos Apache Reservation in eastern Arizona. I met Wendler Nosie, now the Chairman of the Tribal Council, through John Mendez, an African-American pastor in town. I had asked Reverend Mendez to help me with a workshop on dismantling racism for a group of progressive, mostly white Baptists. Reverend Mendez said, “If we’re going to deal with racism, we need to also deal with Native Americans. Let’s invite Wendler Nosie.” I said, “Who’s Wendler Nosie?” Reverend
Mendez answered, “He’s a Chiricahua Apache, a descendent of Geronimo at the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona.” Well, Chairman Nosie came to Winston-Salem, spoke of the struggle of his people, and conducted a closing ceremony in one of our classrooms. He invited me to the annual Sacred Run that summer; it is part spiritual discipline, part political drama, part cultural celebration, and part athletic event. It is staged to call attention to the removal of the Apache to San Carlos and to their exclusion from Mt. Graham, the historical center of Apache religious, cultural, and economic life, which is now seventy miles outside the Reservation.

In preparation for the Run, they had a Sweat Ceremony; the ceremony lasts for about three hours, with four sessions interrupted by a swim in the river. At one point in the ceremony each person shares why they have come. When it was my turn, I said, “I have come to see what I haven’t seen before and what many people like me try hard not to see and to recover something I have lost. When I was young, I could look at a tree and feel like we knew each other. I can’t do that anymore and I feel like Wendsler can, and I want to learn how to do that again.”

Well, I saw a lot that week in 2002 and more in the trips I’ve taken since then: San Carlos has a 76 percent unemployment rate with 77 percent living under the poverty line; the Apache and other Native Americans are 48.7 percent more likely to suffer from heart failure, 173 percent more likely to suffer from diabetes, and 44.3 percent more likely to suffer from asthma than the general population; there are also high rates of obesity, alcoholism, and drug addiction; the federal government spends half as much on health programs per tribal member as it does on health programs for other Americans; 39 percent of families live in substandard housing and 40 percent of families live in overcrowded conditions; the average life expectancy for Native Americans is 55, which is lower than for residents of Bangladesh.2

I learned also that, for Chairman Nosie and others of the Apache people, Mt. Graham—its geography, vegetation, animal life, and springs—is at the center of their ceremonial traditions and stories, their food ways, their collective memories, and family histories. In short, Mt. Graham is at the center of their identity as Apache people. Their current physical separation from it continues to inflict harm in a multitude of ways.

The policies of the federal government, until very recently can only be described as systematic cultural genocide, with the effect—at one time or another—of suppressing religious ceremonial life, the obliteration of the spoken language, the forced separation of family members, and the removal from ancestral lands.

Having gone to the Reservation and the Run hoping to recover a lost sense of connection to the natural world, I found it ironic and tragic that people like me (i.e., European Americans) and our government have done so much to destroy the very peoples and cultures that could most help us with the current ecological crisis and our own alienation from so much of the natural world.

Work with the Apache of San Carlos, reading for a class I have taught several times now on Native American ways of knowing, and collaboration around racial divisions in my home of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, have all led to several hypotheses that invite research and reflection on the spirituality of men who share aspects of my social location. Said another way, we need research and reflection on what might be called, “the souls of white folks,” alluding to the magisterial work by
W. E. B. DuBois at the turn of the last century. That is a pretty tall order and I do not think I am up to the whole task, but it needs to be done. These hypotheses and reflections are intended as a small contribution to mapping that larger project. Those hypotheses are:

1. Our hearts and minds have been colonized in an advanced capitalist society in which our production is maximized through a complex and pervasive series of material and social rewards and punishments.
2. One of the means and effects of that colonization is a focus on time as an organizing principle of our public and private lives.
3. This focus on productivity and time can serve to alienate us from the place/space around us and from those with whom we share it and on whom we depend for our lives and flourishing.
4. The effects of that alienation include a diminished ability to know, intimately those things—animate and inanimate—around us with whom we are in symbiotic physical, economic, emotional, and spiritual relationships.
5. That lack of knowledge hinders our recognition of the ethical obligations entailed by those relationships.
6. Further, the unawareness of those ethical obligations, as well as the social isolation produced by an individualist self-perception, leaves us ill-equipped and with insufficient power to overcome, or dismantle, the systemic and institutional racist, sexist, heterosexist, classist practices and their ideological supports that harm others and ourselves.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) observed that, “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” To re-state the core of the problem, why is it that many very good people, especially men, simply are not aware that “whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” so that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (p. 290)? And, why, when we are able to see injustice, do we find it so difficult to do much about it?

Here, I want to address one aspect of this nexus of dynamics by exploring some of the effects of time as an organizing principle of a hegemonic masculinity, and identify some resources that might be helpful in incorporating an orientation toward space into our ways of thinking and acting.

**Space and Time**

Visits to the San Carlos Reservation have prompted me to offer a first-year seminar, “Seeing with a Native Eye: Possibilities for Mutual Respect and Collaboration.” Among the native authors assigned are Vine Deloria, Paula Gunn, David Wilkins, and George Tinker. In his recent book, *Spirit and Resistance*, George Tinker (2004)—an Osage—argues:

American Indian spirituality, values, social and political structures, and even ethics are rooted not in some temporal notion of history, but in spatiality. This is perhaps the most dramatic, and largely unnoticed, cultural difference between American Indian thought processes and the western intellectual tradition. *The western intellectual tradition is firmly rooted in the priority of*
temporal metaphors and thought processes, while American Indians inherently think spatially. The question is not whether time or space is missing in one culture or the other, but which metaphoric base functions as the ordinary, and which is subordinate. As noted earlier, American Indians do have a temporal awareness, but it is subordinate to our sense of spatiality, and likewise, the western tradition has a spatial awareness, but that lacks the priority of the temporal. (Tinker, 2004, pp. 105-106; my emphasis)

And,

Western, European, and euro-American cultures—in spite of demonstrable strengths—have a nearly fatal flaw…. While this flaw is most apparent today in political and economic relationships in the world, its underlying sources are the spiritual, theological, mythological, and philosophical imaginations of the West....I have described these in terms of the overwhelming mythological commitment of the West to individualism and temporality. (Tinker, 2004, p. 12; my emphasis)

I think he’s right about this. As I have said, there seems to be in me, and I assume others, a kind of temporal urgency. That urgency, in turn, can serve to isolate us from those around us, centering our attention on ourselves. Tendencies wound that closely into our minds and bodies must have roots in the stories and worldviews—the “mythological commitments”—that shape us. Tinker accurately observes that a spatial and communal awareness is not absent in western perspectives, as temporal and personal awareness is not absent from indigenous views; however, he believes that the temporal focus and individualism of western ways of thinking are overwhelming.

Rather than focus on the historical, cultural origins of these dual commitments to temporality and individualism—an important task—I want simply to illustrate them with regard to the religious and political polarizations in the US today and comment on one of their most fatal effects. Then, I want to suggest—from my own recent experience—some ways toward restoring more balance in our lives by developing more spatial and communal ways of thinking and acting.

The Priority of Temporality and Individualism in US Christianity

Despite significant differences with one another, the two groups—conservatives and liberals—that dominate US Christianity manifest a common commitment to individualism and temporality, with neither offering much in the way of a vision or motivation toward a transformed world.

Twenty years ago, the sociologist of religions, Robert Wuthnow (1989) observed that the most significant, contemporary theological differences emerged, not between Christians belonging to different denominations—as had been the case historically—but between Christians belonging to the same denominations (pp. 19-38). What Wuthnow sees is a divide between two identifiable groups—conservatives and liberals—with fairly coherent views, contending with each other within denominations and often within individual congregations and families.
On the conservative side of the spectrum, a religious/mythological perspective identifies God as a legislator, sin as disobedience, Christ’s sacrificial death as the payment of the debt of human disobedience, salvation as the forgiveness of personal guilt and reunion with God in another world at the end of one’s life or at the end of history. Concern about this world, therefore, is limited to a focus on personal morality and the freedom from secular influences that might lead one to violate God’s will and, thus, disqualify oneself and others from heaven (Gonzalez, 1999).3

The core values of many conservatives focus on individual, moral purity and an always imminently expected, and welcome, temporal end of the world. The mission for Christians, then, is to get busy eliminating moral stains in their personal lives (e.g., proscribed sexual activity, substance abuse or, even, use, unkindness in interpersonal relationships). In addition, they must urgently spread the message of forgiveness and personal transformation, while pushing back the forces of a sinful secularism, in order to prepare others for a heavenly destiny before the always imminently expected return of Christ.

The religious/mythological perspective of those on the liberal side of the spectrum identifies God as an inexpressible, elusive source of truth, sin as ignorance/obliviousness, Christ as an illuminator, salvation as personal insight and growth into a realization of one’s potential. Concern about this world is focused on the conditions necessary for the freedom to reach one’s full potential.

The core values of liberals promote personal enlightenment and development toward fuller self-realization through time. The mission, for many liberal Christians, calls on them to get busy with that self-improvement and with pushing back the forces of darkness—including the religion and politics of conservatives—that obstruct the personal freedom to do so.

In the religious/mythological perspectives of both groups that dominate US Christianity, there is little in them to motivate Christians to join hands with each other and those outside the faith in sufficient numbers to do much about the class interests, institutions, and mechanisms of power exercised by the ruling elite in our country. In the meantime those who share those interests, oversee the institutions, and employ those mechanisms lead us toward even more devastating environmental degradation, international isolation and hostility, and domestic, class polarization. In Tinker’s words,

What we [i.e., Christians] lack yet today is a creative and powerful theological foundation for the justice we desire. All our churches ostensibly take seriously the scriptural demands for justice, to some extent, yet none of them has provided a persuasive and satisfying means for arguing or achieving the desired results. (Tinker, 2004 p. 104)

This, unfortunately, is not a new phenomenon. Two generations ago, acutely aware of widespread inaction of European and American Christians in the face of the deportations of Jews and others to extermination camps, the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1973), observed, “In recent years we have seen a great deal of bravery and self-sacrifice, but civil courage hardly anywhere” (p. 5). He was puzzled by what it was about the Christian ethos that failed him and many others when
challenged by the Nazi agenda. More recently, responding from the Birmingham jail to the criticism published by eight moderate, mainline white clergymen, Dr. King lamented,

So here we are moving toward the exit of the twentieth century with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a taillight behind other community agencies rather than a headlight leading men [sic] to higher levels of justice. (King, 1963, p. 299)

Temporality and Individualism in US Politics
A similar and, often related, polarization exists, according to Harry Boyte in much of contemporary American politics. In his *Everyday Politics*, Boyte describes two political populisms that dominate the “blue state/red state” landscape today.

Conservatives tend to identify “big government” as the problem and fight, politically, for freedom from its corrupting influence on their pursuit of essentially personal virtues. The rallying cries, then, tend to turn around issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and other issues concerning personal responsibility. An unwillingness to feed “the beast” of government manifests itself in their allergy to taxation. We might add that, in addition to the corrupting influence of “big government” there is the international, terrorist threat of all those who do not share a conservative insistence on democracy (read: individual freedom). Liberals believe that conservatives, particularly religious conservatives are being duped by the representatives of business interests as they manipulate personal, moral issues or peoples’ xenophobic fears. For liberals, the enemy is “big business” and the solution is government—that means by which the common good is advanced—sometimes, when necessary, over the objections of the myopic who cannot see it. Liberals tend to have the sense that the world can be improved through a model of cooperation that seeks to build national and international institutions that “facilitate trade, diplomacy, and security” (Lakoff, 2006, pp. 38-39).

The problems with this approach are several. First, someone else does the facilitation of trade, diplomacy, and security—trained professionals in a bureaucracy. So, citizens remain removed from others with whom they have a “facilitated” relationship. Second, the basis for the unity that transcends difference is often seen as a notion of universal reason. Consequently, liberals lean on the power of persuasion to move things forward, to transform things and tend to get exasperated when those of the Right—or even in the middle—just don’t seem to get it; the sense is that they are more than a little dense. Third, liberals tend to mobilize around big, national problems—the solution of which is in the hands of those who are generally remote from them. So, relatively impersonal (traditional or electronic) petition drives constitute an important strategy. Finally, there are those who either enjoy tension and conflict and those who avoid it at all costs. Those who avoid tension and conflict are, as Dr. King pointed out, love “order more than justice” and end up doing little to change things. Those who enjoy, or have come to accept conflict, can hone a socially and politically “prophetic vision” that can become brittle—more anti-classist than thou; more anti-sexist than thou; more anti-racist than thou; more anti-heterosexist than thou—so that rather than developing a larger and larger net with increased
power to transform institutional classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism, the
group gets smaller and smaller, having alienated allies and potential allies.
Whether shaped by the religious or political right or the religious or political
left, many men have been significantly disabled, or put another way, have never
developed the capacity and skills necessary to dismantle institutional sexism, racism,
heterosexism, or classism. Given these religious and political polarizations and their
deleterious effects on a fuller, more comprehensive vision and path toward justice, I
found quite poignant the question of a student in the first year seminar I teach on
Native American issues. In an assignment we had read a passage from George Tinker
(2004):

[Gustavo] Gutierrez, like other Latin American theologians, explicitly and
implicitly identifies the preferential option for the poor in terms of social
class structure and overlooks the crucial point that indigenous peoples
experience their very personhood in terms of their relationship to the
land….American Indian peoples resist categorization in terms of class
structure. Instead, we insist on being recognized as “peoples,” even nations
with a claim to national sovereignty based on ancient title to our land.
(Tinker, 2004, p. 102; my emphasis)
The student asked:

How does it feel to have so much of one’s identity defined by one’s
family/group and the land you are on?

Implicit in the question was a strong reaction—shared by most of the other
students—to the perceived limitations implicit in those ways of identifying oneself:
1. a limitation on the very mobility that the students felt they must have in order to
maximize their earning power and/or self-realization; 2. the ability to create and re-
create oneself and one’s sense of identity, apart from one’s family and/or ethnic
group, if, indeed, there is the perception that one belongs to an ethnic group—a
perception most of the white students do not have.
These objections are strong in my students and, I must admit, in me.
However, I think Tinker and other indigenous people are on to something in their
insistence that there must be a connection between one’s notion of justice and one’s
relationship to the land and the people with whom one shares it.

Finding a Way to Here
To introduce the more constructive part of this essay, I offer another story.
One day as I was working in my yard, a neighbor came by and asked if I would
be willing to help a local neighborhood association in a fight over a landfill expansion
they were involved in. Since they had helped our neighborhood with an issue the
year before, she asked if I would go to a meeting and consider contacting a city
councilor I knew.
That evening I went to the meeting; what I heard was dumbfounding: 1. The
City-County Utilities Commission was planning to triple the size of the city landfill in
the midst of 15,000 residents within 2 ½ miles of it. That is a population ten times
more dense than that around any other landfill in the state; 2. It was, essentially, a regional landfill with trash coming from three other surrounding counties; 3. The 180 acres for the expansion had been bought in secret by the Utilities Commission, threatening the owners if they revealed the plans to their neighbors; 4. The property values of the surrounding neighborhoods, some as close as 800 feet, would drop as much as $30,000 to $100,000; 5. There had been, in the last year, as many as 6 fires at the old site, requiring calls to the fire department; 6. A report of groundwater contamination under the existing landfill had been filed with the state regulatory agency.

As we began to mobilize to raise awareness of all of this, we decided to do more research to understand why the city council would approve of these sorts of effects on its constituents inside the city limits. Surrounding counties had long sense located their landfills in rural areas away from urban populations. What we discovered was, in some ways, even more sobering: 1. The city had given over its control over the water and sewer works—the most important asset it controls, in terms of growth and vitality, to the joint Utilities Commission (UC) in 1976; 2. The rules were drawn up in such a way that all of the proceeds of the sale of water would go to the expansion of infrastructure, directing new development outside the city in the suburbs; 3. The net effect over the last thirty years is a distinct pattern of white flight with predominately white affluent suburban communities that have, because of the availability of water and sewer services, incorporated and, therefore, by state statute can fend off city attempts at annexation; 4. While the tax base of the city had shrunk as a result of this development pattern driving up tax rates for city residents, residents of suburban communities paid a fraction in municipal taxes; 5. The shift in residential patterns has meant that most of the new schools have been built in the suburbs with the effect of re-segregating our district with predominately African-American schools in the city and predominately white schools in the suburbs; 6. The creation of the UC took place four years after school de-segregation in Forsyth County—a development we do not think is accidental—a white person can live in the suburbs, work in Winston-Salem, pay less in taxes, and enjoy newer and better schools, with a very small percentage of African-American and Hispanic students; 7. The UC members are almost without exception builders, developers and bankers and attorneys linked to the development community; 8. Some of these members are instrumental in not only funding city council campaigns, but also choosing who will run for election. In all of this I and my neighbors learned a lot about the form of classism and racism in our community.

In terms of class, developers can buy undeveloped, rural land at low prices, build subdivisions, contract with UC to run water and sewer to them, and, then, sell high. There is a lot of money to be made; too bad that it is made on the backs of middle-class homeowners who have a significant portion of their retirement money invested in the home equity.

In terms of race, I have already mentioned the racial re-segregation of the schools and the differential in resources available to them. In addition, it is also not an accident that the landfill exists in one of the wards with the highest percentage of African-Americans and which is one of the politically weakest in the city. I learned that this pattern is common and is called “environmental racism.”
Armed with this knowledge and some pretty compelling arguments the neighborhood association tried to avoid the NIMBY (Not in My Neighborhood) label by cultivating support for our cause in other parts of the city. We sought help from other middle-class neighborhood groups, through the Winston-Salem Neighborhood Alliance, and with the Ministers’ Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity—a predominately African-American organization that came to embrace our cause, as another effort to combat racism in our community.

As we did that, particularly, with the ministers, we learned about other issues affecting African-Americans that had been invisible to our predominately white group. Racism was no longer abstract; it wasn’t something that affected people we didn’t know. It was about the friend of one of our group, Harold, who was wrongly accused of a string of jewelry store robberies he had nothing to do with. It was about Darryl serving 19 years for a rape and murder he knew nothing about. It was about J.T. who—though very gifted—was routinely suspended from school and had trouble keeping up academically. Our need for and development of allies, led some of us into relationships that helped us see dynamics that had been invisible to us before.

In the midst of the landfill struggle, our neighborhood group helped start an interfaith organization, affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)—started by Saul Alinsky back in the 1930s—now made up by 53 dues-paying congregations—including a mosque, a synagogue, churches, and four neighborhood organizations. In the last several years, that organization, CHANGE (Communities Helping All Neighbors Gain Empowerment) has: audited all 66 schools in the district and secured a commitment from the Superintendent to establish baseline equity standards; obtained $132,000 from the City Council for summer youth jobs; won $800,000 to keep open a downtown health clinic, used by many poor, working poor, and moderate income folks; increased voter turnout by an average of 8-13 percent in 33 precincts by contacting more than 10,000 citizens in the 2004 elections; successfully lobbied to charge school board elections from partisan to non-partisan, mitigating some of the control over education exercised by suburbanites. Currently, we are working on a $25-50 million Community/Human Development Fund for affordable housing, blight removal, local health clinics, and grocery stores in predominately African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods, and senior services.

The landfill struggle ended fairly well. CHANGE included the area around the landfill in its audit of city neighborhoods and held an assembly, attended by two hundred fifty delegates from member organizations, asking the mayor to address that issue, as well as others. Due, in large part, to that leverage, the city agreed to buy out about thirty of the closest homeowners, build bigger buffers, and use only 90 of the 240 acres originally planned for the expansion. Several lessons emerged from involvement in this struggle against racist and classist exploitation.

First, in order to make much headway against institutional racism, sexism, and heterosexism, you need power. In public work, there are two predominant kinds of power—organized money and organized people. Many of us who would like to see our institutions and our world transformed and the effects of these crippling forms of oppression lessened generally do not have a lot of the first kind of power. But we do make decisions everyday about where our energy, time and talent are going to be invested. Organizing and collaborating with other people, particularly those separated from us by race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation—to name
just a few of these dividers—requires that we make conscious decisions to do so. Those decisions bring with them costs, in terms of time, energy, money, and—in some cases public reputation.

Second, in order to organize people you need relationships with them. The IAF defines power as two or more people agreeing to do something and then doing it (Chambers, 2003, pp. 27ff.). In order to induce someone to agree to a joint plan of action, you need to obtain their consent. While you can for a time, force, intimidate, shame, or guilt to consent to a plan, those strategies are not the basis for the long-term consent and widespread consent necessary for the kind of power necessary to transform our institutions, communities and the world. The best way to win consent from someone is to develop a plan that includes their self-interest. In order to know what another person’s self-interest is, you have to ask them and then observe whether what they do is consistent with what they say. In other words, you have to develop a relationship with them (Chambers, 2003, pp. 44ff.).

Third, one’s power—in public work—depends not so much on one’s merit, academic credentials, or powers of persuasion, but more on the number and quality of the relationships one has. For example, as one of the spokespersons for our neighborhood association in the landfill fight, I came to see that the city councilors were generally not moved as much by what we said, but on what we would say—after we left the room—to people whose support they needed. Relationships of trust with people that those in power need constitute an important source of power.

Fourth, critical men’s studies scholarship has shown that developing mutually respectful relationships with people is not something many men have been socialized, conditioned, or taught to do effectively. It requires the vulnerability of listening to the heart of another and the risk of being changed by what you hear. It requires the vulnerability of sharing one’s own desires, passions, and visions. Ironically, then, learning to be appropriately vulnerable is a path to the kind of social power required to address effectively institutional expressions of, for example, racism and classism.

In conclusion, I want to note the connections among several themes touched on in this essay. As I began to pay more attention to where I was—that is, to the particular neighborhood, city and region where I live—I became aware of policies, decisions and practices that threatened my wellbeing and that of those around me. It became clear that my wellbeing was integrally tied to that of my neighbors and our wellbeing depended on the willingness of others in the city to work with us. The effectiveness of our collaboration, in turn, depended on our willingness to create new spaces to meet with, talk, and listen to one another. Those new, cultural spaces and the processes in which I participated began to change both my sense of myself and my assessment of what was possible. When our neighborhood association began the fight, we were told, “You can’t fight city hall.” We joined hands with the Winston-Salem Neighborhood Alliance and its 26 member organizations, as well as with CHANGE and its 53 congregations and neighborhood groups. City Hall was willing, then, to listen and negotiate a more mutually beneficial plan for the landfill. We learned that, in the pursuit of fairness, the fact that we belonged to a group—a neighborhood association or a congregation—mattered much more than who we were individually.
I return now to the two practices—a focus on time and an individualist identity—and the six hypotheses about “the souls of white folks.” As I became more aware of where I was, geographically, I became concerned about dynamics and conditions that adversely affected our neighborhood and larger community that were invisible to me before. My understanding of my self-interest also broadened. The threat to the property values of my neighbors did not significantly affect me, but other things did—the potential threat to the water table under the landfill, the higher municipal taxes, and the re-segregation of the schools as a result of the policies of the Utilities Commission. I saw more clearly that my self-interest was integrally connected to that of others around me. It also became abundantly clear that—for all my education and academic work—I was not going to be able to do very much about the unjust effects of the landfill expansion, without the collaboration of others. Developing that collaboration involved many hours of conversation—listening to the self-interest of others and sharing aspects of my own. In the process, my sense of identity shifted a bit. I belonged to a neighborhood and group of neighbors what were linked to other neighborhoods in particular ways.

The concern about the dynamics negatively affecting our neighborhood and shift in my self-understanding elicited an urgency to address them. That urgency lessened, somewhat, the temporal urgency I felt to maintain the schedule of the traditional professional productivity, to which I had become accustomed. That concern and shift has also altered the academic, professional scope of my work. Depending on the mission of one’s institution, academic productivity tends to be focused fairly narrowly on a very small number of specialists with whom one carries on technical conversations at conferences and in print. Currently, I am attempting to bring to my professional work some of the fruit of this new spatial awareness and sense of identity. As mentioned before, I now teach a course on Native American culture and perspectives and have developed an annual faculty, staff and student service trip to San Carlos. I have also created a service-learning course, “Religion and Public Life” that requires volunteering in a not-for-profit or other agency and introduces students to notions of relational power, social capital, and faith perspectives that encourage public work for justice.

It now seems imperative to encourage students—and myself—to be where they are, to notice who is there and how they are related to them, and to learn how to address what obstructs their flourishing and those—animate and inanimate—around them.

References


Notes

1 This essay is a revision of a keynote address given at the 14th Men and Masculinities Conference of the American Men’s Studies Association at Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI, April 8, 2006. I want to thank Jim Doyle for suggesting to the Board of Directors that I be asked to address the Conference and to AMSA colleagues over the years who have encouraged me and engaged in the critical study of men and masculinities—the late Sam Feminano, Dave Robinson, Mark Justad, Merle Longwood, Mark Muesse, Vicki Sommer, and Joann Urschel.


3 Chapters 1-4 for his description of three paradigms of theology that recur across historical eras and cultural differences throughout the history of Christianity. His Type A roughly corresponds to the contemporary conservative position, while Type B corresponds to the liberal position.

Stephen B. Boyd, J. Allen Easley Professor of Religion
Department of Religion, Wake Forest University
P.O. Box 7212 Reynolda Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27109/USA
e: boyd@wfu.edu
Of Fine Wine, Incense and Spices: The Unstable Masculine Hegemony of the Books of Chronicles

Roland Boer

Is the double book of Chronicles in the Bible a solidly masculine zone, dominated by a seamless hegemony? This article suggests not. Making use of the theories of Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci and Antonio Negri on unstable hegemonies and constitutive resistance, the article looks for signs of trouble in the dominant hegemony of the text. It does so by exploring the utopian/dystopian ripples around a very phallic temple, the overdone camp of the mighty warriors, and the concern with crucial matters of cultic performance, such as utensils, cooking and interior design. In this respect, the study may be seen as another step not only in studies of masculinity, but in opening further new directions taken in the study of Chronicles in recent years.

The two books of Chronicles are forbidding territory for all but the hardiest of readers. As a world full of men, priests, kings, battles, and a vengeful God, only a small band of biblical scholars dare to make Chronicles their home. Rarely if ever does a feminist, gay, lesbian, postcolonial, poststructuralist or even a Marxist critic dare to enter this forbidding text that begins with nine grueling chapters of genealogies. Fortunately, that closed world has begun to open up in the last few years, with utopian studies by Schweitzer (2007a), who builds on my earlier work (Boer 1997, 1999), and the feminist study by Kelso (2007). This refreshing opening also enables the study and critique of masculinity in Chronicles, not despite but because it is a work devoted to the world of men.

In what follows, I begin with some theoretical concerns, drawn from Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Antonio Negri, which deal with the unstable nature of hegemonies, the internal conflicts of ideologies and the constitutive power of resistance. From there I introduce two features of Chronicles: its nature as a literary utopia (for whom?) and its central motif of the rigid phallic temple. Yet this phallic world is not as firm as it seems, for the stories in Chronicles continually soften one’s initial impression: the overt machismo is a little too camp to be taken seriously; David and Solomon turn out to be expert interior designers; and the crucial sign of one’s faithfulness to God is through the correct observance of the temple cult—in terms of cutlery, cooking, spices, oils, incense, fine wine, and singing. What sort of masculinity is this? Let us see.
Masculinity, Hegemony and Ideology

It has become a standard if somewhat banal point that masculinity is by no means an eternal, static, and singular quality inherent to men, but that it is constructed, performed, multiple, fluid and subject to historical change (see, for example, Connell, 2005; Hooper, 2001, pp. 17–76). Masculinities may be constructed discursively, socially or economically, they may be constituted through performance, they may be fluid and constantly shifting, the multiplicity of masculinities is a feature of any historical period, and masculinities change over time, are created, die and are recreated again and again. Apart from the obligatory theoretical touchstones of Foucault, Butler, Haraway, and a host of lesser lights, another who makes a regular appearance in studies of gender and masculinity is Antonio Gramsci. Or rather, a bowdlerized version of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony that owes much to Edward Said’s misreading usually turns up. According to this perception of hegemony, it designates the dominant position, the one of the ruling class or race or gender (e.g. Connell, 2005, pp. 77–78; Hooper, 2001, p. 40). It is reinforced by force (police, both secret and not so secret, law courts and army) and persuasion (propaganda in the media, education and argument).

There is some limited truth in this perception. However, a careful reading of the many treatments of hegemony in Gramsci’s notebooks (1971; 1992; 1996; 2007) reveals that such an interpretation is superficial (see especially Boer, 2007, pp. 215–74; Fontana, 1993). Instead, Gramsci’s purpose in developing the theory of hegemony (a reworking of the Marxist theory of ideology) was to find a way to overthrow those in power, to explore how a new, liberating, hegemony might develop. A corollary to this purpose is the argument that the ruling hegemony is inherently uncertain and shaky. So also with the Bible: despite the effort in the Bible to present a series of overlapping ruling and dominating perspectives, all the way from social organization to sexuality, not to mention religion, they are very shaky indeed. Or to put it even more forcefully, the very act of asserting dominance is inherently unstable. Subversion lurks in every murky doorway and under every bed. In fact, hegemony is continually undermined from within and without. A major reason that the dominant hegemony is unstable is that it must constantly deal with insurrection—in politics, social movements, ideas, personal beliefs and so on. After all, the reason Antonio Gramsci, the communist, developed the notion of hegemony was to find a way to overcome the dominance of the fascist state under Mussolini and capitalism more generally.

To this account of Gramsci’s theory I would like to add two brief points that are relevant for the analysis of Chronicles that follows. The first comes from Louis Althusser’s argument concerning what he calls ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’—a term that adds some economic and social depth to what are usually called institutions (Althusser, 1971, pp. 121–73). For Althusser, Ideological State Apparatuses include education, religion, family, politics, the legal system, and culture. But the important point for my analysis is that while these apparatuses are zones where the ruling ideas seek to be inculcated, they are also sites of ideological struggle. And these struggles take place within the apparatuses. Although the ruling class attempts to dominate and control the Ideological State Apparatuses, their hold is unstable and contested—a point Althusser owes to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony. Ideological struggles take place in precisely these institutions. Thus, in our own day
we can witness in the debates over media representation (is it biased or balanced?),
education (public versus private, and the drive to render universities subject to the
vagaries of the market), religious institutions (orthodoxy versus social justice),
culture (funding for the arts), the continued attacks on trade unions as part of a neo-
liberal agenda, and so on.

The second point comes from Antonio Negri, whose work is simply absent
from studies of masculinity. One of Negri’s major arguments, coming out of the
workerism (operaismo) of Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, is that a dominant power is
not a given against which one resists. Rather, resistance itself is constitutive, and
power must constantly adapt and reshape itself in response to such resistance. For
Negri this creative resistance is embodied in the trade union movements, in the
global anti-capitalist protests, in anti-colonialism, and in the green and feminist
movements. I would suggest it also applies very well to studies of masculinity, for
what are assumed to be dominant masculinities do not occupy centre stage, givens
against which resistance must struggle. No, those dominant forms must constantly
change and respond to what resists them.

Obviously, Negri’s position is a step beyond those of Gramsci and Althusser,
but let us see how all of them apply to my reading of masculinity in the biblical book
of Chronicles. In this text we find a wholesale construction of an exclusively male
world of priests, but it is an unstable hegemony, one that must constantly be
reasserted in the face of a constant resistance. In this ideal world religion, politics
and gender are the dominant Ideological State Apparatuses, woven together
through the temple in a way that suggests their separation is artificial. However, the
instability of that artificial world is due to its own inconsistencies and conflicts, to
internal ideological struggle, rather than any external threat. In fact, that resistance
will turn out to be the constitutive feature of Chronicles, a resistance to which the
dominant masculine ideology must try to assert itself. So let us see how all this works
in my reading of Chronicles.

**Utopia and Phallic Temples**

I begin my reading of Chronicles with two positions, one concerning utopia and the
other dealing with the centrality of the temple. To begin with, Chronicles may be
read as a utopia, an effort to represent an ideal world that resists the world as it is
(see Boer, 1997, pp. 136–68; Boer, 1999; Schweitzer, 2007a). I should point out that
such a reading is a radical break in itself with the bulk of Chronicles’ scholarship,
which obsesses over matters of historical reliability, textual production and
transmission, manuscript variations and theology. It is a text that creates a different
memory of the past in order to construct the picture of a different present and
hoped for future. It challenges, erases, and rewrites the established patterns,
providing an appeal to alternative collective memories—embodied particularly in the
genealogies—for the hope of the future. More correctly, Chronicles may be read as
uchronian fiction. It tells a different story of the past in order to open up the
possibility of a different and better present and future—the basic definition of
uchronian literature. Chronicles presents a picture of an ideal or utopian Israel in
opposition to the strongly dystopian lines of the story in the Deuteronomistic
History, especially Samuel and Kings. By contrast with the Deuteronomist History,
which presents an increasingly apostate people and leadership, or as Schweitzer puts
it (2007a), a fatalistic determinism, Chronicles has a much more positive picture of both people and kingship. In presenting an ideal past, with the (dis)obedience of king and people acting as a trigger for immediate divine favor or disfavor, with the priests as the actual rulers, Chronicles also generates a hope for a future in which such an ideal state will be realized.

But now we need to ask a further question: for whom is this utopia? Chronicles is a document that expresses the ideas and hope of a distinct class, or rather sub-class. And that sub-class is none other than the Levites. Particularly in the sections that describe an ideal organization of the temple and its worship, the Levites, who are usually relegated to a second-class status, are granted a much greater role than in other pieces from the Hebrew Bible. Not only do they have a role in the cult, but they are entrusted with matters of defense as well. Although they are a sub-class within the ruling class, they are disenfranchised on two counts: Levites were usually placed in secondary roles to the priests; the ruling class itself was a class without much power, since Judah (or Yehud) was a province of the Persian Empire when Chronicles was penned. Without a king, with a Persian appointed governor, the clerics and scribes had to find another avenue to express their wishes. So they redirected their efforts towards the only other area they knew best: religious observance. Yet this Levitical utopia is clearly one for men. Women are few and far between in this text, especially when its central concern is the temple and its worship—an exclusively male zone.

In short, this utopia is one that belongs to the interwoven Ideological Apparatuses of religion, politics and gender in which the religious dominates.

Further, at the centre of the masculine utopia of Chronicles is the temple, a distinctly phallic temple. The narrative itself leads us to the building and organization of the temple. David passes on the task to Solomon without a hitch (in contrast to Samuel and Kings where David is not permitted to build the temple) and then we come across no less than six chapters (2 Chronicles 2–7) devoted to the construction and organization of the temple. Even in the lead-up to these chapters, David plays a massive role in preparing for the temple. But this is a literary and ideological temple, never built. I would suggest that the temple is a figure for the books of Chronicles as a whole, an image that represents the phallic economy of this ideal world.

I do not make this assertion without textual ground, for in 2 Chronicles 3.3–4 the following measurements appear:

These are Solomon’s foundations for building the house of God: the length, in cubits of the old standard, was sixty cubits and the width twenty cubits. The vestibule (ḥa’ulam) that was in front of the length, across the breadth of the house, was twenty cubits, and the height one hundred and twenty. (emphasis added)

Compare this text with the other description in 1 Kings 6:2–3:

The house that King Solomon built for Yahweh was sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty cubits high. The vestibule in front of the temple of the house
was twenty cubits long, across the width of the house. Ten cubits was its width in front of the house.

Note the difference: in the Kings text no height is given for the vestibule at all; it is 10 by 20 cubits on the ground plan. By contrast, in Chronicles height is included: the vestibule is 20 cubits across and 120 high. Given that the main section of the temple is only 60 cubits long, that makes the vestibule twice as high as the length of the whole temple! It is a massive phallic tower, a high-rise temple for Solomon, like some angular cock raised to the heavens with its balls on the ground. Commentators on Chronicles are keen to cut down this phallus: the unanimous agreement is that 2 Chronicles 3.4a is—of course!—corrupt. It could not possibly mean a massive tower of 120 cubits. However, I suggest that this text is a telltale sign of the text’s masculine economy, for it is the image *par excellence* of the overwhelming if desperate effort to assert a male-only world. The text of both books of Chronicles leads to this climax, this high point, this massive effort to assert a distinct hegemony.

With this image of the priapic temple at the centre of Chronicles a number of other texts begin to make sense. Let me deal with one example, which necessitates a dip into Hebrew terminology, namely, the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 and their formulae. The dominant formula for the genealogies makes use of *holidh*, translated variously as ‘was the father of’ or, in a still classic translation, ‘begat’. So we get ‘A *holidh* B, C, D….’ As in ‘Abraham begat Isaac’ (1 Chronicles 1:34). Semantically, there is nothing exceptional about the formula, partly because we are so used to the statement that such-and-such ‘begat’ a child, or became the father of a child. The problem with all of this is that at a basic level the *holidh* formula leaves the mother entirely out of the process. Where the mother’s name does appear, we find *yaledhah*, ‘she bore’, the form of the verb (Qal) in which the mother is the direct subject, the son the object, and the father the indirect object. And so we get, ‘X bore Y for A’ (see 1 Chronicles 2:19, 21 and so on), or just ‘X bore Y’ (see 1 Chronicles 2:17; 7:14). However, with *holidh* we have a different form of the verb (Hiphil), which means strictly, ‘A caused to bear B’—for instance, ‘Abraham caused to bear Isaac’. The question then becomes: whom did he cause to bear? The mother is the obvious answer, but the formula itself effaces her presence, attributing the verb for giving birth to the man. Thus, what we have in the genealogies is an endless list of men producing men, with the occasional exception, such as Keturah, Abraham’s ‘concubine’ in 1 Chronicles 1:32, or Tamar in 1 Chronicles 2:4, or Ephrathah in 1 Chronicles 2:24, or Caleb’s concubines in 2 Chronicles 2:46-49.13

Let us estrange14 the genealogies for a moment, asking what it means for men to ‘beget’ men without women. The image that keeps coming back to me is of the whole human tradition from Adam onwards with men giving birth to men. How did Abraham manage his pregnancy? Did he worry about how he was going to give birth? How did he deal with the hormonal changes? Did he produce the child all on his own, coming in his own mouth perhaps? The genealogies become a huge story from the beginning of time of pregnant men, waddling about, belly-buttons popped out, waiting for the birth of yet another son from their own bodies. In the very effort of Chronicles to restrict the ideal world to men, they have to become pregnant, carrying a child and giving birth if the line was going to continue. The masculine


hegemony of Chronicles has already started to come unstuck, if indeed there was any uniformity in the first place.

**Machismo**

This phallic world is not as rigid as it might be, the temple less than solid and somewhat flaccid, the apparent masculinity showing signs that it is not quite what it at first seemed to be. A series of texts indicate that this masculinity is queerer than we might expect. Indeed, a distinct campiness pervades the books of Chronicles. On top of the auto-generation of the genealogies, three other items of this increasingly strange masculinity emerge from Chronicles: excessive if somewhat comical machismo; an extraordinary concern with interior design; and an intense emphasis on those crucial cultic items such as utensils, incense, spices and freshly baked bread.

Testosterone seems to be overabundant in the ‘mighty men’ (*hagibborim*) of David, who flex their muscles all the way through Chronicles, wielding swords and massive spears as though they were prosthetic penises (see 1 Chronicles 11:10–47). They slaughter hundreds of enemies at a blow (Jashobeam and Abishai), dispense with gigantic enemies bare-handed (Benaiah and the Egyptian), and leap into snow-filled pits to wrestle lions (Benaiah again)—enough to shame even those mad dog Viking berserkers. Yet the mightiest act of all is not some feat that would outdo even these astounding achievements; instead it is nothing less than King David’s glass of water. Out in the field of battle, David looks wistfully out over the troops, licks his lips and croaks, ‘O that some one would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate’ (1 Chronicles 11:17). A heartrending wish, is it not, a small thing to ask these great men? But there is one small problem: that well with its sweet, fresh water, lies a good distance away, behind Philistine lines. Dumbly obedient to their king and his wish for a drink, Jashobeam, Eleazer and third unnamed man, crash through enemy lines, draw out the water from the well as masses of Philistines run towards them, faces contorted in anger and swords at the ready, and carefully carry the mug of water back to David—presumably without spilling a drop.

Given that these men are David’s bodyguard, one would expect them to be well organized, just like the temple and its furnishings (see below). Sadly, it is not so, for they can hardly count at all, let alone get themselves into any sense of order. Do these three brave souls who fetch David a drink belong to the two, the three or the thirty? An extraordinary and bewildering passage from 1 Chronicles 11 leaves everyone confused. Is Jashobeam at the head of the thirty (1 Chronicles 11:11) or of the three (2 Samuel 23:8)? For his part, Eleazer believes he is just behind Jashobeam among the ‘three mighty men’ (1 Chronicles 11:12). But then another mighty man, Abishai, feels that he is chief of the three, except that he ‘had no name among the three’ (1 Chronicles 11:20). What is going on here? Perhaps the next verse will help us: ‘Among the two was he more renowned than the three, and he became their leader, but unto the three he did not come’ (1 Chronicles 11:21). If we are confused, then spare a thought for poor Abishai. To add to the confusion, Benaiah turns out to ‘have a name among the three mighty men’ (1 Chronicles 11:24). Then again, perhaps he didn’t; he certainly was better known than the thirty, but he wasn’t actually part of the three (1 Chronicles 11:25). One can only assume that David
feared for his own life at the hands of these dolts who mill about in numerical confusion, especially when Benaiah was appointed over David’s bodyguard (1 Chronicles 11:25). Reading this passage, I can’t help thinking of the oxymoron ‘military intelligence’.

However, the real answer to organization for battle lies elsewhere—in the temple choir. Later, towards the end of the second book of Chronicles we meet King Jehoshaphat, face to face with the marauding army of the Ammonites, Moabites and men of Mount Seir. Unfazed, Jehoshaphat asks God what he should do (2 Chronicles 20:1—17). The answer: sing! Forget complex maneuvers like ambushes, pincers or disciplined advances under cover of the archers. No, faced with the enemy, Jehoshaphat ‘appointed those who were to sing to Yahweh and praise him in holy array’ (2 Chronicles 20: 21). They were to beat back the enemy with the refrain, ‘Give thanks to Yahweh, for his steadfast love endures forever’ (2 Chronicles 20: 21). The result: God takes control of the battle and enemy ends up slaughtering itself through ‘friendly fire’. Battle as a musical: all that is left for the victors is gather the spoil and head for home, still singing (2 Chronicles 20: 24-8).

Masculine hegemony? If so, it is not what we would expect. In fact, I would suggest that here a resistant masculinity is emerging that makes mockery of the phallic rigidity of the temple. What appears in this battle account is perhaps the central theme of Chronicles, namely correct observance of the cult. Follow the minute rules for organizing the temple and for worship and God’s blessings will smile on you. If not, then a curse soon follows. Incense mixed incorrectly, a golden basin out of place, a false note sung—these unforgivable sins among many others would bring God’s immediate wrath, usually in terms of marauding foreigners, strange diseases, loss of those valuable sons the men labored so valiantly to produce, and gruesome early deaths.

Cult Matters: The Finer Things of Life

All this campy machismo is in the end a sideshow for Chronicles (which is a shame in many respects). After all, the temple is the main concern of these two books of the Bible, which brings us to the matters of interior design, organization, crockery and other masculine matters of cultic correctness. Here at least, the men can organize themselves.

And what an organization it is! It begins with David, who is no hack when it comes to interior design, and then that organizational skill passes (genetically?) on to Solomon. David leaves Solomon a detailed shopping list for an exclusive home furnishings store (see 1 Chronicles 28:15-18 and 29:3): gold and silver lamp-stands, tables and bowls, forks and basins and cups of pure gold, a golden altar of incense, precious stones throughout the temple, and even the pièce de résistance, a golden chariot for those cherubim on the ark of the covenant. Anything David can do, Solomon can do better: he ensures that every corner of the temple is adorned with gold, decorates the tops of each pillar with necklaces of pomegranate and gold, and above all pays special attention to the curtain concealing the most sacred place, the Holy of Holies. That, stipulates Solomon, must be woven ‘of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen’ (2 Chronicles 3:14), and it must be embroidered with cherubim. The list is endless, as is Solomon’s delight with these vital matters of state: forks, tongs, snuffers, fire-pans, lamp-stands, pots, shovels, finely wrought and
carved wash basins, not to forget the all-important flowers (see 2 Chronicles 4: 1-22). Solomon, it seems, had a soft spot for the finer things in life.

How did one care for such an elaborate interior? The forward thinking David has it in hand, for he appoints no less than 38,000 Levites in the thirty-plus age group (1 Chronicles 23:3). Even they were not enough, so David drops the age barrier to twenty (1 Chronicles 23:24). What were they to do? Lead the odd worship service? Pray? Meditate? No, they were to clean, cook the breads and wafers and baked offerings, mix the various oils and ... sing at every opportunity (1 Chronicles 23:28-31). To accompany them others were to strum lyres and harps and ring cymbals. So involved were these tasks that they were rostered on a monthly basis; even the mighty men we met above came in on the act (see 1 Chronicles 25-27).

Perhaps the best summary of these vital tasks appears towards the beginning of the first book of Chronicles:

Some of them had charge of the utensils of service, for they were required to count them when they were brought in and taken out. Others of them were appointed over the furniture, and over all the holy utensils, also over the fine flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, and the spices. Others, of the sons of the priests, prepared the mixing of the spices, and Mattithiah, one of the Levites, the first-born of Shallum the Korahite, was in charge of making the flat cakes. Also some of their kinsmen of the Kohathites had charge of the showbread, to prepare it every sabbath (1 Chronicles 9:20-32).

What do real men do in Chronicles? They concern themselves with crockery and cutlery, furniture, fine flour, wine, oil, incense, spices, flat cakes and showbread. Everywhere we find the singers; released from any other service, they were rostered on to sing day and night (1 Chronicles 9: 33). Picture the scene: the men in the temple, finely dressed and perfumed, mix the spices, cook the flat cakes, arrange the furniture, ensure that the holy crockery and cutlery are correctly ordered; as they go about their tasks, they are surrounded by groups of singers and choristers who launch into song 24/7. A musical? An early version of piped music? Masculine?

In case we might think that these foppish dandies were engaged in peripheral matters, like some high church Anglicans, then we need to think again. Cultic correctness is, for Chronicles at least, a matter of life or death—in short, God’s favor or disfavor. Perhaps the best example of its importance appears in some words uttered by king Abijah, soon after the breakup of the united kingdom after Solomon’s reign. After the breakup of the two kingdoms—faithful Judah and rebel Israel—face each other. Abijah begins by pointing out the cultic errors of the wayward Israelites, and then he says:

But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him. We have priests ministering to the Lord who are sons of Aaron, and Levites for their service. They offer to the Lord every morning and every evening burnt offerings and incense of sweet spices, set out the showbread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lamp-stand that its lamps may burn every evening; for we keep the charge of the Lord our God, but you have forsaken him. Behold, God is with us at our head, and his priests with their battle trumpets to sound the call to battle against you. (2 Chronicles 13:10-12a)
Are the signs of faithfulness an upright heart, a prayerful and moral life, justice for the poor, a humble walking with your God? Or does it require the offering of sweet spices at the right times, setting out the showbread on the gold table and making sure that the golden lamp stand keeps burning? No and yes would be Abijah’s answer to these questions, berating the Israelites as he did so for their failure to live up to these standards. Yet even here there is ambivalence. Abijah’s confidence may well be covering a deeper uncertainty. Standing there in his carefully washed linen robe with its jiggling tassels and tinkling bells, his beard trimmed and carefully oiled, Abijah has yet to realize that even his preferred approach does not live up to what Yahweh wants, for in 2 Chronicles 30 his successor, Hezekiah, would lead all the people to become aware of how inadequate their cultic observance had been. Yahweh was obviously a difficult god to please.

**Conclusion**

Chronicles consistently undermines the masculine hegemony it so desperately seeks to establish; it is a very unstable hegemony, an Ideological State Apparatus that is deeply conflicted within itself. It is a text full of queers doing their thing, whether in the genealogies of men begetting men, in the comic machismo of the ‘mighty men’, in the interior design of the temple, or in the attention to the finest detail of temple organization and decoration. Or, given that it is an utopian representation that was never realized, is it a very different masculinity, an alternative hegemony from what we might have expected, a resistant masculinity that must be thwarted by more conventional phallic models?

**References**


Notes

1 Needless to say, the reading offered here differs from anything the reader will find in the standard commentaries on Chronicles. See, for example, Curtis (1910), Ackroyd (1973), Japhet (1993), McKenzie (2004), and Knoppers (2004a; 2004b). Even Jarick’s mildly different commentary (2007a; 2007b) does not come close.

2 I am actually falling in line here with the standard scholarly position on Chronicles and the cult, but see Schweitzer 2007b, who argues that a text like 2 Chronicles 30, with its repentance and unworthiness for keeping the cult the way they have, the people seek forgiveness.
3 ‘Ideology’ Althusser famously defines as the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence, thereby revolutionizing Marxist approaches to ideology (it is not simply false consciousness). It is not the imaginary relationship itself that is ideology—for instance, an illusion such as belief in justice, or God, or the honesty of one’s rulers. It is not, in other words, a deliberate concealment of the truth by a conspiracy of priests and the powerful. Rather, ideology is the way this imaginary relation is represented. It operates at a second remove from reality.


5 In contrast to ancient Greece and Rome, there is still relatively little on this subject in biblical studies. See especially the work of Stephen Moore (1996; 2003), David Clines (1995) and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (1993), who make far greater use of deconstructive strategies which soon run up to their limits.

6 See the references in note 1.

7 In traditional historical critical scholarship such a perspective has been described as eschatology or messianism (Braun, 1979, 59–61; Williamson, 1977, p. 135; 1982, pp. 24–6).

8 The desperate effort by Knoppers (2001) and Labahn and Ben Zvi (2003) to salvage some role for women in Chronicles only reinforces this point.

9 So Kelso 2007, but see the argument by Schweitzer (2003 and 2007b) that this disenfranchising of priests, Zadokites and the high priest has an implicit democratizing tendency, since it breaks the stranglehold on power by the traditional priesthood as well as moving the focus away from the monarchy.

10 A standard point in Chronicles’ scholarship; see the references in note 1.

11 For a comparable assessment of the role of the temple in Ben Sira, see Camp (2002). See, however, Kelso’s study (2007), where she argues that the temple also contains within itself a womb, appropriating the productive capacity of women into a male-only world.

12 On what follows, see especially Kelso (2007), whom I follow quite closely here.

13 In fact, when the mother’s name does appear in the formula, the syntax breaks down. It seems as though that masculine world cannot handle the presence of women even in the structure of its sentences. For example, in 1 Chr 2:18 there is the strange sentence: ‘Caleb the son of Hezron begat (holidh) Azubah, his wife, and Jerioth’. Or is that ‘Caleb the son of Hezron begat by means of (’et) his wife, Azubah and with Jerioth’? It is unclear here whether the ‘et is a marker of the direct object—in which case Caleb begets his wives—or the preposition ‘with’.

14 The estrangement effect, or Verfremdungseffekt, owes itself famously to both Bertholt Brecht and the Russian Formalists (Ostrenanie).


16 This is the well-known ‘immediate divine retribution’, first identified by Julius Wellhausen (1994 [1885], pp. 203–10). To spell it out: the divine response to obedience or disobedience is immediate blessing or punishment, particularly by the
kings and often exhibited in terms of cultic correctness (see, for example, 2 Chronicles 29–31). The inevitable punishment that follows disobedience may be averted by repentance after a warning. However, this immediate retribution may not be as smooth or as immediate as many have assumed. See especially Dillard (1984).

Roland Boer, Visiting Research Professor
Research School of the Humanities, Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200/AUSTRALIA
e: roland.t.boer@gmail.com

Joseph Gelfer

The academic study of men and masculinities is often one of lamenting the constructions of masculinity in popular culture and then analyzing the negative implications these have on men. *The Good Men Project* provides a welcome alternative to this process offering, according to the blurb, “a groundbreaking anthology of thirty-one essays by a broad range of men—rich, poor, black, white, gay, straight, urban, rural, famous, ordinary—all writing about the challenges, obstacles, triumphs, failures, and defining moments they encounter.” The book is part of a larger initiative which includes an accompanying DVD documentary and The Good Men Foundation, which aims to promote positive ways of doing masculinity by encouraging dialogue around the subject and supporting projects such as Street Potential, The Boys and Girls Club of Boston, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay, and Dorchester Youth Alternative Academy. The book and the Foundation are the products of James Houghton and Tom Matlack, both of whom have a background in business and finance: an unusual start, but let’s read on.

*The Good Men Project* is divided into four sections: fathers, sons, husbands and workers. The “fathers” section includes: a single dad learning to live alone with his young daughter; the birth of a son for a man who worries about manliness; coming to terms with a son’s autism; coping with the death of a daughter; navigating the empty nest; the shock of new fatherhood; two sons’ battle with substance abuse; a father who goes busking with his daughter; suicide and birth; a gay father’s experiences overcoming depression; maintaining sobriety. The “sons” section includes: not wanting to fight as a boy; learning lessons from fathers; fathers’ decay and deaths. The “husbands” section includes: lessons learned from women generally, and in sexual relationships; a gay man’s search for a partner; the death of a wife; the breakdown of marriages and their repair. The “workers” section includes: a stay-at-home dad; the restlessness of a nomadic war photographer; a prisoner who learns how to live again in the wider community; a youth worker who takes troubled youths on wilderness trips; a Peace Corps worker in Mongolia; an athlete; an anonymous-feeling office worker.

It doesn’t sound like a lot of fun, does it? Indeed, the book is in many ways an unexpected return to existential ultimate concerns that seem to be rather out of fashion these days: death, meaninglessness, isolation, freedom. But that is the value of *The Good Men Project*: it largely ignores the feel-good factor and shows of success, silently acknowledging that it is precisely these which often contribute to problematic masculinities. Instead, we have meditations on failure, loss and brokenness. The redemptive lesson, of course, can be found in the Leonard Cohen lyric: “there is a crack in everything, that’s where the light gets in.”
It is also what is *not* in the book that is interesting for a popular discussion of men and masculinities. With the possible exception of former NFL linebacker Andre Tippett’s contribution (which speaks of the value of martial arts in focusing the spirit), there is a noticeable absence of normative signifiers of masculinity. Sure, there are references to men who have been in the military, or who have been a success in business; however, in most popular men’s literature these would be used to demonstrate some form of “authentic” masculinity, rather than simply serving as background to the actual story. The second noticeable absence is animosity towards, or placing blame upon women: despite the book containing various experiences of divorce, there is none of the all-too-usual snipes against women and the bias of the divorce courts. Even when a moan looks on the cards, it does not come. Take, for example, Charlie LeDuff’s contribution about being a stay-at-home-dad: when turned away from the Mommy and Me yoga class for being male, he’s peeved, but writes, “I left without incident. Why shouldn’t women have a club where they can be free from the stink of testosterone?”

In the context of *JMMS* there are various occasions when spiritual or religious themes are taken into consideration in the masculine performances portrayed, a few of which stand out among the most memorable stories in the anthology. Kent George looks back to his boyhood in a stereotypical-yet-real Irish Catholic family in Boston and his desire not to be a fighter. Bruce Ellman writes of how, over a number of years, he came to know both his father and Judaism. Julio Medina, while incarcerated in Sing Sing, undertakes a Masters degree through the New York Theological Seminary and is inspired on his release by his faith in God to work with other inmates. If these stories were contained within the pages of an academic journal, and framed by some references to Laurel Richardson, Carolyn Ellis and Norman Denzin, they would make some neat pieces of autoethnography.

*The Good Men Project* is a welcome contribution to popular conversations about men and masculinities. Within a teaching environment it could also be a useful resource for undergraduate gender courses as an example of non-fiction literature focused on men that runs counter to expectations of traditional masculinity. Hopefully, the wider hopes surrounding the book and Foundation will prove fruitful, and will not be compromised by various forms of men’s movement (such as Father’s Rights, Mythopoets, Pick-up-Artists, Men’s Ministry, Men Going their Own Way) who will no doubt see a great advantage in appropriating the honor of being “good men.”

Joseph Gelfer, School of Political and Social Inquiry
Monash University/AUSTRALIA
e: joseph.gelfer@arts.monash.edu.au

Robert J. Myles

The concept of “otherness” has become a major theme of study within the humanities over the past half-century. As part of the influence of feminism and the prevalent appeal of poststructuralism, “otherness,” seen as socially constructed and contingent rather than natural and essential, has become widely used in explaining the construction of the self and the formation of self identity. Since its inception in the 1980s, masculinity studies has paid much attention to masculinity as a subjectivity and the ways in which it is constructed against certain “others.” While histories of masculinity have generally examined these constructions within frameworks that define them against the feminine, this book contains a collection of essays that move towards exploring historical instances of masculinity and male identity when defined as much by their relations to other men as by women. The editors astutely point out that a focus on the male-female binary can unnecessarily limit the usefulness of the “otherness” concept, which, in addition to reinforcing ideas about the essentialisms of gender, overlooks the influence of masculine alterity on the formation of both male self-identity and masculine social ideologies.

Consisting of thirteen essays from scholars working across the fields of art history, history, and literature, this collection examines some of the forms of “otherness” against which ideas of masculinity have been defined in different contexts. Organized into six sections, the essays cover masculine spaces such as the outdoors and the natural world, the gendering of sexual orientations, to various instances of masculine socialization including heroic adventuring in the twentieth century, militaristic influences on masculinity, and knighthood in the medieval period. This vast array of subject matter makes for an interesting assortment of approaches to the study of masculinity, but also illuminates the reoccurring themes of otherness and masculine alterity.

For the purposes of this review, I now provide a more detailed account of two particular chapters that deal specifically with masculine spirituality. While most of the essays intersect in some way or another with a broader definition of spirituality, I believe these two chapters will be of most interest to the current readership.

The first chapter, “‘A Canoe and a Tent and God’s Great Out-of-doors’: Muscular Christianity and the Flight from Domesticity, 1880s-1930s,” by David B. Marshall, focuses on the life of a Winnipeg-based Presbyterian minister and popular novelist, Reverend Charles W. Gordon. As a well-known exponent of imperial muscular Christianity, Gordon’s novels followed a successful formula of “the triumph of a muscular Christian missionary over the forces of evil” (p. 26). Marshall assesses Gordon against a tension apparent within histories of the period between men who
identified with the escape from their domestic responsibilities, and those who sought the warmth and security of home and family. Gordon, who himself frequented a cottage as a wilderness retreat, believed that time spent in the wilderness would ensure the development of character and vigor for young men. This required a delicate balance between domesticity and intimate family ties with the pursuit of adventure and other manly activities. As Marshall identifies, spending time at the cottage did not, for Gordon, mean fleeing domesticity. Rather, it involved both the practice of manly skills, whether canoeing or chopping wood, but also the strengthening of family relationships as these skills and activities were passed on.

Another contribution, “Making (Protestant) Men: Alfred and Galba and the East India Company Soldiers,” by Susan Murphy, argues that the presence of a juvenile fictional book, Alfred and Galba, on the reading lists for soldiers in the East India Company during the 1820-30s is understandable given its promotion of a distinctly positive account of British masculine identity. In the story, two brothers begin reading the Bible and quickly deduce that Rome, as a human institution, is corrupt and in need of eradication. The brothers are subsequently banished to an uninhabited island by their rigidly Catholic parents and clergy. On the island they live in an idyllic setting, and, clearly modeled on Robinson Crusoe, view their circumstances as a result of God’s providence for their faithfulness. They eventually establish a thriving colony of Protestant Christians upon the island, the foundation of which consumes a significant portion of the novel.

Murphy suggests that the narrative establishes a crucial link between masculinity and Protestantism; namely, that the protagonists achieve their masculinity through their discovery of the Protestant faith, in addition to their rejection of the Roman Catholic faith, which is implicitly constructed as emasculating. She then argues that the presence of Alfred and Galba in the libraries established for soldiers makes sense given that its narrative is concerned with the construction of a particular reader—that being a Protestant male—who understands that his faith elevates him above Roman Catholics and justifies a colonial relationship to “pagan” races. Such a message would have been seen as beneficial by the East India Company, who probably thought the fusion of a masculine identity with religious instruction would improve both the conditions and character of the soldiers and, by consequence, strengthen its colonial and imperial presence.

The essays are mostly focused on white Western constructions of masculinity situated within the Americas and Europe—as the editors put it “a cultural focus on Anglo-Saxon masculinities” (p. 10). Some essays, however, do assess the formation of the white self against the construction of the non-white “other.” Andrew Wells, for instance, looks at masculinity and its other in eighteenth century racial thought, and Murphy, of course, mentions the interconnected relationship between the colonial soldier and the colonized other. Such readings help to break the trend of perceiving masculine subjects without appropriate consideration of liminal spaces. It was intriguing to view how the contributors dealt with their common assumption that any definition of masculinity draws on numerous definitions of normativity and alterity (such as sexuality, race, economic, or other social categories, and not just hegemonic masculinity) to construct complex forms of identity. In doing so, they avoid the trap of narrowly focusing on masculinity in isolation from other influences on the formation of a coherent self.
Because of the wide-ranging time-span covered by the essays, they demonstrate an ability to read history through a lens of masculinity in quite different contexts and across different disciplines. They are also successful at problematizing masculinity as a construction. The book will be of use to those who desire to see how particular case studies of history done from this perspective might be approached.

Robert J. Myles
The University of Auckland/NEW ZEALAND
e: r.myles@auckland.ac.nz

Björn Krondorfer

John Powers, who teaches Asian studies at the Australian National University, investigates early Buddhist discourses on masculinity, especially as they relate to the Buddha himself and to those who follow the path toward buddhahood. It is “a hybrid study,” Powers writes in the Preface, “merging traditional Indology with contemporary studies of the body and sex” (p. x). The book gathers an abundance of material from Buddhist textual sources that illustrate the predominance of a male-centered universe, whether this pertains to the Buddha’s ideal physiognomy, monastic rules, culture-bound social hierarchies, soteriological expectations, or gendered advice to male and female disciples dispensed by the Buddha or by his biographers and interpreters.

Powers, who has steeped himself in the study of Buddhism, admits that for a long time he “overlooked the tropes” of masculinity and that he lacked an “interpretive grip” to situate “Indian Buddhist notions of gender and the body,” which seem so “foreign to contemporary understandings” (p. 226). Those tropes, however, are plentiful and obvious. “Despite the fact that the vast majority of Buddhist texts were written by, for, and about men, and [that] these texts contain a wealth of material on cultural notions of normative manhood, the body, sexuality, and male sociality,” Powers writes, “there has been surprisingly little interest to date in discourses relating to masculinity” (p. x). The works by Michel Foucault (on discursive regimes), R. W. Connell (on hegemonic masculinity), Thomas Laqueur (on the cultural history of sex), Pierre Bourdieu (on habitus), and Judith Butler (on the performative nature of gender) offer Powers a conceptual framework for acknowledging the preponderance of masculine images and normative gender prescriptions in sacred texts. Thus, A Bull of a Man is the first book-length contribution to a critical study of men and masculinities in Buddhism.

Perhaps one should say what the book is not in order to guide a reader’s expectation in the right direction. It is not a book about contemporary Buddhism or about Buddhist cultures around the globe. Rather, it is a study of texts from a limited geographic area (India) and a defined historical period, namely from the Buddha’s life in the fifth century BCE to the eight century CE, with a concluding chapter on Tantric Buddhism up until the twelfth century and the eventual disappearance of Indian Buddhism with the Muslim invasion of Northern India.

The book is also not an introduction to either Indian Buddhism or to the study of gender in religion. Yet, a wide audience will benefit from reading it. Those interested in questions of religion and gender without a particular background in Buddhism can easily follow the wealth of material gathered in this book (Powers’ use of English equivalents for the Pāli and Sanskrit terminology is of great help in this
regard). Experts in Buddhist studies and Indology, on the other hand, will find an opening for a fruitful discussion about a neglected topic, namely the issue of masculinity in historical Buddhism, which Powers embeds in the current debate on women in Buddhism. References to gender theory and to the original Pāli and Sanskrit texts are amply footnoted, so that scholars can trace the primary sources as well as secondary literature in order to crosscheck the material or deepen one’s knowledge about a particular topic.

Finally, *A Bull of a Man* is neither a philosophical essay on Buddhism nor a meta-historical discussion of gender theory. Rather, the bulk of the work consists of summaries and retellings of collected materials from a variety of Indian Buddhist texts that speak to the “core themes of masculinity, sex, and the body” (p. 229). Although Powers situates these texts within their cultural histories and occasionally offers theoretical and comparative suggestions, his work is best understood as a source book on images, stories, anecdotes, discourses, rules, medical treatises, ritual techniques, mythological biographies, and cosmologies relating to masculinity in Indian Buddhism. While soaking in the abundance of stories and indulging in the exuberance of the religious imagination (especially by the time one reaches the Mahāyāna tradition), readers might get lost in the details. But the point always remains the same: masculine tropes are ubiquitous! “The tropes highlighted,” Powers states, “could be multiplied many times over, and the reason for drawing them from a wide variety of texts is … to demonstrate how widespread and pervasive they are in literature relating to the figure of the Buddha” (p. 66).

Besides the brief Preface and Conclusion, the seven chapters are organized chronologically and thematically. Chapter 1 introduces the general attributes to the body of the Buddha, a body described as beautiful, virile, perfected, skilled in martial arts, strong, and transcendent. Physical beauty and noble family origins were seen as befitting a Buddha (as a result of karma), and so was the fact of his manly nature, since women were seen as inferior and the female body a result of negative conduct in previous lives. Hence, studying images of Buddha’s manliness is studying cultural views of normative masculinity. What is considered a beautiful male body, however, might be quite different from Western expectations: a retracted, sheathed penis with the testicles hidden, a disproportionately large tongue (the Buddha can insert his tongue into his ears), a large cranial lump, a long curl of hair on top of his head, eyelashes like a cow, a mouth like a bimba fruit ... and so the list continues with a total of 32 major physical characteristics and 80 minor characteristics. To most Westerners today, Powers cautions, “a person with such a body would appear like a freak” (p. 10). Yet, this non-muscular body with its “flaring hips” (p. 10)—which nevertheless is stronger than any human warrior—reflects the manly beauty ideal in Indian Buddhist texts. Such attributes are, of course, not descriptions of the historical Buddha (which are not available to us) but of the literary character of Buddha as mahāpurusa (great man) that he becomes in the tradition that begins with the “first council” of the five hundred perfected monks (arhats).

Chapter 2 traces biographic-hagiographic portrayals of Buddha’s life, from his birth to his upbringing in the royal palace, from his ascetic training to his awakening in Bodh Gaya, from his various defeats of the demon Māra to his son Rāhula’s induction into the monastic order. In sum, “Buddha was constructed as a man ... whose entire life demonstrated his complete and effortless mastery of all possible
“desirable masculine traits” (p. 65). Chapter 3 describes the rules and expectations of celibate monks and the strong disciplinary codes by which monastic men had to abide. Neither intercourse nor penetration were permissible: if the penis entered a woman “even for the width of the seed of a sesame plant,” it was considered “sexual indulgence” (p. 72). Similar to the early Christian monastic culture, public confessions were required of monks who had violated any of the rules. Another similarity between the medical-spiritual literature in Western antiquity and ancient India concerns male semen. Since semen is perceived as life energy, celibacy is a practice of retention of vitality and heat (tapas). Of interest to the reader might also be the characterization of sexual deviance (pandaka) in Buddhist texts. Sexually deviant behavior covers a wide range but astoundingly little is said about homosexuality. According to Powers, such silence should not be mistaken for permissibility but interpreted as a sign for heterosexuality occupying the “default position” for monks (p. 94).

Chapter 4 addresses the Buddhist ambivalence toward the body. Uncontrolled bodies and excreting fluids were a source of disgust which, however, could be “closed off through meditative practice” (p. 114). A dry body was a sign of self-composure and mindfulness (usually ascribed to the Buddha), while an oozing and sweating body was one of defilement and anxiety. Meditative practices in the face of decomposing bodies were developed in order to conquer sensual attachment and pleasure. Male monks were admonished to meditate on male corpses, lest they were tempted by decomposing female flesh. Not surprisingly, women’s bodies were seen as naturally prone to impurity (which served as further proof of their “deficient karma” [p. 125]). According to classical medical texts, like the Caraka’s Medical Compendium, women desired “copious amounts of semen” (p. 129) for sexual satisfaction, while a man was advised to ejaculate quickly so as not to waste his vital energies and, hence, live longer. Similar to Christian treatises on celibacy, Buddhist texts regulating the lives of celibate men do not consider involuntary nocturnal emissions as “offenses against the monastic code” (p. 131). Further sources on monastic sociality are gathered in chapter 5. Central is the issue of male-male friendships. Monks aspired livelong friendships, among them the exemplary couple of Sāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. “Male company,” Powers sums up, “is conceived as comparatively problem-free,” and the monastic lifestyle is described as lacking “the emotional entanglement and interpersonal difficulties of worldly affairs” (p. 161-62).

Chapter 6 moves to the sūtras of the Mahāyāna tradition (“Greater Vehicle”), beginning in the first century CE. There is a shift from the uniqueness of the one Buddha in the earlier texts to the “incalculable number of beings who have reached buddhahood” (p. 169) in Mahāyāna, from the “superhuman figure” (p. 166) of Buddha in the Pāli canon to the nonmaterial body of a cosmic Buddha, from the earlier “bull of a man” (p. 26) to the new masculine ideals of bodhisattvas. The bodies of the bodhisattvas are “hard, diamondlike, real, infallible, and indestructible” (p. 182). The teachers of Mahāyāna claim, like the Gnostics in Christianity, to have access to true wisdom taught by Buddha only to his “advanced disciples” (p. 169). No longer grounded in any kind of historical realism, the religious imagination becomes unbounded, verging on the truly fantasmatical. The large tongue of the Buddha, for example, now extends not only to his ears but to the Brahma heavens, and from his tongue “innumerable bodhisattvas” emanate, each sending “their tongues into the
farthest reaches of the cosmos” (p. 178). From the seventh century onward, Tantric Buddhism further expands such religious imaginings (chapter 7): here, buddhas are depicted as “wrathful deities” (p. 204) with multiple legs, arms, and heads. Tantric techniques deliberately flaunt ideas of purity and celibacy on the basis of the teaching of emptiness. Its logic declares that true practitioners cannot be derailed when engaging in sexual activities or other socially constructed taboos. Tantric rituals are about channeling energy: with the right mind and attitude, all activities, even those that are socially forbidden, can be rechanneled into “not only harmless but soteriologically beneficial” energies (p. 209). Such libertine energy channeling is, however, not free from gendered assumptions. “All of the tantras I have studied,” Powers concludes, “assume a male perspective, were written by men for men, and assumed that males would be performing their rituals ... Female consorts are not described as deriving any spiritual benefit from their participation” (p. 215).

These are some of the images and stories retold and collected in Powers’ study on Indian Buddhism. In the Conclusion, aptly titled “Oversight and Insights,” the author reminds the reader that “ancient Indian” ideas about “masculine perfection ha[ve] not resonated with Buddhists in other countries, and these characteristics are rarely even mentioned by contemporary Buddhists, particularly in the West” (p. 227). This statement sums up both the boundaries of this particular study—with hopefully more studies on male gender to emerge from other Buddhist locations—as well as Powers’ challenge to contemporary Western perceptions of Buddhism to begin investigating the unapologetically masculinist views in the canon. In this sense, it is hoped that A Bull of a Man will not be the first and last critical study of men in Buddhism but only an opening salvo.

Björn Krondorfer
St. Mary’s College of Maryland/USA
e: bhkrondorfer@smcm.edu
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.

Joseph Gelfer, School of Political and Social Inquiry
Monash University/AUSTRALIA
e: joseph.gelfer@arts.monash.edu.au
I’m 65, and I must be getting old. I am still trying to figure out the paradigms of masculinity from the 1960s through the 1990s, when I was in my 30s, 40s, and 50s. I am trying to figure out whether I care about being a Provider, Protector, and Impregnator (David Gilmore), or what it really means to be a “marketplace man” (Michael Kimmel), or how to perform my male gender in ways that do as little violence as possible to women and children and the earth, or how to break free spiritually from the oppressive misogyny and patriarchalism of institutional monotheism and the history of Biblical exegesis. Perhaps I’m not unlike those who are stuck in Second Wave feminism, looking at the emergence of Third Wave feminism and thinking “Wait. There are still problems that need more attention before we move on to something new.”

Almost twenty years ago, I wrote a book called Counseling Men (Fortress Press, 1994), in which I attempted to address some of the issues that proceeded out of my personal and cultural struggle to be a better father to my two children. I didn’t have all the answers then, but thinking back, I am struck by the negative hermeneutical lens through which I wrote Counseling Men in contrast with the positive hermeneutical lens adopted by the various authors included in Oren and Oren’s Counseling Fathers. Probably influenced by my training in psychotherapy, my own writings on fatherhood were shaped by my reaction to my father’s neglect in walking me through the Oedipal struggle, his seeming disinterest in teaching me how to be “a man” (whatever that means), and his general absence from my life, in keeping with the work of Guy Corneau and Samuel Osherson. Men of my generation will understand, at least viscerally, what I am talking about, and how we have spent our lives struggling with the resulting woundedness.

All that is a background to explain my surprise when I began to read Oren and Oren’s collection of essays about something called “The New Fathering Movement.” Perhaps because my children are now in their 30s, my attention has shifted too far away from my responsibilities for nurturing my children into a world that is as free from gender damage as possible, turning my attention instead to the task of “re-authoring” my own life as a male in the last decades of his life, and trying to figure out what that means and how to live into the “generativity” that Erik Erikson suggested as being a mark of maturity in later life. At the same time, I was pleased to see that our understandings of masculinity continue to grow, and perhaps it is a mark of the continuing maturation of the larger men’s movement that positive interpretations of the role of fathering are being explored, bearing in mind the lessons learned from both the women’s and men’s movements of earlier decades.
Counseling Fathers is a collection of thirteen essays written by academics, counselors and psychologists, and educationalists. The opening essay, “The New Fathering Movement,” by Ronald Levant and David Wimer, tracks the historical background of studies on masculinity and fathering, and examines the emergence of the new father role beginning in the late 1980s. This new role attempted to take seriously the criticisms of traditional masculinity that were generated by Second Wave feminism, but it also has taken into account the significant changes in American gendered behavior during the 1980s and 1990s, including the fact that two-thirds of all divorces are now initiated by women. As they remark:

In our view, women’s increasing willingness to leave marriages is related to attitude changes. Basically, women want a better deal...They have been on their gender-role journeys for most of their adult lives, and they really are tired of waiting for men to catch up and join them on an equal plane, although Black women may have become tired of this much earlier than white women. (p. 9)

Levant and Wimer explain women’s dissatisfaction with men’s continuing behavior by discussing the “the male code,” a set of socially constructed and socially reinforced rules delineating how “real” men should behave; the inherited assumptions (“the sturdy oak” theory) that men should not show weakness or display emotion; and “discrepancy strain,” or the psychological distress that men feel when they fail to live up to the cultural ideals of masculinity. This is not new; these issues were identified already in the 1980s, and a number of writers in the men’s movement challenged males to pluck up the courage to model new ways of being mature and responsible husbands and fathers. The antidote today seems to be to encourage men to become more intimately involved with their children, to counter this negative gender role legacy among their sons, and to provide their daughters with supportive and liberating parenting. Again, this has all been said before. What makes this collection of essays worth reading are the subsequent chapters that attempt, based on both qualitative and quantitative research, to teach men how to become more involved with their partners and children through the perspectives and techniques of “new fathering.”

Chapter 2, by Chen Oren, Matt Englar-Carlson, Mark Stevens, and Dora Chase Oren, explores the possibility of a “strength-based perspective” that can replace the “deficit-based perspective” out of which too many men still operate. Fathers need to be encouraged to discover what they can do, rather than wringing their hands about what they can’t do. The authors structure their suggestions about new fathering around three strengths: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. This combination is referred to as “generative fathering,” for it emphasizes the strengths and positive qualities of fathers. However, because few men indicate that they have had satisfactory role models as fathers themselves, and little experience in caring for their siblings, the authors argue that new fathering must be intentionally taught, rather than “figured out.” The suggested venue for this educational endeavor is the counselor’s office or structured programs. The chapter provides a very helpful and detailed case study of a man who had lost his wife and young child through a divorce
precipitated by his substance abuse and emotional isolation, though the case study is too brief.

Chapter 3, “An Assessment Paradigm for Fathers and Men in Therapy Using Gender Role Conflict Theory,” by James O’Neil and Melissa Luján, explores further the concept of generative fathering, particularly as a means to weaken the power of traditional patriarchy. Gender Role Conflict (GRC) is defined as “a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others. GRC occurs when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles result in restriction, devaluation, or violation of others and self” (p. 50). The four domains of GRC include the cognitive (how we think about gender), the affective (how we feel about gender), the behavioral (how we act because of gender training, or respond to and interact with others), and the unconscious (how gender dynamics outside our consciousness produce conflict). The application of the GRC diagnosis is explored creatively, so that it includes not only the stress that results from breaking out of the gender stereotypes an adult male has created, but also the stress that some fathers feel when their sons deviate from traditional masculinity. The chapter is also useful in its emphasis on how children internalize their father’s emotional and psychological pain and the adult male’s unconscious “father wound.” The authors observe that few counselors and therapists are trained to diagnose and work with GRC, or in fact, to address gender issues in the therapy room at all! Without such sensitivity, counselors and therapists tend only to focus on provider roles, discipline, protection, and the enforcement of a moral code, overlooking altogether some of the other critical factors in a male parent’s identity, such as spiritual and sexual education, emotional literacy, and self-confidence to nurture.

For the purposes of a review in this particular journal, it is interesting to note that the first time that the subject of “spirituality” is even mentioned is one-quarter of the way into the book, and then only briefly. Only two of the thirteen chapters purport to intentionally include the topic of spirituality, a subject of concern to the readers of JMMS: “Mexican American Fatherhood: Culture, Machismo, and Spirituality,” by Joseph Cervantes, and “Challenges and Clinical Issues in Counseling Religiously Affiliated Fathers,” by John Robertson. Cervantes’ essay defines spirituality quite loosely, as a part of the construction of Mexican American masculinity:

a Mexican American man cannot be fully complete in his manhood nor as a parent unless he is able to recognize the truth of his word, the sense of responsibility, and the rejection of any abuse. In addition, to take time to reflect and pray, be sensitive and understanding, speak with support and clarity to others, and model honesty and love are understood to be fundamental aspects of being a Mexican American male and a father. (p. 88)

One would hope that all fathers, no matter their race or culture, could recognize these as admirable qualities and integral aspects of the new fathering. Cervantes fails to address the predominantly Roman Catholic heritage of Mexican Americans, including the strong sense of patriarchal privilege built into that religious system. Robertson’s essay is both much stronger on the topic, and yet it too is limited. Robertson begins with a question: “The dilemma can be perplexing: how to help a
man who maintains that his clearly ineffective fathering practices are rooted in his religious values?” The counselor is caught in a dilemma: will the father misunderstand challenges to his parenting style as being challenges to his religious beliefs? If the father can separate parenting style from religious beliefs, is the counselor then equipped to handle the possible repercussions of a father’s identity becoming less stable when his spiritual foundation is rocked? In general, this is a very useful and challenging essay for any counselor to read. For example, Robertson suggests that not knowing about a father’s religious views may be a violation of the American Psychiatric Association’s insistence that multicultural awareness and sensitivity be part of a mental health treatment plan. The author argues that spiritual assessment should be part of the treatment plan for any man who is experiencing gender-role strain in his responsibilities as a husband and father, yet few of the standard psychometric instruments are suitable for assessing spirituality outside its traditional Christian forms.

None of the essays in this book address any form of spirituality outside the organized denominationalism of Christianity. To my mind, this is a significant shortcoming of the book, for almost all cultural and spiritual heritages have gender assumptions built into them that can easily and invisibly spill over into ways in which masculine stereotypes are privileged and responsibilities gendered.

This is a significant weakness in the book, since mental health is presently understood to include the integration of mental, physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual wellbeing. Yet this weakness should not detract from the overall usefulness of this collection of essays. Fully two-thirds of the book demands culturally competent clinical interventions by mental health practitioners who are treating gender role conflict for the purpose of encouraging new fathering, whether culture is defined in terms of ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation. I was pleased to see this, for cultural sensitivity and awareness are slow to enter much of the men’s movement literature, in spite of the fact that most scholars in the field understand masculinity as a cultural construction. In addition to the chapter on Mexican American fathering, there are chapters on Asian American fathering, African American fathering, as well Caucasian fathering, and other chapters on teen fathering, gay fathering, and fathering by older males, including grandfathers.

In late December last year, I functioned as the officiant/celebrant at the wedding of my daughter Katie to a great guy named Jim. My daughter and son-in-law look forward to being parents themselves in the future. Although the book is generally oriented toward the technicalities of counseling and psychotherapy, it contains useful-enough information that I plan to give them a copy to read. Strength-based fathering is still a new idea for many, even in my children’s generation, and to be effective, needs the support of both men and women, no matter their age.

Philip Culbertson
The University of Auckland/NEW ZEALAND
e: p.culbertson@auckland.ac.nz
In the second half of the twentieth century, Christian feminists critically addressed gender-neutral concepts of theology and church. Their arguments were not exclusively opposed by men within churches and theology but sometimes taken on. Although the last thirty years witnessed a range of gender-theoretical discussions and a pluralization of perspectives—including the development of critical masculinity studies—until now, it seems, only little cooperation between gender-conscious women and men within the field of theology has developed.

As a starting point in the context of German theology, the publication Mannsbilder. Kritische Männerforschung und theologische Frauenforschung im Gespräch (2006) edited by Marie-Theres Wacker and Stefanie Rieger-Goertz can be mentioned. This volume Theologie und Geschlecht, edited by Heike Walz and David Plüss, shares the concern of exchange between gender-conscious women and men within the field of theology. The initial point of this book lies in the concrete institutional and social contexts of the formation of the “Netzwerk Geschlechterbewusster Theologie” (Network of Gender-Conscious Theology). The network first met in the context of collegially organized meetings with the slogan “blinde Flecken” [blind spots] in Basel in 2003 (p. 10). This volume documents the first output from this network for the general public and is the first publication in the new series Dialoge querbeet. It offers a collection of articles by 24 authors, most of whom are located in Switzerland and Germany, two in the USA, one in Argentina, and one in Austria. Most contributors belong to the church or academic-theological settings. Their denominational background is mainly Protestant.

The volume starts with Heike Walz’s substantial introduction. More than simply an overview, Walz discusses the existing research in the field of theological gender studies, the previous exchange between feminist approaches and men’s studies within the field of theology, and further questions perspectives on that issue. The subtitle of Walz’s introduction is blinde Flecken, which she uses in reference to the already mentioned reasons for the formation of the network. But Walz also wants to cover several issues that have been neglected so far by research. She mentions the necessity of viewing men as gendered subjects (pp. 12, 14–15), the controversies about female delinquent and privileged women (pp. 12–13, 17–18), pleas for a pluralization of female perspectives (pp. 13, 17–18), and the reception of constructivist gender theory within theology (pp. 13–18). Walz addresses subjects that have been extensively discussed within feminist and gender-political contexts since the 1980s and are still of current interest.

Apart from the leitmotif of “blind spots,” of special interest to Walz is the concept of deconstruction by Jacques Derrida—and its further development by
Judith Butler—in the context of gender-theoretical discussions (pp. 12, 15, 17, 19, 29). According to her, this concept offers potential for the network because of its key idea of the indefinability of Geschlecht/gender (p. 19). But Derrida’s concept of deconstruction is not limited to gender-theoretical matters but deals with questions of truth and essence. It addresses ideas of metaphysics with the aim of deconstructing them. Derrida’s theory of deconstruction constitutes no less than a substantial challenge to theology. Walz raises concerns for theological implications when referring to an anti-metaphysical stance (p. 29), but unfortunately she leaves the readers with open questions. Nevertheless, the reader can take away suggestions for further thought about the specific characterizations of the categories gender and religion. With respect to deconstructivist understandings of Geschlecht/gender, it remains unclear how deconstruction as a theory and method could be fruitfully applied to the field of gender-conscious theology. Reading through the volume one gains the impression that—apart from a few exceptions—“women” and “men” are not only the central subjects and objects of this field but rather the constituent sources for defining Geschlecht/gender. Walz herself characterizes her deconstructivist understanding of Geschlecht/gender in offering some catchwords like fluidity and indefinability (pp. 17, 19), and she critically discusses the limits of and rivalries between different definitions of Geschlecht/gender in specific contexts (p. 14). The volume itself documents those gender-theoretical differences.

*Theologie und Geschlecht* is structured in five parts, each of which consists of two dialogues discussing a particular issue. Part One (Theologie und Geschlechterbilder) negotiates questions concerning different experiences of women and men regarding “birth” (Scheuter, Oldenhage, Borter, Plüss) and “body” (Krondorfer, Standhartinger). Birth as a theological issue is reflected by Sabine Scheuter and Tania Oldenhage in terms of personal and female experiences, overshadowed by gender-specific expectations and dealt with too little pastoral care. Based on this appraisal they introduce some feminist theological conceptions of pregnancy and birth and critically reflect their underlying understandings of femininity. In his response, Andreas Borter complains about the specific female perspective and refers critically to women-centered definitions of family. David Plüss adds his personal experiences regarding the birth of his child and depicts his feelings of pain, helplessness and hope. Both male authors express their general agreement with the relevance of the matter and both demand a broader consideration of fatherhood and male experiences—a claim that Scheuter and Oldenhage do not deny in their response.

Part Two (Theologie und Geschlechtsidentitäten) offers discussions of individual and collective identity formation in the context of network-building (Rödiger, Bachmann) and introduces basic ideas for implementing queer theory into the field of theology (Schippert, Söderblom, Brinkschröder). Claudia Schippert, Kerstin Söderblom and Michael Brinkschröder introduce their work by explaining “queer” and queer theory, which leaves little room—especially for Schippert—to engage theological considerations. Her remarks are reduced to questions about ethical consequences for queer perspectives. Söderblom offers an exemplary analysis of the film *Fremde Haut—Unter die Haut* by Angelina Maccarone. Both authors demonstrate how queer theory is deeply interlocked with questions of difference beyond the issues of gender and sexuality. Of special interest is the
recurr ent mentioning of liberation theology in the context of queer theoretical approaches. Schippert, as well as Söderblom, seem to be affected by this approach. The issue is taken up by Brinkschröder, who offers a critical and differentiated discussion of Schippert’s and Söderblom’s theoretical and political references, elaborating on similarities and differences between queer theory and liberation theology.

The two dialogues in Part Three (Theologie und Männ er geschlecht) deal with “male megalomania” (Walser, Pöm per, Rödiger), especially in regard to the masculinity of Jesus, and with different concepts of theological men’s studies and deconstructive gender studies (Fischer, Heß). The dialogue between Martin Fischer and Ruth Heß demonstrates how shared interest in gender-conscious theology does not have to start with or lead towards shared concepts of Geschlecht/gender and theology. Their divergent positions, which are both representative of the field of gender-conscious theology, are stated clearly—although Heß is more detailed in her argumentation, but they are not further discussed. Fischer does not fully respond to Heß’s offer to take on the challenge of dealing with their differences.

In Part Four (Theologie und Geschlecht im Gottesdienst), issues around gender and liturgy (Plüss, Bieler, Becker) and sermons (Becker, Glasser, Plüss) are introduced. Brigitte Becker reflects on the ambivalence of feminist sermons, which, for her, is caused by the complex situation of communication between the preacher and the listening church community. The relevance of language, which is stressed by Becker, is questioned from a Catholic point of view by Christine Glasser. For Glasser, the idea of the presence of Jesus Christ during a sermon is of great significance and relativizes the importance of the preacher’s words. David Plüss takes on the concept of “confessional competence” (pp. 223, 232–233) and links it to the “biographical I,” which he argues reflects more accurately Becker’s feminist self-conception.

The fifth and last part of the volume (Theologie und Geschlechter-Gerechtigkeiten) negotiates questions of theology and gender justice by means of “education” (Neuhoff, Pöm per) and “development” (Chung, Bünker, Bichsel, Kolb). Meehuyn Chung tries to combine her understanding of interwoven relationships between people and ambivalent aspects of knowledge and power within a concept of web-theology. This web-theology is embedded in questions of gender and gender justice because of two aspects: first, for Chung, questions of participation and knowledge accumulation are of special urgency for women; second, the idea of indissoluble connectedness between people and their environment is important in relation to the idea of femininity. In response, Arnd Bünker describes different forms of knowledge and self-organization in Brazilian cities, which he connotes as either “male” (the model of mafia-like knowledge forms; p. 276) or “female” (democratic knowledge; p. 277). Heinz Bichsel problematizes the concept of “development” and Internet use, while Andrea Kolb introduces the example of a Latin-American women’s network named “con-spirando,” where the Internet is embedded within a social context and primarily functions as a medium for information and advice for young women.

Are these dialogues successful? To answer this question it is important to acknowledge different subjects and perspectives: female and male perspectives, different theological disciplines, different understandings of Geschlecht/gender, and the issue of dialogue between theology and gender theories. The volume
communicates such variety, including competition between different theoretical backgrounds and unease over exclusions. A range of voices is missing: trans-identities are mentioned but not integrated; differences between Europe and Latin-America are not represented; apart from mostly Protestant and a few Catholic perspectives, no other Christian denominations are included. Finally, parts of the volume read more like an introduction into different fields of gender studies while the theological focus seems to drift away—which is a problem that accompanies many disciplinary-based approaches to gender.

Altogether, the volume is—despite the critical remarks—absolutely worth reading. The dialogues take on a number of contemporary issues concerning gender and theology. Mostly, however, they inspire because of their verve, interconnectedness and candor—precisely because of their gaps.

Márcia Elisa Moser
Freie Universität Berlin/GERMANY
e: marcia_moser@web.de