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Susan Abraham, Geraldo De Mori, Stefanie Knauss (eds.), *Masculinities: Theological and Religious Challenges*. London: Concilium - International Journal of Theology - SCM Press: 2020, 150 pp.

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This publication discusses the theme of masculinities and their relevance to theological studies and religious practices. Susan Abraham, Geraldo de Mori and Stefanie Knauss edited this short, distinctive and thought-provoking research. This undertaking concentrates on three key words: *masculinities, religions and patriarchy*. Seven out of eleven authors, mostly men, come from the global North, which agglomerates the major portion of men and masculinities studies. The authors come from a wide geographical field: Australia, USA, Africa, India, Paraguay, Austria and Brazil.

This tome invites theologians and religiously minded

individuals to a “self-critical reflection on the ways in which Christianity has supported the creation and reinforcement of notions of masculinity that uphold hierarchical structures from which (some) men benefit at the expense of subordinate ‘others,’ both men and women” (p.9).

The book is divided into three parts. Namely the leading essay *Men, Masculinity, God: Can Social Science Help with the Theological Problem?* is by Raewyn Connell, a sociologist and internationally renowned authority on the sociology of gender, opens this series. With crystal-clear prose, Connell describes her data on masculinities (the reader can find further details of it in *Masculinities* 2005). Her theory, based on social empirical studies, includes four masculinities: *hegemonic, subordinated, complicit* and *marginalised*. Connell has

strongly highlighted that the masculinities framework is not to be used as a sociopsychological typology; but should always be applied in a dynamic context of social gender relations. In this text, Connell excels in presenting the concept of hegemonic masculinity that is always at the top of the hierarchy of gender relations.

Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as “the pattern of social conduct by men, or associated with the social position of men, which is most honoured, which occupies a central position in a structure of gender relations, and which helps to stabilise an unequal gender order as a whole.” (p.17)

Herbert Anderson in *A Theology for Reimagining Masculinities* encourages Christian theologians to catch up and raise awareness that we are living in a “new era of more fluid, expansive, non-binary understandings of being human” (p.25). He suggests that theologians consider the concepts hegemonic masculinity and ‘toxic masculinity’ as a conceptual tool for building up equality, diversity and inclu-

sion in gender relations in churches, religious congregations, and theologies.

Anderson, Vincent Lloyd and Julie H. Rubio adopts the term ‘toxic masculinity.’ The phrase is quite recent and widely cited in the literature of the gender. This new nomenclature is by no means based on empirical analysis. Connell points out that “the term ‘toxic masculinity’ has come into use in journalism quite recently, especially in the USA, as a result of the #Me-Too movement.” (p. 17).

Part two, composed of six papers, the longest and most diverse of the volume, discusses the sociology of masculinities around culture, religion, and politics. Three authors are worth highlighting here. Ezra Chitando in *Masculinities, Religion, and Sexualities*, a well-informed exposé, remarks about the interpenetration among masculinities, religion and sexualities in Africa. He warns that “apart from African women theologians, most African scholars of religion and theology have not been as forthcoming in addressing religions and sexuality in

the three main religions in Africa, namely, African Traditional Religions, Islam and Christianity." (p.54).

In *Orthodox Ideology and Masculinity in Putin's Russia*, a bold treatise by Nicholas Denysenko, applies the concept of hegemonic masculinity to explain the indestructible ties between the Orthodox church and Vladimir Putin's well-known political system. He shows that "patriarchal constructions of masculinity are staple features of post-Soviet Russian identity, and the Russian identity, and the Russian Orthodox Church functioned as a convenient source for usable components of powerful and patriarchal empire" (p.74)

Finally, we can cite Angelica Otazú's findings, one of the few contributions from the global South here, *Masculinity in the Guaraní Religious Tradition*. Otazú's writing aligns with the notion of patriarchy within the religious culture of the Guaraní civilization in South America. She affirms that "the Guaraní culture is remarkably male orientated. Religion is, not exclusively, but predominant-

ly in the hand of men, and it is through them that the dominant aspects of the cultural *ethos* are expressed in a more clear and sensitive way." (p.100).

The very last section addresses the masculinities within the Catholic Church. Leonardo Boff, in *Clerical Masculinities and the Paradigm of Relationality*, weaves eclectic considerations about the celibate condition and the sexual abstinence of clerical masculinity. Boff asserts the Catholic church's endless struggles against theories of gender and human sexuality has its basis in Saint Augustine "who had the greatest influence on Christian moral teaching, especially as sexuality. He regarded sexual activity as the path by which original sin entered the world, with the result that every human being is a sinner without personal sin, but through solidarity with the sin of Adam and Eve." (p. 129). Unfortunately, Boff does not address the great problem of patriarchy and machismo in the Brazilian Catholic Church.

In *Masculinity and Sexual Abuse in the Church*, Julie Hanlon Rubio questions the cleri-

cal masculinities that commit sexual abuse. According to the author, these crimes, for the most part, are discreetly covered up within the scope of the male clergy coterie. She stresses that the concept of gender can contribute greatly to understanding the abuses committed by priests. The author draws on Judith Butler's gender conceptions (performativity of gender), which differs greatly from Connell's social empiricism. Butler's approach has largely been criticized for not being able to acknowledge intersections of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and sexual orientation.

In the last article of the series, Theresia Heimerl, in *Essentially Different Men? Varieties of Clerical Masculinity*, introduces her outstanding investigation of the social construction of clerical masculinity from the beginnings of Christianity to the present day. She also throws light on important questions about the present and future of clerical masculinities in the face of such transformations in gender social relations in recent centuries. Heimerl states that "clerical masculinity is not an alternative

form of masculinity in the sense of being a break with traditional heteronormativity, but rather its raising to a higher ontological plane through the negation of sexual activity." (p.114).

This compendium touches on thorny issues of theology and religion. It underlines the importance of gender as a social structure for a better understanding of injustice and acknowledgment of gender within religious institutions and theological traditions. The world of clerical masculinities is hard to penetrate. Certainly, the topic is not new in academia. This body of work is crucial, since it powerfully attempts to inform numbers of readers within and outside the clergy of the importance of masculinity studies.

I would maintain that the global South is backward in gender studies, and particularly with regard to masculinity studies. In this zone, the concept of gender as 'women's stuff' still strongly predominates. We still have a long path to tread in order to perceive men from the South as gendered ontologies.

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