

BOOK REVIEW

Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love*, Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015, pages:182, ISBN: 978-0-8028-7299-9.

Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Associate Professor of Theology at Earlham School of Religion, through her book *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love* communicates a strong message, of sharing God's mercy through embracing the other. In this book the author develops an Asian American constructive Theological vision by setting her own story and narrating the hardships, racism, discrimination that she experienced from the hands of Whites when she was living in North America. She explains the existing differences between Blacks and Whites by comparing the harsh and pathetic living situations of the poor Blacks and the lavish communities of the wealthy Whites. She ascribes the root for the process of racial discrimination to a Christian theology where the racism and prejudice were shaped in part by a Dutch Calvinist theology that was used to maintain the colonial status quo. She is of the opinion that Christian theology was central to the production of race in the 'New World'.

Wherever there is an inordinate amount of injustice and oppression towards people of colour in our societies, women and girls are often the most vulnerable victims of oppression. She argues that it is because of the patriarchal pathology that women are continually mistreated and abused. She also explains the presence of racism and patriarchy in the present day political context with ample examples. She speaks about the role of Church in confronting the sins of racism and sexism in our society today, and suggests that it is only through the power of the Spirit, the heart and soul of Christian theology, we could eliminate this oppression and achieve justice, peace, healing and hope. She points out that focusing on God as Spirit is more welcoming and will open doors for further dialogue, understanding and acceptance.

This book invites all people into a collective introspection and discussion by providing a deeper theological perspective on God as Spirit and contributes to the revitalization of North American Churches. It is her considered view that the North American Church would survive and grow in this modern world only if it addresses the crucial problem of the other.

The book consists of six chapters with a short introduction. The first chapter titled "Foreign women in the Hebrew Bible" provides a comparative study of the treating of foreign women in Ezra's days and the immigrant women in the present time, intending to develop a biblical understanding of the promise and problems of embracing the other. Chapter Two examines the particular history, social context, and life of Asian immigrant women in North America, also illuminating the existential plight of foreign women today. She speaks about the set of challenges that the Asian immigrants face in North America. Much confusion was created mainly because of the clashing of ideas and traditions caused by different religions, languages, cultures, etc. The European and the Asian immigrants were treated differently and it was purely based on race and colour. Thus the Asian migrant women are marginalized in the West.

In chapter Three, she presents women as the other from a Postcolonial perspective. She begins this chapter by saying religions are famous for making distinction between "us" and "them" by depicting the multi-caste and religious context of India. In order to substantiate her argument on discrimination she quotes Edward Said, a Palestinian American literary theorist, and his book *Orientalism*, where he argues that "the Orient" is an invention of the Western imagination and the West use this term as a way to assert its cultural superiority over the East. Under the heading "Asian Women as the Other" she pinpoints some of the incidents where Asian women had been sexually exploited and talks about the inhuman sex tourism and human trafficking. She brings to light an issue of a double oppression of Asian North American immigrant women where they are oppressed by their own traditional cultures and then by the dominant Western culture. Asian women are viewed only as commodities,

at times considered worthless and often pushed to the margins of society. She is of the opinion that the concept of a delivering God has had negative effects and caused grave damage. Rather she suggests the need to find alternative ways of reimagining God that are not only good for a few select people.

The fourth chapter titled "Overcoming the Gendered Division of Humanity" speaks about the importance to highlight the women's movements that are taking place to affirm dignity of women and to support their leadership in the society. Some feminist theologians have already foregrounded the importance of women's experiences in theological understanding. This chapter provides some examples of historic and contemporary faith-fuelled feminism. Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom should help us to search for a more egalitarian society by overcoming the gendered division.

Chapter Five offers a theological reconstruction of Spirit as God. Here she develops an understanding of the Divine as Spirit God, the one who empowers and liberates the marginalized. The author relates the marginalization of women with the understanding of God. In the Western Christianity God was perceived as the Almighty. The patriarchal image of God had negative effects on women, and the White men used this as a tool to subjugate women and people of colour. The patriarchal understanding of Scripture and God is a challenge to the Christian ideal of preferential option for the poor. She discusses Spirit God discourses in Scripture and also in the continental philosophy. The understanding of Spirit God heals the wound existing in the society.

Last chapter is on the transformative Spirit of love which empowers everyone to work for reconciliation between men and women. A great source for restoring the union and love between men and women is the gracious love of the Triune God. The Greek word *Eros* is brought as the vital soul for transforming the world. The Divine Eros can eliminate all the dividing aspects of our society. She points out some factors that prevent us from embracing the other and suggests few steps to rectify the situation. *Perichoresis* – the mutual indwelling of the three

persons of the Trinity – is shown by the author as an inspiration for everyone to embrace the other.

She concludes her book by explaining the term 'model minority' and why this title prevents the Asian American women to raise their voice against these kinds of painful discrimination. She ends with a hopeful note that the powerful Spirit will help and empower them to overcome the difficulties and to flourish. She also includes a postscript where she challenges everyone to become channels of God's mercy by reaching out to the marginalized and embracing the other.

The author speaks about the importance to recognize the problems that women face today and to dismantle the system that gives rise to them. She is very optimistic that a discussion of women's identity and being will help us to move forward towards equality and reconciliation between men and women. We can live holistically with others by seeking, embracing and welcoming differences with dignity and grace. This is a very relevant book with a systematic presentation of some of the present issues. Moreover it is a feminine approach on women's problems in North America, conveying a strong message, that is to cross the boundaries of gender, race, class and religion, and embrace the other.

Roby Vadana