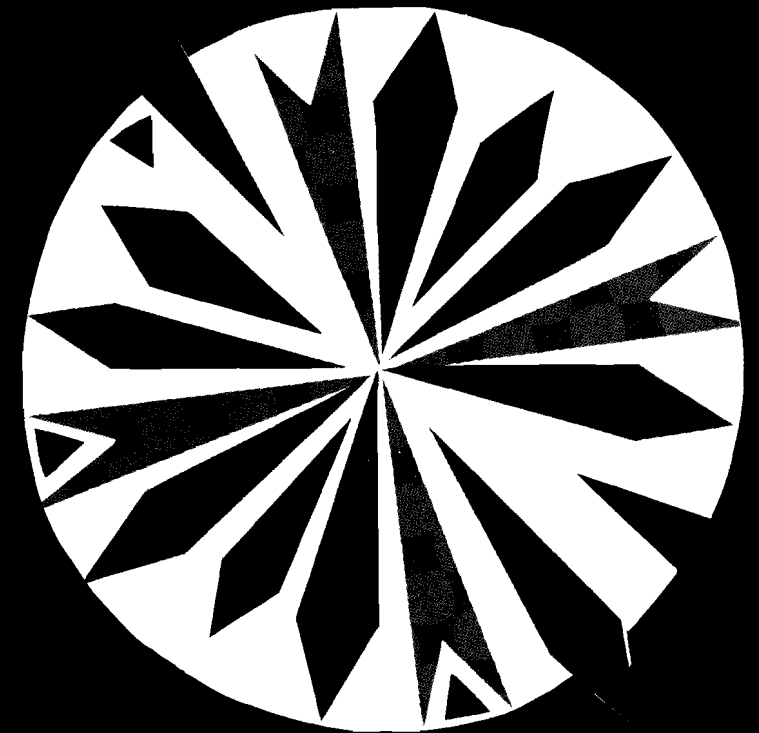


Daughters of Sarah

July/August 1990

CHANGING PATTERNS:



***A Christian Feminist
Kaleidoscope***

Book Reviews

A Season of Mercy
by Martha Manning
Ave Maria Press, 1988
71 pages, paper, \$6

In this prose poem, Martha Manning explores her experience of searching for God in the midst of great pain and loss. The crisis that ironically gives birth to an intimate and mysterious knowing of God is a debilitating pregnancy that ends in surgery and miscarriage. Manning describes her groping for understanding—can she find God as father? as mother? No. Neither image works because the pain, confusion, and fear she is living with do not speak of a loving parent who cares and nurtures. Her daily, even hourly, battles with nausea, weakness, and fever become overwhelming, separating her from other people as well as from God.

In her bewilderment Manning turns to a comforting memory from her childhood—her grandparents' beach house in New England near a lighthouse. As she moves into this memory, images begin to surface and she is joined by a woman figure who asks questions, points out connections, guides her to look within, urges her to trust the images and the understanding those images convey. The woman is Sophia, mercy. Through Sophia, Manning finds herself, God, and a peace that is authentic and transcendent.

This narrative has the ring of truth; Manning tells an honest and compelling story. She does not flinch from showing the doubts and dead ends she finds herself in, but she also reveals the encounter with Sophia and the release from despair with beauty and openness. She cannot explain all the steps of the way, but she knows where she has been.

The language of *A Season of Mercy* is simple and direct; though sometimes stark, it is also gentle. The loose free verse form suits the motif of exploring and allows space for interaction with the author's thoughts and feelings. The fine charcoal illustrations by Elizabeth J. French reflect and enhance the ebb and flow of the

writing.

I was moved and nurtured by this book. No two women's stories are the same: we meet our pain in different places. Martha Manning's sharing of her place and her passage through the valley of the shadow of death sheds light for the rest of us, offering a sign that hope and life are as real as doubt and death.

Reviewed by LINDA WILLIAMS, a
copyeditor and retreat leader from
Deerfield, Illinois.



Miryam of Judah: Witness in Truth and Tradition

by Ann Johnson
Ave Maria Press, 1987
141 pages, paper, \$6

This book, like Johnson's earlier work, *Miryam of Nazareth*, is a series of reflections based on Mary—the Hebrew Miryam. In *Miryam of Judah*, Johnson focuses on Mary as the mother of the Christ in the context of Jewish community and ritual life.

The book is divided into three sections: Lineage, Learning, and Miryam's Sabbath. In Lineage, Miryam remembers four of her female ancestors—Bathsheba, Ruth, Rahab, and Tamar—as a way of preparing for the coming ordeal of the crucifixion. The second section is based on the Kaddish, an ancient Hebrew prayer form. The specific Kaddish used here is one known as "Kaddish d'Rabbanan," a prayer to sanctify teachings; Johnson recasts portions of Matthew 5 and 6 as Kaddish prayers spoken by Miryam. The final section of the book takes Miryam through the sequence of Sabbath observances in the midst of mourning for her son.

I found the second and third sections the strongest. The beatitudes cast as Kaddish prayers are thoughtful and at times beautiful. They offer some fresh perspectives that draw the reader into

reflection and prayer. These variations on the Kaddish seem close in form to the Psalms and make effective use of rhythm and repetition. Certain lines ("Use your burdens for building your bridges to peace" and "Peaceful walking is one small step toward freedom") suggest important possibilities. These meditations would be useful for public worship and group readings as well as for private prayer.

The third section, Miryam's Sabbath, weaves together Miryam's grieving for the dead Christ, the rhythm of Jewish Sabbath rituals, and passages of Scripture. There is reverence and awe here, as well as strength derived from community and tradition.

Although this book juxtaposes Old and New Testament patterns and interpretations in interesting ways, it also has some problems. First, the writing is often vague and conventional. Although Johnson makes a point of coining new words—including such inclusive terms as *genderful*—I found many of these constructions more awkward than clarifying. Judicious editing and greater attention to using sharp, clear language would have made the work more forceful and unified.

Second, the four reflections on biblical women in the first section and the portrayal of Miryam herself offer too few new insights. In her introduction, Johnson says, "I have chosen to write of strength, of mental discipline, of all-persuasive commitment, of unwavering faith, of devotion to the Torah." She fulfills her goal, but at the expense of breaking new ground. The descriptions are general and couched for the most part in traditional religious language; the women are too often remote rather than real.

Third, despite an introduction, an orientation (explaining Hebrew words and certain English terms), and an epilogue by a Jewish rabbi, I had trouble keeping the work as a whole in focus. Perhaps such clarity would come with repeated readings.

Despite its weaknesses, this book contains certain riches. Ann Johnson's willingness to join the Jewish and Christian strands by looking at the two traditions in light of the wisdom and experience of each is a gift born out of her love and faith. Such

a response to the world's alienation and pain *does* break new ground and deserves our attention and gratitude.

Reviewed by LINDA WILLIAMS,
Deerfield, Illinois.



Love Medicine
by Louise Erdrich
Bantam Books, 1987
288 pages, paper, \$9

The Joy Luck Club
by Amy Tan
G. P. Putnam, 1989
288 pages, paper, \$6

Writing a Woman's Life
by Carolyn G. Heilbrun
W. W. Norton, 1988
paper, \$7

Bradshaw On: The Family—A Revolutionary Way of Self-Discovery
by John Bradshaw
Health Communications, Inc., 1988
paper, \$10

Were it not for the hernia that needed repairing, I probably would have read only two books last summer, as usual.

But God in Her graciousness scheduled abdominal surgery for me, and for the first time in ten years I found myself with two weeks of supine leisure. So I devoured five novels. Two of them weren't worth mentioning, but the other three were so good I have to tell all my friends.

First of all, *Love Medicine*. This book scores off the top of the chart for heart-rending human stories of several generations of Chippewas living on and off a reservation in North Dakota. In the first chapter we see the death of a tall beautiful woman, half-white, who was loved by everyone but didn't quite fit in anyone's world. In the succeeding chapters we enter the lives of her children, nieces, and nephews, and we hear about the lives of the generation before her, particularly the aunt and uncle who took her in as an orphan surviving alone in the woods. Most real and lovable of all the characters is a young man named Lipshaw, who has an inborn gift for spirituality and healing using

ancient Chippewa wisdom. If you don't have time to read anything else, this is the book to read.

Of course, *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, the Pulitzer prize winner for 1988, was a rich and rewarding reading experience. For understanding human suffering and the mother-daughter relationship, this novel is unsurpassed. (See review by Virginia Mollenkott in DOS, March/April 1989.)

Similar themes are explored in a totally different culture in *The Joy Luck Club*. We meet four elderly women who gather weekly to play mah jong, a Chinese gambling game. In separate chapters we enter into each person's consciousness (as in *Love Medicine*), hearing about the forced marriages and lost babies that lie behind each woman's decision to emigrate to San Francisco. We also meet their four American daughters, now in their thirties, and become involved in their struggles to understand their mothers and themselves. It's a fascinating book. I recommend jotting notes inside the cover to keep the various mothers straight; it gets a little confusing.

These novels I read for sheer pleasure. Before the hernia, I had also managed to read two books for survival: *Writing a Woman's Life* and *Bradshaw On: The Family—A Revolutionary Way of Self-Discovery*. After reading them, I wrote in my journal, "Now I am equipped to live my life. Before I wasn't."

Bradshaw reviews recent research, particularly that of Alice Miller, on how the family works as a system and may be either functional or dysfunctional depending on how functional each parent is separately and in the marriage relationship. He presents the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of our families now and in much of the historical past have been dysfunctional. They have operated on a shame/blame basis rather than affirming individual persons' needs and worth. Our schools, churches, and other institutions have perpetuated this "poisonous pedagogy" and reinforced it in the family.

According to Bradshaw and Miller, we are unable to treat our children right until we first deal with our pain over how we were treated by our parents and in our

schools and churches. They say that grieving frees us from the compulsion to reenact our anger in shaming the next generation. I have found this book invaluable in my day-to-day dealings with my husband and three daughters. And with my mother and father. Next on my reading list is Bradshaw's follow-up book, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*.

Finally, and best of all, is Heilbrun's slim book *Writing a Woman's Life*. Every sentence is quotable, but for starters, she says, "[W]omen have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over—take control of—their own lives."

Heilbrun says women's lives have been written in four ways: autobiography, biography, fiction, and in daily living. But we have up to now only had two or three plots. Biographies are fiction, she says, and in them, as in fiction, women have not been allowed to have anger, despair, or passionate struggle. Even a woman like George Sand, whose life clearly had these elements, has been lost because she is not taught in literature classes. "[T]he story of her life has not become an available narrative for women to use in making fictions of their lives," concludes Heilbrun. She then asks, "How may new narratives for women enter texts and then other texts and eventually women's lives?" All that in the first chapter.

In the succeeding chapters she explores the lives of major women novelists and poets over the last 150 years, looking at their marriages and their female friendships to find where they got their energy and nurturance. She quotes Virginia Woolf, "Only women stir my imagination." (Leonard nurtured her but did not inspire her.) Another memorable quote from Heilbrun is, "The sign of female friendship is not whether friends are homosexual or heterosexual, lovers or not, but whether they share the wonderful energy of work in the public sphere" (p. 108).

In a wonderful discussion of why women have used pseudonyms and have given lives of daring and freedom to their fictional creations but not themselves, Heilbrun talks about her own mystery novels written by "Amanda Cross." She observes that these fictional characters are

What did our Feminist Foremothers say about Abortion?

Elizabeth Cady Stanton "When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit." (letter to Julia Ward Howe, October 16, 1878)

Susan B. Anthony "I deplore the horrible crime of child murder... We want prevention, not merely punishment. We must reach the root of the evil... It is practiced by those whose inmost souls revolt from the dreadful deed... No matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed... but oh! thrice guilty is he who drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime." (*The Revolution*, July 8, 1869)

Matilda Gage "[This] subject... lies deeper down into woman's wrongs than any other... The crime of abortion is not one in which the guilt lies solely or even chiefly with the woman... I hesitate not to assert that most of this crime of 'child murder', 'abortion', 'infanticide', lies at the door of the male sex." (*The Revolution*, April 9, 1868)

Mattie Brinkerhoff "When a man steals to satisfy hunger, we may safely conclude that there is something wrong in society—so when a woman destroys the life of her unborn child, it is an evidence that... she has been greatly wronged." (*The Revolution*, September 2, 1869)

Victoria Woodhull "Every woman knows that if she were free, she would never... think of murdering [a child] before its birth." (*Wheeling, W VA Evening Standard*, November 17, 1875)

For more quotations and further information, write:
Feminists for Life of America, 811 E. 47th Street, Kansas City, MO 64110
Membership \$10

Sponsored by: Feminists for Life Education Project, 16309 Pine Street,
Minnetonka, MN 55345
(Donations to FFLEP are tax deductible)

always either orphans or motherless—free from the strong guiding hand of a maternal role model. In her final chapter, about women finding new courage in middle age or later, she concludes, “I do not believe that death should be allowed to find us seated comfortably in our tenured positions. . . . Instead, we should make use of our security, our seniority, to take risks, to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular.”

Like Jesus Christ. Sometimes when the truth emerges, it comes from all directions.

Reviewed by ANNE EGGBROTEN, who teaches English when she is not leading a Brownie troop. She is also a founding member of Evangelical Women's Caucus.



The Dance of Intimacy: A Woman's Guide to Courageous Acts of Change in Key Relationships

by Harriet Goldhor Lerner
Harper & Row, 1989
255 pages, paper, \$10

As a teenager I loved to go to dances in the school cafeteria. The dances had certain unwritten rules, and one of them was how close to your partner you “should” dance. During the fast dances, you kept two or three feet between you and never touched; it was almost as if you danced alone. But the slow dances. . . ah, then you could get as close as possible—if both were willing—and you’d rock from foot to foot, your bodies molded together.

I thought of these individualistic and then steamy dances when I read Harriet Goldhor Lerner’s latest book, *The Dance of Intimacy*. Lerner is a gifted psychologist. Fortunately she also has the ability to write psychological theory which non-psychologists can actually comprehend and use in their lives. Her earlier book, *The Dance of Anger*, was also written specifically out of her studies of the psychology of women.

The dance of intimacy which Lerner describes is a dance we all perform with our parents, children, partners, and

friends. It is a process of finding true connectedness (without enmeshment in another’s life) and true separateness (without cutting ourselves off from others).

Lerner’s work is well-grounded in the family systems theory of Murray Bowen, but she does not wallow in psychological jargon. Instead, she introduces us to women who have struggled to change real-life relationships. Lerner shows great respect for women, for the way culture influences women’s lives, and for the heroism women demonstrate in changing their behavior. She is a feminist who seems to care about all types of women.

It’s obvious that I highly recommend this book: to women unhappy in a significant relationship; to women in 12-Step and other recovery programs; to women who are trying to understand themselves and their family system. This is a book to read and re-read for solace and courage.

Reviewed by ANNETTE BOURLAND HUIZENGA, Assistant Pastor at LaSalle Street Church, Chicago.



The Philippines: Fire on the Rim

by Joseph Collins
1989, 316 pages, paper, \$10
Order from: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 145 Ninth St., San Francisco, CA 94103

The Institute for Food and Development Policy is best known for its books which deal head-on with the prevalent American myths about such issues as hunger, food aid, democracy, or communism. In a striking departure from that method, Joseph Collins, an Institute co-founder, has compiled a series of fifty interviews in which Filipinos (and two Irish priests) tell their stories in their own words.

The bulk of the interviews were done in 1986-87 in Negros Occidental, a province which Bishop Fortich (one of those interviewed) described as a “social volcano.” The collage of stories—from unemployed sugar workers, a doctor in a malnutrition ward of a hospital, the governor, members of the New People’s Army, a union organizer, plantation

owners, a government military officer—combine to give the reader a sense of the competing forces and the reason for the continuing turmoil there. Though specific to one province in the Philippines, these stories are instructive for anyone who wants to understand social and economic dynamics in a Third World country.

Other sections focus on the underground revolutionary movement, the Export Processing Zone for international factories, and Olongapo, the rest-and-recreation town beside the U.S. military installation at Subic Bay.

Collins sets the stage with a brief introduction to each section and to each interview, but he does not intrude on his subjects. Some stories are personal testimonies of transformation—a middle-class priest who now works with the poor in Basic Christian Communities, a former plantation manager who now heads the National Federation of Sugar Workers, an upper-class student who joined the poor in the New People’s Army. The final interview is with the director of a children’s rehabilitation center who poignantly describes the difficulties of children who are survivors of human rights abuse in the ongoing undeclared war in the Philippines.

The book also contains photos, a chronology, a resource guide of organizations active on Philippine issues, and several pages of social and economic indicators. The latter would be more useful if sources had been noted.

The raw material of people’s experiences and perceptions is compelling in itself and makes for fascinating reading. However, what one has come to expect from the Institute’s publications and is missing here, is the skillful drawing out of the implications of the stories and the challenge that the array of Philippine voices pose for life and work in the United States.

Reviewed by DOROTHY FRIESEN, Director of Synapses, a peace and justice center in Chicago, and author of Critical Choices: A Journey with the Filipino People (Eerdmans, 1987).



To Love Delilah: Claiming the Women of the Bible

by Mary Cartledge-Hayes
LuraMedia, 1990
96 pages, paper, \$8

Have you ever read a Bible story book you couldn’t lay down? Have you, for that matter, ever read about Bible women who weren’t either extremely good, extremely bad, or merely adjunct to the primary stories about males?

In this small, witty book that can be read in an hour or two (I promise you can’t lay it down!), Mary Cartledge-Hayes follows her thinking “around corners and up trees and through the woods until it [comes] out on the other side” (p. 38). Such thinking first exposes the common wisdom about seven biblical women like Eve, Delilah, or Lot’s wife, and the moral-of-the-story which has been drawn out to show that women are worthless, stupid, traitors, or the root of all evil. Cartledge-Hayes then “rehabilitates” these women by getting the facts straight and presenting them as real, ambiguous, three-dimensional characters who might just as well be the woman next door or the friend you met through your support group.

Cartledge-Hayes’s ultimate aim is to help contemporary women reject caricatures of themselves as worthless, stupid, and not good enough. At the end of

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