

Is God the Only Reliable Father?

By Diane Tennis / Reviewed by Alvera Mickelsen

This small, highly provocative book by a staff associate for the General Assembly Mission Board, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has surprising premises and conclusions, worthy of the careful attention of pastors and serious students of the Bible. Tennis pleads with readers not to abandon the imagery and language of God the Father. Her conclusion is not surprising—but some of her reasons are.

Tennis does not defend patriarchy. Neither does she defend efforts to rid God of "maleness." Rather, she presents God the Father as a *model* for earthly fathers. She does not defend her position on the grounds that God is *like* human fathers; instead, she insists that human fathers should be like the loving, nurturing father that God is. Unlike many earthly fathers, God the father is reliable, loving, persistently present with his children, (both physically and emotionally) and never abusive.

She makes her case on the basis of the need of men and women alike to have a "reliable Father." Tennis believes that one of the reasons that men and women alike need God the Father is the failure of most of their own fathers to be what God intended.

The book draws more heavily on psychology, sociology, and history than on the Bible. Tennis carefully points out that when the Bible speaks of God as Father it is nearly always in the context of *nurturance* and *love*—not in the context of dominance and autonomy. She maintains that the desire of many feminists to eliminate the symbol of God as Father is based on a wrong kind of father image—a tyrannical one who is preoccupied with his power and need to control, and that some feminists have collected their ugly father images out of their human experience and deposited them on God as Father.

The author also enumerates unwise ways in which women have dealt with the problem of unreliable fathers. She decries the tendency of women to tolerate irresponsibility in others and to blame themselves for every family problem. She terms this an illusion of omnipotence that leads to a sense of martyrdom. She says that women as well as men like to play God, and women do it by acting and thinking as if everything depends on them and they are responsible for everything. Tennis finds fault with the way many women rear their sons and daughters. "When the little girl grows up, what has she learned about the quality of love? She has learned that unconditional love comes from a woman [her mother] who she is now. She expects to give it to a man. She does not expect to receive it from a man." When boys grow up, they expect to *receive* unconditional love (as their mothers gave them), but not necessarily to give that kind of love (p. 65).

Tennis points out that "Father God" was not used as direct address in the Old Testament, nor in Jesus' day. Instead, Jesus often addressed God as "Abba," an intimate, affectionate term. But Jesus did not use the "Abba" terminology in his moment of despair on the cross: "My God (*not* 'My Father') why have you forsaken me?"

Tennis says that an accurate concept of God as Father is itself a strong critique of patriarchal domination, and we need to use God the Father as a model to transform human fathers, to strengthen father images and fathering behavior. "God as Father is available. He is intimate. He is tender and compassionate. He suffers, leads, loves, recalls, forgives, reconciles, and starts over. He adopts children, especially orphans. He shares his own being-spirit with the children. And he never leaves them. He never ceases being a father. God the Father is reliable" (p. 90).

This book does not use the usual evangelical sources or terminology and some of its ideas (such as

apparent approval of early gnosticism) will not be acceptable to most evangelicals. However, many of the author's concepts are worthy of careful examination. This is not an inspirational book to hand out at random to church members, but is worth reading by those who have a good knowledge of the Bible and are capable of examining ideas on their own merit.

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117 pages ; 21 cm. Includes bibliographical references (pages 115-117) and index. God as reliable Father. God's reliability ; An exclusively male God as Father ; Patriarchal stereotypes of God as Father ; God as goddess ; God as neither mother nor father -- Absence of modern men. Work patterns ; Abandonment and the occasional father ; An anticipated presence ; Emotional absence ; Dangerous fathers ; The oddity of emotionally present men -- Women's special compensations and temptations. Self-denial ; The inexhaustible early mother ; The abuse of power ; Playing God ; Not telling the t Only 1 left in stock - order soon. Ships from and sold by gamesters3. Add to Cart.Â Condition: Used: Good. Comment: Good condition, wear from reading and use. All pages are intact, and the cover is intact and has some creases. The spine has signs of wear and creases. This copy may include From the library of labels, stickers or stamps and be an ex-library copy. Add to Cart. Other Sellers on Amazon.