

Elaine J. LAWLESS, *Holy Women, Wholly Women : Sharing Ministries of Wholeness through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, xiii+300, ISBN 0-8122-1444-7)

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Elaine J. LAWLESS, *Holy Women, Wholly Women : Sharing Ministries of Wholeness through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, xiii+300, ISBN 0-8122-1444-7).

Holy Women, Wholly Women is a continuation of Elaine Lawless's interest in the lives of female religious leaders in U.S. Christian traditions. While her earlier work focused on Pentecostal women preachers, this book presents and interprets the life stories of women ministers from "mainline" Christian denominations. The life stories, which comprise more than a third of the book, were told to Lawless by ten of the members of a "women in ministry lunch group" in a midwestern town. The stories tell of the women's "call to ministry" and the obstacles and pleasures encountered in their processes of becoming ministers. Methodological and interpretive chapters are interspersed with the stories.

Lawless worked with a methodology she calls "reciprocal ethnography," in which she brought the transcribed stories and her interpretations back to the women for comment and discussion. The women met in a group with Lawless, and the dialogue from these meetings is included in the interpretive chapters. Lawless considers her methodology to be "feminist and humanistic," and states that it "takes 'reflexive anthropology' one step further by foregrounding dialogue as a process in understanding and knowledge retrieval" (p. 5).

Lawless goes a long way towards achieving her goal of reciprocal ethnography. The women's voices are clearly presented both within the individual life stories and the group dialogue. In the ministers' discussions there is agreement, debate, and laughter, as well as some very well-articulated reflection. Lawless is also careful to present her own voice, often noting how her perceptions and interpretations changed in the process of conversations with the women.

While reciprocal ethnography may have succeeded well in Lawless's encounters with these women ministers, some of the keys to its success are left hidden in the text. Lawless notes that all of the women who agreed to speak with her are highly educated, and with the exception of one Hispanic woman, all are white. They shared the language of feminist theology and theory with Lawless, and were predisposed to lengthy self-reflexive conversation. While these similarities do not take away from the eloquence of their reflections, it's important to note that it is easier to be "reciprocal" between equals. Women antagonistic to feminism or not interested in sustained meditation on the self may have perceived themselves as receiving less from such reciprocity.

The most interesting chapter for me concerned the importance of sexuality to the role of the "woman minister." Sexuality, not gender, claims Lawless, is at the heart of the resistance and discomfort directed towards women ministers. Women's bodies are marked as sexual, says Lawless, and as such, "women in

ministry boldly confront the myth of the asexual minister" (p. 230). In their discussions of sexuality, the ministers and Lawless come to the fullest articulation of what it means for them to be "holy women, wholly women." However, even though Lawless mentions repeatedly that this group is made up of heterosexual and lesbian women, she and the women she quotes only discuss heterosexuality overtly. Some explanation for this neglect (or choice) is necessary.

Another intriguing issue that arises within the women's discussions but which is not taken up directly by Lawless is the frequency of situations in which the most vocal opponents to women ministers are other women. This dynamic of women-opposing-women is a tender topic no doubt, but one that must provoke dis-ease of a different sort than that evoked by powerful men in the church hierarchy. A discussion of this pattern, which is distinctly embedded in the stories, would have added to the book.

Some of the problems of the book stem from the difficulty of keeping track of ten women's lives. While some repetition of biographical background is helpful, certain quotes are repeated several times, which becomes annoying. Overall, however, enough space is devoted to each woman to tell her story, and with some repeated reference to the life stories the reader can keep the identities distinct.

The most substantial problem I perceived is the lack of detail given about the denominations these women represent. One of Lawless's points is that these women cross denominational boundaries in their theologies and relationships, but even with such ecumenicism, some elementary background to the various churches would make for a deeper base from which to understand the women. In general, I found Lawless's assessment of women in Christian history to be patchy, and at times overly simplified. This is partly due to her choice of sources—she depends on feminist theologians to the exclusion of religious historians to make historical statements about women in Christianity. For example, a comment on how these women ministers fit into or disrupt the trajectory that Ann Douglas presented in her (problematic) account of 19th-century U.S. Protestantism, *The Feminization of American Culture*, would have been interesting.

Though with some unnecessary gaps of context, I found *Holy Women, Wholly Women* an engaging read. The women's stories are illuminating narratives of professional women within patriarchal structures, and Lawless's analysis is both respectful and provocative. This book should be of interest to those attentive to women's life stories from the perspectives of folklore, religious studies, and anthropology, and anyone curious about the contemporary religious scene in mainline Christian denominations.

Bibliography

DOUGLAS, Ann,
1988[1977] *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York, Anchor Books.

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John MINTON, "*Big 'Fraid and Little 'Fraid*" : *an Afro-American Folktale* (Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1993, 104 pp., ISBN 951-41-0701-2).

When I agreed to review Minton's book, somewhere beneath the initial pleasure of being asked and the challenges it would inevitably present, I felt a little daunted. After all, I am not an Afro-Americanist by dint of either nature or nurture: it is not my area of specialization and I felt that my experiences of growing up in Lynn Valley, North Vancouver did not equip me with the delicate, intuitive coordination of the native—or at least *neighbourhood*—ethnographer which I could then bring to bear on a study of the narrative folklore of this particular cultural group.

While reading the book, however, I found myself, a little like the ubiquitous Monkey, rather precariously balanced at a vantage point from which I could survey at least the author's part of the argument. By the end of my second reading, I had been provided with a context in which to signify. Certainly, this book has potential significance in many research contexts, and I think that it presents a thorough discussion of issues which are germane to scholars in cross-cultural studies, ethnic folklore, and folklore and literature. Although his study appears to be directed towards a fairly specialized audience, Afro-American narrative researchers, Minton's work is a thought-provoking read which raises many questions about methodology, worldview, and the reassessment of rationale. As such, it is a timely publication which should be of interest to a range of specialists in related fields.

Minton's book is a detailed examination of the life history and traditional placement of the single-motif tale type, 1676A/K1682.1 "Big 'Fraid and Little 'Fraid," within the Afro-American folktale canon. He asserts that the inherent circularity of the historic-geographic method, and the Indo-European focus of one of its most prolific adherents in North America, Stith Thompson, inadvertently led other researchers, notably Richard Dorson, to conclude that the greater part of Afro-American folktales were of European origin. Though their methods