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Susannah Cornwall, *Un/familiar Theology: Reconceiving Sex, Reproduction and Generativity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 224 pp., \$35.00, hardcover (ISBN 978-0567673251).

Susannah Cornwall's *Un/familiar Theology* deals with fundamental questions and topical hot issues related to family life, including marriage, same-sex relations, monogamy and polyamory, having children, adoption, sex, gender, and so forth. Her starting point is the experience that the family is changing and that "this doesn't seem quite right" (152). Cornwall wants to take this experience seriously and thus arrives at an investigation under the title of the 'familiar' and the 'unfamiliar.' This title covers both her theological method and the contents of what, in her view, family life is about.

The method of un/familiar theology is one of exploring old, familiar traditions just as much as unfamiliar practices that have recently emerged in search for new possibilities and unfamiliar perspectives. The new and unfamiliar is always approached from the familiar, from what exists. But what exists can be opened up to change. For Cornwall this is a hopeful way of doing theology, which she also characterizes as eschatological. The urgency of this method lies in the tendencies that have always existed, especially in the church, to interpret family, sex, and procreation as unchanging or having only one meaning. Up to the present, the language of what is 'natural' or 'biological' has been used to express this meaning. Un/familiar theology deconstructs this language to create space for reflection on the unfamiliar forms of family that fall outside the suggested category of the biological, such as same-sex relations or adoption. This also means taking leave of thinking of family in terms of 'original' or 'divinely ordained' forms and 'exceptions' or 'special cases.' Family is always something we find to be present in specific forms and that we have to shape ourselves. Every family relation is a 'special case.'

This taking leave of absolutes does not imply the impossibility of discussing what is good family life, which 'effectively mediates grace' (17). It means that every aspect of family life asks for a discussion of its own. Cornwall undertakes these conversations with an impressively broad choice of authors and a capability to reduce complex discussions to their relevant cores. In these dialogues, the label 'un/familiar' also provides her with a central focus: generativity and natality. Again, these concepts should not be taken in an exclusively biological sense. Biology is important in the sense that we are also animals, with a body that shapes our desires. But generativity is about more than begetting children, and natality is more than being born as an individual from a mother. Both concern being social and creative in a much broader sense. As generativity and natality, relationships and creativity are crucial for being human;

they have important implications for family life. As regards marriage, the broad understanding of generativity and natality reveals that having children is an important aspect but not the sole defining characteristic (chapter 2). It also creates room to value adoption, and sex without a procreative function (chapter 5). The idea that marriage is the relationship of ‘two and only two spouses,’ a man and a woman, is relativized as well (chapter 3). Polyamorous relationships help to see that marriage is an agreement that needs ongoing consent and consultation. It is a possible not an automatic location in which to learn vulnerability and patience with one another (63).

Cornwall’s study is especially valuable in getting a quick overview of current theological discussions on family-related topics. She analyzes a wide range of authors varying from conservative to queer perspectives and everything in between. She carefully selects valuable elements from all of them and is just as well critical in her analyses. Because of the wide scope, these discussions can only be brief. As a result, the formulations in which Cornwall reveals her own view are sometimes rather abrupt, such as in the disqualification of Quiverfull family life as narcissistically desiring sameness instead of possibility (chapter 7). Moreover, her sympathy clearly lies with the possibilities opened up in the new forms of family life. There is less room for discussion of the ‘old views.’ As a result the reader is left wondering whether this is not more of an ‘unfamiliar theology.’ A thorough taking into account of the ‘familiar’ would at least require more elaborate illumination of the central theological notions, such as being God’s children, eschatology, grace, or resurrection. If one is not familiar with Cornwall’s theological presuppositions on these points, it is sometimes hard to grasp her argument and be convinced by her conclusions. But this is, of course, also a confirmation of Cornwall’s central insight that what is familiar or not cannot be outlined in general, but will always have to be reflected on by concrete persons in their (family) situations. Her book is a powerful argument to engage in such a reflection.

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