



Mutuality Matters: Family, Faith, and Just Love

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Married and family life around the world has undergone a revolution in the last several decades: the radical democratization of intimacy in spousal and parent-child relationships. Previous principles of hierarchy, inequality, and duty that defined the relationships between husband, wife, and children have been challenged and often replaced by more fluid bonds of equality, intimacy, emotional self-disclosure, communication, and mutual trust. The key question that has emerged for our times, then, is how exactly do families sustain genuine mutuality, democracy, and strong relationships? Figuring out good answers to this question is the major theme of this book and the origin of the title *Mutuality Matters*. Three common strategies for creating just marriages have arisen: political and legal reform, smarter negotiating by women, and new cultural perceptions of marriage. While the authors in this book attend to all three strategies to different degrees, the primary focus is the third strategy: changing our cultural understanding of women and men in marriage. Moreover, to effect genuine cultural change, the authors recognize the need to enlist the help of religion as a key culture-forming element. Mutuality has become a common way for theologians from a variety of perspectives to talk about a more just love, a love that combines affection and justice. But many questions have been left unanswered: What exactly do people believe they have promised when they align themselves with Christian claims about love in their rituals of marriage and partnership? Do Christian views of love include the ideal of justice in marriage? Because accommodation or sacrifice is inevitable in any intimate human community, how can families insure that it will be mutual and just? How is marriage strengthened if justice is added to love at the core of mutuality? What does mutuality mean across time and distance, when participants are parents and children, when fathers are absent, when parents should be honored, or within a violent context? Is it possible to have democratic families without mutual sacrifice? Can submission be mutual? On these and other questions, the authors of this volume claim distinctive responsibility for rethinking Christian convictions about love and family life around the theme of mutuality and for strengthening the ministry of religious communities as those communities seek to empower and support families in their practice of mutuality. The essays written for this volume reflect the development of practical theology as one method for exploring the religious meanings of family and enhancing the practice of family living by 1) assuming that all theory has implications for practice and all practices are theory laden and 2) drawing into dialogue the knowledge and interpretations of a variety of perspectives including philosophy, biblical criticism, anthropology, liturgical studies, pastoral care, ethics, cross-cultural studies, and religious education. This collection of essays is noteworthy for both this interdisciplinary scope and its richly ecumenical representation.

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