

Divine Enjoyment: A Theology of Passion and Exuberance, by Elaine Padilla. Fordham University Press, 2014. ix + 296 pp., \$27.00. ISBN-13: 9780823263578

Reviewed by Bradford McCall, Holy Apostles College and Seminary, bmccall@holyapostles.edu

KEYWORDS

divine enjoyment, divine love, panentheism, passion, seduction

Elaine Padilla is Assistant Professor of Constructive Theology at New York Theological Seminary. This book's theological construction of a God of enjoyment poetically reconceives divine love. This book aims to provide a fresh definition of the seductive love of God by constructing a theological model that challenges the notion of absolute self-sufficiency that in our time has come to define the successful human being. The modern person is considered to be superior on the basis of self-independence and autonomy, which basically means freedom from relational entanglements with others. The manner in which we speak of God, Padilla notes, informs our ways of existing in relation to others. One way to challenge self-centered modes of being is to imagine God's relationship with the cosmos as passionate.

Happiness and enjoyment, in our era, are often equated with selfishness, self-indulgence, luxury, bliss, and decadence. To think of God as having enjoyment, then, can therefore be problematic. If happiness is seen to be consonant with overconsumption and self-centeredness, a happy God would be an opulent one. All that exists, in this view, would only fulfill God, as his happiness would come at the expense of all that is creaturely. Yet enjoyment can also mean acquiring the fuller sense of life, a sense that is often associated with what takes place in *las fiestas*. The good life in community, that which does not cause harm to others, deserves to be preserved, nourished, reproduced, and celebrated. Theologically speaking, the trope of divine love is a key element and impetus in this kind of relationship; it awakens us to the distinctive, interweaving, and even parasitical and virulent elements that exist in the cosmos.

To arrive at the model that places a God of enjoyment beyond the divine self, Padilla embraced another metaphysics, one that allows her to envisage more permeable forms of divine love, an erotic dimension of passion in fact. In so doing, Padilla aligns herself with the postmodern critique of modernity pose to the metaphysics of self-sufficient love that protects God and the cosmos from intermingling. Indeed, she raises some insightful questions regarding the simplistic manner in which Scholastic metaphysics establishes either/or contrasts. Embracing panentheism, Padilla gives preference to teasing out the fluidity of seeming oppositional relationships over analyzing categories of love that have become too static. God and the cosmos, she asserts, share a much more permeable relationship characterized by love.

In her search for an erotic language with which to express her re-conception of the divine relationship of enjoyment, she pursues a metaphysics

that is ridden with erotic imagery. Introducing a bit of Latin American feminism, Padilla brings a balance to life's pain and pleasure, placing the cosmos more intimately within the inner existence of God as the source of fertility and vitality. This bodily approach to metaphysics helps Padilla paint an analogy of mutually shared enjoyments akin to passion that challenges patriarchal views. Rather than the unmoved mover and *actus purus* of Aristotle, Padilla found in the mystics and poets the location from which to speak of the God-cosmos relationship through the metaphor of love-making. She embraces theo-poetics as a means of speaking of the divine mystical union with all living things because it gives space to the imagination, which exhibits other forms of rationality..

Five interrelated aspects of divine enjoyment play roles in Padilla's book with each comprising a chapter: pain (1), yearning (2), permeability (3), intensity (4), and impropriety (5). Chapters one and two present ideas that are more fully articulated in the later part of the book from a distinctively feminist viewpoint. In the first chapter, Padilla highlights the vulnerability of God, the divine impulse of love in the cosmos, the return of all things to God, and the notion that as the eros of the cosmos, God will finally become one with the cosmos. Chapter two discusses the divine relationship with cosmos as propounded in the work of Aquinas, which resembles the loving union between lovers. Aquinas posits a God who seeks enjoyment with creation in amorous ways, which serves as an initial step of conceiving the relationship between God and the cosmos as one that is reciprocal. In chapter three, the divine lover emerges as one that loves erotically according to the flesh, in an explicitly reciprocal manner, which challenges the view that God receives nothing in return from the one who loves in return. Chapter four develops a panentheistic conception of God who becomes increasingly passionate with the cosmos, inasmuch as he seduces all beings in the cosmos. The fifth chapter concludes the divine dance with a multitude of lovers – the Trinity, humans, animals, and plants – transmuting God into hospitable generosity as he takes on the yet-to-be finished shape of the enjoyment of the many.

In its concern to recapture a zest for life that is exemplified in the regenerative performance of celebration, this book provides another angle on the model of enjoyment. It elaborates upon a theological model that allows for reciprocal forms of enjoyment between God and all living things. Padilla posits that each generation must recapture and reignite a zest for life abundant if it is to overcome systems of belief that seek to impose a reality contrary to deeply relational, interdependent, and communitarian forms of living. Like a God who goes out into the streets urging people to come into the banquet, this book portrays an intimate and vulnerable God. This picture of God as one whom we can enjoy and who can enjoy us points to a radical God-cosmos interdependence in the pursuit of happiness. In sum, this book breaks new ground in its depiction of the God and cosmos relation. It should be welcome to all comers who have interests in systematic theology.