

[MJTM 13 (2011–2012)]

BOOK REVIEW

Trevecca Okholm. *Kingdom Family: Re-envisioning God's Plan for Marriage and Family*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012. Pbk. 181 pp.

At times it seems the stores are full of information about family: self-help books, counseling books, videos, and so on. As a result, pastors and other ministry leaders may be excused if they feel overwhelmed by the range of available choices. This leads to the first question, why read this book? Okholm's text, while primarily written to help parents nurture the faith development of their children, is readily adaptable to provide ministries with insights and strategies for supporting families as faith formation centers.

Okholm grounds her argument for a Christian approach to parenting in a brief cultural analysis of the North American (read "mainstream American") family (ch. 1). While much of what appears within this section is applicable to the Canadian context, readers would be well-advised to augment what she has written with data that is reflective of the cultural, socio-economic, and geo-political contexts of their ministries. In chapter 2, Okholm advances her thesis that the Christian family has a missional purpose that is greater than the self-actualization of its children. While this concept may seem novel both to a generation focused on helping children reach their full potential and communities of faith who have tended to be more concerned about *how to raise children* than the desired outcome of the process, Okholm's perspective is in line with the church's historical position. Indeed, beginning with the Scriptures (i.e., Deut 6:4–7; Acts 16:15, 33; Titus 1:6) proceeding through the writings of Chrysostom, Luther, the Puritans, and into the nineteenth century, the historical position of the church is that the family is a "church within

the church” whose task is to bring members of the household to mature faith.

With this thesis firmly in mind, the book proceeds to explore the themes of Christian identity (chs. 3 and 8), purpose (ch. 4), lifestyle (chs. 5 and 8), responsibility (ch. 6), authenticity (ch. 7), and mission (ch. 9) from the perspective of the family as the crucible in which Christian faith and character are formed. Throughout her discussion, Okholm describes practices that may be readily adapted by families to foster a child’s spiritual awareness, support the child’s discipleship as a follower of Christ, and train the child to engage the world from a Christian perspective. Throughout the book, Okholm’s writing style and focus is practical rather than philosophical, a fact that reflects her experience as a ministry-based Christian educator. Thus, one of the book’s strengths is that it provides the reader with a practical frame of reference both for guiding the day-to-day life of a household and for informing a church’s family ministry strategy. This practical frame of reference, however, means that anyone looking for an in-depth reflection on the nature of family ministry will need to look elsewhere (i.e., Diana R. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999). A second strength is that this text describes a range of activities that families can use at home. In practical terms, this book offers the possibility of creating synergy between a church’s ministry plan and what families do at home. Indeed, Okholm’s text offers a practical supplement to the existing family ministry literature (i.e., Garland, and Mark Holmen, *Faith Begins at Home*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005) in that it provides families with ways to bridge the gap between program and action.

In conclusion, this little book is an important resource both for those who minister with families and for those who are looking for ideas to nurture the faith of their children.

Kelvin F. Mutter
McMaster Divinity College