

Grace Ji-Sun Kim. *Contemplations from the Heart: Spiritual Reflections on Family, Community, and the Divine*. Eugene, OR: RESOURCE Publications, 2014. 109 pages. \$16.00.

We live in a fast-paced world of complex challenges. While today, we are more technologically connected than ever before, paradoxically with this also come forms of disconnection—from others, ourselves, the earth, and God. Amidst seemingly endless choices and busy lives, many people are left grasping for a sense of meaning and direction, a need to rest, and a valiant struggle against the emptiness that can so quickly descend upon us. All of this is within a world torn apart by the deeply ingrained evils of racism, sexism, economic inequality, and many other forms of injustice and violence. It is precisely from and for this context that Grace Ji-Sun Kim offers a book of meditations and theological reflections, *Contemplations from the Heart: Spiritual Reflections on Family, Community, and the Divine*. This book, intended both for individuals and faith communities, seeks to help us reconnect with God, others, and the needs and cries of our souls. The meditations here offer stories and reflections that connect with the hearts of readers and open us to stories, possibilities, and communities beyond ourselves, encouraging us to enter further into the diverse, overflowing love and care of God.

Consisting of a series of thirty meditations, the book is divided into three sections: family, environment, and church and society. The first section on “family” focuses specifically on the challenges many women, particularly mothers, and even more specifically, immigrant women and mothers, face in today’s (in this case, U.S.) society. One of the strengths throughout is the way in which Kim utilizes story-telling and shares her own experiences as a means of engaging the topics at hand and connecting with readers’ own lives. In this first portion of the book, Kim explores the ways in which we can “keep sanity and wholeness in our busy lives” (9) and the tension of being a mother and having a professional life, in her case, being a scholar. In the second section, “environmental concerns,” the focus shifts to the environment and the impact of consumerism and over-consumption upon both our souls and the world around us. Kim encourages us to consider the serious state of the current global climate and our practices of consumption so that we can reimagine possibilities of seeking more sustainable ways of living. Finally, in the third section, “church and society,” Kim engages more specifically issues of racism and sexism in relation to the church and society. In the first meditation of this section, “Overcoming Racism and Building Bridges,” Kim shares a specific story of racism from her own experience and leads into a discussion of the ideology of “whiteness” (71-72) and the ways in which this ideology creates privilege for some and a society of racial injustice that continues its violence and oppression of those with darker skin. We see this dynamic in the many cases of police brutality against black bodies today; Kim also here writes of the subtle dynamics of race in everyday life, recounting her own experience as an Asian-American and the sense of being a “perpetual foreigner” in America (69). Toward the end of this section on the church and society, Kim engages gender and the need to overcome sexism, especially among churches. In all of this, Kim urges us on to seek “the ‘reign of God’ which receives all people as equal regardless of class, age, ethnicity, or gender” (106). This sums up well a major message of the book that is engaged compellingly through the stories within.

One of the special strengths of this book is the way in which readers are invited to join in first with listening and then with telling their own stories, making this book an excellent resource for pastors, teachers, and theologians as well as especially for congregations and socially-concerned

people of faith. I think by opening *Contemplations of the Heart*, readers are making a gesture to open their own lives and perspectives. Depending upon our location in society, we may or may not have had experiences similar to those of Kim; in the cases where there may be less resonance, readers are called to listen and imagine experiences beyond themselves, opening their minds and hearts to recognize and take apart systems of oppression; in the case readers find Kim's experiences to all too painfully and familiarly reflect their own, readers gain solidarity and perhaps the ability to more clearly articulate their own stories. Several questions are offered at the end of each meditation, expanding upon the reflection and suggesting further ways to engage. The book is well-suited for individuals to read as a spiritual practice of prayerful reflection in the attempt to nourish one's soul in today's world and connect with God and a call to justice. These meditations are also suited as an excellent guide for small groups at churches or other religious communities. These profound reflections would generate much conversation and further meditations among a community, serving as a guide to what can often be challenging conversations and issues to confront, and ultimately, I think bringing the community closer to one another and to actively seeking justice. The reflections here can open us and help us tend to our inner journeys and to a more just and humane world, to seeking overflowing life and ultimately to God, who sustains all.

Katye Stone
Vanderbilt University

