Urgent Message from Mother: Gather the Women, Save the World

Jean Shinoda Bolen.

Reviewed by Louise Gonsalvez

In Urgent Message from Mother: Gather the Women, Save the World author Jean Shinoda Bolen calls for women to rise collectively against the patriarchal machine that is leading us towards environmental collapse, social chaos, and mass conflict. She asserts that the patriarchal model is fraught with false assumptions about the nature of humankind and, like Malcolm Gladwell, believes there are tipping points in the raising of human consciousness that can alter the course of history.

Bolen’s argument is convincing, compassionate, and compelling. She reminds us that the human spirit is full of creative genius and claims that the Sacred Feminine can offer humane solutions to political, social, economic, and environmental entanglements. To support her claim, she cites numerous accounts of successful women’s movements and women leaders, whose acts of courage and resistance have given rise to overwhelming social, economic, and/or environmental change.

Bolen argues effectively for the advantages of feminist perspective, praxis, and political leadership. She notes the gendered nature of many socio-economic and environmental issues (for example, domestic violence, poverty, and political leadership) and identifies the advantages of bringing feminist approaches such as collaboration, dialogue, and talking circles to real world problems. She invokes the first time the people of the world saw the beautiful planet earth from space and how that event catalyzed a paradigm shift—at
Ideologies and Technologies of Motherhood: Race, Class, Sexuality, and Nationalism illuminates how meanings and realities of motherhood are shaped by various cultural, economic, and political forces. This collection of essays is structured around three areas of inquiry: ideologies of racial difference, narratives of personhood, and socio-legal parameters of motherhood. The book consists of qualitative sociological and anthropological research projects that present the diverse voices of homeless mothers, adoptive mothers, surrogate mothers, single mothers, mothers of children with disabilities—in other words, mothers who do not meet normative expectations and are often perceived as existing outside of the cultural ideal of “good” mothering. Taken together, the essays explore motherhood as a socially constructed and historically situated institution, showing us how “mother” itself becomes a highly contested and ideologically loaded term.

Part one addresses motherhood as it is affected by cultural sets of ideas about race. The common theme running through the essays written by Christine Ward Gailey, Heléna Ragoné, and France Winddance Twine is that of redefinitions of kinship. In her well-researched piece, Gailey critically interrogates narratives of United States adoption and analyzes how they are gendered by a nexus of race, gender, class, and nationality. Ragoné discusses the growing practice of gestational surrogacy and its role in transfiguring notions of race while at the same time challenging “natural” aspects of reproduction (65). Twine’s essay focuses on the experiences of race and motherhood by white birth mothers of black children in British multiracial families. Twine reveals that mothers develop agentic antiracist strategies in response to a logic once, Mother Earth was recognized as a living, borderless entity.

Bolen’s work lacks a strong theoretical framework, comprehensive secondary references, and empirical tables, but Urgent Message for Mother conveys a powerful message that socio-economic issues must be addressed in the interest of peace and environmental sustainability.