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Numen, Old Men: Contemporary Masculine Spiritualities and the Problem of Patriarchy (Gender, Theology and Spirituality)

Joseph Gelfer

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Since the early 1990s, there have been various waves of interest in what is often described as "masculine spirituality". While diverse, a commonality among these interests has been a concern that spirituality has become too feminine, and that men's experiences of the spiritual are being marginalized. Masculine spirituality is therefore about promoting what it perceives to be authentic masculine characteristics within a spiritual context. By examining the nature of these characteristics, Numen, Old Men argues that masculine spirituality is little more than a thinly veiled patriarchal spirituality. The mythopoetic, evangelical, and to a lesser extent Catholic men's movements all promote a heteropatriarchal spirituality by appealing to neo-Jungian archetypes of a combative and oppressive nature, or understanding men's role as biblically ordained leader of the family. Numen, Old Men then examines Ken Wilber's integral spirituality, which aims to honour and transcend both the masculine and feminine, but which privileges the former to the extent where it becomes another masculine spirituality, with all its inherent patriarchal problems. Gay spirituality is then offered as a form of masculine spirituality, which to a large degree resists patriarchal tendencies, suggesting a queering of spirituality could be useful for all men, both gay and straight.

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