

mean they have no special religious significance at all, or that a family birthday party and a Christmas celebration can be analyzed with pretty much the same intellectual tools. Perhaps it is the non-negotiable nature of these events—the ecclesiastical and theological “givens” of a Christmas, Easter, or Passover celebration—that at least in part accounts for their persistence. Pleck’s focus on the family at times obscures the larger role of religious congregations, and the devotional and intellectual traditions they represent, in monitoring and defining certain types of domestic ritual. That’s a complicated matter, of course, but certainly necessary to a thoughtful understanding of the reciprocal power of family and faith in American culture.

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Driscoll, Daniel W. (2002). *Daddyhood: This changes everything*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books. ISBN: 1893732428. 125 pp. \$11.95.

My wife and I have always agreed that the easiest thing we’ve ever done together (getting married), was followed all too quickly with the most challenging thing we’ve ever done (becoming parents). Fortunately, as I’ve often said to my two sons, they have made it relatively easy for me to be a Dad. Still, parenthood has changed my life irrevocably, and therefore I am grateful for the company of other dads, if only for mutual commiseration. I am also grateful for the written insights of Daniel Driscoll.

Daddyhood: This Changes Everything is Driscoll’s first book. An editor for Ave Maria Press, Driscoll previously served as the director of parish social ministry for the Catholic diocese of Greensburg, PA, and as a high school teacher in New Rochelle, New York. Lest you question his qualifications to write this book, Driscoll’s fatherhood of four, and marriage to Felicia, provide ample experience upon which to share his reflections, vignettes, and insights on daddyhood.

Stemming from the notion that “any man can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a daddy,” this book is a collection of stories and ruminations by Driscoll on his first five years as a dad. Even though I’ve got a fifteen year head start, Driscoll’s comments and insights are just as apt for a dad with soon-to-be launched teenagers as they are for

a dad with pre-schoolers.

From such vantage points as the living room floor during “wrestle time,” the hospital emergency room, the birthing room, the night sky, and a host of other ordinary venues, Driscoll has uncovered the extraordinary experiences which served to confirm and solidify his calling to daddyhood. “I have spent five years as a daddy, and have cried and pleaded my way through them,” he writes.

A particularly poignant chapter includes an eloquent apology to all parents for the rash judgments he made *before* he became a parent about the ways they handled their children. “Every time I offer another piece of buttered bread to a child who won’t eat her carrots, just to be sure she eats *something*, I pay for my earlier question about why some children can be so fussy with their food.”

In another chapter, Driscoll describes an evening encounter of going for ice cream at nearby Kerber’s. “The day might have been crazy, the kids might have been wild, but there is a peace to Kerber’s that settles us. Kerber’s is a respite, a place where we can relax after dinner and enjoy each other. It is a place with a time and order of its own, a chance to sit on a bench, look at our children through the eyes of a stranger and fall in love with them again.”

This book does exactly the same. It’s a “Kerber’s” experience that stimulates the reader’s reflections upon his own parenting, floods him with his own memories, and invites him ever so gently but powerfully to lay claim to his own vocation of daddyhood.

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Wallace, Catherine M. (1999). *Motherhood in the balance: Childhood, career, me, and God*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing. ISBN: 0819218731. 260 pp. \$14.05.

Caught in the balance of my own life mothering three boys and teaching divinity school students, I toted *Motherhood in the Balance*, as free-lance author Catherine Wallace herself might have expected, to a whole array of kid sports, orthodontist appointments, and school band concerts. Fortunately, this book lends itself well, both in style and content, to reading under such circumstances. Peppered with humor and literary allusions, this memoir weaves to-

gether memories of Roman Catholic schooling and life as a middle child in an economically stretched Irish family with Wallace's adult dilemmas of vocation and faith. Reading the book in snippets here and there felt a bit like indulging in the very housewife myth she debunks in a chapter on "Bonbons and Soap Operas,"—a poignant, even sacramental, treat in the midst of work and family demands. At other times, as with candy and shallow television, the book left me unsatisfied.

Wallace grapples with two sets of questions, even though the preface only claims the first: Is God real? And if God is real, what difference does it make? (p. ix) A second, more personal query dominates the first 100 pages and runs through the book: What are my gifts? And if I have gifts beside the capacity to mother, how do I best deploy them? The first three chapters recount Wallace's quandaries as she makes her way through ten- and twelve-hour days of graduate study in English to her first teaching position and, almost simultaneously, into the brain-numbing experience of mothering first a son and then, two years later, boy and girl twins. Unfortunately, this account seems driven by a residual need to account for the devastating experience of her eventual tenure denial and what she later calls the "choice" to stay home with her children. Even if less a choice and more an imposition under dire circumstances, this experience allows Wallace to acknowledge both the undervalued value and needs of children and her own gifts as poet, wordsmith, and author.

Not until chapter 4 does Wallace finally turn more overtly to questions about God and faith, a sure frustration to readers awaiting such reflection. Yet, here as before, her characterizations of common experience are perceptive. She captures well the power of religious community, ritual, and imagination, the often-overwhelming nature of parenting, and the trite competitiveness of the university and its insensitivity to family life. However, other vivid depictions, such as the riveting nature of sermons "week after week after week" (p. 166), the shallowness of academic life, the always more important needs of children, and the damage done by child care, seem overdrawn, stereotyped, and perhaps a subtle result of lingering resentment.

As the "Me" in the subtitle hints, the book sometimes seems unduly self-indulgent. One tires of listening to her self-refracted stream-of-consciousness dialogues with her own imaginings about whether she is a poet and whether

God is real. The rumination is interspersed with repeated acclamations by others that she has, "such a gift, such a gift for words" (p. 88) and with lines from the early nineteenth-century British Romantic literary theorists that prove that Wallace does, indeed, possess an English Ph.D.

The title and subtitle also mislead the reader. First published as *Dance Lessons*, the book seems in search of the right epithet. Important sections still depend on the metaphor of dance. Moreover, just as "children" and "God" stand at opposite ends of the subtitle, they also do not meet frequently in the book. Oddly enough, in the final chapters where Wallace really grapples with God, the kids mostly retire to the background. When she makes her way to an Episcopalian church after years of abstinence, she says nothing about her children in this context. Just as she struggles to reconcile the compartments of her life, so also does the book ultimately fail to bring together her experiences as spiritual wanderer, her parental experiences, and the experiences of her children in their own faith formation.

Despite these limitations, the power of this book comes from its radical self-disclosure and honesty about the craziness of religious faith and family life as well as the complexity of women's vocational decisions. Wallace reveals the wonderful permeability between women's lives, poetry, storytelling, and theology.

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Bucka, John R. (2001). *Faithfully parenting teens: A Proactive Approach*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. ISBN: 0570052629. 176 pp. \$9.99.

Smith, John F. (2002). *Raising a good kid: Chances are you're doing just fine*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books. ISBN: 1893732436. 126 pp. \$11.95.

Because adolescents are indeed experiencing profound and rapid developmental changes, parents of teens need all the help they can get. Thus, I welcome two new books dealing with parenting teens from a Christian perspective. The titles reflect the approaches the authors take: *Faithfully Parenting Teens* and *Raising a Good Kid*. Each book has strengths; each has some shortcomings. Before I consider them indi-