Opinion
Culture
Spirituality
Faith
Guest Voices



(Unsplash/Anton Luzhkovsky)

by Shannon Evans O'Brien

Spirituality and culture editor

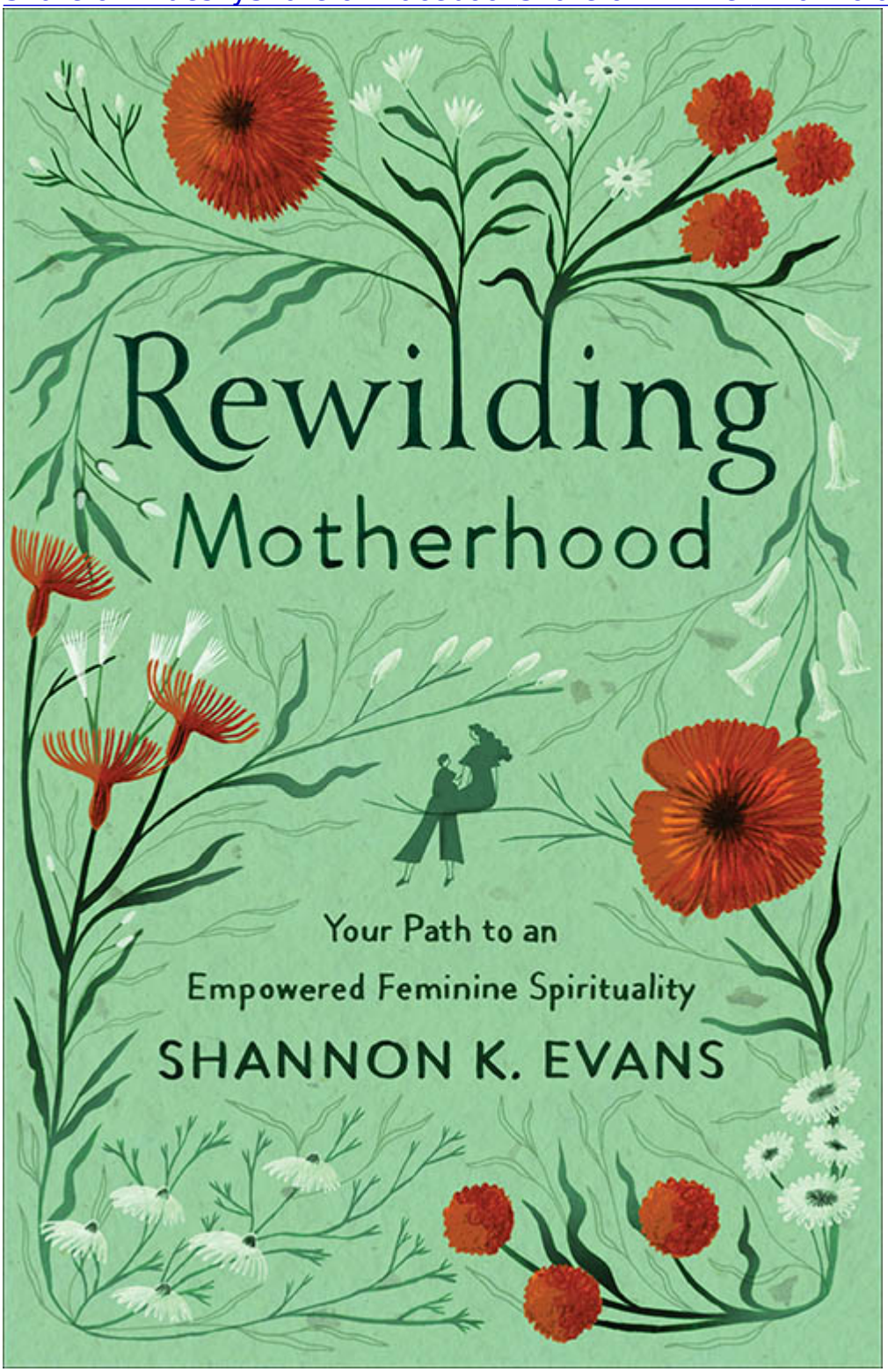
View Author Profile
sobrien@ncronline.org

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

May 7, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



Rewilding Motherhood: Your Path to an Empowered Feminine Spirituality
Shannon K. Evans
192 pages; Brazos Press
$16.99

Editor's note: *The following is an excerpt from* Rewilding Motherhood: Your Path to an Empowered Feminine Spirituality *(Brazos Press) by Shannon K. Evans.*

Not long ago I had a dream in which my neighbor, who is both a fiber artist and a mother of two, was pressing fabric into a basin of shallow water — ostensibly dying the fabric, perhaps, but I can't be sure. She was making art, one way or another, and she kept finding larger and larger containers to serve her purpose. Without frustration, without disappointment, she happily and with curiosity moved from vessel to vessel, seeking something vast enough to contain the wilds of her creativity.

When the basin failed to satisfy, she moved to a washtub; when the washtub did not suffice, she swapped it out for a kiddie pool; when the kiddie pool proved inadequate, she drained an Olympic-size pool in her front yard, stories and stories deep, astonishingly deep — we marveled together at how we hadn't known how fathomless the water had been all along. She covered the bottom with a shallow film of water and meticulously laid out the fabric inside, careful hands pressing out the creases. The result satisfied her, and she left the work to soak.

But a drained concrete pool of treacherous depths is not a safe thing to have sitting barrier-free in a little Midwestern neighborhood. In the dream I saw two of my own children heading over to play and I ran after them, knowing the danger they were in. The ground was covered with hornets that I stepped on as I rescued my little ones, muttering prayers of thanksgiving under my breath for their safety as I guided them home across the street, leaving my neighbor, her art, and a perilous cavern of imagination behind.

> We can lose ourselves in the depths of our inner life, but only for so long before we must rein ourselves in once more. We make dinner. We do laundry. We tend to those in our care.
>
> Tweet this

I awoke from this dream with pieces of it implanted in my bones. Weeks have since yawned by, but I cannot shake the knowledge that there was something archetypal at play in the image of my neighbor's labor. In dream language water represents the unconscious, and the act of exploring bigger and bigger containers for that inner world strikes me with incredible resonance — and not just for my own sake, but for the sake of mothers everywhere.

Because, if you think about it, this is what we do; we play at the edges of our unconscious, we explore the boundaries of our creative spirituality and suspect they go deeper than we can imagine. We long to give ourselves over to the mysteries of this inner life, and yet, we have responsibilities. We cannot neglect the physical and emotional needs of our children. We must be available to them, must protect them from all forms of danger. We can lose ourselves in the depths of our inner life, but only for so long before we must rein ourselves in once more. We make dinner. We do laundry. We tend to those in our care. We console ourselves that there will be a day when we can be baptized in the waters of Mystery, but today is not that day. Today we have children to dress and floors to sweep and eggs to scramble. The dream of the self that is spiritually alive — soulfully, creatively, holistically alive — is just that: a dream. We might touch it for a moment, but it is never ours to keep.

Few mothers I meet feel they are regularly in touch with that Mystery. Rather, most feel despondent about their spiritual lives, believing that somehow it is meant to be more than what it is but having no idea how to see that desire fulfilled. The path we took as younger women does not serve us now; there are no hours for silent prayer, no private moments to journal and weep, no time or energy for the community we used to have. So we put on a smile in the mornings, take our kids to worship on the weekends, flop exhausted on the couch in the evenings, and tell ourselves this might be all there is. And then we wonder why we can't feel content.

> We are women, first and foremost. We were our own before we were ever anyone else's. And we have to find a way back to ourselves.
>
> Tweet this

But contentment is not the apex of what we were made for. The feminine wisdom inside us knows this, and it is clawing to set us aflame in wonder and love. Let's face

it, the deck has long been stacked against mothers thriving spiritually: our social, religious, and family structures together have forged a path that keeps us busy, preoccupied, self-denying, and obedient. These structures praise a woman who will give of herself but side-eye a woman who will belong to herself. The divine invitation is to be both women at the same time.

After all, we were women before we were mothers. But now there are days — maybe years — when we feel more like mothers than women, when the role of mothering subsumes the person we once knew ourself to be. Motherhood is an imposing figure in the room of the soul, and womanhood often bows in deference to her. But we are women, first and foremost. We were our own before we were ever anyone else's. And we have to find a way back to ourselves.

Not long ago I stumbled into reading about the ecological restoration practice of rewilding land, which heals damaged wilderness areas by removing all the harmful human intervention that has become so commonplace in resource management. To rewild a piece of land is to allow it to return to its original state: biodiverse and flourishing as nature intended. Rewilded land will look unkempt to the outside observer, but in actuality it is thriving — a fact proven by its self-regulatory and self-sustaining ecosystem.

Advertisement

When I read this something in me shifted, and I thought, *What if we could rewild motherhood?* What if, instead of confining women to some narrow social standard, motherhood could be the very thing to return us back to our original state as image bearers of an untamed God? If we removed all the harmful human intervention, could motherhood rewild itself into a healing and nourishing space in which to dwell? Dare I hope that if freed from the meddling of outside hands, my soul could be its own self-sustaining ecosystem?

Such rewilding is the intention of the book in your hands. It is not prescriptive, because there is no prescription for feminine spirituality. It offers few answers, because the questions you are asking are uniquely, perfectly, and frighteningly yours alone. But my hope is that it may serve as a nurturing hand to hold on your journey, leading you through the ins and outs of your ordinary life and inviting you to reimagine motherhood as the spiritually empowering experience it should be.

The Mystery within you cannot be confined to a basin or a washtub or a kiddie pool. The Mystery within you is miles deeper than you know, wondrous and treacherous and full of intrigue, beauty, and possibility. The narrow way forged for you by others is not the only choice you have. If you are ready to search the depths of yourself and trust what you find there, a wilder landscape awaits.

[Content taken from *Rewilding Motherhood* by Shannon K. Evans, ©2021. Used by permission of Brazos Press.]