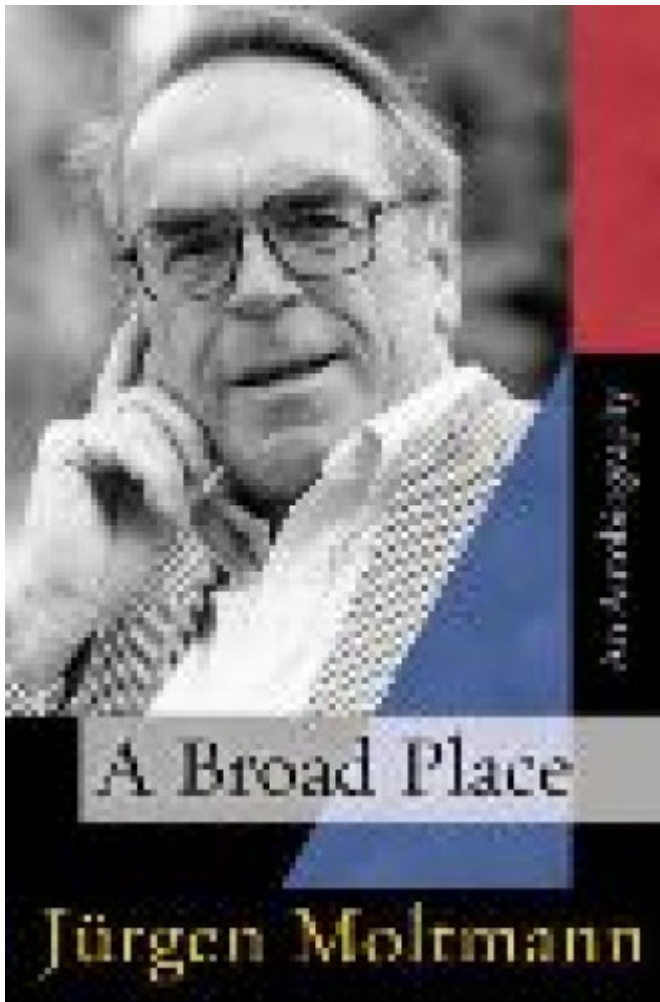


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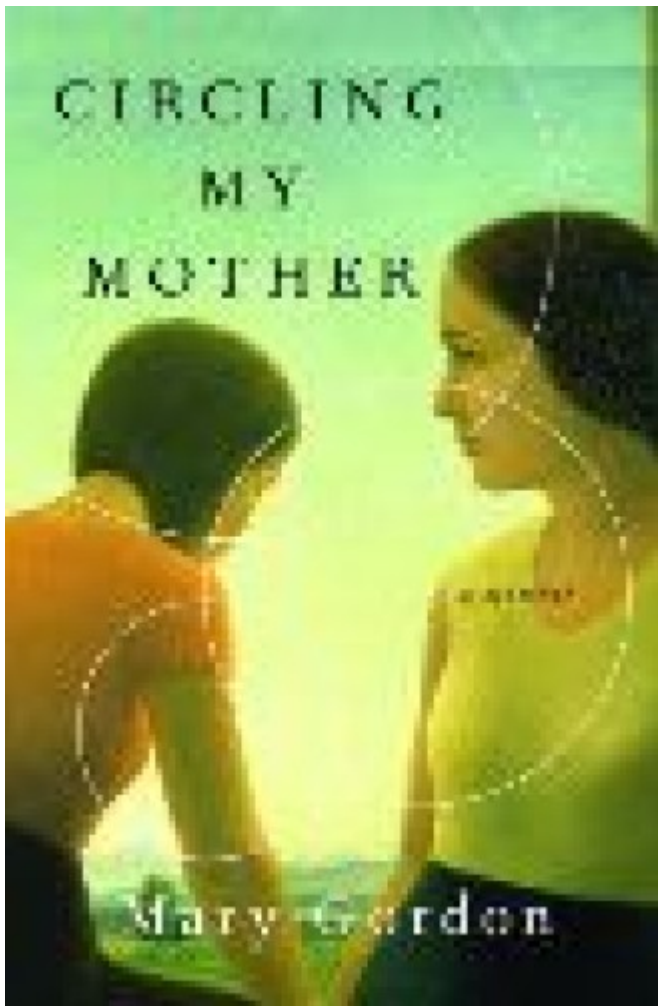
Books in the [December 11, 2007](#) issue

In Review



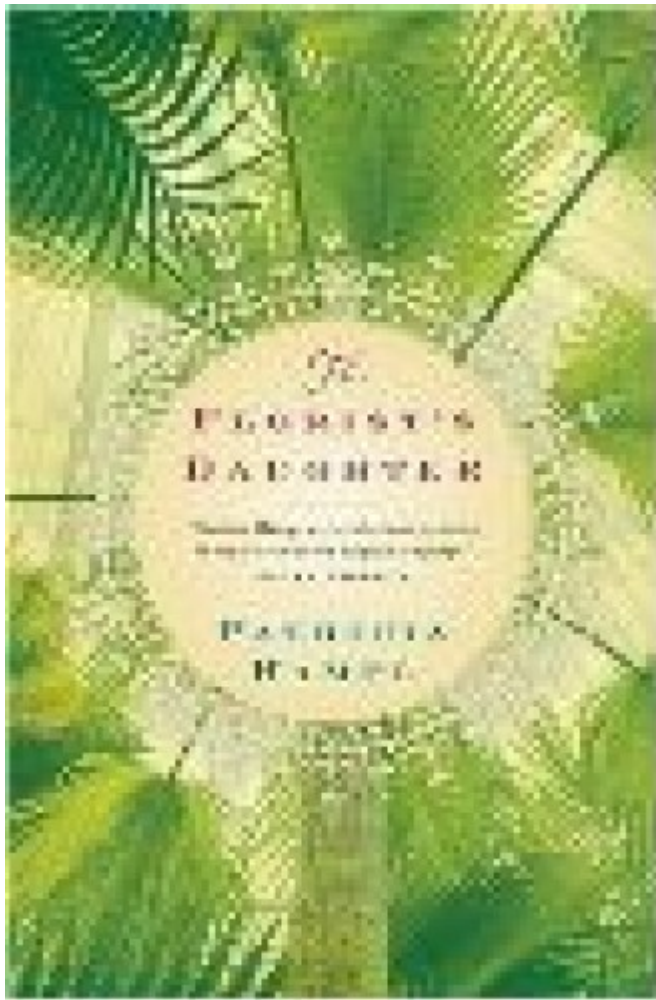
A Broad Place: An Autobiography

Jürgen Moltmann
Fortress



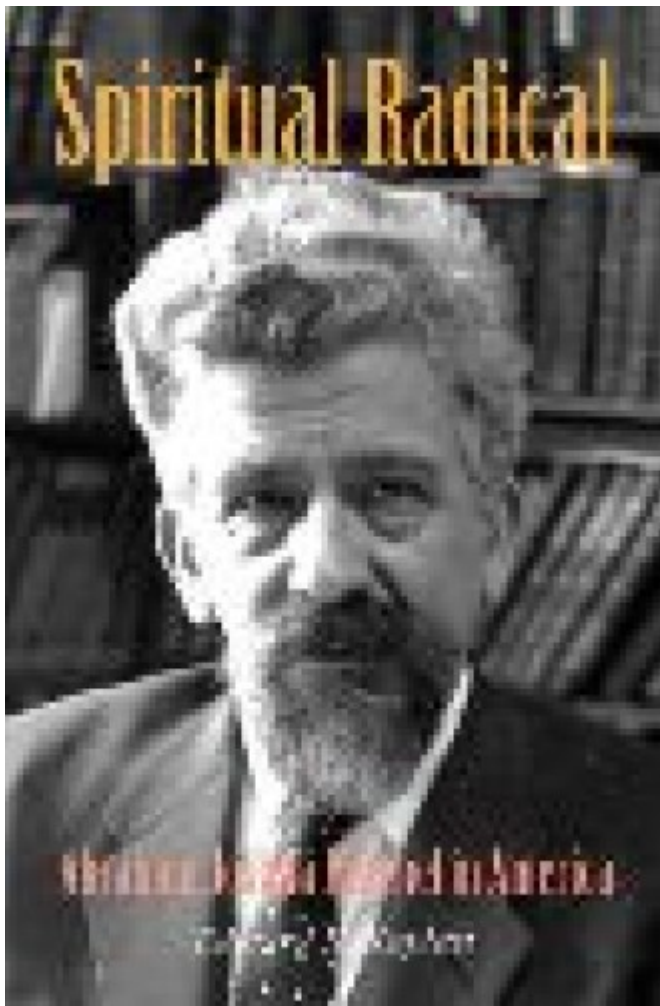
Circling My Mother: A Memoir

Mary Gordon
Pantheon



The Florist's Daughter: A Memoir

Patricia Hampl
Harcourt



Spiritual Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel in America, 1940-1972

Edward K. Kaplan
Yale University Press



Without a Map: A Memoir

Meredith Hall
Beacon

One of Moltmann's great strengths as a theologian is that he wasn't brought up in the church. He came to faith as a young adult and approached it with fresh eyes. As a German soldier he was taken prisoner in World War II, and in the prisoner-of-war camp he discovered the Bible for the first time. "I have never decided for Christ once and for all, as is often demanded of us," he says. "I have decided again and again in specific terms for the discipleship of Christ when situations were serious and it was necessary." In his case, biography is theology. Along the way the reader gets a refresher course in late-20th-century theology.

Novelist Mary Gordon says she writes about her mother because "it's the only way that I can mourn her." Gordon writes about the place of words and music in her

mother's life, her relationship with her sisters and with her husband, the priests in her life, her mother's views on the larger world, and even about her mother's body—afflicted since childhood with crippling polio and later with alcoholism. Her mother also endured begrudging and acerbic siblings. For the last 11 years of her life—she died at age 94—she was demented. Despite her mother's adversities, Gordon thinks that “it is possible that my mother found exactly the place in the world that suited her.” The book is a poignant study of a second-generation immigrant whose life nearly spanned the 20th century.

Hampl's fifth volume of memoirs focuses on her Catholic roots in St. Paul, Minnesota, her youthful indiscretions, and especially her parents. Her Irish mother had a way with words, while her Czech father, a florist, exposed her to the beauty of images. There's great pathos in the portrait of Hampl's mother, an epileptic who aspired to be a writer. Pulsating through this memoir is the question about why Hampl, who teaches creative writing at the University of Minnesota, stayed so close to home despite her early desire for broader worlds.

A sequel to *Prophetic Witness*, which traced Heschel's life up until the time of his immigration to the U.S. in 1940. Heschel's *Man Is Not Alone* (1951) caught the attention of Reinhold Niebuhr, who predicted that Heschel “will become a commanding and authoritative voice not only in the Jewish community but in the religious life of America.” The two became friends. Unfortunately, Heschel was at times marginalized by his own colleagues at the Jewish Theological Seminary. This volume traces the development of Heschel's thought about Jewish faith, Israel, prayer and ethics, as well as his interfaith activities, support of civil rights and opposition to the Vietnam War. Kaplan draws on previously unseen sources, FBI files and interviews.

Pregnant at age 16 in 1965, Hall was sent by her mother to live with her father and stepmother in the country. She gave up her baby boy at birth. Eventually, Hall roamed the world on foot. When her son was 21, the two met each other for the first time since his birth, and she found out that he had lived a hard-scrabble life as a child who was abused by his adoptive father. Hall was reunited with her mother and cared for her from the time she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis until she died—but they never could talk about the past. *Without a Map* is a haunting story about life and love, loss and death by a late bloomer who didn't graduate from college (Bowdoin) until she was 44.

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